ANGELUS

HIGH AT A COST

Can anything stop America's marijuana madness?



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ON THE COVER
SHUTTERSTOCK

Marijuana has become more accessible (and more potent) than ever in the U.S. But while Catholic teaching on its use is clear, on Page 10 Patrick T. Brown argues that any answer to society's casual attitude toward weed should keep in mind that the consequences of pot use are hard to reconcile with the Church's vision of a life well lived.

THIS PAGE
PETER LOBATO

Young girls hold up a portrait of the late Bishop David O'Connell during a special Mass on Sunday, Feb. 1, at St. Frances X. Cabrini Church in South LA marking three years since his death. Archbishop José H. Gomez led the Mass (and a short procession beforehand) at St. Frances, where O'Connell served as pastor during two separate stints.



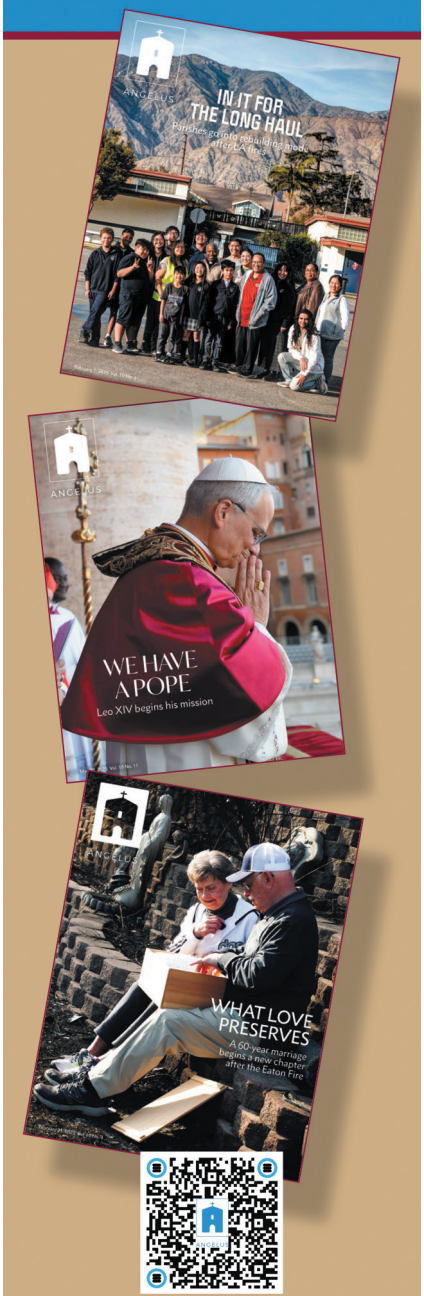
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POPE WATCH

The art of forming people

The following is adapted from Pope Leo XIV's Feb. 6 address to participants in the Plenary Session of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life in the Vatican Apostolic Palace.

It is true that in the Church, at times, the figure of the formator as "pedagogue," engaged in transmitting instructions and religious competences, has prevailed over that of the "father" capable of generating faith.

Our mission, however, is much loftier, and so we cannot stop at transmitting a doctrine, an observance, or an ethic. Rather, we are called to share what we live, with generosity, sincere love for souls, willingness to suffer for others, and unreserved dedication, like parents who sacrifice themselves for the good of their children.

There is also a communal aspect of formation. As indeed human life is transmitted thanks to the love of a man and a woman, so Christian life is conveyed through the love of a community.

It is not the priest by himself, or a catechist, or a charismatic leader who generates faith, but the Church, the united, living Church, made up of families, young people, celibates, and consecrated persons. They are inspired by charity and therefore eager to be fruitful, to transmit to everyone and above all to the new generations the joy and fullness of meaning that it lives and experiences. The desire in parents to give life to their children does not arise from the need to have something, but the wish to give, to share the superabundance of love and joy that dwells in them. It is here that every work of formation also has its roots.

There are a few other fundamental elements of the mission of the formator.

First, the need to foster consistent, engaging, and personal paths of life that lead to baptism and the sacraments, or to their rediscovery, because without them there is no Christian life.

Then, the importance of helping those who embark on a journey of faith to mature and preserve a new way of life that embraces every area of existence, both private and public, such as work, relationships, and daily conduct.

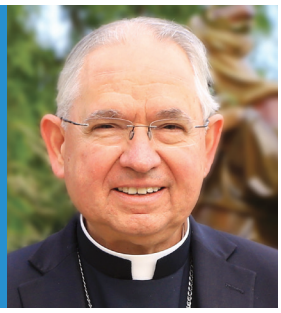
Also, it is essential to nurture in our communities aspects of formation aimed at respect for human life in all its stages, particularly those that contribute to preventing every form of abuse of minors and vulnerable persons, as well as accompanying and supporting victims.

The art of forming is not easy, and cannot be improvised: it requires patience, listening, accompaniment, and verification, both on a personal and a community level.

Over the centuries, spiritual giants such as St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Philip Neri, St. Joseph Calasanz, St. Gaspar del Bufalo, and St. John Leonardi have emerged. It was with this in mind that St. Augustine, shortly after being elected bishop, composed his treatise "*De catechizandis rudibus*," whose guidelines remain useful and valuable to this day.

The challenges you confront can at times seem beyond your strength and resources, but don't be discouraged. Start small, following the Gospel logic of the "mustard seed," confident that the Lord will never fail to provide you with the necessary energy, people, and graces at the right time.

Papal Prayer Intention for February: Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.



NEW WORLD OF FAITH
» ARCHBISHOP JOSÉ H. GOMEZ

The better angels of our nature

On Feb. 4, Archbishop Gomez celebrated a Mass and led a Holy Hour for peace at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. The events were held in response to a call from the U.S. bishops for prayer in the wake of tensions and violence related to federal immigration enforcement actions. The following is adapted from the archbishop's homily.

We join our prayers with those of our Catholic brothers and sisters all across our country. We pray for peace, peace in our streets and neighborhoods, and also peace in our hearts.

We pray for government leaders, law enforcement officers, and for those protesting and defending the immigrant families caught up in this struggle — here in Los Angeles, in Minneapolis, and in so many other cities.

We ask the Lord to take away the spirit of confrontation and give us a spirit of cooperation. We ask Jesus to open every hardened heart and awaken again the conscience of America.

In the Gospel passage that we just heard, Jesus comes back to his homeland, but he finds that his countrymen have closed their hearts to his mighty deeds and message of love. Jesus is saddened by this. As we heard: "He was amazed at their lack of faith."

This passage of the Gospel makes me reflect on what's going on in our country. We're in a moment when it seems like many have lost faith in America's promise and her founders' vision.

And it is sad that this is happening this year, when we are celebrating our nation's 250th anniversary. This should be a time for renewal, not a time of retreat.

America's founders dreamed that this would be a land where men and women from every race and faith, from every national background, could live with dignity.

As Americans, as Christians, we have to speak out for the dignity of the human person.

Every crisis is a crisis of saints. So now is the hour for our Christian witness. It is our duty as followers of Jesus to help America recover her soul.

Jesus calls his followers to be people who heal, make peace, and bear witness to his love.

Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to pray for those who oppose us. Practically speaking, that means we need to treat others with dignity and respect, even if we don't share their point of view, even if they have a different vision for our country.

So, we pray today for the strength to be more disciplined in our words, more restrained in our actions. We pray for the grace to see the humanity of those around us, especially those who oppose us.

Jesus calls his followers to be people who heal, make peace, and bear witness to his love.

We all share this beautiful vision — the vision of God, the vision of Jesus, the vision of America's founders. This beautiful vision of every man and every woman as a child of God, made in God's image, with a sanctity and dignity that must be cherished and fostered.

And the most beautiful witness we offer is our solidarity with those who are suffering. So, let's keep close to our immigrant brothers and sisters. Let them know that nothing can ever separate them from the love of God!

In this time and this moment we are also called to help our country to recover her national story of liberty and equality under God.

We need to help our neighbors to see the beautiful vision that we see. We need to find new ways to summon the best of the American character, "the better angels of our nature," as someone once said.

We are in a difficult moment, a challenging moment, a time of division and even violence. But our country has faced hard times before and overcame them.

So it is, again, a moment to especially pray for our country. To pray that we open our hearts to the beautiful reality of so many of our brothers and sisters who are here just to make a difference in our country.

So let's pray seriously about a spirit of nonviolence and a renewal of commitment to America's founding principles.

Let us open our hearts to the grace of God. Let us especially ask God to bring peace to our country at this time.

And let us meet the challenges we face with prayer and moral seriousness, with the spirit of nonviolence, and with a commitment to America's founding principles.

We ask Mary our Immaculate Mother, patroness of America, to pray for us. May she help us to seek justice, love mercy, peace, and may she help us to walk together humbly with her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

WORLD

Traditionalist group to ordain bishops without papal approval

The Priestly Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), a traditionalist group in "imperfect communion" with the Catholic Church, defied the Vatican by announcing plans to consecrate new bishops without papal approval.

The consecrations, scheduled for July 1, would be the SSPX's first since 1988, when founder Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre consecrated four new bishops without Rome's approval. That action led to an automatic excommunication on Lefebvre and the four bishops, which was lifted in 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI.

Since then, there have been various attempts to regularize the situation. Pope Francis granted SSPX priests faculties to hear confessions and validly witness marriages.

