Medically changing a person’s sex characteristics to those of opposite sex ‘not morally justified,’ say U.S. bishops

WASHINGTON (OSV News)—Surgical, chemical or other interventions that aim “to exchange” a person’s “sex characteristics” for those of the opposite sex “are not morally justified,” said the U.S. bishops’ doctrine committee in a statement released on March 20.

What is of great concern, is the range of technological interventions advocated by many in our society as treatments for what is termed ‘gender dysphoria’ or ‘gender incongruence,’ ” it said.

The statement urged “particular care” be taken “to protect children and adolescents, who are still maturing and who are not capable of providing informed consent” for surgical procedures or treatments such as chemical puberty blockers, “which arrest the natural course of puberty and prevent the development of some sex characteristics in the first place.”

Technological advances that enable the cure of “many human maladies” today and “promise to cure many more” have been a great boon to humanity, but there are “moral limits to technological manipulation of the human body,” it said.

“The human person, body and soul, man or woman, has a fundamental order and finality whose integrity must be respected,” the committee said. “Because of this order and finality, neither patients nor physicians nor researchers nor any other persons have unlimited rights over the body; they must respect the order and finality inscribed in the embodied person.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Administrative Committee on March 15 approved release

Bill allowing Indiana pharmacists to prescribe birth control raises concerns

By Victoria Arthur

A measure that would allow Indiana pharmacists to prescribe contraceptives is moving through the General Assembly amid serious objections from the Catholic Church and many health care practitioners.

House Bill 1568 would grant pharmacists the authority to prescribe and dispense hormonal contraceptives, including birth control pills and patches to women at least 18 years old who complete a self-screening.

Proponents argue that passage of the legislation would expand access to what they consider necessary health care, while also providing conscience protection for pharmacists who object on moral grounds to prescribing and dispensing contraceptives. At the same time, the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) and others raise concerns regarding both moral and ethical considerations and potential risks to women’s health.

“We have concerns with this bill on a lot of levels,” said Angela Espada, executive director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. “We have objections from Catholic social teaching about contraception, along with serious concerns about a woman’s health. Pharmacists are highly educated and skilled professionals, but they wouldn’t necessarily know a woman’s medical or family history or how these hormones would affect her. This is clearly not the same as having a personal relationship with a doctor.”

Currently in Indiana, only physicians can prescribe contraceptives. If House Bill 1568 passes the General Assembly and becomes law, Indiana would join approximately half of the states in extending prescribing rights for these products to licensed pharmacists.

The bill, authored by Rep. Elizabeth Rowley (R-Yorktown), passed the House 86-12 and at press time was scheduled for

See ICC, page 2
See MEDICAL, page 8

Caring for creation

Archdiocesan Catholic helps launch worldwide Laudato Si’ implementation guide, page 9.

Saint Theodora Excellence in Education Award winner

Amanda Horan shows the joy that teaching brings her as she works with students during a lab in the Honors Chemistry class she teaches at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis. Horan is this year’s recipient of the Saint Theodora Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor given to an educator in the archdiocese.

Amanda Horan is in a self-described place of “contentment and happiness,” so it may seem unusual to start this story about her by focusing on what she calls “a dark period” in her life, a time when she was angry at God. Still, that time offers a defining insight into Horan, who this year’s recipient of the Saint Theodora Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor given to an educator in the archdiocese.

Teacher finds right chemistry with God and students in times of darkness and light

By John Shaughnessy

That dark period is such an important part of her faith journey that she shares the details of it with the students in her chemistry classes at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis—and with other students when she gives her personal testimony during their spiritual retreats.

“Every day, I start class with prayer. And there’s one or two reflections that come up every year that talk about how sometimes when God doesn’t answer your prayers the way you think they should be answered, he’s actually answering...”

See TEACHER, page 8

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The bill, authored by Rep. Elizabeth Rowley (R-Yorktown), passed the House 86-12 and at press time was scheduled for
a March 22 hearing in the Senate Health and Provider Services committee. The ICC has been meeting with lawmakers to request adding language to the bill requiring pharmacists to also provide information about Natural Family Planning (NFP) during their discussions with patients if the measure becomes law.

“We are working very hard to get information about NFP—natural, non-invasive, non-pharmaceutical methods—included in this legislation,” Espada said. “If pharmacists can prescribe contraceptives, they can also give out information about NFP.”

NFP, which is fully supported by the Catholic Church and highly effective when used correctly, encompasses several scientific methods that track a couple’s fertility to help achieve or postpone pregnancy. In discussions with lawmakers, the ICC is also advocating for insurance coverage of NFP training and materials.

Kelli Lovell, a trained NFP practitioner who is also a licensed pharmacist, brings a strong perspective to the legislation before the General Assembly.

Lovell has worked as a pharmacist in Evansville, Ind., for 16 years and has witnessed growth in her profession, including the authority for pharmacists in Indiana to now perform diabetes testing supplies and smoking cessation products. But she has significant concerns about House Bill 1568 and its implications.

“I'm pro-pharmacist prescriptive authority in the appropriate circumstances,” said Lovell, a graduate of the Purdue University College of Pharmacy. “This is not what I think is an appropriate circumstance. That’s not because I don’t think that pharmacists can do it, but because I don’t think they should do it.

“I don’t think it gives the right message to the public that this medication is so benign and so safe that you can have somebody who doesn’t even know you prescribe it to you in a five-minute counseling session.”

Lovell says she is grateful that House Bill 1568 includes a conscience protection clause for pharmacists who have moral objections to prescribing and dispensing contraceptives. Still, she acknowledges the tension that this legislation poses for a practicing Catholic who also has the utmost respect for professionals in her chosen field.

“The biggest conundrum is being put in this position where you feel like you have to go against the advancement of your professional career or moral standard, and I’m going to go with the moral standard every time,” said Lovell, a member of Good Shepherd Parish in Evansville (Diocese of Evansville).

A trained practitioner in both the Creighton and Landon models of NFP, Lovell also points to the well-established medical risks of artificial contraception, including the potential for blood clots and other side effects.

“Women’s bodies are not meant to be under that level of steroid-based synthetic hormone,” she said. “Simply put, contraceptives are not good for women. They go against natural law.

“The contraceptive pill when used as a contraceptive is the only time in medicine that we would purposefully create a medical condition that would cause a functioning system of the body in the absence of disease.”

Dr. Andrew Mullally, a Catholic physician who operates a pro-life family practice in Fort Wayne, Ind., shares numerous concerns about both House Bill 1568. Lovell also points to the well-established medical risks of artificial contraception, including the potential for blood clot and other side effects.

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Mullally noted similar objections to the legislation raised by the Indiana State Medical Association (ISMA).

“It’s clearly bad just from a secular medical perspective,” said Mullally, a member of both the ISMA and the Catholic Medical Association. “Supporters of the legislation view it as a means of serving a larger number of women in Indiana, especially in smaller communities with limited access to primary care doctors. They also argue that it would reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, particularly following last year’s legislation restricting abortion in the state.

But the ICC offers a much different view.

“The Church is opposed to this legislation due to the risk to women’s health, unborn life and the false narrative behind this bill: that increased access to contraception leads to fewer abortions,” said Edward T. O’Meara, associate director of the ICC.

Mingus points to extensive Catholic social teaching on the sanctity of life, which includes numerous arguments against artificial contraception.

“Victoria Arthur, a member of St. Therese of the Infant Jesus [Little Flower] Parish in Indianapolis, is a correspondent for The Criterion.”

Do you have a favorite Bible verse or a favorite quote that guides your life?

Do you have a favorite Bible verse or a favorite quote that serves as a touchstone for you—that helps guide you in your life, that centers you in your relationship with other people, or that reminds you of the presence of Christ in your life?

The Criterion is inviting you, our readers, to share your favorite Bible verse or a favorite quote with us, hoping that you also will share why that verse or quote has such a special meaning for you.

Do you have something exciting or interesting to share related to your parish and a daytime phone number where you can be reached?

The Church is opposed to this legislation due to the risk to women’s health, unborn life, and the false narrative behind this bill: that increased access to contraception leads to fewer abortions.”

—Alexander Mingus, associate director of the Indiana Catholic Conference

The Church is opposed to this legislation due to the risk to women’s health, unborn life, and the false narrative behind this bill: that increased access to contraception leads to fewer abortions.”
Mercy sister who is lifelong advocate for developmentally disabled to receive Notre Dame’s Laetare Medal

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (OSV News)—Mercy Sister Rosemary Connelly, former executive director of the Misericordia Home for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities and a lifelong advocate for such individuals, will receive the University of Notre Dame’s 2023 Laetare Medal, the oldest and most prestigious honor given to American Catholics.

It will be presented at the university’s 176th commencement ceremony on May 21 at Notre Dame Stadium.

The announcement was made on March 19, Laetare Sunday, which is the fourth Sunday of Lent. The medal has been given to Catholic leaders since 1883.

“With her characteristic tenacity, grace and genius, Sister Rosemary has ensured that the residents of Misericordia—as wonderful children of God—have the quality of life and opportunities they deserve,” said Holy Cross Father John Jenkins, president of Notre Dame. “We are inspired by her vision, her leadership and her compassion and are honored to bestow the Laetare Medal on her.”

When Sister Rosemary came to Misericordia as executive director in 1969, the nonprofit on Chicago’s south side provided a home and custodial care for children with disabilities from birth to age 6. Though the children were well cared for, they did not have access to educational and enrichment activities—as was typical at the time.

