The Christmas artwork pictured here was created by two of the four winners of Bishop Ronald Gainer’s 2017 Christmas Card Contest. The contest allowed students to portray an interpretation of the birth of Jesus Christ as seen through their eyes. A total of 53 entries were submitted from 27 schools this year, and four winners were selected from contest entries among four age categories. The image on the left is by Kristen Landsman, a senior at Delone Catholic High School in McSherrystown, and the image at the right is by Abby Caruso, an eighth grader at St. Catherine Labouré School in Harrisburg. The other two winning images were featured on the cover of the December 8 edition. The four winning pieces were used as illustrations on Bishop Gainer’s Christmas cards this year, and the students are pictured on page 3 with the bishop.

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we quiet the hymns of the Advent Season for another year and begin the Carols of Christmas, there is a thought from one of the most common Advent hymns that keeps coming to my mind. In “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” we sing:

“O come, desire of nations, bind In one the hearts of all mankind Bid Thou our sad divisions cease And be for us our King of peace”.

The words of this hymn were most likely penned by an anonymous monk before the year 800 AD. One of the seven verses was sung at Vespers on the final week before the celebration of the Lord’s Nativity. Each verse begins with the word “O” – addressing Jesus with an Old Testament image of what the awaited Messiah would do and hailing our Lord as the One who fulfilled those cherished expectations.

Throughout the centuries as Christian voices raised this sung-prayer to God, the phrase “our sad divisions” has referred to many different kinds of conflict. First sung in that time period we now call “the Dark Ages,” at times “sad divisions” referred to the splintering of the Church, the wars of religion, civil wars and wars between city-states and among nations. In 2017, each of us can “fill in the blank” as to what we understand as our sad divisions. Whether you are thinking on the level of your family, our nation, our world or our Church, there are enough sad divisions to go around.

Nonetheless, we believe that the Incarnate Son of God is “our King of Peace” who can “bind in one” our hearts and make our divisions cease – but only if you and I allow Him. We must allow the Christmas Mystery to awaken awe in our minds and hearts by the revelation that the One who holds all creation together in Himself is now being held by His mother; that He who is the Bread of Life is now hungry and fed by His mother; that He to whom all things in heaven and earth belong comes to us in poverty and need. The mystery that the Infinite One becomes infant should cause us to surrender in reverent adoration that the Father loves us this much.

Christmas Day comes and goes so quickly. For us, the Church, Christmas is a season – a series of days to contemplate and celebrate the mystery of the Word Made Flesh. May this season bring us the needed grace to accept and worship “the Desire of Nations” – the newborn King of Peace who fulfills God’s promises to us.

A Blessed and Merry Christmas!

Bishop Ronald Gainer
Our Lady, Help of Christians Parish Celebrates Father Opoki’s 25th Anniversary

Our Lady, Help of Christians Church in Lykens – located in northern Dauphin County – was aglow with celebration on the evening of Dec. 12 for a special Mass marking the 25th anniversary of the ordination of its pastor, Father Michael Opoki, A.J., and visit the grave of St. Patrick, the Diocese’s Patron Saint on a 12-day pilgrimage to the Emerald Isle with the Bishop of Harrisburg, Most Reverend Ronald W. Gainer.

A member of the Order of the Apostles of Jesus, Father Opoki was born in Uganda, where his mother and siblings still reside, and where one of his brothers is also a priest.

The son of parents who were active in the Church, Father Opoki entered the seminary in 1980, and was ordained to the priesthood on Dec. 12, 1992. He served as a priest in Africa for 21 years, including six in Uganda and 15 and in Ethiopia. Since his assignment to the United States, Father Opoki has served at Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Lewistown, St. Jude Thaddeus Parish in Mifflintown, as chaplain at Hershey Medical Center with residence at St. Joan of Arc Parish, and now as pastor of Our Lady’s and of Sacred Heart of Jesus in Williamstown.

Parishioners attended the Dec. 12 Mass to offer congratulations to Father Opoki, who was joined in the celebration of Mass by several priests, including those from his religious order and those from the diocese. The celebration concluded with a dinner following the Mass.

Call for a brochure or to register: 800.713.9800

Early registration price $3,599 + $319* per person from Washington Dulles if deposit is paid by 5-20-18

Base price $3,699 + $319* per person after 5-20-18

*Estimated Airline Taxes & Fuel Surcharges are subject to increase/decrease at ticketing (30 days prior)

OPTIONAL $30 ROUNDTRIP BUS BETWEEN HARRISBURG/WASHINGTON DULLES
Knights of Columbus Council 869 Feeds Homeless, Hungry during the Holidays

By Jen Reed
The Catholic Witness

On a rainy and foggy Saturday in November, members of Knights of Columbus Council 869 in Harrisburg found themselves among the homeless who live beneath the city’s Mulberry Street Bridge and in the abandoned industrial buildings nearby.

Here, on this soaking and dismal day, just a week before Thanksgiving, the Knights came with boxes of some of the holiday’s traditional fare: mashed potatoes, vegetables, bread and pie, and fully cooked rotisserie chickens in place of frozen turkeys.

The effort was part of the council’s participation in Food for Families, a program established at the national level to help end hunger in local communities.

Council 869—based on Peach Street in Harrisburg—annually takes part in the program. Council members connect with area ministries that provide Thanksgiving meals to people in need, and help supply those efforts, which include the Silence of Mary Home and the Nativity School in Harrisburg.

The Knights also inquired with area residents in the immediate vicinity of their Peach Street location, and also made deliveries to the homeless in the area of the Mulberry Street Bridge.

To secure the meals, the council works with Giant Food Stores, which supplies the food. The Knights pick up the food from Giant, bring it back to their meeting place to assemble meal boxes, and then distribute them.

Frozen turkeys are the main staple, however rotisserie chickens are provided to people who don’t have an oven.

This year, Council 869 distributed 85 boxes. With each box containing enough food for four people, they ultimately served 340 meals.

Approaching the area of Harrisburg where the homeless seek shelter, Deputy Grand Knight Joe Bosche said he and two fellow Knights didn’t know what to expect as they arrived with food.

“The homeless live in old, industrial, concrete block buildings, and you’re carrying boxes of food and shouting out that you have food, hoping that somebody responds to you,” Mr. Bosche relayed. “A gentleman poked his head out the glass front of a building, and opened the door for us. Inside, there was no electricity, no light, no heat. Just a couple of mattresses.”

In another building, the Knights found men huddled around a bucket, trying to build a fire, and six people living in tents.

“To think about what they go through at Christmas or Thanksgiving, do they even have Christmas? Will they have food? Do they have anybody who can help them?” Mr. Bosche pondered. He said that these questions have led Council 869 to consider additional outreach efforts in January and February.

“When you’re somebody, like me, who lives in a suburban community and you go into an area that could be dangerous, it’s definitely sobering. But when you start interacting with the people, you see the humanity, the need, and their extreme gratitude,” Mr. Bosche said.

The Food for Families effort fits perfectly into the mission of the Knights of Columbus. The fraternal organization has four degrees: charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism.

“Charity is the first cornerstone that every Catholic man is exposed to when joining the Knights of Columbus,” Mr. Bosche said. “Therefore, it is paramount that the Knights are present in their community to provide charitable works.”

The Witness Returns January 19

The December 22 edition of The Catholic Witness is the final one for 2017. Our first issue of the New Year will be January 19.

Do you know that you can receive The Catholic Witness via e-mail instead of standard mail? Sign up for the e-mail service by logging on to the diocesan Web site at www.hbgdiocese.org. Follow the News/Events tab to The Catholic Witness page and click on “Catholic Witness E-mail Sign Up.” Or, send your name and street address to witness@hbgdiocese.org, and we’ll sign you up. Each Friday that the newspaper is published, you will receive an e-mail with a direct link to the latest edition.

Registration with the e-mail service will not cancel your mailed subscription unless you state otherwise.

As parishes, schools and organizations plan their event calendars for the New Year, we take this opportunity to let you know that our schedule of issue dates and submission deadlines for 2018 are now available. You can find the Publication Schedule and information on how to submit items to via The Catholic Witness link at www.hbgdiocese.org. If you would prefer to receive the Publication Schedule and Submission Guidelines via e-mail or standard mail, contact us at witness@hbgdiocese.org or 717-657-4804 and we’ll be happy to send them to you.

Remember to stay in touch with news from the Diocese of Harrisburg by visiting its Web site, www.hbgdiocese.org, and by following it on Facebook and Twitter.

We send you best wishes for a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year!