Should the consecrations continue as scheduled, those involved could incur automatic excommunication like the bishops from 1988. The head of the SSPX, Father Davide Pagliarani, announced plans to meet with Vatican officials in February.

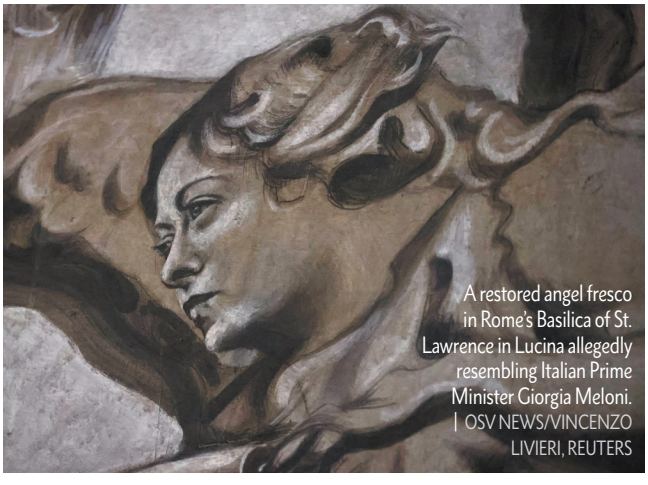
Italy: Is that an angel or the prime minister?

A Roman church briefly became a viral sensation after an angel's face appeared to resemble Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

During restoration work at San Lorenzo in Lucina, one of Rome's oldest churches, a cherub painted by artist Bruno Valentinetti drew crowds after visitors noticed its likeness to Meloni.

Selfie-seekers flocked to the church, and the image spread rapidly online. Meloni herself reacted with amusement on Instagram, writing, "I definitely don't look like an angel."

But following investigations by Italy's Ministry of Culture and the Diocese of Rome, Valentinetti covered the face after the diocese asked for the original features to be restored to protect the church's spiritual purpose.



A restored angel fresco in Rome's Basilica of St. Lawrence in Lucina allegedly resembling Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. | OSV NEWS/VINCENZO LIVIERI, REUTERS

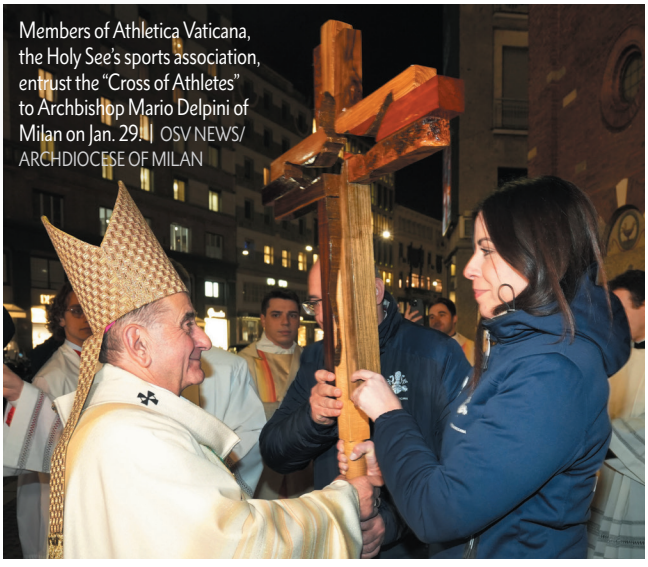
'Sports Cross' helps kick off Milan Olympics

The Archdiocese of Milan welcomed the Vatican "Sports Cross" Jan. 29 as the city prepared for the 2026 Winter Olympic Games.

The simple wooden cross, also known as the "Cross of Athletes," has traveled to the dioceses hosting the Summer and Winter Olympics since 2012.

Archbishop Mario Delpini of the Diocese of Milan welcomed the cross during a special Mass scheduled to coincide with the "Olympic Truce," an ancient Greek tradition of peace for the safe travel of Olympic Games that was revived in 1991.

"Pope Leo has, from the beginning, talked about the importance of peace," Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Culture and Education, told EWTN News. "Sport speaks a common language … I think peace comes from that sense of people giving their best, giving it in service of others, and working for the good of all."



Members of Athletica Vaticana, the Holy See's sports association, entrust the "Cross of Athletes" to Archbishop Mario Delpini of Milan on Jan. 29. | OSV NEWS/ARCHDIOCESE OF MILAN

Jimmy Lai sentenced to 20 years: a death sentence?

Hong Kong media entrepreneur and pro-democracy advocate Jimmy Lai has been sentenced to 20 years in prison, in what critics say is the harshest penalty yet under China's national security law.

A Hong Kong court handed down the sentence Feb. 9, nearly six years after Lai's arrest sparked international outrage.

Lai, founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily, was convicted in December of sedition and conspiring to collude with foreign forces. His family warned that the 76-year-old's declining health makes the sentence life-threatening.

"If this sentence is carried out, he will die a martyr behind bars," said Lai's daughter, Claire.

Fulton Sheen beatification gets green light from Vatican

The Diocese of Peoria, Illinois, said that the Holy See had informed them that "the Cause for the Venerable Servant of God Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen can proceed to Beatification."

Sheen, a legendary media evangelist who lived from 1895 to 1979, appeared set to be beatified in late 2019. But his cause was stalled mostly by concerns that as bishop of the Diocese of Rochester, New York, from 1966 to 1969, he might have overlooked sexual abuse by at least one former diocesan priest there.

However, multiple investigations since found no concrete reasons to believe Sheen had mishandled abuse cases.

As a priest, Sheen drew tens of millions via his weekly "Life Is Worth Living" TV program. After his first year on the air, Sheen won an Emmy award for best television personality. Upon acceptance, he famously thanked his writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

New York Archdiocese: Insurer made fake victims group

The Archdiocese of New York alleged an insurance company created a fake victims advocacy group to create pressure in an ongoing lawsuit over coverage for sexual abuse claims.

"Chubb [Insurance] deliberately and fraudulently disguised itself as a third-party 'victim's rights' organization and hid the organization's true identity for years," read a Jan. 31 legal filing.

The filing claims that Chubb did this while "pretending" to collaborate with the archdiocese.

In 2023, Chubb allegedly launched a website for the "Church Accountability Project," without originally disclosing its connection to the insurer. The site claimed the archdiocese was "deploying all of its VAST resources to deny its victims the compensation they rightfully deserve."

But that year, Chubb sued the archdiocese over an $859 million insurance claim covering more than 3,000 cases of sexual abuse. In 2024, the archdiocese countersued Chubb for evading its obligations.



A new era in the Big Apple — Archbishop Ronald A. Hicks smiles after his predecessor, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, retired archbishop of New York, escorted him to the cathedral during his installation Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City on Feb. 6. | OSV NEWS/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

You really are getting invited to fewer weddings

Catholic marriages in the U.S. have declined by nearly 60% in the past 25 years.

The Official Catholic Directory recorded 267,000 marriages in 2000 but just 108,000 in 2025, according to provisional numbers. Compared to 1970, when approximately 426,000 Catholic marriages were recorded, the rate has dropped almost 75%.

"When we see the rise in divorce, families not practicing their faith, not going to church, not active in their parishes — what can we expect?" Christian Meert, founder of Colorado-based Agape Catholic Ministries, told EWTN News. "We, the Church, the whole community of faithful, aren't we all responsible?"

Habemus papam … and Seahawks?

A popular internet theory has linked the Seattle Seahawks' Super Bowl LX appearance to the election of Pope Leo XIV.

The Seahawks, who defeated the New England Patriots 29-7 on Feb. 8, have made it to every Super Bowl following a papal election since the start of the millennium: Super Bowl XL following the 2005 election of Pope Benedict XVI; Super Bowl XLVIII following the 2013 election of Pope Francis; and now Super Bowl LX following last year's election of Pope Leo XIV.



Seattle Seahawks chairwoman Jody Allen lifts the Vince Lombardi trophy after Super Bowl LX in Santa Clara, California. | OSV NEWS/KYLE TERADA-IMAGN IMAGES VIA REUTERS

Hundreds gather at cathedral for Mass, Holy Hour for peace

Archbishop José H. Gomez called on Catholics to stay close to migrants amid national unrest over actions by federal immigration officers, while praying for the strength "to be more disciplined in our words, more restrained in our actions."

"We're in a moment when it seems like many have lost faith in America's promise and her founders' vision," said Archbishop Gomez in his homily during the Feb. 4 Mass for the Day of Prayer and Holy Hour for Peace at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

"We ask the Lord to take away the spirit of confrontation and give us a spirit of cooperation," prayed the archbishop. "We ask Jesus to open every hardened heart and awaken again the conscience of America."

Nearly 1,000 people turned out for the Mass and Holy Hour, held in response to an invitation from U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops president Archbishop Paul S. Coakley.



Further faith in Francis — Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, in the Barrio Logan neighborhood of San Diego, inaugurated the Pope Francis Center on Feb. 1, dedicated to assisting migrants struggling amid the Trump administration's deportation campaign. | OSV NEWS/CHARLIE NEUMAN, COURTESY DIOCESE OF SAN DIEGO

Long Beach Catholic school holds reparation Mass after desecration



A shattered statue of the Virgin Mary lies on the floor next to the altar in the sanctuary after Holy Innocents School in Long Beach was discovered vandalized and ransacked on Feb. 2. | HOLY INNOCENTS SCHOOL

Students, staff, parents, and community members held a reparation Mass at Holy Innocents School on Feb. 3, only 24 hours after discovering their campus hall and chapel ransacked, vandalized, and desecrated.