Sister Rosemary, however, believed the children were capable of more and deserved a higher quality of life. She began seeking out special education programming for them and when she found that nothing yet existed, she began seeking out programming and when she found that nothing yet existed, she developed her own.

Today, the Misericordia community has expanded to include a 37-acre campus on Chicago’s north side serving more than 600 children and adult residents, with more than 1,200 staff members and thousands of volunteers, as well as an outreach program that offers assistance to more than 140 additional families.

“It is considered a benchmark in compassionate care for individuals with disabilities, offering a wide range of vocational training and educational, social, recreational, medical and therapy opportunities,” said the Notre Dame news release on the 2023 Laetare Medal recipient.

Sister Rosemary said she has felt God’s presence at every turn.

“I always felt that God was with me, that God really took care of me. He even spoiled me by always making sure the right people were in the right place at the right time,” she said in a statement.

“And I don’t think that’s accidental. The Lord has been more than gracious to me. So I’m thankful to God that we have a Misericordia. It’s a place where the children are respected and loved and the staff is very committed to them.”

A native Chicagoun, Sister Rosemary was one of six children born to Irish immigrant parents. She joined the Sisters of Mercy at age 19 and taught in several Chicago archdiocesan schools while continuing to pursue her own education. She earned a bachelor’s degree in social science from St. Xavier University in 1959, a master’s in sociology from St. Louis University in 1966 and a master’s in social work from Loyola University Chicago in 1969.

Sister Rosemary has received nine honorary degrees—including one from Notre Dame in 1997—and numerous awards and honors, including the Order of Lincoln Medallion, Illinois’ highest award for lifelong outstanding achievements; the Illinois Entrepreneur of the Year Award from Ernst & Young; and a Caring Institute award, naming her one of the most caring people in America.

Now 92, she has recently transitioned from her role as executive director to chairwoman of the board of the Misericordia Foundation, which focuses on fundraising efforts, and continues to spend as much time as she can working with the Misericordia community.

“What motivates me? I think the fact that I’m surrounded by wonderful people, including the staff and especially the residents here,” Sister Rosemary said. “They challenge us to be our best. They’re loving. They live life beautifully. And they can be models for us all.”

The Laetare (pronounced lay-TAH-ray) Medal is so named because its recipient is announced each year in celebration of Laetare Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Lent on the Church calendar. “Laetare,” the Latin word for “rejoice,” is the first word in the entrance antiphon of the Mass that Sunday, which ritually anticipates the celebration of Easter. The medal bears the Latin inscription, “Magna est veritas et praevalebit” (“Truth is mighty, and it shall prevail”).

Established at Notre Dame in 1883, the Laetare Medal was conceived as an American counterpart of the Golden Rose, a papal honor that antedates the 11th century. The medal has been awarded annually at Notre Dame to a Catholic “whose genius has ennobled the arts and sciences, illustrated the ideals of the Church and enriched the heritage of humanity.”

Previous recipients of the Laetare Medal include Civil War Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, actor Martin Sheen, Dave Brubeck, singer Aaron Neville and actor Martin Sheen.

The three most recent recipients are Kathleen McChesney, a former FBI executive assistant director and the first person to lead the U.S. bishops’ Office of Child and Youth Protection (2020); Carla Harris, a celebrated Gospel singer and a leading U.S. financial executive (2021); and Sharon Lavigne, an environmental justice activist (2022).
Why do Catholic schools succeed?

Every independent research study on the effectiveness of Catholic education in the United States has shown conclusively that Catholic schools make a difference in the lives of students and families, and the church, and society as a whole. Catholic schools are a recognized success, especially in central and southern Indiana are individuals and communities.

Many of the Catholic schools in central and southern Indiana are thriving. This is the result of several factors, including strong support from parish school commissions, parishes and the archdiocese, the excellent education provided by teachers and staff, parents who are willing to make sacrifices for their children, elected officials and donors who recognize the importance of Catholic schools. Together, these individuals and organizations are making a real difference.

Another key to this initiative is the Choice Scholarship Program—and also known as the “voucher” or “choice” program—where state funds help make Catholic schools a reachable reality for nearly all families.

Unfortunately, since the 1970s, Catholic school enrollment has declined nationwide. There are hopeful signs (post-pandemic) of an increase in enrollment—especially at the preschool and kindergarten levels—but the decades-long downward trend has not yet turned.

However, Catholic schools exist to proclaim the Catholic faith (catechesis). The mystery of God, as revealed to us by the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the principal content of a Catholic education. Everything else that is taught—as part of a genuine commitment to educational excellence—is an elaboration on the wonders of God’s creation and the history of our salvation.

All of the academic calendar and the history of our local communities, the more we discover that the teachings of our Church, as contained in Scripture and in our Catholic tradition, represent the truth, the way things really are. Outstanding Catholic schools are vibrant learning environments that promote curiosity and an openness to new ways of living and learning.

Finally, in order to be truly Catholic, a school must teach its students and all members of the school community to reach out to others and accept responsibility for the well-being of all God’s creation (social justice). Catholic schools do not exist for their own sakes. They exist for the good of their students and the communities they serve.

Frequently, a Catholic school is an “anchor” in its neighborhood, a source of stability and mental health. A school that is truly Catholic serves its neighborhood and community because of its recognition that we cannot love God as we should unless we also love our neighbor. Social justice is a constitutive element of the Catholic school. That means it must also be a constitutive element of the curriculum and the daily life of every student.

With the help of God’s grace, may all our Catholic schools in the archdiocese continue to transform hearts and lives.

—Daniel Conway

Reflection

Bishop Robert P. Reed, OSV News

‘Annunciation’: Salvation and the words of the air

Perhaps you’re like me: I just love Christmas and though the liturgical calendar moves on as it must, I’m always sad to see it go.

Like the reformer Erasmus, Scrooge, I try to hang on to it for as long as I can—the birth of the humble baby, told to the astonished shepherds by angels—not just ordinary angels, “do not fear, my dear children, but David angels—messengers charged to announce that your Lord has been born from on high, with a big, celestial noise.

That’s what the word “annunciation” is all about. It’s the big announcement, and not about the latest deal on Amazon with free shipping, but about something bigger than our imaginations—information dropped from heaven to Earth, for our good. For our delight. For our salvation.

In fact, with Christmas now feeling well behind us, we nevertheless touch it again, on the 25th of this month, when we observe the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord as recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke.

The Annunciation is one made by the archangel Gabriel to a young woman of Nazareth—Mary, who is full of grace. Motivated by that grace, she generously acquiesced, permitting this announcement of God’s will to change her life, and that of the entire human family, for history has been hinged upon her “fit,” her “yes,” just as our salvation hinges upon our current tendency to say “no.”

In that, Mary has modeled for us the means of uttering a trust “yes” even when it comes with a hint of fear, or a breath of doubt.

“Behold,” she said. “I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Mary was, no doubt, overwhelmed by all of this. I’m certain that these annunciations—both Gabriel’s and her own—had an immediate impact on her faith, her life, her relationship to her family and to Joseph. Despite all that, her holy response, simple and direct, changed the history and trajectory of humankind, and of her whole being. She became the new Eve who saved us from original sin—who helped us become the children of light once more. By the working of the Holy Spirit, God enlarged our humanity without diminishing his divinity.

In the Church of the Annunciation, built in Nazareth, over the place where this history-harvesting encounter occurred, the inscription on the marble altar explains the mystery: “Verbum caro hic factum est.” That is: “Right HERE, the Word became flesh.”

In that instant of announcement—much faster than the angel of Christmas—the waiting was over, the cryes and hopes of God’s people chosen by centuries were fulfilled. Sacred was that child conceived in Mary’s womb, a divine person, wrapped in our human nature where supervised, sacred is every human person from the moment of conception.

Through these combined annunciations of Mary and Joseph, December, God gave us the greatest weapon of all in our ultimate battle against Satan. He gave us his only Son, Jesus, made flesh and made food, and our Blessed Mother, who loves us so much, and the Church that is Christ’s body. Let’s not take this month—today, and every day—I make this solemn announcement to you. Jesus is with us, and will be until the end of the age, as he has promised.

He has fulfilled the will of his Father, gathering disciples and friends, offering us the “ Anchor” in his neighborhood, in Nazareth, and the Church that is Christ’s body. May he bless you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

That’s what the word “annunciation” is all about.

Letter to the Editor

Reader: Editorial on Pope Francis reminds us to help, love and forgive others

Thank you to Daniel Conway for his editorial. “After 10 years, what do we know about Pope Francis?” in the March 10 issue of The Criterion.

I smiled as Conway mentioned the Holy Father noting that we all need to “get off our comfortable couches” and begin with the Church “in the role as a field hospital,” caring for the wounded in body, mind and spirit. All I could think of in response was the amount of time we spend on social media giving opinions on minutia and posting selfies.

As I understand the various judgment scenes described by Jesus in the Bible, selfish, followers, entertainment news, sports statistics and many other things are never mentioned as qualifiers for those who seek entrance into heaven; only whether a person helped, loved and forgave others. To do so to them, Jesus said, is like doing it to him.

Thank you, Mr. Conway, for the editorial. Thank you, Pope Francis. And God bless you as you continue to lead us in the right direction.

Sonny Shanks
Corydon

Letters Policy

Letters from readers are welcome and every effort will be made to publish the letters from as many people and representing as many viewpoints as possible.

The editors reserve the right to select the letters that will be published and to edit letters from readers as necessary based on space limitations, pastoral sensitivity and content (including spelling and grammar). In order to encourage opinions from a variety of readers, frequent writers will ordinarily be limited to a single letter every six weeks. Concise letters (usually less than 300 words) are more likely to be printed.