To report suspected abuse of a minor, call the toll free PA Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-932-0313

To report suspected abuse of a minor by a church official, employee or volunteer, also please call the Diocese of Harrisburg Youth Protection Hotline: 1-800-626-1608 or email:

ReportAbuse@hbgdiocese.org

Bishop Gainer’s Public Calendar

- December 24 – Celebrate Mass, St. Patrick Cathedral, Harrisburg, 9:30 a.m.
- December 25 – Celebrate Midnight Mass, St. Patrick Cathedral, Harrisburg.
- January 2 – Attend Swearing-In Ceremony of Judges McNally and Marsisco, Whitaker Center, Harrisburg.
- January 4 – Celebrate Mass for Diocesan Principals, Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg, 9 a.m.
- January 14-19 – Mission Trip to Haiti.

Diocese of Harrisburg Youth Protection Program

Pura reportar la sospecha del abuso de un menor, llame al número de teléfono gratuito Línea de Ayuda Abuso del Niño Pennsylvania 1-800-334-0313

Para reportar la sospecha del abuso de un menor, llame al número de teléfono gratuito Línea de Ayuda Abuso del Niño Pennsylvania 1-800-334-0313

For more information about Bishop Ronald Gainer’s Christmas cards this year enjoyed a luncheon earlier this month with the bishop and members of the Department for Catholic Schools. Shown with the bishop, from left, are Kristen Landsman, a senior at Delone Catholic High School in McSherrystown; Abby Caruso, an eighth grader at St. Catherine Laboure School in Harrisburg; and Abby Klein, fifth grade, and Annie Verrelli, second grade, at St. Anne School in Lancaster. The winning artwork has been featured on the bishop’s Christmas cards and on the covers of the Dec. 8 and Dec. 22 editions of The Catholic Witness.
The Idol of Idea
By Sister Geralyn Schmidt, SCC
Special to The Witness

Some time ago, I was contacted by a president of a Catholic women’s group to speak at a communion breakfast. She told me about the particulars of the event, and then asked me the topic about which I would speak. Without skipping a heartbeat I responded, “The Dignity and Vocation of Women.” Her response was silence and then, “Um, Sister, you can’t speak about that, it’s too feminist. Our priest don’t like to listen to hot button topics that oppose Church teaching.” I asked, “If an event is geared toward women, why not speak about women’s dignity?” She responded, “I don’t think that would be a worthwhile topic. I need to ask Father about it. It’s just too controversial.” I responded that I am a true daughter of the Church and would never talk about something that the Magisterium would not agree upon.

“But, please,” I urged, “talk to Father and let me know what he says.”

Several days later, she got back to me and said that the pastor gave permission for me to speak on the topic.

I could not help think of this story as I turned to another modern day idol: The Idol of the Idea. In Strangeegods: Unmasking the Idols in Everyday Life, Elizabeth Scalia writes, “[We make idols of ideas] when we cling to ideas long past the point of what is healthy or reasonable, and we set them before us, dazing anyone to knock them down. … When we over-identify with our thoughts, the result is always inhibition, narrowness, and constraint, instead of liberation, joy, and freedom. … When another individual confronts us and these constructs, we can easily dismiss them because they are “different,” or, “those kinds don’t understand.” This type of thinking alienates another member of the body of Christ! This alienation destroys the unity that Jesus came to mend! In fact, it puts one member of the body of Christ against another member.

St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:20-26 says it this way, “As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no disension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

In short, anything that prevents us from loving another also prevents us from loving God. This is indeed idolatry because we determine what is and is not God.

I can’t help thinking of a young maiden who was engaged to a wonderful man. She had to have her life planned out ahead of her as a wife of a carpenter. The moment she understood God’s idea for her, she relinquished it as she whispered, “Fiat!” It is my prayer that we, in our lives, can whisper that as well.


The Catholic Witness

Christmas: Focusing on Fundamentals
By Jim Gontis
Special to The Witness

In this wonderful, often hectic time of the year that we call Christmas, do you ever feel the need to call yourself back to basics as to what Christmas and this season are all about?

Don’t get me wrong, I love Christmas! I also love the trap- pings of Christmas, at least most of them. I love the food, the presents, the Christmas trees, the wrapping paper, the stockings “hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.”

I delight in the food, especially the sweet treats baked at home and that come by way of mail. I love the green, red, and blue lights, the gatherings of family and friends. Even in the busy hustle and bustle of our children’s faces on Christmas morn as they run downstairs to see what awaits them under the tree as she and I look on through bleary, blood-shot eyes that usually have not seen more than an hour or two of sleep from Christmas Eve.

I want our family to delight in these things, too… and they do! Yes Christ- mas, including the trappings, is a big deal to us. But I remind myself, and Eva and I try with some frequency to remind our kids, that the decorations, presents, Christmas movies and shows, et al, are not the main event.

The main event is THE EVENT. And THE EVENT, the central point of all this, is that on Christmas what we are celebrating, or should be, is the mani- festation of God in the flesh in the Person of the Infant Jesus, the Infant of Bethlehem.

The immensity of this mystery transcends us and yet is intimately with us. A little more than 2,000 years ago, the Lord of the Universe, the Alpha and the Omega, God Himself, became man. Not only did he become man, but in taking human nature, he became an embryo, and after nine months of develop- ment in Mary’s womb, the infinitely mighty Lord was born as a baby, in a stable in a cave, amongst angels, in a mess. Isn’t life like that? It is good, it is worthy, but this life is messy.

In this supreme act of divine condescension, he was born in poverty and laid by the Mother of God and his foster-father, St. Joseph, in his first bed, a manger of straw. This is why it is so important that central to our Christmas celebrations must be the creche, the Nativity scene, begun by St. Francis of Assisi to commemorate and to help make tangible this great mystery of faith.

And all this was done on his own initiative, by the power of God the Holy Spirit, through the complete and total consent of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But why?

The Church gives us four primary reasons why God became man:

1. To reconcile us to God the Father. He who is eternally from the Father, and the only begotten Son of the Father, came for our salvation. This had been lost through the Fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. He made atonement for our sins to put us “at-one-ment” with the Father, so that we could have the opportunity to have life and joy everlasting. In his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, the God-Man, Jesus Christ, redeems us. What does it mean to redeem us? It means he “Buys us back” from slavery to the ravages of sin, death and the devil. His very name, Jesus, which means “Savior”, Jesus is the one Savior, the one Mediator between God (the Father) and mankind.

2. Jesus does this so that we might know God’s love for us. God is love. He has never stopped loving us. He will never stop loving us, any of us. He cannot stop loving us because he is love. Jesus is love enfleshed. He wants us to share in this love by living and dying in the state of grace, so that we might experience his love both in this life and forever in heaven.

3. Jesus came to be our revelation and model of holiness. Holiness is only accomplished through the giving of ourselves and the abandonment of selfishness for selflessness. The greatest symbol of this self-giving love that God has for us is the crucifix. But there is no Cross without the Crib. Pope Benedict was fond of emphasizing that in a certain sense the nativity, the cru- cifixion, and the resurrection make up one mystery. Put another way, there is no Easter without Christmas.

4. God became man to make us partakers of the divine nature. He re- mained what he was (God) and became what he was not (man). God desires royalty for each and every human. He wants us to share in his divine majesty. Every human person has great dignity because every human being is made in God’s image. But because of the incarnation and paschal mystery, and our immersion into that mystery through baptism, the Christian is adopted as a son or daughter of the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ. We receive much more than the gold, frankincense, and myrrh that the magi laid at the feet of the Christ-child. We are given a share in the divine life of God. Our inheritance, so long as we cooperate with God’s grace, is eternal happiness, joy, and peace.

In a world so in need of peace, in need of God, it can be helpful to remember that without Jesus, peace on earth and goodwill toward men simply becomes a cliché. Let us seek peace and comfort in the poverty, humility, and simplicity of the Infant Jesus. Let us make Jesus the best he can be, as he was, by our Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, the choirs of angels, the shepherds, the magi, and yes, even the animals at the manger. Let us adore him. Dear Infant Jesus, I love you! Merry Christmas!

(Jim Gontis is the Director of the Diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechesis, and the Director of Sports Ministry for the Diocese of Harrisburg.)
March for Life Announces Location, Tentative Speakers

By Rhina Guidos  
Catholic New Service

March for Life organizers announced in a Dec. 6 news release that they want to focus on the sanctity of life involved with bringing life into the world but also in the interactions with one another.

One of the speakers who will talk about that during the event is Pam Tebow, mother of former football player Tim Tebow, said Mancini.

“Her story for choosing life for Timmy is beautiful,” Mancini said. Tebow’s dotor told her she had to have an abortion to save her own life, but she refused and delivered a healthy baby.

Another person who will share her story is Kelly Rosati, a March for Life board member, who has adopted four children previously in foster care, Mancini said. She said the organization also wants to provide a focus for the work done by pregnancy centers and maternity homes that help women who find themselves in an unplanned pregnancy.