Auxiliary Bishop Marc Trudeau of the San Pedro Pastoral Region, blessed the altar with holy water. Following the Mass, Father Peter Irving III, pastor at Holy Innocents Church, led a Eucharistic procession around the school.

On the morning of Feb. 2, Principal Cyril Cruz discovered the scene in the school hall: trash and food everywhere, lighting equipment and musical instruments damaged, and several Virgin Mary statues — including a life-size replica that had been at the school since its opening in 1958 — were shattered or dismembered. The bronze tabernacle holding the Eucharist was thrown to the floor, broken.

"People who are broken tend to break things," Trudeau said during the homily. "We call on our Blessed Mother to help us to be like her Son, bringing healing and forgiveness to all who need it."

Donations to the school can be made at lbcatholicschool.com.

Archbishop Gomez receives award from Catholic business group

Archbishop José H. Gomez received the 2025 Cardinal O'Connor Defender of the Faith Award from Legatus, a Catholic business organization that integrates faith and leadership, during the group's national summit meeting in Santa Barbara on Jan. 29-31.

Archbishop Gomez, the organization's ecclesiastical adviser for the past 14 years, received the award for being "a consistent voice of compassion and reason on the moral and spiritual issues shaping American public life and culture," said Legatus President Stephen Henley.

In a video message, Archbishop Gomez said he strives to model his beliefs after Cardinal John O'Connor, who "believed in the Gospel's power to change lives and renew the conscience of society."

"Right now, we are living a troubled moment in our history, a time of confrontation and uncertainty," Archbishop Gomez said. "And our country needs your witness. …We have to help our neighbors rediscover the beauty and mystery of human life."

IN OTHER WORDS...

Letters to the Editor

Two Catholic journalists who made a difference

How appropriate that, as reflected in your tributes in the Feb. 6 issue, Catholic writers Russell Shaw and John L. Allen Jr. both passed from this life just days apart.

Both men were so important for modern American Catholicism, influencing how the Church was perceived and understood ... especially by Catholics themselves!

For example, Allen's book about Opus Dei helped me reconsider some of the prejudices I had about the movement. Later, Shaw's "Eight Popes and the Crisis of Modernity" actually helped me understand the pontificate of Pope Francis (even though he wasn't one of the eight popes discussed).

Kudos to Angelus for featuring both of these giants in your pages over the years. Not many publications can boast that.

— *Jesse Atienza, Miami, Florida*

Continue the conversation! To submit a letter to the editor, visit AngelusNews.com/Letters-To-The-Editor and use our online form or send an email to editorial@angelusnews.com. Please limit to 300 words. Letters may be edited for style, brevity, and clarity.

A different kind of Catholic school dress code



Students at Notre Dame School in Santa Barbara dress for what they want their future careers to be during Catholic Schools Week. View more Catholic Schools Week images from around the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. | NOTRE DAME SCHOOL

View more photos from this gallery at AngelusNews.com/photos-videos

Do you have photos or a story from your parish that you'd like to share? Please send to editorial@angelusnews.com.

"We are giving them a job and they're giving us Christ."

~ Dan Gallagher, executive director of Brother Andre's Cafe, a Catholic-owned Pittsburgh coffee shop that employs adults with mental disabilities, in a Jan. 31 The Pillar article.

"This is a call to be a missionary Church, not a country club."

~ Archbishop Ronald Hicks, the newly installed prelate of the Archdiocese of New York, in the homily during his installation Mass on Feb. 6.

"You are drawn from different traditions, different cultures, different countries. And yet you are united by sport — a universal language."

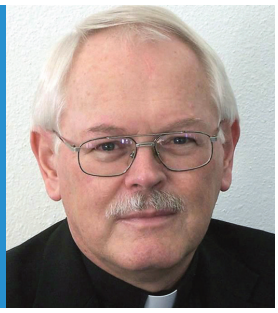
~ Giovanni Malagò, president of the Milano Cortina 2026 Organizing Committee, in a speech during the Winter Olympics' Opening Ceremony.

"Probably a lot of people are asking, 'Why?' But why did someone climb Mt. Everest? Why do a marathon in Antarctica?"

~ Catherine Breed, a swimmer, in a Feb. 4 LA Times article on her plans to swim the length of California's Pacific Coast this summer.

"I hope the agents do not come around. I hope they see the center as part of our church."

~ Father Scott Santarosa, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in San Diego, in a Jan. 29 article in The Southern Cross (Diocese of San Diego) on concerns that ICE might target the parish.



IN EXILE

» FATHER RONALD ROLHEISER, OMI

Oblate of Mary Immaculate Father Ronald Rolheiser is a spiritual writer; ronrolheiser.com

John L. Allen Jr., RIP

The renowned anthropologist Mircea Eliade once issued this warning: "No community should botch its deaths." He's right. Death washes clean, and only after someone is gone can we fully drink in the gift that he or she was for us and the world.

On Jan. 22, the Christian community, and the Catholic Church in particular, lost someone who had been a gift to us for a long time. John L. Allen Jr., the editor-in-chief of Crux, died in Rome at the age of 61. He had been battling cancer since 2022.

John was one of the most prominent (and important) English journalists commenting on religious issues, particularly on ecclesial issues and the shifting demographics of religion in the world. He worked out of Rome as a Vatican correspondent and out of the USA as editor-in-chief of a news site that helped keep us abreast of what was happening religiously in the world.

A number of things made him stand out as a journalist. He had a talent for having his finger on the pulse of things, not just in what was happening in the churches, but also what (in his words) were the mega-trends in the world. For those of us who didn't have time to scan the news every day and read the numerous articles in religious magazines and websites — well, we could read John.

But, even more important than his talent for having his finger on the pulse of things was his always fair-minded, balanced commentary. John did not fall into either of the current ecclesial categories of liberal or conservative. He was both, and neither. He was comfortable in both liberal and conservative gatherings, comfortable with Popes John Paul II and Benedict, and with Francis and Leo. He had devotees and critics on both sides of the ecclesial spectrum. That speaks well of him. If I may use a time-worn cliché, he was too conservative for some liberals and too liberal for some conservatives. He didn't have a full home with either of them, even as he was at home with both. Moreover, he was never accused of being unfair, even by those who disagreed with him.

Then, beyond the journalist, there was John the man, the friend, the one who forever brought lightness, warmth, and humor into the circle. I was privileged to get to know him (and his favorite restaurants) during my years on our General Council in Rome. He befriended our Oblate community and we befriended him. Our friendship continued after my return to Canada and the U.S., and John accepted invitations to speak at various symposia and conferences at our school and at other Oblate sponsored events.

And he was always memorable, not just for his solid content, but also for his color and humor. He would introduce himself to the audience by sharing that he came from Hill City, Kansas, where, in his words, "there is no hill, and sure as hell no city!" The local bar there, he said, had a sign in the men's restroom: "Please don't gut your ducks in the sink!" He carried that earthiness into his presentations, and no one ever left wondering what exactly he was talking about. He didn't only bring balance and fairness, he also brought wit.

John carried that into his life in general: insight, balance, and color. My image of John is this: a cigarette in hand, a drink in front of him, sitting with a group who are holding forth on every kind of issue, with John providing colorful banter along with keen insights from his wide world experience.

I remember a story he shared at just this kind of gathering, about how he was with his family inside a mall in Minneapolis when his phone rang. He looked at the number and then told his family he needed to step outside to take this call. It was Pope Benedict. How do you tell your family in a shopping mall in Minneapolis that you just had a phone call from the pope?

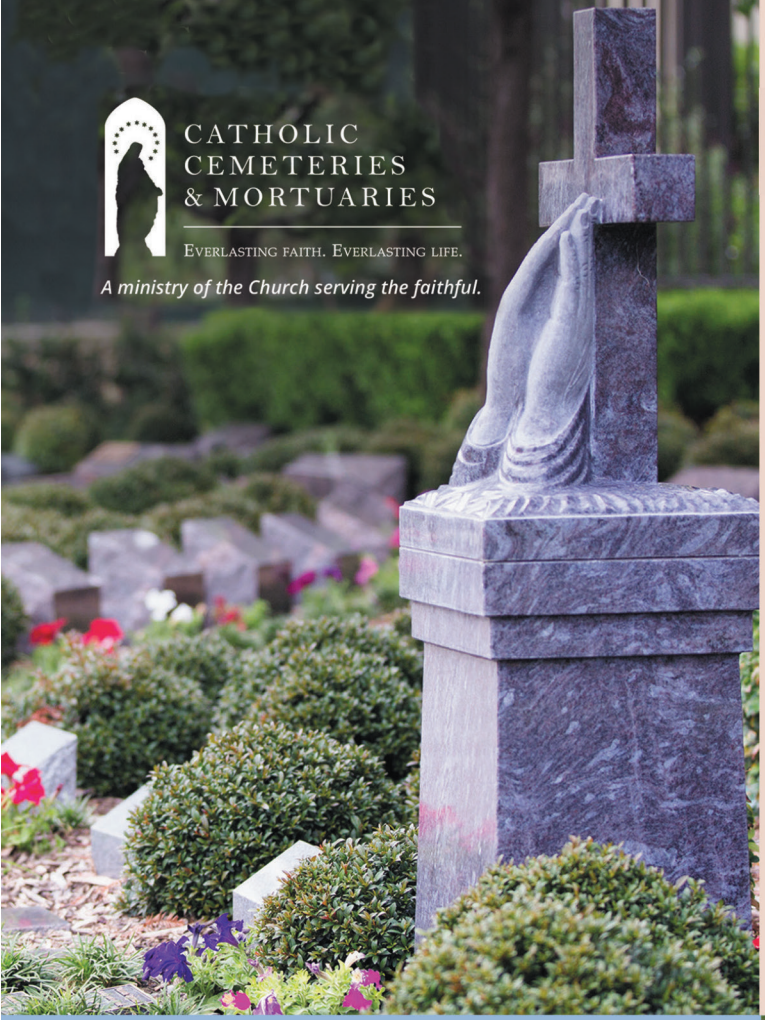
As Eliade says, no community should botch its deaths. In his discourse at the Last Supper in John's Gospel, Jesus repeatedly tells his disciples that they will only be able to receive his spirit after he dies. Like Eliade, he is warning them not to botch his death. They didn't.