Letters relevant to the Catholic Church and to serious reasons, names may be withheld.

Send letters to “Letters to the Editor,” The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to criterion@archindy.org.
Tomorrow, Saturday, March 25 is the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. It is the day that interrupts the penitential season of Lent to celebrate the announcement of God’s saving action through Mary, and her willing acceptance of God’s plan for her. “Hail, Mary, full of grace,” we pray, echoing the greeting of the archangel Gabriel. “The Lord is with you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.”

The Gospel reading for this solemn feast is the familiar story told by St. Luke of Mary’s “fiat,” her acceptance of God’s Word, which changed the course of human history. Because Mary, a humble young woman in an obscene little town far removed from the seats of power and influence, said “yes” to God’s mysterious and frightening invitation, the redemptive power of divine love was unleashed in the world, and God himself became a man.

Mary’s “yes” was not an impulsive reaction. God had been preparing for this moment her whole life and, in fact, the Jews, the chosen people of God, had been preparing for this moment throughout their entire history. Mary’s humility, her prayerfulness and her eagerness to do whatever the Lord commanded were the results of her openness into the spirituality of Judaism. In Mary, the daughter of Zion, the hopes and dreams of the people of Israel were fulfilled. Her openness to the mystery of God’s love incarnate made it possible for her son, Jesus, to redeem all humanity.

The first reading for the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord (Is 7:10-14, 8:10) contains the strange, apparently contradictory prophecy. The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God is with us” (Is 7:14) Mary, a virgin, conceives a son by the power of the Holy Spirit and, as a result, God literally becomes one with us. In him, the enigmatic prophecy is fulfilled—not just symbolically but literally. God is with us as a human being, and his self-sacrificing love is the redemptive power that saves us from the destructive effects of sin and death.

The second reading for the Annunciation (Heb 10:4-10) discloses the only form of sacrificial offering that is acceptable to God. Brothers and sisters: It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins. For this reason, when Christ came into the world, he said: “See, I come to do your will, O God” (Heb 10:4-7).

Willingness to do God’s will is what is required of us if we wish to repent of our sins and become one with the God, who made us for union with himself and with all our sisters and brothers. Mary’s “fiat” is the model for all of us because it anticipates her son’s words in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but yours be done” (Lk 22:42).

What we will celebrate tomorrow is God’s generous, self-sacrificing love, which became God incarnate the moment Mary said, “yes.” Our Catholic faith teaches us that God gives us a free choice. We can say “yes,” like Mary, or we can say “no.” God will not force us to do what he knows is in our own best interests. He gives us the freedom to follow our own path, come what may. Lent is the liturgical season that tries to help us discern the right path and to make choices that are good for us. The disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving are all designed to help us prepare for those moments when we will have to make life-changing decisions. How will we respond? Will we say, “Yes, I want to do it as my own will according to your word?” Or “not my will but yours be done?” Or will we stubbornly insist on doing things “my way?”

The holy season of Lent gives us many opportunities to practice the kind of self-sacrificing love that authentic Christian discipleship demands. Let’s take advantage of this penitential time to sharpen our ability to say “no” to those things that lead us away from God’s will for us.

Remember that St. Luke’s Gospel tells us that Mary was “greatly troubled” when she first heard the words spoken by God’s messenger. “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” (Lk 1:30) The angel assures her. Let’s take these words of consolation to heart.

Mary’s “yes” has paved the way for us. Her generous acceptance of God’s will gives us confidence and hope.†

**El ‘sí’ de María cambia el curso de la historia y nuestras vidas**

Mañana, sábado 25 de marzo, es la solemnidad de la Anunciación del Señor, día de júbilo que interrumpe el tiempo penitencial de la Cuaresma para celebrar el anuncio del acto salvador de Dios por medio de María, y su aceptación voluntaria del plan de Dios para ella. “Dios te salve, María, llena eres de gracia,” rezamos, haciéndonos eco del saludo del arcángel Gabriel. “Bendita eres entre todas las mujeres y bendito es el fruto de tu vientre, Jesús.”

La lectura evangélica de esta solemnidad es el conocido diálogo narrado por san Lucas del fiar de María, su aceptación de la Palabra de Dios, que cambió el curso de la historia de la humanidad. Porque María, una humilde joven de un recóndito pueblo alejado de las sedes del poder y la influencia, dijo “sí” a la misteriosa y aterradora invitación de Dios, se desató en el mundo, Cristo dijo: “No quieres sacrificio y ofrenda, pero me has dado un cuerpo. No se agradan los holocaustos ni las expiaciones por el pecado. Entonces dije: ‘Mi Dios, aquí estoy para hacer tu voluntad, como está escrito de mí en el libro’” (Heb 10:4-7).

La disposición a cumplir la voluntad de Dios es lo que se requiere de nosotros si queremos arrepentirnos de nuestros pecados y llegar a ser uno con el Dios, que nos hizo para unión con Él y con todos nuestros hermanos y hermanas. El fiar de María es el modelo para todos nosotros, porque anticipa las palabras de su Hijo en el huerto de Getsemaní: “Padre, si quiere, haz que pase de esta copa; pero que no se haga mi voluntad, sino la tuya” (Lc 22:42).

Lo que celebraremos mañana es el amor generoso y abnegado de Dios, que se escarnió en el momento en que María dijo “sí.” Nuestra fe católica nos enseña que Dios nos libra de la tentación de elección. Podemos decir “sí” como María, o podemos decir “no” Dios no nos obligará a hacer lo que sabe que nos conviene sino que nos da la libertad de seguir nuestro propio camino, pase lo que pase.

La Cuaresma es el tiempo litúrgico que trata de ayudarnos a discernir el camino correcto y a tomar decisiones que nos hagan bien, de conformidad con la voluntad de Dios. Las disciplinas de la oración, el ayuno y la limosna están diseñadas para ayudarnos a prepararnos para esos momentos en los que tendremos que tomar decisiones que nos cambiarán la vida. ¿Cómo responderemos? ¿Diremos: “Sí, hágase en mí según tu Palabra”? O tal vez “que no se haga mi voluntad, sino la tuya”? “O insistimos obstinadamente en hacer las cosas ‘a mi manera’?”

El tiempo santo de la Cuaresma nos ofrece muchas oportunidades para practicar el tipo de amor abnegado que exige el auténtico discípulo cristiano. Aprovechemos este tiempo penitencial para agudizar nuestra capacidad de decir “no” a aquello que nos aleja de la voluntad de Dios para nosotros.

Recuerden que el Evangelio de san Lucas nos dice que María “se turbó mucho” cuando oyó por primera vez las palabras pronunciadas por el mensajero de Dios. Él ángel la calma diciéndole: “María, no temas. Dios te ha concedido un gran favor” (Lc 1:30). Dios nos ha dicho serios estas palabras de consuelo.

El “sí” de María nos ha allanado el camino en su generosa aceptación de la voluntad de Dios nos da confianza y esperanza.†

**Cristo, la piedra angular**

El ‘sí’ de María cambia el curso de la historia y nuestras vidas
March 24-May 28
RISE UP! Daily Lent and Easter Reflections: 20-minute video reflections led by Father Jonathan Meyer, pastor of All Saints Parish in Downtown Cincinnati. Receive link via text or email, text “Rising” to 84576, free delivery. 575-4302, jiacktowaspers@gmail.com.

March 30
Archbishop Edward J. Naumann will hold his annual Mother of the Redeemer Mercy Day of Reflection, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., $40, includes materials, limited to 10. Information, registration: 317-788-7581, benedictinn@benedictinn.org.

April 7
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Good Friday Personal Day of Reflection, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., $40, includes private room for the day and lunch. Information, registration: benedictinn.org/programs, 317-788-7581, benedictinn@benedictinn.org.

April 14, May 5
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 2214 Main St., Oldenburg. A Day of Reflection, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m., $20 with spiritual direction. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, www.oldenburgfranciscancenter.org.

April 15
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 2214 Main St.

April 16

April 21
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Benedictine Values in Caring for Our Creation, 9 a.m.-noon, Benedictine Sister Marie Fitzpatrick presenting, $35. Information, registration: benedictinn.org/programs, 317-788-7581, benedictinn@benedictinn.org.

May 3
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 2214 Main St., Oldenburg. Contemporary Prayer, in person or via Zoom, 2-3:30 p.m, Franciscan Sister Olga Wittkendorf presenting, free will donation. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, jesart@ oldenburgerc.org.

Announcement for couples celebrating 50, 55, 60, 65, 70 or more years of marriage are accepted. Go to cutt.ly/anniversaries or call 317-236-1585.

The Indianapolis Society of St. Vincent de Paul will hold its annual Love Your Neighbor 5K, walk/run virtually from April 15-29. The fee to enter is $25 per person on April 29.

The virtual option allows participants to walk or run their own way whenever they choose. The in-person option will take place at White River State Park, 801 W. Washington St. in Indianapolis, at 9 a.m. A 1-mile Family Fun Run will also be held.

For both virtual and in-person 5K events, the cost for one to three participants ages 23 and older is $29 through March 26; $34 from March 27-April 16; and $39 from April 17-22. The cost for one to three participants younger than 23 is $25. For all ages, there is a $5 discount per person when registering four or more participants.

The 1-mile Family Fun Run is $19 per person, with a $5 discount per person when registering four or more participants.

For more information, contact Darlene Sweeney at 317-924-5769, ext. 238, or dsweeney@svdpindy.org.