Those homes are totally about providing resources for women facing unexpected pregnancies and they’re often given a bad rap,” she said.

A day before the rally and march, the March for Life organization will host a conference and an expo, as well as a session with instructions on how to track legislators’ votes and provide “tools to lobby.”

Because the National Park Service has a refurbishing project that makes it too expensive to be on the grounds of the Washington Monument, the noon march, the main event on Jan. 19, will begin instead on the National Mall between Madison Drive and Jefferson Drive in Washington, and then will wind down Constitution Avenue. The march will head toward the U.S. Capitol and then proceed outside the Supreme Court of the United States.

Congressmen Dan Lipinski, an Illinois Democrat, and Chris Smith, a Republican from New Jersey, have confirmed their attendance, Mancini said.

“The March for Life is nonpartisan, or bipartisan, we’re also nonsectarian, we always try to get people from both sides of the political aisle to speak at the March for Life,” she said, adding that it’s not always an easy task.

The annual event marks the Supreme Court’s 1973 decision in Roe v. Wade and its companion case, Doe v. Bolton, that legalized abortion.

The March for Life also has invited White House officials to speak, she said, but gave no indication of whether they would attend. Vice President Mike Pence spoke at the event last year.

The organization has a full list of events at: http://marchforlife.org/mfl2018/

Rally Program

• Musical Opening featuring Plumb!
• Holy Infant in Manchester is sending a 25-passenger bus, leaving at 6 a.m. and returning at approximately 8 p.m. For more information or to register, contact Tom Polchin at 717-829-4543. Cost is $30.
• St. Leo the Great in New Bloomfield will depart at 7 a.m. and will return at approximately 5 p.m. For more information or to register, contact Tom Evans at 717-235-8833 or tomevans54@comcast.net. Cost is $20.
• The bus for St. Catherine of Siena in Quarryville will depart at 9 a.m. and will return at approximately 1 p.m. For more information or to register, contact Jack Schuring at 717-368-0841 or info@knights12532.com. There will be no charge for the bus.
• The bus for St. Joseph in Danville will depart at 7:30 a.m. and will return at approximately 4:30 p.m. For more information or to register, contact Tom Evans at 717-235-8833 or tom@evans54.com. Cost is $25.
• The bus for St. Mary of the Assumption in New Freedom will depart at 8 a.m. and return at approximately 4:30 p.m. For more information or to register, contact Tom Polchin at 717-829-4543. Cost is $30.
• The bus for St. Patrick in Carlisle will depart at 5 a.m. and will return approximately 8 p.m. For more information or to register, contact George Pollin at gpolin3@gmail.com. Cost is $30.
• The bus for St. Bernard in New Bloomfield will depart at 8 a.m. For more information or to register, contact Tom Polchin at 717-829-4543. Cost is $20 for adults; $10 for those under 18 years of age.
• The bus for St. Catherine in Harrisburg is sending a bus, and seats are available. Cost of the trip is $25. Contact the parish at 717-564-1321 for more information.

Parish Buses to the March for Life

(For the list of a bus, provided by the Diocesan Office of Family and Respect Life Ministries, that will be headed to the March for Life on Jan. 19. Please contact the individual parishes for information.)
• Holy Infant in Manchester is sending a 25-passenger bus, leaving the parish at 7:30 a.m. and returning at approximately 7:30 p.m. To register, call the parish at 717-296-5228. Cost is $30.
• St. Leo the Great in New Bloomfield is sending four buses, departing after the 7 a.m. Mass and returning at approximately 9 p.m. To register, call Rose Gross at 717-397-4696. Cost is $10 per person; $25 per family. Reduced seats as well as group rates are available.
• The bus for St. Catherine of Siena in Quarryville will depart at 9 a.m. after the 8 a.m. Mass. The bus will stop for dinner on the return trip and should arrive back to the parish between 9:30-9:45 p.m. For more information and to register, call Darlene Graver at 717-667-0971.
• The bus for Our Lady of the Visitation in Shippensburg will depart at 8:45 a.m. and will return at 4:30 p.m. For more information or to register, contact Jeanne Meehan at 717-491-6485 or otlppl4@verizon.net. Cost is $25.
• The bus for Immaculate Heart of Mary in Abbottstown will depart at 8:45 a.m. and will return at 5 p.m. For more information or to register, contact Steve Sigmond at 717-253-5904 or stjmg21@gmail.com. Cost is $10.
• The bus for St. John Neumann in Lancaster is sending a 30-passenger bus, leaving at 8 a.m. and returning by 9 p.m. Please bring something for lunch. There will be a dinner stop on the return trip; participants are responsible for their dinner. For more information or to register, contact Susan at 717-988-0941 or sigob1205@gmail.com. There will be no charge for the bus.
• The bus for St. Joseph in New Freedom will depart at 7 a.m. and will return at approximately 10:30 p.m. The bus will stop briefly at a food court on the way home for dinner. Contact the parish office at 750-275-2512 or Dave Brady at davebrady@actonline.com or for more information or to register, call Sister Fran and Knights of Columbus are sponsoring this event (parishioners have priority).
• The bus for St. John the Baptist in New Freedom will depart immediately after the 9 a.m. Mass. The bus will return at approximately 10:30 p.m. For more information or to register, call Tom Evans at 717-235-8833 or tom@evans54.com. Cost is $25.
• The bus for St. Patrick in Carlisle will depart at 5 a.m. and will return at approximately 8 p.m. For more information or to register, contact George Pollin at gpolin3@gmail.com. Cost is $30.
• The bus for St. Bernard in New Bloomfield will depart at 8 a.m. For more information or to register, contact Tom Polchin at 717-829-4543. Cost is $20 for adults; $10 for those under 18 years of age.
• The bus for St. Catherine in Harrisburg is sending a bus, and seats are available. Cost of the trip is $25. Contact the parish at 717-564-1321 for more information.

Diocesan Respect Life Mass

Sunday, January 21 at 11:30 a.m.
Good Shepherd Church, Camp Hill
Father Paul Schenck, Celebrant

This Mass is celebrated every year to commemorate the lives lost to abortion since 1973 and to pray for the building of a culture of life in our nation from conception to natural death. Those who are not able to attend the annual March for Life in Washington are especially encouraged to attend this Mass. For additional information, contact the Diocesan Office for Family and Respect Life Ministries at 717-657-4804, ext. 317 or email KNeri@hbgdiocese.org.
Trinity Dome Mosaic Dedicated
‘Crowning Jewel’ of National Shrine

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

The overflowing congregation at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception hardly needed reminding to raise their “eyes to the heavens” during a dedication of the Trinity Dome Mosaic Dec. 8.

Before Mass began, all eyes were already on the newly completed gold dome above the front central section of the Upper Church.

When it was blessed during Mass, incense rose above the congregation and bright lights were turned on to give a better view of the newly finished dome that includes the words of the Nicene Creed encircling the base and a depiction of the Holy Trinity, Mary, the four Evangelists, angels and more than a dozen saints connected to the United States or the shrine.

During the blessing and before and after Mass, phones and cameras were held aloft to capture the completed work more than two years in the making. But it would take more than a few pictures to capture the details in this majestic work of art described as the “crowning jewel” of the national shrine during introductory remarks by Msgr. Walter Rossi, the rector.

The dome mosaic is composed of more than 14 million pieces of Venetian glass covering more than 18,300 square feet of the dome’s surface. Its completion marks the final step in finishing the work of the Upper Church that began in 1955.

The dome was dedicated, fittingly, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, reflecting the basilica’s namesake. The dedication Mass was celebrated by Washington Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl and Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell, prefect of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life, who was named by Pope Francis to be his special envoy at the dedication Mass.

Cardinal Wuerl pointed out in his homily that the mosaic tiles in the dome are symbolic of the living body of Christ regularly filling the pews of the shrine and reflecting the Church’s diversity.

He urged the congregation of families, women religious, students and people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds who filled the pews, the side chapels and stood in the back at the dedication Mass to always look to this “great majestic dome mindful of our prayer to Mary” and ask for her intercession.

He said Mary is the model of “what our faith should be” because she believed that nothing was impossible with God.

The cardinal said he remembered coming to the shrine when he was a student at The Catholic University of America in the 1960s when the walls were simply brick except for the mosaic image of the Risen Christ at the front of the church.

He also noted that the completion of the dome finishes a work that began nearly 100 years ago when the shrine’s cornerstone was placed in 1920.

As construction began on the National Shrine, as it was then called, Catholics across the country were invited to contribute however they could. Some donated pieces of gold jewelry and even precious stones, the cardinal said, which were fashioned into what came to be known as the “first chalice of the National Shrine” and was used at the Dec. 8 mosaic dedication.