After his death, his first disciples, for all their misunderstanding and infidelities while he was alive, didn't botch his death. In the light of his death, they were able to grasp, fully for the first time, his person and his message.

We lost a giant in John and we shouldn't botch his death.

We need to drink in his spirit so that, among other things, we might be more fair-minded, not fall into any one-sided ecclesial ideology, and always bring warmth and wit into a room.

John Allen, RIP, you were always the good Hill City man who was far too sensible to ever gut your ducks in the sink.



What Will You Do?

If you've ever wondered what will happen when a loved one dies or how to plan for your own passing, then don't miss this informative, FREE online seminar:

My Father's House
What to expect When a Loved One Dies,
How to Prepare for Your Own Final Needs...
From a Catholic Perspective

We'll walk you through the steps you'll take when a family member passes and explain why preplanning for yourself is so important.

Wednesday, March 12, *7 p.m. *Q & A to follow

Pre-registration required at: **CatholicCM.org/webinars**

Questions?
Please contact **Outreach@CatholicCM.org**
or call **213-637-7810**

¿Y Tu Que Harías?

¿Haz pensado alguna vez qué pasaría si alguno de tus seres queridos muere y además cómo planearías tu propio funeral? Si es así, no te pierdas este próximo taller informativo, llamado:

La Casa de mi Padre,
Que esperar cuando un ser querido fallece
y como preparamos nuestras necesidades del funeral
desde una perspectiva Católica.

Te mostraremos paso a paso que hacer cuando tu familia se enfrenta a una situación así.

También explicaremos la importancia de planear con anticipación.

¿Cuándo? Jueves, 13 de marzo, 2025, *7:00 p.m.

*Continuaremos con una sesión de

preguntas y respuestas.

El curso es gratuito pero requiere registrarse en:
catholicCM.org/webinars

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A man smokes a marijuana joint in this file photo from Nov. 19, 2020. | OSV NEWS/CARLOS JASSO, REUTERS

A BLUNT REALITY

As marijuana goes mainstream, what's the spiritual answer to a society chasing a dangerous high?

BY PATRICK T. BROWN

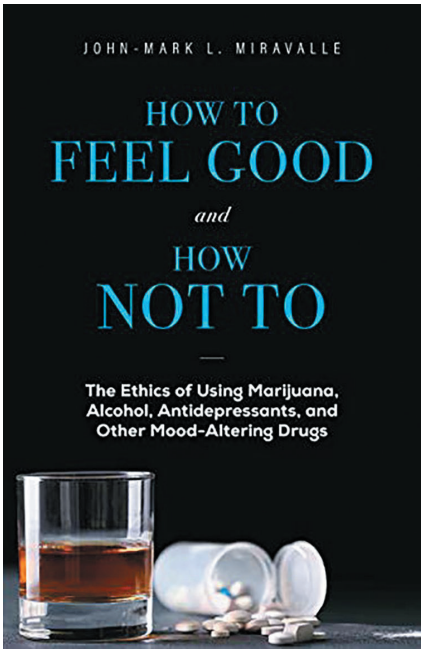
Weed in America is riding high. In 2011, no state in the union legally allowed cannabis for personal, non-medical use (not that that ever stopped Seth Rogen, Snoop Dogg, or Willie Nelson.) A decade-and-a-half later, almost half the states allow recreational marijuana, and a new change in Washington will soon make cannabis easier to sell and market.

This explosion of access has the potential for dramatic ramifications for society at large.

Already, emergency room visits due to accidental marijuana-related poisonings are up; the number of workers' absentees due to marijuana use has risen; and the reports of women finding that too many young men are more interested in getting high than maintaining a healthy relationship are worrisome. A casual attitude toward weed raises some questions for the Church, and anyone concerned about the well-being of young men, in particular, who are most likely to use marijuana on a regular basis.

The Church has long held that the use of drugs, apart from medicinal or therapeutic reasons, "inflicts very grave damage on human health and life." Doing drugs like marijuana to get high, theologians have long argued, is a deliberate attempt to set aside reason, and thus become more susceptible to sin, while also risking the long-term damage some studies have shown marijuana dependence can cause to health and well-being. In 2001, the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care even put out a handbook devoted to the rise of drug use and abuse.

The Church has weighed in on the public policy ramifications of marijuana legalization as well. When marijuana has been on the ballot, bishops' conferences in New York, Florida, Massachusetts, and Illinois, among



CNS/SOPHIA INSTITUTE PRESS

others, weighed in against greater access to recreational drugs. Following legalization in their state, the bishops of Minnesota put together a resource page, "Living in the Real," that lays out some of the costs and consequences of habitual marijuana usage.

Recently, Denver Archbishop Samuel Aquila, whose state was among the first to legalize marijuana in 2012, wrote a pastoral letter laying out his case that "the legalization of marijuana and cultural acceptance of drug use have been disastrous to our society." In it, he quoted St. Pope John Paul II's remarks that taking drugs "is always illicit, because it involves an unjustified and irrational renunciation of thinking, willing and acting as free persons … the human being has no right to harm him/herself, nor the right to abdicate one's personal dignity, which comes from God!"

Some may wonder how this is any different than alcohol, which as everyone knows, can also lead to a renunciation of acting of one's own free will.

There is a big difference: many people can enjoy a glass of wine, or a hand-mixed cocktail, without losing their grasp on reality or rationality. As theologian John-Mark Miravalle points out in his book "How to Feel Good and How Not To: The Ethics of Using Marijuana, Alcohol, Anti-depressants and Other Mood Altering Drugs" (Sophia Institute Press, $11.10), the point of drugs is to get you high — if they don't, you'd consider it a waste of money.

In most cases, the point of alcohol is enjoyment and relaxation — you wouldn't consider it a waste of money if it didn't get you drunk. In the same way that drinking to get drunk is considered a sin against human dignity, while drinking to enhance a night with friends is not, taking drugs in order to alter your conscience is something that the Church looks on with extreme concern.

Of course, not every point raised by those in favor of marijuana legalization can be disregarded. There is some evidence that marijuana can be beneficial for those with chronic pain, even if sometimes overstated by weed's strongest supporters. Some prosecutors have been overzealous in filing charges related to marijuana possession, even if the scale of weed-related prison sentences is often overblown in the public imagination. And many, perhaps even most, people who try weed can manage to keep their usage from spiraling into addiction or dependency.

But the public health concerns lie not in the average user's individual experience, but the cumulative impact of a cultural shift toward more frequent and more intensive use across the population. The overall effects of America's plunge into reefer madness is showing up on job sites and emergency rooms. A decade after the first states legalized recreational marijuana, positive tests for the drug following on-the-job accidents tripled, according to the Wall Street Journal. One in five lifetime users show some sign of cannabis use disorder.

For young people — the share who are most likely to consume it — marijuana is associated with lower levels of education, lower earnings, and less marriage and family life. Plenty of research confirms that the drug makes young men, in particular, more inclined to drop out of society. That's hard to reconcile with the Church's vision of a life well lived.

Part of the rise of disorders related to marijuana usage is simply because of the greater availability of the drug, which was first legalized for medical reasons in California in 1997. The Trump White House is in the process of easing some restrictions on marijuana nationwide. This will make it easier for sellers to commercialize the product, which will lead to rates of usage going even higher. Promising investors higher returns by getting more Americans hooked on an addictive substance is a troubling approach to stewarding the common good.



A man holds a sign urging voters in the District of Columbia to legalize marijuana in this 2014 file photo. | CNS/GARY CAMERON, REUTERS

Additionally complicating this push is that today's weed is much more potent, ounce for ounce, than the product smoked behind Volkswagen camper vans outside of a Grateful Dead concert in the 1970s. The National Institute on Drug Abuse found that the average level of the main chemical in cannabis has increased more than tenfold over the past 50 years. The more mellow high of the Doobie Brothers has been replaced with the sour odor that permeates the street corners of nearly every U.S. downtown.

But simply greater accessibility and a more potent product does not explain why marijuana use has become so widespread. There have to be buyers, after all, for the products being sold.

One insight comes from its nature. Marijuana is less a relational or social drug than alcohol or so-called "party drugs" — it's often used less to facilitate a good time than to numb emptiness and fill vacant hours. A young man who comes home from work and lights up a joint while flipping through short-form video content on his phone is hardly living his best life — he's dulling his reality.