Handbook for Living in the Kingdom of Heaven, priests retreat, Benedictine Father Eugene Hensell presenting, $465 single registration, stmaryoftheimmaculateconception.org/retreats.

May 29
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Come and see the Woods, $10, sponsorships available, must register by May 10. Information, contact Darlene Sweeney at 317-924-5769, ext. 238, or dsweeney@svdpindy.org.

May 30
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Days of Marriage Preparation Weekend, 7-8 p.m., reflection on Jesus’ life, includes housing and meals, free. Information: provctr@spsmw.org.

May 31
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 2214 Main St., Oldenburg. First Saturday Devotion, 3-4 p.m., Father Keith Hoose facilitating, meet in retreat Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove.

Event Date
Event Name
Location
Organizer
Cost
Information
April 2
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Outdoor Stations of the Cross, 3-4 p.m., Father Keith Hoose facilitating, meet in retreat house. Information: loomsop@archindy.org, 317-547-7651.

April 6
Archbishop Edward J. Naumann will hold his annual First Saturday Devotion, 9:30 a.m., $35, includes materials, limited to 10. Information, registration: provctr@spsmw.org, 317-788-7581, benedictinn@benedictinn.org.
Project Joseph helps men on ‘journey of healing’ from abortion

By Natalie Hoefer

At pro-life rallies, Eric Slaughter often holds a sign that reads, “Men Regret Lost Fatherhood.” “I’ve had perpetrators tell me I don’t have a way out, that abortion is as good as none of my business,” says Slaughter. His experience of losing a child to abortion tells him otherwise. “You’ve lost this child, and you’re suffering the loss, feeling regret and pain from failing to be a man and a family,” he says. “And society says you’re supposed to hold it in and not talk about it.”

Women who have had an abortion have men walking around with this pain that affects their lives and relationships. It’s important to have a venue for men to acknowledge these feelings so they can heal themselves and their relationships.

This conviction led him and David Bangs—who also regrets his role in his child’s abortion—to bring Project Joseph post-abortion healing retreats for men to Indiana. The retreats will alternate between the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in the fall and the Lafayette Diocese in the spring. The next retreat is scheduled for April 22-23 in Lafayette.

“It’s a way of bringing men out of themselves and start the healing process,” says Slaughter, “and a way for men to know they’re not alone.”

Child’s abortion ‘had a dramatic effect on my life’

Both Slaughter, a member of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish in Indianapolis, and Bangs, a member of St. Patrick Parish in Kokomo, Ind., in the Lafayette Diocese, have participated in and now help facilitate Project Joseph’s post-abortion healing retreats. While open to all, the majority of attendees are women, says Slaughter.

He notes the men who do attend “are less likely to speak, not only because they expect, as I did, that all women are going to hate [them], but men are taught to hold our feelings in and not share.”

“The journey is about trying to forget” about the abortion of his child, says Bangs, who was 19 at the time of his loss. “But it had a devastating effect on my life. I was very angry, I had relationship problems, I suffered from depression. It took me 25 years to realize what was causing all that.”

Slaughter says he suffered because “of my failure to live up to my responsibilities of protecting my child and the child’s mother.”

Both men’s experiences reflect two studies cited by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in its 2022 report, “Addressing the Medical and Social Impact of Abortion: Understanding the_truth.”

“Every time there is Russian occupation in Ukraine, they’re stopping tyranny.” Archbishop Sviatoslav Gudziak of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia told attendees of the 18th annual National Catholic Prayer Breakfast on Capitol Hill on April 14. “And Ukrainians are resisting,” he said. “There’s good and there’s evil. While the Biden administration has committed more than $31.7 billion in security assistance for Ukraine since the start of Russia’s 2022 invasion, there has been bipartisan support for these efforts. However, some Republicans have called the bill too costly.

But Archbishop Gudziak argued on March 14 at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast that the U.S. support of Ukraine’s efforts is not only moral, but practical. “The Russian invasion has affected each of your pockets and the pockets of every single person on Earth,” Archbishop Gudziak said. “And Ukrainians are resisting which is affecting your economy. Our economy.”

Also at the March 14 event, Slaughter noted that it is the 10th National Catholic Prayer Breakfast since the U.S. Supreme Court’s Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization decision in June. The decision overturned Roe v. Wade decision, that previously found abortion access to be a constitutional right.

Providing an overview of the legal background of Roe and its downfall, Slaughter explained Catholics now have a crucial role in promoting the dignity of human life through active support to mothers and children.

Recognizing the need for a post-abortion retreat geared toward men, Bangs says he and Slaughter “looked at modifying a couple other programs to adapt them.”

Then Brie Anne Vine, the director of the archdiocesan Office of Human Life and Dignity, told Slaughter about Project Joseph—a retreat similar to Rachel’s Vineyard but intended for men. He attended a retreat in Texas and knew it was the solution he and Bangs were looking for.

“Centered around forgiveness”

The retreat uses Scripture readings, “especially about men in the Bible like St. Joseph, King David, figures that help us to reinforce and understand our purpose and responsibility as men,” says Slaughter.

Bangs both attended and helped facilitate a Project Joseph retreat in Lafayette last year.

“It’s very healing,” he says. Compared to Rachel’s Vineyard “it suits men a little better” and, at 30 hours, “is a little shorter.”

“Also some of the more emotional parts of the Rachel’s Vineyard retreat are not part of [Project Joseph],” he says.

Each retreat includes a licensed therapist and a facets familiar with past abortion, ministry, and a priest offers Mass and the opportunity for confession.

“The retreat is centered around forgiveness,” Bangs explains. “A lot of times, we will see the sin of abortion as an unforgivable sin. The Project Joseph retreat brings [men] to understand that God can forgive anything and helps them believe they can be forgiven and learn to forgive themselves.”

Men also have an opportunity to unlock their silence and tell the story of their own experience with losing a child to abortion and the impact it had on their life.

Each man’s story told at the retreat is important not only for themselves, but for the healing of the others present,” says Slaughter, who shared his story in a 2021 book he co-authored called The Aftermath: Stories of God’s Grace and Freedom After Abortion. “A man who has lost a child to abortion feels alone, because of the feelings he may not be able to express or share with anyone. Hearing the stories of other men helps each to understand that they are not alone, and together at this retreat they begin their journey of healing.”

(For more information on Project Joseph post-abortion healing retreats for men or to sign up for the one scheduled in Lafayette on April 22-23, contact David Bangs at 765-860-6006 or dbangs@gbamil.com, or search for Project Joseph Indiana on Facebook.)

WASHINGTON (OSV News)—U.S. Catholics should urge their lawmakers to continue to help the people of Ukraine fend off Russia’s invasion of their country, Archbishop Sviatoslav Gudziak of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia told attendees of the annual breakfast, which was launched in 2004 when we’ve deconstructed almost everything, that affects their lives and relationships. It’s important to have a venue for men to acknowledge these feelings so they can heal themselves and their relationships.

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Challenged to assist Ukraine, mothers and children post-Roe

The context in which the question of abortion arises is not a conflict of isolated strangers,” Snead said. “It is a crisis involving a mother and her child. And any decent society, any decent person, if you hear that there’s a crisis affecting a mother and her child, you don’t ask, ‘Who has the right to the body?’ You stop, you say, ‘Let’s go help. Let’s rush to the aid of that mother and that child.’ “So imperative is it to come to the aid of those in need, before and after the child is born,” he said, arguing that the role of the law should be to facilitate those efforts.

“And when help, support, and protection are not forthcoming, [we must] step in and provide it directly,” he said. “The success or failure of the law, our success or failure, will be understood through this lens.”

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens said the congress will be the “high point” of the U.S. Church’s ongoing Eucharistic Revival. The congress is expected to draw more than 80,000 people, and organizers have compared the event to World Youth Day, with prayer and liturgies, catechesis for individuals and families, and a festival-like atmosphere.

“Brothers and sisters, I invite you to be part of this revival, and I hope to see you in Indianapolis,” he said.

(Registration for those who want to attend the National Eucharistic Congress can be done at www.eucharistcongress.org)
The study of chemistry is often measured in exact numbers, and numbers support Horan’s success as a teacher. In her tenure teaching Advanced Placement (AP) Chemistry, she has doubled the number of students taking the exam each year. And the students in the course pass the challenging, comprehensive, end-of-year test at a rate of 89%.

The chemistry between Horan and her Advanced Placement students showed when the class celebrated her Saint Theodora selection, her selection as the Saint Theodora Award recipient by the Order of Men and Women Being Created, or from what condition they may be best medical care, as well as Christ’s power over creation. … An appreciation into thinking that we enjoy absolute medical intervention that uses available technology to repair defects in the body, “usually when it has been affected by some injury or ailment … shows respect for the fundamental order of the body, which is commendable,” the committee stated. “In fact, each of us has a duty to care for our bodies.”

Horan has two Black children that she and her husband have adopted, Amanda Horan, left, wants positive Black role models in their lives. Here, she shares a moment of joy with Samantha Byrd, one of the three presidents of the Black Student Union at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis. Horan is the moderator of the group. (Photo by Kelly Lucas of Bishop Chatard High School)
John Mundell, center, a member of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Indianapolis, poses with Brian Henning, left, and Cardinal Michael F. Czerny in a recent event at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash., to help launch ‘Our Common Home: A Guide to Caring for Our Living Planet.’ Mundell is the director of the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, a part of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Integral Human Development, which is led by Cardinal Czerny. Henning is a professor of philosophy and environmental studies at Gonzaga.

Lenten penance services are scheduled at archdiocesan parishes

Parishes throughout the archdiocese have scheduled communal penance services for Lent. The following is a list of services that have been reported to The Criterion.