When Pope Francis was at the shrine in 2015 to celebrate Mass and canonize St. Junipero Serra, he also blessed a piece of the mosaic: the words for the beginning and end of the Nicene Creed: “I believe in one God” and “Amen.”

At the end of the dedication Mass, Msgr. Rossi thanked the artists and workers, some of whom were seated at the front of the church, for their work on the mosaic, which was done in Italy and shipped in 30,000 sections weighing 24 tons. He pointed out that no one was injured and no damages occurred in the installation.

He also thanked the many donors who contributed to the dome work and gave to the shrine’s one-time national collection for the project on Mother’s Day.

“This crowning jewel of Mary’s shrine is really your work, your gift to the Blessed Mother,” he said.
The Nativity scene in St. Peter’s Square is not getting rave reviews: The backdrop does not look like a stable and the characters in need – hungry, naked, dead, imprisoned – don’t exactly evoke a silent night when all was cozy, calm and bright.

Franciscan Father John Puodziunas said he didn’t like it at first.

In addition to Mary and Joseph – baby Jesus will appear only on Christmas – the scene includes figures of people who illustrate the ongoing need for the corporal works of mercy, including feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, burying the dead, caring for the sick and visiting those in prison.

As Father Puodziunas, a friar from Philadelphia who is now general treasurer of the Order of Friars Minor, stood in St. Peter’s Square, he said he realized “this really captures what I believe the Nativity set is about. It’s about ‘Where am I today? Where is the world today? Where is the Church today?’”

The Vatican display, he said, “brings the manger scene into our present world reality to remind us that this is a God who continues to step into our world. It isn’t just something that happened 2,000 years ago.”

According to legend, it was St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of Father Puodziunas’ order, who invented the Nativity scene in 1223 by bringing straw, an ox and an ass to the side of a hill where Christmas Mass was about to be celebrated.

Father Puodziunas conceded Nativity scenes may have been around before St. Francis brought one to life in Greccio, Italy, but the Franciscan is certain the friars were responsible for spreading the tradition and bringing it into people’s homes.

“Why did St. Francis do the crib scene on the side of the mountain? Because the people were not able to receive the child into their lives,” he said. But like today, the obstacles may have been “business or anger or war or the past or concerns.”

But by bringing the people of Greccio to the manger, he said, St. Francis hoped they would be able to experience again the power and awe of God taking human flesh, becoming one of them and then offering his life for them.

“The whole idea of the crèche speaks to so many feelings and emotions we have,” Father Puodziunas said. “The child, manger, animals, night, outdoors, emptiness” – they all communicate feelings that endure through time and can be recreated anywhere.

St. Francis, he said, was focused on “the crèche and the cross. The wood of the manger becomes the wood of the cross. This Christ that steps into a messy world – whether at the time of Christ, the time of St. Francis or our own time – is the same Christ that takes us to the cross and is the source of our salvation.”

While there probably was a catechetical element to St. Francis’ crèche, Father Puodziunas believes it was more spiritual and experiential than education. “It was about making the story of Christ come alive in their lives... This child steps into the world we have today, into our own lives, not as a child, but as a savior.”

The scene also is a reminder of humanity’s poverty, not in the sense of things that people do not have, but in the sense that there is a void in everyone that only God can fill, he said. “Love, peace, mercy, freedom, joy – these are the real pover-ties of the world” and the gifts that the Christ child brings.

St. Francis believed that “we’re not all that bad,” but that God steps into the world to offer more, he said.

“As pretty as our manger sets are,” he said, “the reality is that that first manger wasn’t a pretty sight and that the world that this child steps into isn’t always pretty. And yet, this child chooses to step into this world.”

The inclusion of animals in a Nativity scene not only helps illustrate Jesus’ birth in a stable, he said. “Clearly, the Incarnation touches all of creation” and “all things are created for the purpose of praising God.”

But, he said, “we are not a ‘Hallmark Christmas’ people.” Life gets messy, but in the Gospel Jesus talks about the truth being revealed to the smallest children.

As they “grow up,” Father Puodziunas said, many people build walls and other obstacles to experiencing God’s love for them and to seeing how God is stepping into their lives.

When he was in parish ministry, he said, he would bring the little children up to the Nativity scene and tell them there was something they must tell their parents and older siblings “because they forget,” and that is: “Jesus is born.” And after Mass, he would tell them, “You need to bring them up to the manger scene.”
‘Hear the Cry of the Earth,’ Pope and Patriarch Urge in Ecology Message

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

Environmental destruction is a sign of a “morally decaying scenario” in which too many people ignore or deny that, from the beginning, “God intended humanity to cooperate in the preservation and protection of the natural environment,” said the leaders of the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Marking the World Day of Prayer for Creation, which was observed in September, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople issued a joint message.

They urged government and business leaders “to respond to the plea of millions and support the consensus of the world for the healing of our wounded creation.”

Looking at the description of the Garden of Eden from the Book of Genesis, the pope and patriarch said, “The earth was entrusted to us as a sublime gift and legacy.”

But, they said, “our propensity to interrupt the world’s delicate and balanced ecosystems, our insatiable desire to manipulate and control the planet’s limited resources, and our greed for limitless profit in markets – all these have alienated us from the original purpose of creation.”

“We no longer respect nature as a shared gift; instead, we regard it as a private possession,” the two leaders said. “We no longer associate with nature in order to sustain it; instead, we lord over it to support our own constructs.”

Ignoring God’s plan for creation has “tragic and lasting” consequences on both “the human environment and the natural environment,” they wrote. “Our human dignity and welfare are deeply connected to our care for the whole of creation.”

The pope and the patriarch said prayer is not incidental to ecology, because “an objective of our prayer is to change the way we perceive the world in order to change the way we relate to the world.”

The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople established the World Day of Prayer for Creation in 1989. In 2015, shortly after publishing his encyclical on the environment, “Laudato Si’,” Pope Francis established the day of prayer for Catholics as well.

The object of Christian prayer and action for the safeguarding of creation, the two leaders wrote, is to encourage all Christians “to be courageous in embracing greater simplicity and solidarity in our lives.”

Echoing remarks that Pope Francis made when the pontiff announced he and the patriarch were issuing a joint message, the text included a plea to world leaders.

“We urgently appeal to those in positions of social and economic, as well as political and cultural, responsibility to hear the cry of the earth and to attend to the needs of the marginalized,” they wrote. No enduring solution can be found “to the challenge of the ecological crisis and climate change unless the response is concerted and collective, unless the responsibility is shared and accountable, unless we give priority to solidarity and service.”

Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew also highlighted how “this deterioration of the planet weighs upon the most vulnerable of its people,” especially the poor, in a more pronounced way.

“Our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly implies the recognition of and respect for all people and all living creatures,” they said. “The urgent call and challenge to care for creation are an invitation for all of humanity to work toward sustainable and integral development.”
To Fight Hunger and Forced Migration, End War, Arms Trade, Pope Says

By Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

It makes no sense to lament the problems of hunger and forced migration if one is unwilling to address their root causes, which are conflict and climate change, Pope Francis said.

“War and climate change lead to hunger; therefore, let’s avoid presenting it as if it were an incurable disease,” and instead implement laws, economic policies, lifestyle changes and attitudes that prevent the problems in the first place, he told world leaders at the United Nations’ Food and Agricultural Organization.

Pope Francis received a standing ovation after he addressed the assembly at FAO’s Rome headquarters to mark World Food Day Oct. 16, the date the organization was founded in 1945 to address the causes of poverty and hunger. The FAO was holding a conference on the theme “Changing the future of agriculture.”

Food insecurity is linked to forced migration, the pope said, and the two can be addressed only “if we go to the root of the problem” — conflict and climate change.

International law already has all the instruments and means in place to prevent and quickly end the conflicts that tear apart communities and countries, and trigger hunger, malnutrition and migration, he said.

“Goodwill and dialogue are needed to stop conflicts,” he said, “and it is necessary to fully commit to gradual and systematic disarmament” as well as stop “the terrible plague of arms trafficking.”

“What good is denouncing that millions of people are victims of hunger and malnutrition because of conflicts if one then does not effectively work for peace and disarmament?” he asked.

As for climate change, he said, scientists know what needs to be done and the international instruments — like the Paris Agreement — are already available.

Without specifying which nations, the pope said, unfortunately “some are backing away” from the agreement.

“We cannot resign ourselves to saying, ‘Someone else will do it,’” he said. Everyone is called to adopt and promote changes in lifestyle, so that resources are used and in production and consumption — particularly when it comes to food, which is increasingly wasted.