Or, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote before becoming Pope Benedict XVI: "Drugs are the pseudo-mysticism of a world that does not believe yet cannot rid of the soul's yearning for paradise. Thus, drugs are a warning sign that points to [something] very profound … they disclose a vacuum in our society, which that society's own instruments cannot fill."

The rise of marijuana and other illicit substances is a sign of spiritual emptiness. They reflect a society that is prosperous economically, yes, but shorn off from too many of the social relationships and connections we need to truly belong. For most of us, daily life does not mean a fight with the elements to scratch out just enough sustenance to stay alive, nor a struggle to maintain dignity against the demands of an oppressive regime. Instead, too many are able to drift by, uninterested in or unwilling to being called for more. Reaching those religiously and socially unaffiliated may be one of the biggest challenges facing the Church in the next century.

That's a painful reality that no change to drug enforcement can grapple with. We need more wisdom and prudence around access to drugs like marijuana — as well as ones with even clearer downsides, like fentanyl and heroin — to call young people to something more than dulling life's frustrations and filling hours in a meaningless haze.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church, perhaps uniquely, can speak to the ennui young people feel in a life without thick bonds or timeless values. More than "just saying no," it can offer a resounding "yes" to belonging, community, and communion.

Patrick T. Brown (@PTBWrites on X) is a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, where he writes the weekly "Family Matters" newsletter on Substack.



An employee weighs marijuana from a jar of cannabis on sale at a dispensary in Michigan, shortly after it became legal in the state to sell recreational marijuana to customers over age 21. | CNS/MATTHEW HATCHER, REUTERS

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The new columbarium site at San Gabriel Mission is along the north side wall of the Chapel of the Annunciation. This site will accommodate the growing need of internments adding 552 double niches: allowing for the remains of two family members.

El lugar designado para el nuevo Columbario de la Misión San Gabriel está situado a lo largo del muro norte de La Capilla de la Anunciación. Este espacio tendrá la capacidad de añadir 552 nichos dobles satisfaciendo así la urgente necesidad de lugares para cremación.

Khu nhà lưu giữ tro cốt (Columbarium) mới tại Nhà thờ San Gabriel Mission nằm dọc theo bức tường phía bắc của Nhà Nguyện Truyền Tin (Nhà thờ lớn). Khu vực này sẽ đáp ứng nhu cầu an táng ngày càng gia tăng với việc bổ sung 552 hộc đôi, cho phép lưu giữ hài cốt của hai thành viên trong cùng một gia đình.

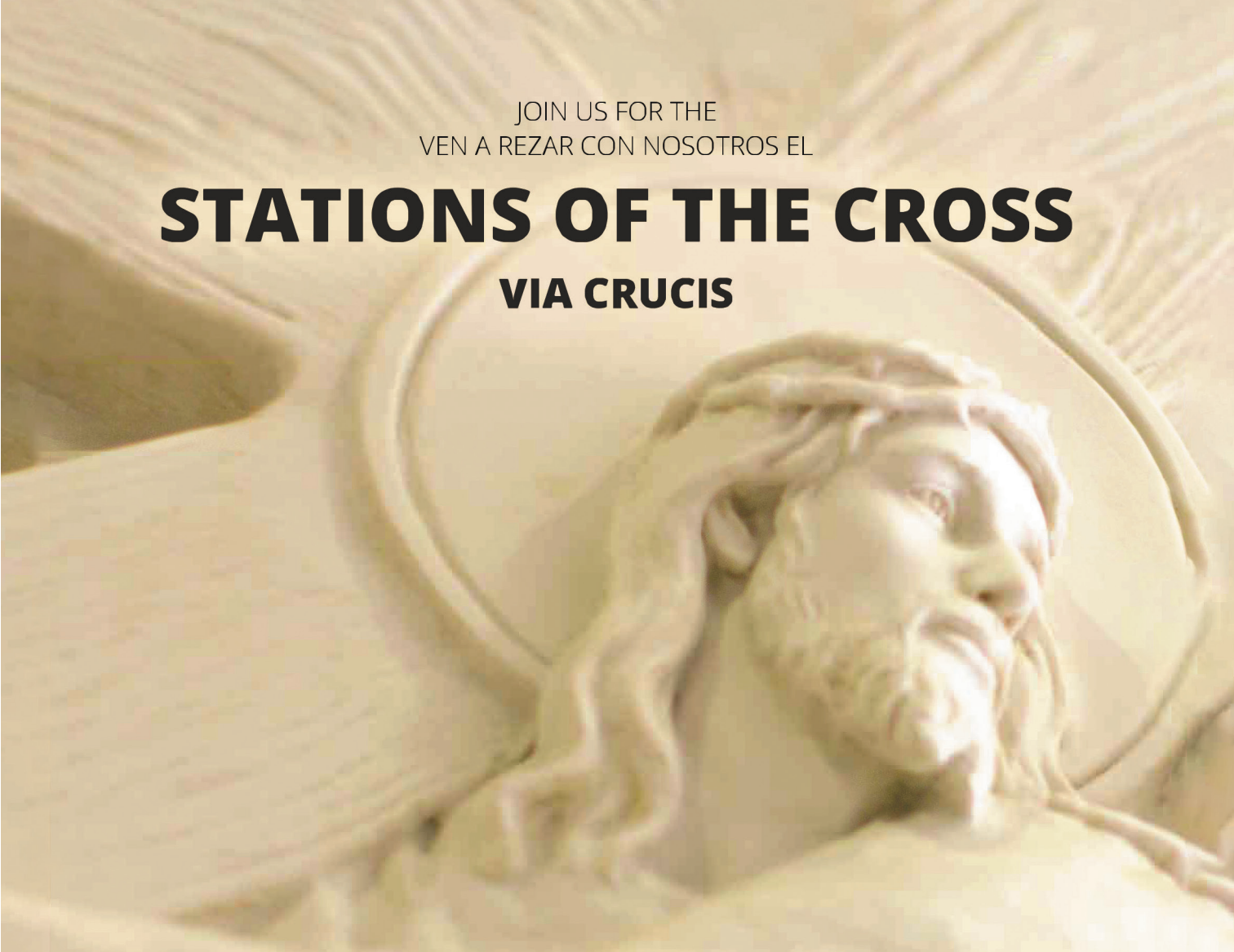
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HOLLYWOOD MEETS HOMEBOY



Moderator Alessandro DiSanto of Hallow (left) with panelists Chris Pratt, Katherine Schwarzenegger Pratt, and Fabian Debora of Homeboy Industries at the Ethical Leadership Lunch on Jan 28. DiSanto was a panelist at last year's event.

Tough childhoods and miracle moments: Panelists at this year's Ethical Leadership Lunch recalled the origins of their improbable careers.

STORY BY PABLO KAY / PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER LOBATO

Two Hollywood power couples and a pair of Homeboy Industries veterans told very different stories about how their Catholic faith has shaped their lives and career paths at this year's annual Ethical Leadership Lunch hosted by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

"When you think about this very moment and the 'nows' that we live through, there's an incredible need for witness," said Chris Pratt, one of the world's highest grossing actors, who shared the stage with his wife Katherine Schwarzenegger.

Hosted by Archbishop José H. Gomez, the Jan. 28 lunch drew more than 400 local entrepreneurs, executives, and Catholic educators to the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels' conference center. The lunch was held during national Catholic Schools Week and raised more than $300,000 for Catholic school scholarships.

In a panel discussion moderated by Alessandro DiSanto, co-founder of the Hallow prayer app, Homeboy co-CEO Shirley Torres said nothing in her upbringing had prepared her to work with former gang members at Homeboy.

Torres spoke of being raised Catholic by immigrant parents in a poor, crime-riddled South LA neighborhood, before going off to college at UCLA.

When she arrived at Homeboy, which serves ex-gang members who have served prison time, Torres said she "had to surrender everything I thought I knew."

"And for the first time working at the margins, I never felt closer to God," she added. "I saw a kind of abundance, and a kind of depth, and a kind of resilience that made me question my purpose."

DiSanto reserved his most pointed question for Pratt. Had his openness about his Christian beliefs in recent years, DiSanto asked, brought him more anxiety, or more peace?

"Far more peace," answered Pratt, who quoted the words of Jesus: "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul?"

Pratt went on to respond to criticisms that he speaks too much about religion and too little about politics.

"I'm not passionate about politics. I never talk about politics because it's not worth it to me to potentially lose a person going to the movie theater because I say something that they disagree with politically," Pratt replied. "That doesn't mean enough to me to risk it. But my relationship with Jesus does."

While several of DiSanto's questions were centered on the theme of partner-



Chris Pratt poses with LA Catholic high school students at the Ethical Leadership Lunch on Jan. 28.

ship, the conversation soon turned to a reflection on the role of family life in shaping ethical leadership.

Fabian Debora, an acclaimed muralist who heads Homeboy's art academy, spoke about his troubled childhood: a father who was mostly absent from their East LA home, his mother's despair, and hiding under a coffee table to draw — and escape the turmoil around him.

"It gets heavy as a 5 to 6-year-old, you have no coping mechanism, no skills," said Debora. "But the one thing that I did have, and I think it is through the power and the grace of God, was that he blessed me with a beautiful gift … the gift of art."