**Batesville Deacony**

March 28, 6-8 p.m. at St. John the Baptist, Osgood
March 27, 7 p.m. at St. Catherine of Siena, St. John Campus, in Decatur County
March 27, 6:15 p.m. at St. Vincent de Paul, Shelby County
March 26-27, 6-8 p.m. at Immaculate Conception, Millhouse
March 30, 7 p.m. at St. Losius, Batesville

Additionally, recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the Batesville Deacony are as follows:

Wednesdays 5-6 p.m. at St. Charles Borromeo, Milan
Fridays 6-7 p.m. at St. Nicholas, Ripley County
Saturdays 4-5 p.m. at St. Charles Borromeo, Milan (and after weekend Masses at St. Maurice, Napoleon)

Half-hour before daily Masses at St. Lawrence, La porte, and St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Bright

**Bloomington Deacony**

March 28, 7 p.m. for St. Mary, Mitchell, and St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford, at St. Vincent de Paul
March 29, 6 p.m. at St. Martin of Tours, Martinsville
April 5, 6 p.m. for St. Charles Borromeo
St. John the Apostle and St. Paul Catholic Center, all in Bloomington, at St. Paul Catholic Center

**Connerville Deacony**

March 26, 1 p.m. at St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Cambridge City
March 31, 5:30 p.m. at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Bloomington, at Family Camps, Richmond

**Indianapolis East Deacony**

Recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the East Deacony are as follows:

Sundays 9 a.m. (except Palm Sunday and Easter) at Our Lady of Lourdes

**Indianapolis South Deacony**

March 24, 8:30-10:30 a.m. for St. Ann and St. Thomas Moore, Mooresville (Indianapolis West Deacony), at St. Ann

**Indianapolis West Deacony**

March 24, 8:30-10:30 a.m. for St. Martin of Tours, Martinsville
March 29, 7 p.m. at Holy Angels

Additionally, recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the West Deacony are as follows:

Wednesdays 6-7 p.m. at Mary, Queen of Peace, Danville
Fridays 3:30-4:30 p.m. at St. Christopher and 5:30-6:30 p.m. at St. Gabriel the Archangel
Saturdays 4-6 p.m. at St. Gabriel the Archangel

**New Albany Deacony**

March 27, 7 p.m. at St. John the Baptist, Starlight
March 28, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Navionton
March 29, 7 p.m. at St. Anthony of Padua, Clarksville
March 29, 7 p.m. in English and Spanish at St. Michael, Charlestown
March 30, 6:30 p.m. at St. Francis Xavier, Henryville

**Terre Haute Deacony**

April 1, 10-11 a.m. at Annunciation, Brazil
April 2, noon-3 p.m. at St. Paul the Apostle, Greencastle

Additionally, recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the Terre Haute Deacony are as follows:

Thursdays 7-8:30 p.m. at St. Joseph University, Terre Haute
Saturdays 7:30-9:30 p.m. at St. Joseph University, Terre Haute

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Archdiocesan Catholic helps launch worldwide *Laudato Si’* implementation guide

By Sean Gallagher

John Mundell walked with his two grandsons picking up trash along the White River in Indianapolis earlier this year. He revealed in seeing the young boys making a game of it, calling the trash “treasure” and taking it to the “treasure store”—a nearby trash can.

It’s little stories of hope for the care of creation like this that motivate Mundell, in his work as the director of the Vatican’s *Laudato Si’* Action Platform to encourage leaders in the Church, education, health care and business around the world to do the same.

Founded a little more than a year ago, the platform is the Vatican’s initiative to encourage the implementation of the principles of Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical letter on the environment. *Laudato Si’*. On Care for Our Common Home.

The platform is part of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Integral Human Development, led by Canadian Cardinal Michael F. Czerny.

On Feb. 14, Mundell took part in an online press conference to launch the platform’s “Our Common Home: A Guide to Caring for Our Living Planet,” which offers practical suggestions for protecting the environment and ways to reflect on the spiritual nature of this work.

During the press conference, he reflected on the time he spent along the White River with his grandsons.

“I was overwhelmed by their enthusiasm and recognized in these simple actions the root of the ecological conversion we all need to undergo to make a difference,” Mundell said.

Mundell offered that difference responds not only to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor as “Laudato Si’” reminds us, but also to the cry of our children, our grandchildren and all future generations that follow.”

The future of his grandsons, their generation and those that follow led Mundell to call for action now in caring for creation.

“The time for polite conversations and speeches is past,” said Mundell in the press conference. “Only dramatic changes beginning today, right now, in both our personal lifestyles and choices as well as our communal policies and governance will head off the rising temperatures and their devastating consequences.”

Although only about a year old, the platform already has thousands of members, from individuals and families to parishes, dioceses, schools, hospitals and businesses that have millions of people connected to them.

The platform’s newly launched guide will help members and all who read it to formulate achievable plans to care for the environment in their own particular corner of creation.

“We’re trying to encourage people to take those steps and be more concrete,” said Mundell, a member of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Indianapolis in a recent interview with The Criterion. “We’ve done a good job as a Church of talking about what we think is important. But we haven’t been as good at making the commitment to do the work to achieve them.”

Mundell has worked in environmental matters for decades, first helping large corporations clean up pollution, then, for the last 28 years, operating his own environmental consulting firm based on Indianapolis’ east side.

He’s also had decades of experience collaborating with Catholics and Church leaders around the world through his involvement in Focolare, a lay movement in the Church founded in 1943 in Italy.

Mundell describes all this background as the “golden thread” that he sees as God’s providential way of preparing him for his current worldwide ministry in leading the platform.

“Over time, I’ve seen that my business experiences have been very valuable—project managing, budgeting, lots of practical things and the environment part, cleaning up pollution and working with agencies,” he said. “And that whole openness toward other cultures in work in Focolare globally has been brought in, too.”

Seeing all these providential connections is helpful for Mundell as he meets—online and in person—with people around the world in promoting the work of the platform.

“It’s incredibly challenging, but also totally fulfilling. It’s something I feel called to do, like a vocation,” he said. “I think we’re living in one of the most exciting times in the Church’s history.”

During the next year, Mundell hopes to see more individuals and organizations joining the platform and submitting plans that the guide and other online resources can help them formulate.

“A year from now, I hope that this will be in the hands of most of the bishops,” he said. “The environment is a moral issue, not just a political issue. Hopefully, in the United States especially, we can make some headway in communicating with parishes, schools and the hierarchy about why they should have this as part of their program.”

Through it all, Mundell will keep in mind the image of his two young grandsons picking up trash along the White River.

“I’m going to work my tail off because I’m doing this for them.”

(To learn more about the *Laudato Si’* Action Platform and view its guide, visit Laudatosiactionplatform.org. Links to the guide in various languages can be found at bit.ly/LaudatoSiGuide.)
Pope Francis’ ‘anything but dull’ decade as pope has charted a bold new course for the Church

(March 13, 2023, marked the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis’ election to the papacy. Here is a perspective from OSV News.)

(OSV News)—For the biographer of Pope Francis, 10 years into the current papacy, “the Church is in a very different place,” with “the Church transformed.”

Commentators add that Pope Francis is a pope “who is not afraid to spark controversy and has certainly courted controversy and of course many of people to him. But he has certainly arrived.”

The Great Reformer and Wounded Shepherd, told OSV News that “everybody feels” the change Pope Francis has brought to the Church in the last decade.

“I think Francis enjoys being pope. It gives him life. He knows that’s what he should be doing. So I think he brings to it a kind of a joy, a peace, a freedom, which I think is really important,” he said.

What Pope Francis has done, Ivereigh argued, is reconnect the Church with grace and with the Holy Spirit.

“So we have a Church which is much humbler, much more dependent on grace, and therefore feels different, feels more joyful. And so there’s perhaps less anger and defensiveness in the Church, think, as a result.”

He said there’s been a “shift of focus” in the Church. “And I think that shift of focus has been toward the Holy Spirit and also in many ways toward the people.”

Pointing to the bishops’ Synod on Synodality, the first session of which will convene in October, as a kind of example of this shift, Ivereigh emphasized that the “people of God are not just being consulted, but are the subjects of the process itself.”

The drive for synodality in his papacy came from Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s experience, Ivereigh argued.

“Before he became pope, he was, of course, a Jesuit for many, many years, and was also the key player as cardinal archbishop in probably the most synodal event in the Church, which was the meeting of the Latin American bishops at Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007.”

Aparecida was a watershed experience, the pope’s biographer added, “in the sense that the bishops arrived very divinely, as it were, and courageously in a state of disolation, and two weeks later emerged confident, united with a much clearer vision about how the Church needed to evangelize. And he was key to that process.”

The synod for him is “structured listening space in which you’re really trying to understand the responses of your own heart to what is being said. And in those responses, you discover where the Spirit is at work.”

But the Jesuit spirit of discernment is the discernment for many meanings a headache for the Church.

“He’s not afraid to spark controversy,” Francis Rocca, Vatican correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, told OSV News. “One of the sides of the pope is very popular. He’s drawn a lot of people to him. But he has certainly courted controversy and of course many conservatives are distressed,” he said, “and also the use of the Mass according to the 1962 Roman Missal.”

The synodal discussions on moral teachings, Pope Francis is the center of criticism for many Catholics, especially in the United States.

Especially in the area of marriage, he’s obviously been very controversial, said Rocca. “It hasn’t, as we know, changed really anything. Theologically, it’s very subtle. But the message has been very clear that being divorced and remarried is not as grave a situation as it was before.”