Some people believe reducing the number of mouths to feed would solve the problem of food insecurity, but, the pope said, this is “a false solution” given the enormous waste and overconsumption in the world.

“Cutting back is easy,” he said, but “sharing requires conversion and this is demanding.”

“We cannot act only if others are doing it or limit ourselves to having pity because pity doesn’t go beyond emergency aid,” the pope said.

International organizations, leaders and individuals need to act out of real love and mercy toward others — particularly the most vulnerable — in order to create a world based on true justice and solidarity.

Worsening Natural Disasters Prompt Greater Awareness of Climate Change

By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service

Elizabeth Disco-Shearer, CEO of the USA’s Disaster Services Corp., has become a road warrior.

Since Sept. 3, she has been in the field coordinating the Catholic Church’s response to “these extreme events” around the world.

That concerns Betts and fellow scientists, who say global warming is creating more extreme weather.

“Science can tell you what is happening and likely to happen in the natural world. It doesn’t answer the question ‘What should you do in response?’ There has to be moral or ethical grounding to answer that question,” Cervenec said.

“Science is neutral. The larger community can respect the fact that the science community is concerned and climate change is going to affect the country,” he added.

“Most countries are not having the discussion if the science is accurate. In the United States, we’ve got to depoliticize the issue and talk more person to person on a lot of civil issues. This is one of them.”

THE CHURCH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

December 22, 2017 • The Catholic Witness - 9

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County, forcing thousands to evacuate in the dark. Santa Paula, Calif. Pushed by powerful Santa Ana winds, the fire spread for the area Dec. 6. 

Brown told reporters that the fires “may be the end of our neighbors continue to increase,” said Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles on the archdiocesan news site, angelusnews.com.

In this season of giving, let us open our gratitude for the prayers of its many friends on Twitter, the Catholic college expressed “deep appreciation” for all those in danger, “both those whose lives of local homes and livelihoods.

Perhaps no other place was harder hit than Puerto Rico, which was slammed in September by Hurricane Maria, the 10th most intense Atlantic storm on record. Electrical power was at 70 percent capacity and many communities continued to have no access to clean water in mid-December. Catholic agencies responding to natural disasters and undertook fundraising campaigns to help people of different walks of life who lost homes and livelihoods.

The official death toll in Puerto Rico stands at 64. However, data obtained by the Center for Investigative Reporting shows that at least 985 additional people died in the 40 days after the hurricane, which is a higher death toll than response to the fires. In addition, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles started a fund for victims of the wildfires that have raced through the archdiocese in Southern California.

Fundraising Starts to Aid Victims of Southern California Fires

Six major wind-fueled wildfires in Southern California have destroyed more than 1,000 structures and forced the evacuation of 200,000 residents, as of press time Dec. 19. After he surveyed the damage in Ventura County, north of Los Angeles, where the worst of the fires has raged, California Gov. Jerry Brown told reporters that the fires “may be the new normal.”

He had declared a state of emergency for the area Dec. 6. U.S. President Donald Trump declared a state of emergency for California Dec. 8. As of Dec. 12, officials had reported only one fatality.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has started a fund for victims of the wildfires that have raced through the archdiocese and spread to locations in the nearby Orange and San Diego dioceses.

“In fires and high winds” in the wildfires. Archbishop Gomez on Dec. 5 called for prayers for the well-being of families, firefighters and rescue workers “facing devasting fires and high winds” in the wildfires. “May God keep them all safe and put an end to these fires!” the archbishop said in a message sent via social media channels and posted on the archdiocesan news site, angelusnews.com.

On Twitter, Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop Robert E. Barron said the fires in Ventura County, where he is a resident, had alone forced 30,000 people to evacuate.

“Join me in praying for all the evacuees, firefighters, officials, and everyone helping to subdue the flames,” he tweeted. About 1,000 firefighters were working to contain the wind-driven flames.

Called the Thomas Fire, it is the biggest of the wildfires being stoked by dry conditions and high winds. Among the evacuees in Ventura County were students and faculty at Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula.

In a message posted on its website and on Twitter, the Catholic college expressed “deep gratitude for the prayers of its many friends and for the heroic firefighters who battled all of Monday night (Dec. 4) to protect the Santa Paula campus.”

The college canceled classes for the rest of the week as roads had been closed and power was out in some communities.

Students from California who had transportation were considering returning home for the time being; others planned to remain at the homes of local friends and family.

Natural Disasters Prompt Church to Raise Millions for Aid, Recovery

In Puerto Rico, Texas, Florida, California and Mexico City, recovery was slow and deep pain remained from a string of natural disasters as 2017 ended.

Hurricanes, wildfires and earthquakes from August through December caused widespread destruction and claimed hundreds of lives. Rebuilding in the affected areas will take years to complete. Catholic agencies responded with emergency aid and undertaken fundraising campaigns to help people of different walks of life who lost homes and livelihoods.

In response to the disasters, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Catholic Relief Services mobilized to raise funds to assist with emergency relief and long-term recovery.

The USCCB collected $38.5 million for hurricane relief and another $1.3 million for Mexican earthquake relief. Catholic Charities USA raised $24 million for disaster assistance in the wake of Hurricane Maria. The Center for Investigative Reporting shows that at least 985 additional people died in the 40 days after the hurricane, which is a higher death toll than response to the fires. In addition, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles began collecting funds even as wildfires raged in early December for families, parishes and schools affected by the fires in Los Angeles and Ventura counties.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said 2017 was the seventh most active hurricane season on record dating to 1851 and the most active season since 2005.

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In Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, Antigua, Barbuda, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Turks and Caicos were battered by storms.

About the same time, earthquakes of magnitudes 8.1, 7.1 and 6.1 jolted Mexico Sept. 7, Sept. 19 and Sept. 23, resulting in 474 deaths and more than 6,300 injuries. Caribbean storms devasted entire islands. Irma also caused flooding throughout Florida and Cuba.

Beyond Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, Antigua, Barbuda, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Turks and Caicos were battered by storms.

The temblors were followed in October and December by wildfires in California, driven by hot winds and fueled by hundreds of thousands of acres of dry timber, a consequence of a dry summer.

The most recent round of fires near Los Angeles followed by two months more than a dozen wind-whipped blazes in California wine country that destroyed thousands of homes in urban neighborhoods, causing 24 deaths and leaving thousands homeless.

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THE EPIPHANY ITALIAN MASS
EPIFANIA DEL NOSTRO SIGNORE

Sunday, January 7, 2018, at 12:15 p.m.
(Note new time and location)
St. Patrick Cathedral
212 State Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Father Joshua Brommer, Celebrant

Special thanks to:
Rev. Joshua R. Brommer, Chaplain for the Italian Apostolate Ministry
Mario Billow of Daily Funeral Home
& The Italian Apostolate Ministry Committee will provide a reception after Mass
In the Bishop Rhoades Hall located in the lower level of the Cathedral

For more information please contact:
Mariella Amato at 717-278-9420
or Maria DiSanto at 717-554-5698
e-mail: disanto1@comcast.net

2018 Adult Faith Formation Opportunities

Kingdom of Happiness: Living the Beatitudes in Everyday Life among Them

“Disciples young and old are called by name to go into the vineyard. In responding to this call, adults ‘have the greatest responsibilities and capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form. ‘Their formation in faith is essential for the Church to carry out its mandate to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to the world.’”

— Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States

The Winter/Spring 2018 Session of the Diocesan Institute for Catechetical and Pastoral Formation affords adult Catholics the opportunity to continue their formation in the Catholic faith. All courses and sessions are open to any interested adult, including those who are pursuing catechetical certification in the diocese and those who simply wish to understand the Catholic faith better.

Among the faith formation offerings available in the new year is Kingdom of Happiness, an 8-part series produced by Saint Benedict Press that unveils Jesus’ plan for our happiness. It is not just a bumper sticker slogan for advancement in the Kingdom of Happiness. It offers an in-depth look at those beautiful teachings of Christ that all too often have been taken by our modern society and turned into little more than bumper sticker slogans.

Featuring brief teaching videos by Father Jeffrey Kirby of the Diocese of Charleston, and powerful video profiles of normal people living out the Beatitudes in heroic ways, Kingdom of Happiness not only informs participants about the Beatitudes, but also shows them how to live them and achieve genuine and lasting happiness.

All Kingdom of Happiness sessions will be live-streamed via webinar, allowing small groups and individuals in parishes and/or homes to access the videos and join in on accompanying discussions with other participants.

Diocesan Institute offerings marked “Also Available Via Live Webinar” allow for remote live participation from parishes and homes. Recordings of most webinar offerings are also available for the convenience of later viewing.