After getting caught in "cycles of violence" and becoming a drug addict, Debora said he had a spiritual awakening that changed his life.

"I looked into the mirror, and I looked just like my father," said Debora, who credits Homeboy founder Father Gregory Boyle, SJ, with helping give him a second chance in life. After a failed suicide attempt, Debora said he "realized that there is something much more greater than myself, and then I discovered God."

"It is only through the grace of God that I'm sitting here to this day."

Veronica Grazer, CEO of the educational technology platform REEL Genius, spoke fondly of her own father's role in shaping her future: a professor of cinematography at a nearby university, he saved up to buy a VCR machine and introduced his four children to the world of film.

"You know the way God's plan works, I ended up with somebody who's an actual filmmaker," said Grazer, whose platform for teachers incorporates movie clips into classroom lessons. "The two never got to meet because my dad passed away, but I always thought he was moving things around up there."

Grazer was joined by her husband, Brian Grazer, a longtime Hollywood producer who has worked on more than 100 movies, including several with famed director Ron Howard.

She described how for several years she tried to get Brian to attend St. Monica Church in Santa Monica with her.

"I'd try to guilt him into it," said Veronica, who spoke of her Catholic upbringing in central Pennsylvania. "I became overbearing and actually, really annoying."

Brian interjected to say the story had a "good ending": when Veronica stopped pleading, he started accompanying her, leading to an experience that he said helped him overcome bad childhood memories associated with church.

"I've met many other priests, I've met the pope, but I just never allowed myself to really enter," said Brian.

The Pratts said they'd begun to learn the importance of giving their kids a "normal childhood," despite their celebrity status.

Chris praised Katherine's father, actor and former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, and her mother, former journalist Maria Shriver, for drawing a clear line between their careers and parenting duties.

"She had seen maybe two of [Arnold's] movies," said Pratt, who said the couple has purposely avoided telling their small children what he does for a living. "I couldn't believe I had to show [Katherine] 'Predator' when we first started dating."

The Grazers and Pratts have attended St. Monica over the years, and both couples singled out longtime pastor Msgr. Lloyd Torgerson for praise.

While Brian credited Torgerson's "chemistry and wisdom and know-how" for convincing him to join his wife at church, Katherine recalled that the priest had officiated her wedding and baptized her, her siblings, and her own children.

"I'm sure a lot of people think that they have the best location or the best pastor, but we truly have the best pastor," said Katherine to laughter and applause.

But the afternoon's boldest reflection came from Pratt, who mused as to why a one-time door-to-door salesman with no Hollywood connections was given his platform to speak about his belief in Christ.

"Part of me believes — actually, all of me believes — that the reason I am where I am is because it was meant to be that I'd be here."

Pablo Kay is the editor-in-chief of Angelus.


From left: Panelists Shirley Torres, Brian Grazer, and Veronica Grazer at the 2026 Ethical Leadership Lunch.

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U.S. Catholics Join the Church in Guatemala to Provide Safe Shelter to the Suffering Poor

Cross Catholic Outreach has launched a major effort to provide safe housing for destitute families in rural Guatemalan villages. It is asking U.S. Catholics to become part of that life-transforming mission of mercy through its "Be Someone's Miracle" campaign.

The U.S.-based ministry, which has been recognized by the Vatican for its relief and development work in more than 90 countries, has a goal to build 224 storm-resistant homes to benefit 1,164 family members in 15 communities. It also seeks to help needy families with nutritional, educational and health care needs. (See the related story on the opposite page.)

While this appeal has many technical objectives, Cross Catholic Outreach President Michele Sagarino is focused on the individual families that will be impacted.

"This is really about Santiago and Carmen and families like theirs. The challenges they face every day are heartbreaking. Santiago, Carmen and their five precious daughters live in a flimsy dwelling and fear for their health because rain often floods their house, turning the dirt floor to mud. It's also easy for vermin like scorpions and rats to crawl through the gaps in its walls," she said. "It's a situation that must grieve God — so it should be unacceptable to us too!"



According to Sagarino, Cross Catholic Outreach is working alongside Catholic leaders in the dioceses of Santa Rosa de Lima, Sololá-Chimaltenango and Suchitepéquez-Retalhuleu to find solutions for families like Santiago and Carmen's. The plans they have developed can produce life-transforming results — if U.S. Catholics will step forward to help support their work.



Father Alejandro Garcia stands with the Ramirez family outside their leaky makeshift home — one of the many in his Diocese of Santa Rosa de Lima that he hopes to replace with the help of Cross Catholic Outreach supporters.

"Our primary goal is to construct durable, concrete-block houses for the poorest families," she explained. "The homes will have two bedrooms and a common area that can serve as a dining room and living room. Each will have a concrete foundation and walls, a galvanized metal roof, a sanitary latrine, a secure metal door and shuttered windows, providing a level of comfort and safety these families have never experienced."

Because the design is simple, the construction of one of these homes costs less than $9,000.

"That is a large sacrificial gift for one donor or family to make, but many have done that and were so happy they got involved. Most had been looking for something specific and significant they could do to bless others," Sagarino said. "This outreach was exactly what they were looking for because a home does more than offer safe shelter. It gives families a foundation for building a better life."

Serving the poor through the local Church also has important spiritual benefits, according to Sagarino.

"When people learn local Church leaders love them and want a better life for them, it strengthens their faith and restores their hope," she said. "Many have felt isolated and unseen. They need to know we care about them."

Father Alejandro Garcia, director of the local Caritas ministry in the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Lima, has these words of encouragement for U.S. Catholics: "We pray for you. We pray that you continue to be generous, that you continue to be a valiant hand to those who are so needy among us. As Jesus said, 'What you have done for the least of these, you have done also for me.'"

Readers interested in supporting Cross Catholic Outreach's housing programs and other outreaches can contribute through the ministry brochure inserted in this issue or send tax-deductible gifts to: Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC06091, P.O. Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. Those interested in making gifts on a monthly basis can indicate that on the brochure in order to become a Mission Partner, or write "Monthly Mission Partner" on mailed checks to be contacted about setting up those arrangements.

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Guatemalan Families Living in Extreme Poverty Look to the Church for Renewed Faith and Hope

In the rural Guatemalan community of Laguna Seca, a cluster of dirt-floor homes with scrap metal roofs sits in a low spot of a valley. Steep hillsides send floods of water that inundate these makeshift shelters during the rainy season, turning floors into mud and soaking families' belongings.

Brenda and René have raised their daughter, Ana, in one of these unstable dwellings, rebuilding time and again as storms wreak havoc. Inside the house, a wood fire poses an extra health hazard. Looking at the soot-blackened sheet metal ceiling, Brenda lamented, "Imagine what our lungs look like!"

Ana is a bright grade-schooler and takes this challenging way of life in stride. But after she put the family's new chicks into their cage, she sat on the dirt floor next to them and imagined what it would be like to live in a home like her dollhouse with a solid roof and floor. She made her own clay figurines to stand in that toy house and enjoy the security within.

"It's heartbreaking to meet children like Ana who have never known what it's like to be protected from the elements. In rural Guatemala, many families are trapped in extreme poverty, with few opportunities to improve their situation," explained Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, a trusted Catholic relief and development ministry recognized by the Vatican for its effective humanitarian and spiritual programs. "When we witnessed the extreme needs of Ana's family and so many others, we felt compelled to provide help — and our hope is that compassionate Catholics in the U.S. will want to get involved too."

Sagarino said that many of the communities Cross Catholic Outreach wants to serve can only be reached by dirt roads. These villages have little or no infrastructure, so parents there are raising their children without running water, suitable sanitation facilities or reliable electricity.

Most of the men and women in these rural areas are subsistence farmers who work long hours planting, tending and harvesting corn and beans, defenseless against unpredictable weather. Their hard work may provide simple meals for their children, but it is rarely enough to fully cover their housing, health and educational expenses.

Families without access to land for farming face even greater challenges. They typically take work as day laborers, earning about $10 a day when work is available. The Church in Guatemala reports that those families typically earn between $125 and $190 a month — far too little to afford adequate housing. Ultimately, these families must make do with what they have, cobbling together plastic sheets, scrap metal and wood planks to build flimsy, unsafe shacks.



Ana's dollhouse represents her hope for a safe home in the remote village of Laguna Seca, Guatemala.

"Our ultimate goal is to improve living conditions in those communities. We want to help families break free from the cycle of poverty that has plagued them for generations," Sagarino said. "We've learned that providing safe housing plays a major part in improving lives, so we are making that our priority. As families move into safer, sturdier homes, their hope is restored and they have a foundation for building a better life."

Cross Catholic Outreach has been partnering with Guatemalan dioceses since 2013 to help rescue families from the poverty that keeps them malnourished, sick and devoid of hope. With the help of U.S. supporters, the ministry has built more than 800 homes in Guatemala, in addition to providing educational scholarships for children, microenterprise investments for adults, feeding programs for the malnourished and more.

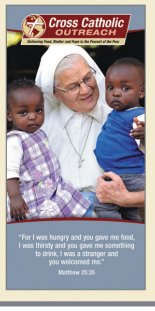
Through its "Be Someone's Miracle" appeal, Cross Catholic Outreach is asking compassionate U.S. Catholics to serve as God's instrument of mercy by funding the construction of homes for the poor and by helping struggling families in three Guatemalan dioceses through other important development and spiritual programs. In 2026, it aims to surpass 1,000 homes built since it began work in Guatemala.