For John Allen, editor-in-chief of Crux, “the single most controversial decision that Francis has made over the past decade” was “Amoris Laetitia,” the papal exhortation on love in the family, debating the possibility of allowing Communon for the divorced and civilly remarried.

“It marked a sort of crossing of the Rubicon,” Allen said. “Prior to 2016, it was possible for Catholic conservatives to insist that Pope Francis was simply misunderstanding, that he was being spun by a liberal media and by a liberal opinion, but in reality, you know, his heart was in the same place that John Paul II and Benedict’s had been.”

“After Amoris Laetitia,” that became a much more difficult argument for many Catholic conservatives to make. And I think, from that point forward, many Catholic conservatives began becoming outspokenly critical of Francis.”

For Allen, that moment “probably crystallized more clearly than anything that had already been building, but I think they really burst into their present form at that time.”

Rocca added that in the area of moral teaching “in regard to homosexuality—things we’ve come to think a lot about, especially these days with the German synod—he hasn’t changed the teaching, but he has really emphasized compassion. And that has caused a lot of anxiety for people who think it’s very important to uphold the traditional teachings and that the Church calls everyone to be chaste.”

For Ivereigh, the restriction on what is popularly called the traditional Latin Mass—the topic currently being debated throughout the Church from parish pews to social media posts—“was the result of a very long consultation of the bishops worldwide.”

Ivereigh argued that “what Benedict thought wouldn’t happen did happen, which is that his vision did become a movement that was undermining the unity of the Church, that it was opposed to Vatican II in many cases, and that it had been caught up with all kinds of ideologies.” He added, “Francis didn’t suppress the preconciliar Mass. He regulated it.”

Allen said he thinks that “in Catholic debate, the Latin Mass is sort of the third rail. Clearly Pope Francis felt that something enormously important was at stake because he was willing to do that despite knowing that it was going to generate enormous criticism.”

Pope Francis also was one who brought hope that he would bring visible change to the Church’s response to the abuse crisis.

For his biographer, “just looking at the number of regulations that have been introduced, the way bishops are now held accountable in the way that they weren’t’ proves he has done a lot to clean up the Church. However, there is still much to be done,” he said.

“And the reason that there’s still much to do is that the institution remains in many ways great trust toward the protection of the innocence of the priest. And I think, yes, he’s made mistakes,” Ivereigh continued. “But I think, frankly, it’s impossible not to make mistakes in this area because you’re trying to balance two things. You’re trying to protect the innocence of the priest, and you’re trying to defend the principle of innocence until proven guilty. But at the same time, you have to start by believing victims and giving them credibility.”

For Rocca, it’s Pope Benedict that “remains the high water mark for rigor and zeal in disciplining priests who abuse.” But it’s also true, Rocca argued, “that Francis, after some very, very grave missteps with regard to Chile, gave a new emphasis and promulgated some legislation, had a big global meeting and drew attention to the topic.”

Allen added that “the verdict on Pope Francis in the sex abuse crisis is that it is a mixed bag.”

“It is far to say that although Pope Francis has said that there should be accountability not just for the crime, but for the cover up—that is, bishops and superiors who covered up abuse should be held accountable—there are almost no cases of that actually happening,” he said. “There is legislation on the books now, thanks to Pope Francis, but it really has not been used in any meaningful way. And so I think a lot of people would give him a grade of incomplete.”

Ivereigh blamed slow action in some areas on clericalism—in the pope’s own words, the “ugly perversion” that the Holy Father has tried to fight from day one of his papacy. “From the very beginning of his pontificate, he has declared war on clericalism in a way that I think has been very uncomfortable for a lot of people,” Ivereigh said.

“I think when clericalism is very deep seated, then it’s a form of corruption. And in general, corrupt people do not change unless they are forced to, unless there is some major crisis or calamity,” Ivereigh added.

Some of the changes in this area, Rocca said, include the appointment of a “number of women to relatively high positions in the Vatican. . .He has sent a message that the laity should have a bigger voice with respect to bishops and to clergy.”

What the pope came to realize, Ivereigh said, “was that the only way we can move on from being a clerical Church is when we have a Church in which the people of God are taking part in the life of the Church, you know, as missiary disciples in which we are responsible and we can all take part in the decision-making processes of the Church, that we are going to move on from being a clerical Church.”

Rocca added that as much as the pope “has probably played down the ‘church of the people’ and the people in the pews, with respect to laypeople,” on the other hand, “he certainly is not shy about using his own power as pope. So we have a perhaps more powerful pope, a more commanding pope than we did in the previous pontificate. So you could look at it at both ways.”

For Rocca, the 86-year-old pontiff celebrating 10 years of papacy is “unstopabble.” “I mean, it’s quite astonishing to see how busy he is, how many meetings he has a day, how many speeches, how many trips he takes.”

Allen added that “the past decade has been dramatic, dizzying, daring, divisive. In fact, I think the only word that starts with ‘D’ that you can’t use is the word ‘dull’; because the only thing it hasn’t been is boring.”

Pope Francis is one of those once-in-a-generation leaders who comes into office with an extremely strong sense of where he wants to take the Church. And his vision is a dramatic change from what had come before.”

—John Allen, editor-in-chief of Crux

Pope Francis smiles during an audience with members of Confidentia, the General Confederation of Italian Industry, and members of their families, in the Vatican audience hall on Sept. 12, 2022. (OSV News photo/Paolo Verdelli, Reuters)
Cultural trends have affected practice of sacrament of confession

By Russell Shaw

Part one of two

(OSV News)—When Dr. Bernard Nathanson died of cancer in February 2011, obituary writers dutifully recorded that he’d become a Catholic in 1996. Some even recalled the reason he gave for taking that step.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Nathanson, a New York OB-GYN, had been a national leader in the campaign to legalize abortion. Then he saw the light, turned against abortion, and became a pro-life crusader. Joining the Catholic Church was another stage in his conversion process.

But why become a Catholic? Because, Nathanson explained, the Catholic Church has the best developed system for seeking and receiving God’s forgiveness. And as someone who’d performed 5,000 abortions himself and shared responsibility for many thousands more, he had much need to be forgiven.

Following conscience

It’s a moving story. But most of us aren’t sinners on that scale and so, we may reason, perhaps we don’t have as much cause as Nathanson to worry about sin and forgiveness.

Tempting as it may sometimes be to think like that, it clashes head-on with the First Epistle of St. John: “If we say, ‘We have no sin,’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, ‘We have not sinned,’ we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8-10).

Today powerful forces in the surrounding culture encourage people to ignore or downplay their sins and, if they’re Catholic, to skip the sacrament of penance. Confused ideas about conscience often have much to do with that. “I do what my conscience tells me,” people say, “and that’s good enough.”

People said the same thing in St. John Henry Newman’s time. But the distinguished English convert sharply criticized the idea of conscience that attitude implied. Calling it a “counterfeit” of genuine conscience, Newman wrote in 1875:

“When men advocate the rights of conscience, they in no sense mean the rights of the creator nor the duty to him. … They demand what they think is an Englishman’s prerogative, for each to be his own master in all things and to profess what he pleases, asking no one’s leave and accounting priest or preacher, speaker or writer unutterably impertinent who dare to say a word against his going to perdition … in his own way.”

Risky business, you might think. Especially in view of a point made by another British convert-author, Msgr. Robert Hugh Benson, concerning serious sins we may culpably ignore: “We need … the pardon that descends when we are unaware that we must have it or die. … Only God, who knows all things, can forgive us effectively.”

Dramatic drop-off

Some years ago, a much-discussed book by the social critic Christopher Lasch argued that our society is dominated by a “culture of narcissism.” The label seemed to fit. Narcissists, though notorious for self-absorption, steer clear of self-examination in any meaningful sense. This makes narcissism the deadly enemy of contrition and confession, considered as elements of a virtuous life.

Whether you accept or reject Lasch’s social analysis, the numbers leave no doubt that a serious problem does exist these days where the sacrament of penance is concerned. To such an extent, in fact, that it’s often said to be a sacrament in crisis.

There is a crisis here all right, but it isn’t really with the sacrament—it’s with the people who need it, but ignore it.

In one recent survey, only about 40% of those identifying themselves as Catholics said they went to confession at least once a year. Nearly 30% said they never go.

The problem isn’t new. Sacramental confession has been in steep decline for years.

In the 1950s and 1960s, about 80% of America’s Catholics went to confession at least once a year. A study in the early 1960s found that 70% had been to confession in the previous month. But by 1986, confession in the previous month had fallen to 23%. Among Catholics aged 18-30, it was 14%.

Down and down. By 2005, fewer than half the Catholics reported confessing their sins as often as once a year.

(Russell Shaw is the author of American Church, The Life of Jesus Christ, and other books. Next week’s article will explore why there has been a drop off in people availing themselves of the sacrament of penance and how to draw people back to it.) †
Challenges and gifts of caregiving and learning to lean into God’s plan

The elderly mother while still actively parenting her youngest sibling. In those years, I often added her to her watch as a child. Even though her stress was undoubtedly getting the better of her, without words, she modeled for me the carer’s journey. I won’t pretend to have any wisdom about how one should answer an unexpected (but vocational) call to caregiving, but now—as I walk alongside my husband as he takes on the care of his parents—I realize how great a lesson I learned with Mom and Daddy that is helping me to be a better partner in this new process the importance of a caring companion. It is a gift just to have an assurance that someone can be trusted to walk this path, no matter who it is.