To view the complete Winter/Spring Session schedule, which includes descriptions and registration fees for both current offerings and pre-recorded courses and sessions, please visit www.hbgdiocese.org.

For information about the Diocesan Institute or obtaining catechetical certification in the Diocese of Harrisburg, contact Ryan Bolster at (717) 657-4804, ext. 225, or rbolster@hbgdiocese.org.

Faith Formation Available in the Comfort of Your Own...Anywhere

The content of our Catholic faith is unchanging—the faith we profess in the Creed is the very same that Christ handed on to the Apostles. But as for how that faith is transmitted, suffice it to say that there have been some recent developments. In just the past few years, producers of excellent Catholic adult faith formation resources (Ascension Press, Augustine Institute, and Saint Benedict Press, to name a few) have begun to utilize online/digital platforms to make formation more readily available to individuals and groups of all sizes. As a result, anyone with a smart phone, iPad, or computer can access a vast array of resources in a variety of media (e.g. films, audio presentations, e-books, and video-based study programs) from virtually anywhere (e.g. home, parish, etc.), and usually at a very reasonable cost.

See the current schedule of Diocesan Institute offerings (www.hbgdiocese.org) to learn more about adult faith formation opportunities in our digital age.

Retrouvaille:
A Lifeline for Marriages

Is there stress in your marriage?

Retrouvaille is a program for married couples who feel bored, disillusioned, frustrated or angry in their marriage. Some experience coldness. Others experience conflict in their relationship. Most don’t know how to change the situation or even communicate with their spouse about it.

Retrouvaille has helped tens of thousands of couples experiencing difficulties in their marriage. In the Diocese of Harrisburg, the program is under the auspices of the Office of Family and Respect Life Ministries.

For confidential information about the program, or to register for a Retrouvaille weekend in January 12-14 in Mechanicsburg, call 1-800-470-2230 or visit www.HelpOurMarriage.com.

Introduction to Morality

Thursdays, February 8, 15, 22, March 1 and 8, 2018
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg

ALSO AVAILABLE VIA LIVE WEBINAR
Mr. Dominick Lombardi

Introduction to Prayer

Mondays, April 9, 16, 23, 30 and May 7, 2018
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg

ALSO AVAILABLE VIA LIVE WEBINAR
Mr. Ryan Bolster

Christology

Wednesdays, January 31, February 7, 14, March 7 and 14, 2018
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg

ALSO AVAILABLE VIA LIVE WEBINAR
Mr. Ryan Bolster

The Gospel of Mark: The Jewish Story in a Gentile Tongue

Thursdays, March 15, 22, April 5, 12, 19, and 26, 2018
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Saint Joseph Parish, York

ALSO AVAILABLE VIA LIVE WEBINAR
Rev. Paul CB Schenck

The Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Tuesdays and Thursdays, February 6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 22, 27, March 1, 6, and 8, 2018
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Mechanicsburg

ALSO AVAILABLE VIA LIVE WEBINAR
Deacon David Hall

Kingdom of Happiness:
Living the Beatitudes in Everyday Life among Them

Thursdays, February 8, 15, 22, March 5, 12, 19, 26, and April 2, 2018
7:00 – 8:30 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg

ALSO AVAILABLE VIA LIVE WEBINAR
Rev. Jeffrey Kirby (Saint Benedict Press)

A Tour of St. Peter’s Square and Basilicas:
Exploring the History and Beauty of the Heart of Rome

Tuesdays, April 3, 10, 17, and 24, 2018
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg

ALSO AVAILABLE VIA LIVE WEBINAR
Rev. Jeffrey Kirby (Saint Benedict Press)
God Does Not Lead Us into Temptation, Satan Does, Pope Says

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

The Italian and English translations of the “Our Father” can give believers the wrong impression that God can and does lead people into temptation, Pope Francis said.

The Italian bishops’ television channel, TV2000, has been broadcasting a series of conversations between the pope and a Catholic prison chaplain looking at the Lord’s Prayer line by line.

The episode broadcast on Dec. 6 focused on the line, “Lead us not into temptation.”

“Does lead people into temptation, Pope Francis said. “The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in its discussion of the Lord’s Prayer, says, “our sins result from our consenting to temptation; we therefore ask our Father not to ‘lead’ us into temptation. It is difficult to translate the Greek verb used by a single English word: the Greek means both ‘do not allow us to enter into temptation’ and ‘do not let us yield to temptation.’”

Pope Francis told Father Pozza, “I’m the one who falls. But it’s not [God] who pushes me into temptation to see how I fall. No, a father does not do this. A father helps us up immediately.”

Prepare Way for the Lord with Prayer, Acts of Charity, Pope Says

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

Advent is a time to make a renewed commitment to prayer and to caring for others, Pope Francis said.

“It is a time to recognize the holes to be filled in our lives, to smooth the roughness of pride and make space for Jesus who is coming,” the pope said Dec. 10, the second Sunday of Advent.

Before reciting the Angelus prayer with an estimated 20,000 people gathered in St. Peter’s Square, Pope Francis spoke about the Sunday Mass readings and particularly about the ways in which people today could respond to the prophet Isaiah’s call to prepare the way of the Lord.

Isaiah says “every valley shall be filled in” and “every mountain and hill shall be made low” in preparation for the coming of the savior.

The personal valleys or voids to be filled, the pope said, are “sins of omission,” especially “the fact that we do not pray or pray seldom.”

The other omission, he said, is in taking care of others. Not only does charity alleviate material needs, but it can be an occasion for the giver to be like John the Baptist in “opening paths of hope in the desert of arid hearts.”

The mountains and hills that need to be laid low, he said, are “pride, haughtiness and arrogance,” which fill one’s heart, leaving no room for the Lord.

As Pope Turns 81, Kids Entertain with Song, Dance and 13-Foot Pizza

By Junno Arocho Esteves
Catholic News Service

Celebrating his 81st birthday, Pope Francis blew out the candles on a 13-foot-long pizza after being serenaded with song and dance by children and employees from a Vatican pediatric clinic.

A group of children receiving assistance from the Vatican’s St. Martha Dispensary, a maternal and pediatric clinic, had given the pope a birthday party Dec. 17 marked with singing, dancing and a cake adorned with gold and white fondant decorations.

They also rolled out a large pizza with a single lit candle on it. The pope was joined with several children from the clinic and counted down before blowing out the candle.

“Eat the 4-meter pizza: Eat well, it will do you good and make you grow,” the pope told the children.

The pope said their joy was a gift and is like “good earth that makes life grow with good fruits.”

“Do not make children sad. When children see that there are problems at home, that their parents are fighting, they suffer,” he said. “They must always grow with joy.”

After meeting the children, Pope Francis greeted an estimated 25,000 pilgrims in St. Peter’s Square for his Sunday Angelus address.

Celebrating the third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, Pope Francis invited Christians to prepare for Christ’s coming through “constant joy, persevering prayer and continual thanksgiving.”

“Joy, prayer and gratitude are the three attitudes that prepare us to live Christmas in an authentic way,” the pope said before inviting the crowd to repeat the words: “Joy, prayer and gratitude.”

With Christmas also around the corner, the pope also met with members of the Italian branch of Catholic Action’s children’s section, parish-based groups of young people, ages 4-14, for his traditional pre-Christmas audience with them.
By Dan Russo
**Catholic News Service**

Relatives of the first chaplain to die in World War II accepted the Silver Star on his behalf 76 years to the day after he died saving 12 sailors during the Pearl Harbor attack.

On Dec. 7, Del and Dan Schmitt, and Fran Hemesath — nephews and a niece of Father Aloysius Schmitt — were among the family members who participated in a memorial Mass and medal ceremony at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa.

They still remember time they spent with their uncle as children before anybody even called him a hero. "He would be very humble," reflected Del Schmitt on how the priest would react to the recognition. "He would probably tell them to give the medal to some other one.

“We’re very proud,” added Hemeseth.

Rear Adm. Margaret Kibben, chief of chaplains of the U.S. Navy, led the military delegation to present the award, the third-highest medal in the armed forces, given for bravery in combat.

“It was his actions that helped to save 12 sailors,” said Fran Hemesath, a cousin of the chaplain. “Father Schmitt has lived out the motto of the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps — ‘called to serve.’”

She also took a moment during her remarks to thank all those who died for their country at Pearl Harbor, “their actions unrecorded.”

Father Schmitt, a native of St. Lucas, Iowa, and a 1932 graduate of Loras College, was ordained for the Archdiocese of Dubuque, was inspired to serve the priestly vocation as a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Dubuque while helping others escape his ship, the USS Oklahoma during the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941.

The military has stringent requirements for the Chaplain's Cross medal, which is called the Distinguished Service Cross, and it was determined Father Schmitt should receive the Silver Star.