"The homes we will build are simple but sturdy, secure and sanitary," Sagarino said. "They will change the lives of these families in profound ways, and the benefits will be lasting. Generational poverty has been a major factor in the hardships these families have been facing. Opening this door to generational prosperity will be a major step in the right direction. My prayer is that Catholics in the U.S. will want to play a role in that restoration of hope. Imagine what a powerful testimony of God's love that would be!"

How to Help

To fund Cross Catholic Outreach's effort to help the poor worldwide, use the postage-paid brochure inserted in this newspaper, scan the QR code, or mail your gift to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC06091, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC, 20090-7168. The brochure also includes instructions on becoming a Mission Partner and making a regular monthly donation to this cause.

If you identify an aid project, 100% of the donation will be restricted to be used for that specific project. However, if more is raised for the project than needed, funds will be redirected to other urgent needs in the ministry.



READY FOR TAKEOFF

Located off the edge of LAX's northern runway, St. Bernard High School struggled for years. Now, an Olympic-sized comeback has begun.

St. Bernard College Preparatory in Playa del Rey near LAX has multimillion-dollar construction projects underway in an effort to boost enrollment at the school.

STORY BY TOM HOFFARTH / PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUANITO HOLANDEZ JR.

Pardon the dust these days that the ocean breeze kicks up around the St. Bernard College Preparatory in Playa del Rey.

There's heavy machinery grading dirt around the campus, with progress viewable in all directions from the school's second-story classrooms. There is also the whisking away of persistent dusty rumors that the school is once again on the brink of closure.

As an ambitious $20 million upgrade to the 14-acre campus moves forward, there's also been a flurry of activity since May 2024 next door on the 31-acre development called Lulu's Place, a new athletic and education complex that will be used as a training facility for the 2028 Olympics.



Supporters of St. Bernard's growth include, from left to right: Director of Admissions Erin Thompkins, Principal Austin Jackson, President Casey Yeazel, Mike Flores, Class of 1969 alumnus, and LA Catholic Schools Superintendent Paul Escala.



St. Bernard students listen to a speaker while participating in the G.O.H.T. (Greatest of His Time) mentorship program designed to provide young men with essential skills.

"It feels as if we're building the plane as it's flying," said St. Bernard Principal Austin Jackson with a laugh, surveying activity from the school's main lobby.

It's an extreme makeover that no one would have predicted just a few years ago.

"If the stars don't align, none of this happens," said LA Catholic Schools Superintendent Paul Escala during a recent visit to St. Bernard, located on prime real estate on the edge of Los Angeles International Airport's (LAX) northern runway.

When Escala arrived on the job in 2019, St. Bernard was on the brink of closure, and finding a way to keep it open quickly became a priority.

St. Bernard High School, as it was called when it officially opened in 1958, had a peak enrollment of about 1,250 during its glory days from the late 1960s through the early 1980s. In 2019, it was 182.

Escala set about forming a plan. Plans for a hybrid community project — the development of Lulu's Place and the remodeling of St. Bernard's — began to take shape, with a green light coming in the spring of 2021. That was when he hired Casey Yeazel, whom he'd worked with at St. John Bosco High School in Bellflower and at a charter school system in the California Central Valley, to lead the school as president.

When the school officially rebranded as a college preparatory campus in 2024, there were 143 students. Today, there are 200.

"The St. Bernard history has been complicated," Yeazel said. "There was a lot of good intentions, but never a catalytic moment. Now we see how this can be an ecosystem for youth of Los Angeles on the Westside."

Lulu's Place, described as the largest-ever philanthropic investment in youth sports in Los Angeles, is funded by a foundation named after Carol "Lulu" Kimmelman, a former USC women's tennis player and longtime Los Angeles Unified School District teacher. The key tenants incorporated with St. Bernard are a STEM lab courtesy of Tiger Woods' TGR Foundation, a national training center supported by the U.S. Tennis Association, and health facilities sponsored by Cedars-Sinai/Providence health systems.

The property is leased from both the Los Angeles World Airports and from Archdiocese of Los Angeles-owned land, allowing the Lulu's Place project to help finance a new all-weather athletic field for the school.

Combined, the two projects represent a $175 million investment in the future.

Escala credits Archbishop José H. Gomez for supporting St. Bernard's cause from the beginning, even before the plan for Lulu's Place emerged.

"He has always sought solutions for a turnaround."

Some 80% of St. Bernard's student body identifies as African American, a majority from the nearby cities of Inglewood and Hawthorne. The high school has had success attracting students from Catholic schools in nearby Westchester — St. Anastasia, St. Jerome, and Visitation — but a need for expansion into South Bay and Westside neighborhoods is key to its future.



St. Bernard Assistant Principal Rosalie Roberts, left, sitting with President Casey Yeazel, has been with the school for 31 years and has seen the ups and downs the campus has experienced, but never lost faith in its potential.

Today, the school boasts several selling points.

Currently, the school has a 12-to-1 student-to-teacher ratio. Tuition has settled into the $13,500 range, well below the state national average of $22,000. Some 80% of the students receive tuition assistance thanks in large part to the Catholic Education Foundation of Los Angeles and the Doheny Foundation.

Philanthropic investment in the school has already been taking place through grants by the Catholic Education Foundation, Shea Family Charities, Dan Murphy Foundation, Seaver Funds, Rose Hills Foundation, and the Ahmanson Foundation.

Yeazel's incremental plans expect to have it up to 500 students by 2030.

Kim Muno, St. Bernard's new director of Impact and External Engagement, says she wishes the school had made a stronger case for her son and daughter to stay closer to home after graduating from American Martyrs School in Manhattan Beach in the 2010s. Instead, they excelled in academics and sports at Notre Dame High School in Sherman Oaks, where Muno worked in admissions for 15 years.

"St. Bernard wasn't the school we knew it could be then," Muno said.

When Yeazel asked Muno about joining the new St. Bernard administration, "it was an easy yes.

"The investment the archdiocese is making makes me believe it's a place South Bay families can come back to, which is what it was for so many years."

When upward of 100 families come to St. Bernard for an open house these days, they learn that 98% of the Class of 2024 and 2025 combined were accepted to a four-year college. A recent valedictorian went to Johns Hopkins University to study medicine. The school has an admissions partnership with nearby Loyola Marymount University. A new program for male leadership development has been launched. They even have a new girls golf team.

Students who are paying attention are also learning about its history.

Michael Simpson, who finishes his senior year at St. Bernard this summer and has been accepted to LMU's screenwriters program, has taken film and theater arts courses since his freshman year. It led to him launching a documentary project on the school's history.

"I had no idea about how close we were to shutting down and what an impact it had on the community until I did this project," Simpson said.

Johnny Bernoudy had only attended public schools in South LA before he was drawn to St. Bernard two years ago when the football program came back in 2024. Apart from being a running back and linebacker, he's also excelled in the school's drumline. Now, Bernoudy hopes to attend West LA College, whose units-building program is built into the St. Bernard curriculum.

"I feel they really care about my education and getting me into college," Bernoudy said. "I feel it's made an impact on bringing out my personality."

Zerimar Ramirez, a senior who has played on the St. Bernard girls soccer and basketball teams, was one of Bernoudy's football teammates — she was the team's placekicker. Ramirez could have easily gone to LA's Fremont High School across the street from her home, but said she gravitated to St. Bernard because her uncle, a 2017 alum, said he appreciated the attention he received there.

"With a smaller campus, there's no real delineation between a freshman and senior, so there's not all that tension," Ramirez said.

Rosalie Roberts was thinking about retirement when she was shown the new St. Bernard High/Lulu's Place plans a few years ago.

Caught up in the latest version of St. Bernard administration musical chairs, Roberts was handed the title of "interim principal" in 2020. The job was only supposed to last three months, but because of COVID-19, it stretched to two years.

"My first response was, yeah, sure, I can give you renderings upon renderings upon renderings of what this place can look like. I've heard these stories all before, then I get excited, then I get let down," said Roberts, a college counselor when she arrived at the St. Bernard campus 31 years ago, the same year her son, Ernest, graduated.

"We've had good times and bad times, but I never lost faith in what this school was and what it could be," said Roberts, back as an assistant principal. A product of LA's Bishop Conaty High School and the sister of the late Father Allan Roberts, she said seeing the fruits of the academic transformation is a sign that patience pays off.

"That's the internal part," she said. "Now, to see all that's going around here with the facilities — it's true, it's really happening. Kids who I taught when I started are bringing their kids here and they have faith in what is happening."

Debra Duncan (Class of 1971) had worked with the Dan Murphy Foundation in the past to obtain funding for the school. Now, St. Bernard's school board chair recalled how it "was so disheartening when we would seem to get something going and then it didn't happen."

"When people tell me they've heard this [revival] story before, I tell them this is not only different, but just drive by the campus and see what's happening. It's a big deal."

Erin Thompkins, a St. Bernard Class of 2001 grad, has been the school's head of admissions for the last two years — long enough to see her daughter, Kiyomi, graduate from there and accept a journalism scholarship to Pepperdine University.

Thompkins' father graduated from the all-boys Mount Carmel High School. Her mother is a product of all-girls St. Michael High School — two archdiocesan schools that eventually closed. Thompkins said she is determined not to see her alma mater have the same fate.