While re-reading my journals from those long days of caretaking, I came across an apt quote I’d transcribed from Rosalynn Carter. “There are only four kinds of people in the world. Those who have been caregivers. Those who are currently caregivers. Those who will be caregivers, and those who will need a caregiver.” I find myself addressing distinctly challenging logistics for ourselves. But if we have loved one in need of care, we are caregivers. My instinct is to be unwilling to be a bother to others, and I too often try to cope with stressful circumstances on my own, but when taking care of my parents, I worked overtime to communicate with my siblings and my husband. It made a difference to know that I was not alone in the process. Still, early in my caregiving journey, I recognized the very real impact my new role was having on our marriage. Now, accompanying my husband as he enters a more intense phase of parental care, I am there for him, because I see how much his support meant to me.

Along with his companionship, I realized the commitments and learned hard lessons about patience and trusting God’s perfect will. I often prayed over a message or a visit of Jesus entrusted John with the caregiving of his own mother (Jn 19:26-27), because they were entrusted to the care of his friends. Our Lord must have known that, when he gave me the opportunity to enter the house of the beloved disciple, and him into hers.

Now, accompanying my husband as he enters a more intense phase of parental care, I am there for him, because I see how much his support meant to me.

Above all else, though, a parish is its faith community and staff. We can’t see varying degrees of assurance that someone can be trusted to walk this path, no matter who it is.

Instead of starting from a position of frustration or despair, asking whether the future is not dark, what must we change the question: What is working successfully in the process of accompanying young Hispanic Catholics? The answer is active faith. Many great initiatives, most of them unsurprisingly led by creative Catholic pastoral leaders who are themselves young adults, are proving effective.

Boston College just released the preliminary results of a national study “Ministry with Young Hispanic Catholics: Towards a Recipe for Growth and Success” (February 2023). I had the privilege of serving as the principal investigator for this study.

This report follows a line of reports emerging from research studies conducted by Boston College’s School of Theology and Ministry at the request of the bishops of the United States, which are transforming the entire U.S. Catholic experience. This last report does not disappoint. It documents how much creativity and commitment Catholic pastoral leaders bring into the world of Catholic youth ministry.

There is a treasure of insights in the report, which I recommend reading. I particularly enjoyed reading the statistics about Catholic faith communities and organizations. The study focused on 12 Catholic organizations throughout the country who are identified as doing creative and effective work in accompanying young Hispanic Catholics.

The initiatives highlighted in the study are led primarily by Hispanic young people, at whose ministry is sustained by what is presented as pillars of success in ministry with young Hispanic Catholics. These organizations are a true example of joyful ministry that brings much hope.

The Holy Spirit is at work in our Church as tens of thousands of Hispanic Catholics rekindle their faith in Jesus Christ thanks to your efforts. Many initiatives are bringing new life to the Church. Even when the day we are accompanying young Hispanic Catholics, (ffr Hoffman is professor of theology and religious education at Boston College.)

I was thinking about routine as I was flipping through the beautiful new pages of my husband’s most recent book—his long-awaited biography of Cardinal Francis E. George, the late archbishop of Chicago—that he poured so much thought, time and prayer into, and which was released in paperback earlier this month. In Glorifying Christ: The Life of Cardinal Francis E. George (Catholicmom), author Peter Michael recounts how a friend had asked Cardinal George how he remained so connected to Christ. The archbishop answered that despite all the challenges that he had faced. “George thought for a while and then answered, ‘I live my faith and focus on the habit’—a practice of living the faith, day in and day out.” Michael wrote. “It is a simple, everyday, self-discipline, and once, ‘is not so much of a matter of choice as it is a matter of habit.’

When people build their lives, they make choices at times, but much of it is simply habitual,” Cardinal George said at one point. “You should try to live your faith in a simple, everyday way, that you’ll be saved from your own individual, evil inclinations at times. If you don’t have some kind of organization [you are] faced with good and evil, you have to make a choice, too often you won’t. You can have your own life, and people live their lives, they live their faith, they go to Mass regularly, they do their best to build up their family and contribute to society. Catholicism is a way of life, a way of thinking, and a way of loving that incarnates a vision uniquely with itself if it is not finally, truly, global.”

He wanted to “remind people that there are customs that identify a Catholic way of life and” how, “if we’ve lost them, the Church becomes a debating society instead of a Church.” How familiar does that sound in our social media-fueled era? Cardinal George was so passionate about his faith that he wanted to write on it to develop it more fully, but his illness prevented him from doing so. What a loss for the Church! Though Michael highlights in Glorifying Christ are well worth reflecting upon. What are our habits, good and bad, and how can we allow them to define us? Around what structure do we build our days? How do we develop our day’s routine, and what habits can we incorporate into our practices to help ensure we make the right choice when we are inevitably presented with a fork in the road?

The answer can be found, as Cardinal George points out, within the Church. He argued that “the Church is the key to a way of life that nurtures vocations and develops disciples. As he told the U.S. bishops in 2003: ‘There is a way of life that is bound up with being a disciple of Christ in...
The Sunday Readings

Sunday, March 26, 2023

• Ezekiel 37:12-14
• Romans 8:8-11
• John 11:1-45

The Sunday Readings

• John 11:1-45
• Romans 8:8-11
• Ezekiel 37:12-14

The Book of Ezekiel provides the first reading for Mass this weekend. Even a quick reading of the history of ancient Israel shows that there were precious few periods of prosperity and calm. Indeed, only the reigns of David and Solomon might properly be considered as truly good times. Some times were more trying than others. Certainly, generations endured miserable times in Babylon, confined in wretchedness, taunted and abused as a minority. Understandably, the Jewish exiles yearned for the day when they could return to their homeland.

Ezekiel built upon this theme of hope and expectation. As did all the prophets, he saw a release from Babylonian bondage not as an accident or a happy turn of events. He saw it as a result of God’s mercy and of fidelity to God. Thus, in this reading, the Lord speaks, promising to breathe new life into the defeated, dejected people.

St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans furnishes the second reading. Rome was the absolute center for everything in the first-century Mediterranean world, the political, economic and cultural heart of the vast, powerful empire. It was a sophisticated city.

Rome’s inhabitants came from everywhere, having brought with them a great variety of customs and beliefs.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, among whom eventually he would die as a martyr. Many of them also would be martyrs. In fact, he had been dead for several days. He was united, then, in God’s power, we will have everlasting life.

However, this eternal life will occur only if we seek Jesus, and if we seek Jesus with the faith uncompromisingly displayed by Martha. Nothing daunted her faith.

The other readings reinforce this theme. Life can be taxing for everyone. Death awaits all. Ezekiel assures us that God will give us true life. It will be a life of joy and fulfillment, a life that never ends.

St. Paul insisted that this divine, unending life abides only in Jesus. So, lovingly, as Lent progresses, as Lent anticipates its culmination, the Church will invite us to Jesus, the Lord of life. †

Question Corner

Church has no formal law regarding penitential practices on Sundays in Lent

Q. I understand that the 40 days of Lent do not include Sundays. Is every Sunday a “little Easter” when we remember and celebrate Jesus’ resurrection?

I hear people say it is “cheating” if one doesn’t abstain on Sundays from whatever one gives up during Lent. But I wonder why one would fast on the happy day of Sunday?

A. The time of Lent is not meant so much to provide us with a literal 40 days of penance, but rather to recall Jesus’ 40 days of fasting in the desert. But let’s take a look at the math. From Ash Wednesday to the Wednesday of Holy Week we have six full weeks plus one day. This adds up to 43 days. If we count the Paschal Triduum—that is, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday—as part of Lent rather than as its own mini liturgical season (which is a bit more technically accurate), this adds another three days, bringing our total up to 46.

But if we subtract the six Sundays of Lent from that total, that leaves us at 40 days even. In other words, Sundays do not numerically count toward the days of penance preceding Easter.

However, during Lent the Church attempts to direct us to the inner meaning of Jesus’ resurrection. At Mass on Lenten Sundays, the Church will invite us to enter into the mystery of Christ’s saving passion and death.

At the same time, Sundays retain their character as a day of joy and rest in the Lord. As you note, Sunday is a day which has always been set aside each week specifically to recall Easter. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “Jesus rose from the dead ‘on the first day of the week.’ Because it is the ‘first day,’ the day of Christ’s resurrection recalls the first creation. . . . For Christians it has become the first of all days, the first of all feasts, the Lord’s Day” (§1166).

In the Code of Canon Law, while canon 1247 restates the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays, it also points out the faithful to “abstain from those works which hinder the ‘joy proper to the Lord’s day.’”

And, notably to those of us who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Scripture reading for Morning Prayer on Sundays throughout the Lenten season exhorts us: “Today is holy to the Lord your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep; for today is holy to our Lord. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength!” (Neh 8:9, 10).

Practically, should we take a break from our Lenten sacrifices on Sundays? The answer—like so many things related to the spiritual life—is that it depends on our own individual situation and spiritual needs. Aside from the relatively few required days of fasting and abstinence from meat, our personal Lenten sacrifices are not strictly required by the Church’s law to begin with. So, if we prayerfully discern that God is calling us to enter into the joyful spirit of Sunday more fully—or that we will be better able to make our sacrifices with love and devotion if we refresh ourselves with a weekly break—then no, it’s not “cheating” to relax our Lenten penances on Sundays.

But it’s also perfectly reasonable for other people to discern that keeping up their Lenten sacrifices throughout the time of Lent will be more spiritually fruitful for them in their own lives.

(Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicOA@osvnews.com)
Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state date of death. Obituaries of archdiocesan priests serving our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in this issue. Order priests and religious sisters and brothers are included here, unless they are natives of the archdiocese or have other connections to it; those are separate obituaries on this page.