“ Members of this family for the last several years have been trying to upgrade his awards, and have gathered quite a bit of firsthand information from people who were there on the ship,” Kibben explained in an interview before the ceremony.

“They identified a fact that he really did deserve a much higher award from our country, and just recently the secretary of the Navy approved it,” she told The Witness, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

The military has stringent requirements that must be met before someone can be awarded any of the top combat medals. Kibben touched briefly on how authori ties determined Father Schmitt should receive the Silver Star.

“One has to be in the thick of combat and one has to display actions related to heroism,” she said. "The heroism is clearly identified by his own personal sacrifice, which is evident in the actions that he took.”

Before the medal ceremony, a Mass was held at Christ the King Chapel at the college. Father Schmitt was laid to rest at Loras College in October 2016.

His remains had been identified following efforts by the U.S. Department of Defense to use modern DNA testing identifying Father Schmitt’s remains as belonging to a U.S. Navy chaplain who had been buried as “unknowns” at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii. The chaplain’s remains are now entombed near the main altar in the chapel.

“Father Al Schmitt does not need our honor, but we need to honor him,” Father Byrnes, described a spiritual life at Lor as, said in his homily. "We need his ex ample and witness to illuminate our own darkness.”

Father Schmitt’s love for God and country continues to have an impact today. Nick Radloff, a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Dubuque, was inspired to investigate the priesthood after learning about Father Sch mitt’s faithfulness in the Air Force. He was among those who spoke at the medal ceremony.

The chaplain’s legacy “lives on through us, and it is my prayer that we all tell that story well,” he said.

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**Lego Kit Brings Mystery of the Mass into Homes of Families**

By Kateri Schmidt
**Catholic News Service**

Stephen and Jennifer Maas’ family business, Domestic Church Supply Co., carries one product: a Lego kit that brings the mystery of the Mass into the lives of a dozen men by pushing them through a portal of safety.

Father Leopold Celebrates Mass” became a quirky passion project, but it has morphed into a powerful tool to proclaim the Good News.

“All our friends and colleagues in the military are major fans of Lego,” Stephen said. "Our firemen, police, and military colleagues have been coming to us asking, 'How can we use Lego to share the Gospel?'

“Father Leopold” is inspired by a Croatian priest and renowned confessor of the Holy Spirit, known for his ability to make the faith understandable to children.

The sets' fans have more to look for than just Lego figures: there are unique and Roman Missal, plus four vestments — a vesting and a Roman Missal, plus four vestments — a vesting and a

The sets' fans have more to look for than just Lego figures: there are unique and traditional designs that will fit with the rest of the Lego logo. The sets include 174 genuine Lego bricks. They include three modified bricks, for the collar, lectionary and Roman Missal, and five other elements in green, white, purple and red.

But it’s the innovative designs that make the product stand out. For the first time, Lego will allow the user to create a Catholic-themed Lego set.

“Father Leopold” is a Lego Catholic Mass set, which features a priest figure that can be placed on the altar of the church. The priest can be dressed in a white stole and vestments, and can be placed on the altar near the main altar in the chapel.

The sets are available on the Maas' website, Domest icChurchSupply.com. They include traditional and traditional designs that will fit with the rest of the Catholic-themed Lego sets.

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**Iowa Priest Honored Posthumously for Heroism as Chaplain at Pearl Harbor**

By Dan Russo
**Catholic News Service**

The priest had just finished saying Mass at about 7:48 a.m. when his ship was struck by torpedoes and began to sink. Father Schmitt sacrificed his own life to escape and helped save the lives of a dozen men by pushing them through a portal of safety.

Father Al was an inspiration to our family; let him now be an inspiration to you to do great things with the rest of your lives,” Dr. Schmitt said.

Another of the chaplain's relatives, told the crowd who gathered for the medal ceremony. "Sloan made the effort to upgrade the priest's military awards, a process that took several years.

For his heroism, Father Schmitt was initially awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal and the Purple Heart. His family and others compiled evidence and eventually submitted a 29-page document to military authorities making the case for an upgrade.

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The Catholic Witness • December 22, 2017

Obituaries

The names of the following deceased persons have been submitted by their parishes. Please remember in your prayers the happy repose of these recently departed souls and the consolation of their loved ones.

ABBOTTSTOWN – Immaculate Heart of Mary: Nanidie Kroft

BERWICK – Immaculate Conception BVM: Patricia Kachurka

BLOOMSBURG – St. Columbus: Michael V. Herbert

BUCHANAN VALLEY – St. Ignatius Loyola: Thomas Doneker

CAMP HILL – Good Shepherd: Richard Long

COLUMBIA – Holy Trinity: Laurence A. Meley

CONEWAGO – Sacred Heart of Jesus: Nadine “Deanne” Dettinburn

ELIZABETHTOWN – St. Peter: Rebecca Paula Cvek, Agnes Haggerty

HARRISBURG – Mater Dei Community: Robert Charlton; St. Catherine Laboure: Helena Waldschmitt; St. Francis of Assisi: Kay Queenzer; St. Margaret Mary: Sue Gregorits, John Hardy, Mary Beth Pantano

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LANCASTER – Assumption BVM: Janet Voss, Kay Winters; St. John Neumann: Ronald Heiser, Vincent Herron, Jr.


MIDDLETOWN – Seven Sorrows BVM: John Gorse

MILTON – St. Joseph: Robert Kirby.

MOUNT CARMEL – Divine Redeemer: Regina Revinski, Joseph A. Throowny

NEW CUMBERLAND – St. Theresa: Dennis Braun, Jewel Brighthill, Angus “Hank” Drummond, Esther Smalanskas.

NEW CUMBERLAND – St. John the Baptist: Albert J. Borys, Mary E. Surguy.

QUARRYVILLE – St. Catherine of Siena: Gerald LaFleur, Joseph Little, Marge Reinhart, Jim Sheetz.

SELINGSGROVE – St. Pius X: Patricia Hoffman.

SHAMOKIN – Mother Cabrini: Eleanor Kaskie, Mary Patynski.

WAYNESBORO – St. Andrew: John J. Jobes.


Sacred Heart Students Dramatize the Christmas Story

Students at St. Joseph School in Dallastown participated in the school’s December mission collection with an ugly Christmas sweater day. Students brought a donation for the Missionary Childhood Association and were allowed to dress down in their “ugly” Christmas sweaters. The school raised $201.92 with this collection. Students pictured are, back row: Olivia, Owen and Ryan; middle row: Teleigh, Hayden and Sadie, and front row: Anna and Maci.

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St. Joseph School in Danville to Open Kindergarten

St. Joseph School in Danville is pleased to announce that it will open a Kindergarten in the fall of 2018.

“We are so excited!” said principal Kimberly Winters. “This is a new chapter in the history of St. Joseph School.”

Father James Lease, pastor of St. Joseph Parish, said, “We’re looking to expand access to Catholic education in the Danville area. St. Cyril’s Academy has an outstanding program and we discerned that even more people could be served by opening a second Kindergarten in Danville.”

The new Kindergarten will be housed in the bright, spacious room which formerly housed the Art program. “We arranged for a few rooms. Art is now upstairs, STEM is in the computer room; it all worked out fabulously,” said Mrs. Winters.

The program is designed to offer a safe, nurturing environment in which children will be challenged at their individual levels to develop confidence in the skills needed for future success.

St. Joseph School is 127 years old and offers Christian education in the Catholic tradition. The school is sponsored by St. Joseph Parish; students of all faiths and backgrounds are welcome. Father Lease noted that, “It’s OK to pray at St. Joseph School. We offer the opportunity to talk about faith and grow in faith as a part of daily education. In an era which seems to oppose faith and reason, we believe in the harmony of faith and reason. We believe in the value of education not despite our faith, but because of our faith.”

Registration information can be obtained by calling the school office at 570-275-2435 or emailing office@stjosephdanville.com. All are welcome to attend our Catholic Schools Week Open House on Sunday, January 28, 2017, where you can visit the classroom and see the many amazing opportunities awaiting your family at St. Joseph School. Tours are available by appointment.

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Diocesan Notebook

Compiled by Jen Reed

Spiritual Offerings

The children of St. Paul the Apostle Parish, 125 South Sipnoue Street, Annville, will re-enact the Stations of the Cross Thursday, April 5 at 7 a.m. to celebrate the season of Christmas. Similar to the Stations of the Cross, there will be 14 scenes that begin with the Annunciation to the Visitation to the Three Wise Men to the Visitation on Jesus on the Ephiphany. There will be light refreshments afterwards. All are welcome!

Caerlom in the Marian tradition of Croatian hymns will be celebrated at Princes of Peace Parish in Steelton. Father Maurice Dobric will be the celebrant, and all are welcome to attend the All Mass.

Pilgrimages and Retreats

A pilgrimage to the Holy Land is being organized by Father John McClearry, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Dallastown, from June 14 to 21, 2018. We will see the key sites in Jerusalem, Galilee, and the desert and the key places where Jesus lived, ministered, died and resurrected. For more information, contact Kelsi Chuprinski at kelsichuprinski@gmail.com.

Education & Enrichment

Young Women Of Grace Study continues at Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Harrisburg. Still time to participate in the program. If you are interested in this study program, created by young women in Grace, for young women in Grace, you will discover your purpose and mission in the world. Regular sessions meet twice a month in the former church on Sundays from 4:30-5:30 p.m. For more information, please contact Ann Marie LaPковicz at 717-687-3665 or maryknoc@gmail.com or Chris Arnold at 717-379-6041 or carnold@womenofgrace.com.

Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible – If you would like to have a deeper relationship with God and a better understanding of the Scriptures, then you are Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible. You will not only benefit personally from being part of this study, you will also help to bring the Scriptures to life which may grow closer to Christ. St. Rose of Lima Parish in York will begin Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible on Jan. 7 at 7 p.m. in the parish hall. For more information, contact Sharon Eglin at 717-843-3043 or segan@hbgdiocese.org.

Fundraisers & Events

St. Patrick Church and School have a long history in downtown York. As we prepare to celebrate our 120th anniversary, if it is our wish to share this wonderful history with our people and students of St. Patrick Parish, School and Religious Education Program. The “Then and Now Project” is reaching out to you – the priests, nuns, parishioners, lay teachers, staff, and alumni of the past – to share your thoughts and memories of your time at St. Patrick Church School. Your stories, pictures or other memories you wish to share are greatly appreciated. Consider a special Mass, a funny memory, a meaningful story, your faith, Holy Communion, sports, weddings, holidays or anything else that comes to mind. Please submit pictures/stories to Joe Steinhilper, RSM, at rsm@stpattyork.org, Joe at St. Joe, at 219 South Beaver Street, York, PA 17401 by Jan. 15, 2018. See more information about the “Then and Now Project” on the St. Patrick’s Web site, www.stpattyork.org.

Good Shepherd School’s 2nd Annual Car Raffle is now underway! Enter to win a new 2019 Audi A6 or $35,000 CASH! The proceeds from this exciting fund- raiser will once again directly go to the school for the benefit of students, faculty and staff. Tickets are available for sale at the school office between the hours of 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. on days that school is in session. For your convenience, you can buy tickets online at www. gsspa.org/rafflehome. Tickets are $25 each or 5 for $100. Only 4,000 tickets are available for sale, so don’t wait, get yours today! The winner will be announced on the GSS Car Raffle Drawing Party on Feb. 10, 2018, at the Good Shepherd Parish Hall in Camp Hill.

Art contest for girls: The Harrisburg Diocesan Council of Catholic Women (HDCCW) invites young women in grades 6-12 in the Diocese of Harrisburg to enter an art contest. The task: design the cover for the 33rd annual H&DCCW Calendar! The theme of the calendar should be an original drawing or painting for a 9 x 12 folder and based on the Convention theme “Caring for God’s Creation.” The winner will receive a prize of $75 and third prize is $50. The deadline to enter is January 15, 2018. For complete details and contest guidelines, please refer to the HDCCW website hdccw.weds.com. You may also contact the HDCCW at 717-860-0707 or e-mail hdccw1@gmail.com with questions.

Adams Christian Prison Ministry Dinner: all are welcome to attend the fund-raising dinner of the Adams Christian Prison Ministry. Dinner and program will be held on Jan. 12 at Harvest Chapel, 6947 York Road, Abbottstown, beginning at 6 p.m. There will be a wine-and-cheese event and will be held on Jan. 26 from 5-7 p.m. at the Catholic Worker House, 270 N. Front St., Reading

Join the St. Columbia (Bloomburg) Voyagers as we travel Sept. 5-11, 2018 to the Canadian Rockies and Glacier National Park. Discover awe-inspiring scenery, wildlife and cultures of the west during a 6-night adventure through Canada and the northern mid-west. Highlights include 3 nights in Banff in the heart of the Canadian Rockies, visit to the National Parks including Glacier National Park, Victoria Glacier, icefields, and more. Price includes roundtrip airfare between Philadelphia and Calgary, 6 nights lodging, all meals, park transfers, services of a Professional Tour Director and baggage handling. For more information, contact Deacon Tom Aumen (who is an APCM Board member) at St. Joseph Parish in Hanover at 717-637-5236 or send to reserve your space.

Job Openings

Parish Manager position at St. Joan of Arc Parish in Harrisburg. St. Joan of Arc is accepting applications for the position of parish manager. The hours are Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. The position of parish manager must be filled by January 15, 2018. For the day-to-day running of the parish office with respect to personnel, scheduling, and administrative concerns such as records, and financial and operational procedures and guidelines. This position will also involve the overseeing of plans for building and property enhancement and/or renovation, as well as the coordination of sessions and programs. In sum, the parish manager will assist the pastor in the overall administration of the parish. At least three years of experience in business administration and personnel supervision is required. Salary, hours and benefits are negotiable. An online application form is available on the parish website at http://stjoanofarc.org. Please submit your application by Jan. 15, 2018.

Lebanon Catholic School is seeking interested candidates for the position of baseball coach. Responsibilities include coaching student athletes in game strategies and techniques to prepare them for college and careers. The school motivates student athletes to develop an appreciation of the sport and supervises students under their control in keeping with the school’s mission and character values. Please e-mail Joseph Shay, Athletic Director at js Shay@lebanoncatholic.org. Posting will close Dec. 31, 2017.

St. Margaret Mary School in Harrisburg is looking for a preschool/kindergarten aide to begin work on Jan. 2, 2018. The aide must be available for hours from 7:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Duties will include assisting teacher with supervision of children in the classroom, at recess and lunch, preparing and cleaning up, and copying necessary materials for class, and other fun things throughout the day. Interested parties should contact Mrs. Tanya Wilt at 717-335-7118 or tanya.wilt@stmparish.org or by calling the school office at 717-232-3771.

A Woman’s Concern in Lancaster is seeking a part-time (24 hours) Infant and Early Childhood Caregiver to work with team to promote life. If you have at least 5 years’ experience in marketing, development, fundraising and social media and want to work for a non-profit ministry that every day makes a difference in the lives of our clients, please apply today. Position is part-time (24 hours). Please email Jill Hartman at jhartman@ womenofgrace.com with your resume and to receive a comprehensive job description.

December 12, 2017

“Catolic Witness” - 15
A Nativity scene and Christmas tree, like those displayed in St. Peter’s Square, are visible reminders of God’s benevolence and closeness to all men and women, Pope Francis said.

The traditional Christmas displays are “the signs of the heavenly Father’s compassion, of his participation and closeness to humanity who experience not being abandoned in dark times, but instead visited and accompanied in their difficulties,” the pope said.

“The tree, which comes from Poland this year, is a sign of the faith of that people who, also with this gesture, wanted to express their fidelity to the see of Peter,” the pope said.

The Nativity scene was donated by the Benedictine Abbey of Montevergine, located in southern Italy. Created in a traditional 18th-century Neapolitan style, it covers a surface of over 860 square feet and features 20 terracotta figures, some as tall as 6 feet.

The representation of the night of Jesus’ birth, the pope said, is “inspired by the works of mercy” and is a reminder “that Jesus told us: ‘Do to others what you would have them do to you.’”

“The tree is the evocative place where we contemplate Jesus who, taking upon himself human misery, invites us to do the same through act of mercy,” Pope Francis said.

As it was last year, the Christmas tree was adorned with ornaments made by children receiving treatment at several Italian hospitals.

“These children, with their parents, participated in a ceramics recreational therapy program” organized by the Countess Lene Thune Foundation for young boys and girls suffering from oncological and hematological disorders, the Vatican said Oct. 25.

Additionally, children from the central Italian Archdiocese of Spoleto-Norcia, which was devastated by earthquakes in 2016, also made ornaments for the Christmas tree.

Pope Francis thanked the children and told them their ornaments are a personal witness of Jesus “who made himself a child like you to tell you that he loves you.”

After the Vatican’s tree-lighting ceremony later that evening, he added, “pilgrims and visitors from around the world will be able to admire your work.”

“Tonight, when the lights of the Nativity scene are turned on and the Christmas tree lights up, even the wishes you have transmitted through your decorative works will be bright and seen by everyone,” he said.

The tree will remain in St. Peter’s Square until the feast of the Lord’s Baptism Jan. 7, the Vatican said.