Bennett, Marriann and Kenneth Mollaun. Grandmother of five.


MILLER, Marcia E., 92, St. Louis, Batesville, Feb. 28. Mother of Pam Nordmeyer, Tom and Scott Miller. Grandmother of five. Great-grandmother of two.


REINHARDT, Margaret L., 74, St. Luke the Evangelist, Indianapolis, Feb. 28. Mother of Marriann and Kenneth Reinhardt. Sister of Sister Franciscan Sister Olivia Rice, who serves in the vocations office of the Diocese of Lubbock, Texas, prays before a relic of Blessed Michael McGivney on March 8 at Christ the King Cathedral in Lubbock. Blessed Michael was the founder of the Knights of Columbus. He was beatified in 2020. In the first week of March, his relic was taken to three dioceses in Texas for veneration.

(Holden photo/Lucia Dione, Diocese of Lubbock)
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Conventional Franciscans open renovated art studio for events

Brownsville’s Bishop Flores named to synod preparatory commission

VAUTICAN CITY (CNS)—Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, has named Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, and six others to be members of the preparatory commission for the general assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October.

According to the apostolic constitution for the synods, the secretary-general establishes the commission “for further exploration of the theme and for the redaction of any documents that may be issued prior to the Synod Assembly.”

The names of the seven commission members were released by the Vatican on March 15.

Mercedarian Sister Shizure “Filo” Hirota from Tokyo was the only woman named to the preparatory commission. She is a consultant for the Catholic Council for Justice and Peace of the Japanese bishops’ conference of Japan.

The other members are: Jesuit Father Giacomo Costa, who will serve as coordinator; Archbishop Timothy Costelloe of Perth, president of the Australian bishops’ conference; Bishop Lucio A. Muandula of Xai-Xai, Mozambique; Father Darío Vitali, a professor of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome; and Polish Msgr. Tomasz Trafny, a member of the synod secretariat staff, who will serve as secretary of the commission.

Employment

Food Services Manager Needed

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House is seeking a full time Food Services Manager to be responsible for all aspects of the daily food service operational needs at Fatima Retreat House. This position involves maintaining food cost and labor cost budgets; menu planning and ordering; inventory control; supervising, training and scheduling of kitchen staff; and cooking. With a team of part-time cooks, the Food Services Manager presents Fatima meals and refreshments attractively and in a spirit of hospitality. The successful candidate must be available for a flexible schedule of at least 40 hours per week. Days may vary throughout the week, Monday through Sunday, depending on the Retreat House schedule.

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Wyoming becomes first state to ban or prescription of abortion pills

(OSV News)—Wyoming became on March 17 the first state in the nation to specifically ban the use or prescription of abortion pills.

Gov. Mark Gordon, R-Wyo., signed the law with a ruling by a federal judge in Texas still outstanding that could potentially implement an 11th-hour ban on the drug mifepristone amid a legal challenge backed by pro-life groups.

The state’s legislature passed two pieces of legislation in March that would restrict abortion in the state, but the governor allowed the other bill to become law without his signature.

The other bill prohibits most abortions in the state with narrow exceptions for cases of rape or incest, risks to the mother’s life, or “a fetal abnormality.”

Local media reported that Gordon, a Republican, told reportes in a March 7 press conference that he is weighing the bills’ constitutionality and wanted to ensure there is an understanding of “how we interplay with existing law.”

“Then we could determine whether another state could ban abortion pills and interact with existing law,” he said.

State law gives Gordon 15 days to veto legislation in such cases, otherwise it becomes law without his signature after approval by the legislature.

Gordon announced a list of his recently signed bills on March 9, including legislation to boost the state’s tourism economy and efforts to protect the state’s Native American cultures, but the abortion bills were not among those he signed at that time.

The ACLU of Wyoming had called on Gordon to veto the bills, circulating a petition arguing that “deeply private, personal and unique decisions about childbirth and protecting unborn children should be left to doctors—who should be able to treat their patients according to their best medical judgment.”

SBA Pro-Life America applauded every lawmaker who played a role in advancing safeguards against dangerous chemical abortion drugs, extending medical coverage for moms to a year after childbirth and protecting unborn children of all ages, Schwend said. “We applaud legislators for being champions for the most vulnerable among us and advocates for the health, safety and security of mothers.”

Experts see hope for pastoral inclusion of Catholics with disabilities

(March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.)

(OSV News)—At his home in Saginaw, Mich., 45-year-old John Kraemer spends hours each day at his craft and vocation—building elaborate models of Catholic churches, then filling them with figures for display at various parishes.

His materials are simple ones: brightly colored LEGO plastic building blocks (over 250,000 of them) that have delighted children for decades.

But the message offered by Kraemer—who has a mild form of cerebral palsy, along with visual and hearing impairments—is a profound one.

“My work is a prayer,” Kraemer told OSV News. “I’m sharing my faith because it helps them belong within the Church.”

From that viewpoint, persons with disabilities can be seen as “agents of evangelization, a subject of the evangelization,” said Kraemer.

“Their vocation is to serve the Church, not to be served.” Both she and Sister Kathleen pointed to several areas where pastoral ministry to those with disabilities requires greater investment.

Catechetical and faith formation materials still need to be made more accessible, said Sister Kathleen, who in 2017 developed and released the Religious Signs for Families app to help deaf children and family members learn to pray in American Sign Language (ASL).

“We still see that some prominent publishers don’t caption their multimedia,” she said, adding that simply relying on adaptive technology to bridge the gap is insufficient.

“Access someone who is actually using adaptive technology,” said Sister Kathleen. “For people who are deaf, you can use automatic captioning, but it doesn’t do a good job with the religious terms. So taking that extra step expresses that you’re keeping in mind people who are deaf and hard of hearing, and that they’re cherished members of our community.”

“Sister Kathleen is the voice of the Venerable Jerome Lejeune Fellowship—designed to raise awareness of the importance of those with intellectual disabilities in both the Church and the culture—was a positive sign from a key provider of faith formation content, she said. Named after the French scientist who identified the genetic cause of Down syndrome, the inaugural fellowship is currently held by Mark Bradford, founding president of the U.S. branch of the Pope John Paul II Research Foundation and the parent of an adult son with Down syndrome.

Making Catholic schools “more inclusive for children with intellectual disabilities” also is vital, said Sister Kathleen. “A fully segregated school for special education is not a trend that has a future, and research bears that out.”

A 2018 study by the National Council on Disability titled “The Segregation of Students with Disabilities” found that “inclusive education results in the best learning outcomes.”

Offering welcome to those with mental illness, Alzheimer’s and dementia is increasingly important, especially as the number of affected individuals grows across the nation, said Katra. From 2019-2020, close to 21% of U.S. adults—more than 50 million—were experiencing a mental illness, according to the nonprofit Mental Health America. The CDC estimates that by 2060, the number of cases of Alzheimer’s disease, the most common form of dementia, will rise in the U.S. from 5.6 million to 14 million.

“The parish can be and should be a place of hope,” said Katra. “It behooves the Church to be that safe place, that home for people to come and be accepted where they are, so we can as Pope Francis says so beautifully ... journey with them to a better place.”

Kraemer said that is the goal of his brick-by-brick labor of love.

“As I’m building, I’m praying on the life of the Church, of our parish communities ... especially after COVID, when we took major hits,” he said. “I pray that people would make the Mass a priority, that more people would be willing to explore their talents, and use them as a way of evangelizing like I do.”

1 The Criterion  Friday, March 24, 2023

Two Catholics to be named to Synod on the Church’s Communion

Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Kathleen, who is the current executive director of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD), said OSV News.

“There has been a lot of movement [forward] over the last couple of decades.”

“I feel like we are making pretty good progress, and what makes my heart happy is to see parishes (aware) that this effort to include people with disabilities is part of the everyday mission for the Church,” said Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Kathleen Schubert, director of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia’s Office for Persons with Disabilities and former chair of the NCPD board of directors.

“According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), some 26% (or 1 in 4) in adults in the U.S. have some type of disability. Overall, 11.6% experience difficulty with mobility, 10.9% experience significant issues with cognition, 5.7% are deaf or hard of hearing, 4.9% have a vision disability and 3% are a rare disability that impedes dressing or bathing.”

Both Kraa and Kathleen said OSV News the continuing phase of the 2021-2024 Synod on Synodality, with its various listening sessions, helped to highlight the concerns and insights of this significant demographic within the Church.

“The synod was a good first step,” said Sister Kathleen. “The process was particularly helpful because it was targeting many people with disabilities and how they see the efforts of the Church. The only way we make progress is by listening carefully.”

When voices of persons with disabilities are heard, pastoral moves approach “inclusion from belonging,” a word Kraemer said.

She has submitted a proposal to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops asking them to embrace that perspective by issuing a new pastoral statement on persons with disabilities, one that updates the bishops’ original document in 1978.

“My suggestion for the new one is to focus more on abilities than disabilities, and ... a sense of belonging, at every level of human feeling and experience,” said Katra.

Instead of being an initiative for a few qualified specialists, pastoral ministry to persons with disabilities should involve a member of the Church [so that] … all people have access, feel welcome and feel some responsibility that they belong within the Church and have access to the life of the Church,” said Sister Kathleen.

Both Katra and Sister Kathleen have been influential figures in this work of “erasing the gap is insufficient.”

The two have been involved in efforts to increase inclusion for those with disabilities in the life of the Church say the horizon is a reflection of the past, but a prayer for the future.”