"Casey has told us: You guys are the ones who will take this school back to what it once was," Thompkins said. "We are forward-thinking and hopeful for the future after so many years of growing pains. This construction makes it real. We're not closing and the proof is all around us."

Escala and Yeazel hope St. Bernard will become a model for other archdiocesan schools when it comes to collaborating with the local community — and getting alumni involved.

Ryan Gales (Class of 1996), the CEO of JGM Architecture Design and Construction Management, is helping with the actual blueprints. Bernard McCrumby and Shannon Howell (both Class of 2000) have returned to lead the respective boys and girls basketball teams.

Mike Flores (Class of 1969) was compelled to drive from his Newport Beach home recently to have Yeazel show him around.

"Buildings don't necessarily make a school — people make the school," said Flores, the starting UCLA quarterback in 1971 who got into college coaching for 15 years and now has his own executive leadership training business. "Casey says he's been moved by the Holy Spirit to be there for these students, and that has a powerful impact on me. You can tell everyone there, it's for the kids."

It's more than just nostalgia that brings alums back, Flores agreed.

At one point in his tour, Flores watched Escala hold up his cellphone to record video of the progress made toward what was once 92nd Street but was now part of the new tennis facility.

Flores shook hands again with Escala and admitted, "I'm impressed."

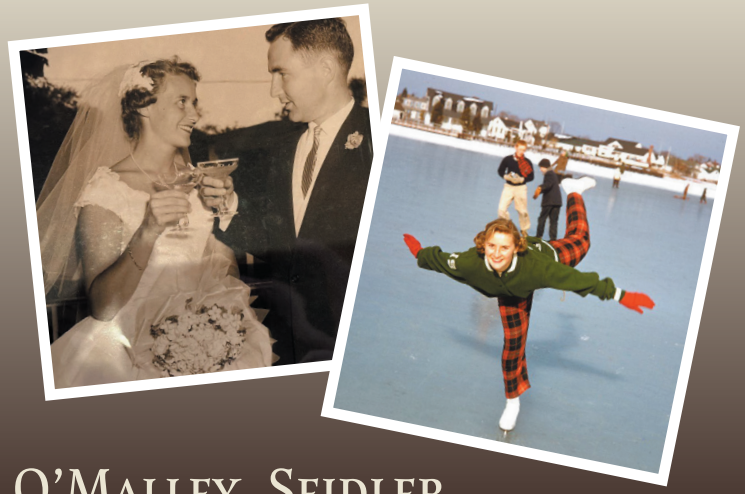
Escala replied: "Wait until we're done."

Tom Hoffarth is an award-winning journalist based in Los Angeles.



St. Bernard Principal Austin Jackson, top center, poses with students, left to right: Zerimar Ramirez, Johnnie Bernoudy, Sa-Myra Harris, Michael Simpson, and Kylie Baird.





Therese (Terry) O'Malley Seidler

May 16, 1933 – December 18, 2025







Therese "Terry" Seidler (nee O'Malley) joined the saints in heaven on December 18, 2025. She passed away peacefully surrounded by the love of family.

Terry grew up in St. Gregory's Church (Brooklyn, New York) and later Amityville, Long Island, with her parents, Walter and Kay O'Malley, and younger brother, Peter. She graduated with honors from St. Francis High School and the College of New Rochelle, where she was class president and captained the basketball team.

In 1958, when her family moved to Los Angeles with the Dodgers, Terry met her soon-to-be husband, Roland Seidler, and they were married in St. Therese Church, Alhambra, Oct. 4, 1958. From then on, Terry's most important role was that of a wife and mom, taking to heart the words of St. Teresa of Calcutta: "If you want to change the world, go home and love your family."

They were blessed with many dear friends and relatives, especially six sons (John, Peter, Michael, Bob, Tom, and Matt) and four daughters (Carol, Mary Kay, Annie, and Jeannie), their loving spouses, 32 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren. Terry was preceded in death by her husband, Rollie (June 8, 2006) and son, Peter (Nov. 14, 2023).

Terry enjoyed teaching religious education in their parish, Sts. Felicitas and Perpetua, coaching Little League baseball, and serving on boards supporting Catholic education, pregnant mothers, and her local community.

For the past 25 years, Terry participated in her son's involvement in minor league baseball, and in 2012, traded in her Dodger Blue for Padres Brown and Gold as she became part owner and avid fan of the San Diego Padres.

She lived her Catholic faith and served as a great example to all who knew her, always prioritizing faith, family, and friends. Her smiling Irish eyes, joyful heart, and faithful devotion to God showed through to the very end.

Rollie often quoted St. Thomas More, "Pray for me, as I will for thee, that we may merrily meet in heaven."

Terry will be merry in heaven too, when a tax-deductible donation is made in her memory to one of her favorite charities for dedication to Faith and Family:

- Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles, 921 E. Alhambra Road, Alhambra, CA 91801-2729.
- LIFEsocal, c/o O'Malley Seidler Partners, LLC, (Federal Tax id #45-2553190), 21515 Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 950, Torrance, CA 90503.
- Peter Seidler Legacy Projects, c/o Padres Foundation (EIN 81-2350619), 100 Park Blvd., San Diego, CA 92101

A Rosary and Funeral Mass will be held at St. Therese Catholic Church, Alhambra. A private burial will be at Holy Cross Cemetery in Culver City.





Finding God Beyond the Pew: Witnessing Christ with Young People Who Don't Yet Know Him

By JC Montenegro, PhD

At the Salesian Family Youth Center, we have learned that evangelization often begins outside church walls. Many of the young people we serve do not regularly attend Mass or identify strongly with the Church. Some carry questions, others distance, and many simply have never been invited into a relationship with God in a meaningful way. Our mission is to meet them where they are and to witness Christ through presence, relationship, and consistency.

One story that reflects this mission is the journey of a young woman who arrived at Camp Salesian searching for peace and direction. She did not come seeking faith. She came carrying anxiety, uncertainty, and a deep desire to understand herself. Like many young people today, she felt overwhelmed by expectations and unsure of her place in the world.

At Camp Salesian, she encountered a community shaped by care, joy, and faith. She was met by staff and volunteers who listened, accompanied her, and lived their faith authentically. Prayer was part of daily life, not as an obligation, but as an invitation. Through shared experiences, moments of silence, and guided reflection, she began to experience God not as distant, but as present and personal.

Over time, her heart opened. She discovered that God had always been walking with her, even when she had not recognized it. This realization brought peace and clarity. Her relationship with God deepened, and she began to see her life with new purpose. What changed her was not instruction alone, but witness—seeing faith lived with integrity and love.

This is at the core of our work. Evangelization begins with witness. We strive to show young people what a life rooted in God looks like before asking them to make decisions about faith. Through genuine relationships and consistent accompaniment, we offer them the freedom to choose. Faith, when freely chosen, becomes transformative.

Many of the young people we serve would not describe themselves as churchgoers. Yet when they experience acceptance, prayer, and community, their understanding of God changes. Faith becomes lived, not theoretical. God becomes someone encountered, not merely discussed. In this way, evangelization unfolds naturally, through trust and example.

In a world where young people often feel disconnected and unseen, Camp Salesian and the Salesian Family Youth Center offer a space of belonging, reflection, and encounter with God. We witness daily how God works quietly but powerfully in their lives.

We ask you to keep our young people and our mission in your prayers. And if you are able, we invite you to support our work so that more young people can encounter God through witness, relationship, and love.

If you would like to know more about our Salesian Family Youth Center, please visit our social media under @SalesianClubsLA
If you would like to be involved in our mission please email us at Jc@SalesianClubs-LA.org

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SAME COUNTRY, NEW STANCE?

Since the removal of its president by the US, Pope Leo has signaled some subtle shifts in the Vatican's approach toward Venezuela.

A woman draped in a Venezuelan flag prays at the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer in Rome Jan. 4, following a U.S. strike on Venezuela where President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were captured the previous day. | OSV NEWS/MATTEO MINNELLA, REUTERS

BY JOVEL ÁLVAREZ

Throughout the last three decades of socialist dictatorship in Venezuela, the Catholic Church's diplomatic approach to Venezuela under three popes has sought to try to strike a delicate balance between friendly dialogue and cautious criticism of both government officials and opposition leaders.

Often, it seemed that Rome and the country's bishops were moving in different directions. But following the election of a new (and American) pope and the U.S. government's removal of Nicolas Maduro from power, all that might be about to change.

The first telling moment came during Pope Leo XIV's trip to Turkey and Lebanon in late 2025. While aboard the papal plane, the pontiff was asked by a group of Hispanic journalists for his thoughts on the Venezuela crisis following the recent U.S. military deployment in the Caribbean.

"I think it is better to look for ways of dialogue, perhaps pressure, even economic pressure, but looking for another way to change, if that is what the United States decides to do," said Leo.

While largely overlooked by the international press, the remarks marked the first time a pope has signaled openness to the use of sanctions to remove Maduro from power.

Leo also remarked that "we [Church officials] are looking for ways to calm the situation, seeking above all the good of the people, because so often it is the people who suffer in these situations, not the authorities."

Today, we know that among those "ways" was a diplomatic effort to get Maduro out of Venezuela and find asylum in Russia.

As the Washington Post later reported, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin met with the U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, Brian Burch, 22 days after Leo's comments to discuss evacuating Maduro from Venezuela to go into exile in Russia.

Notably, this was not a call for dialogue, but rather a concrete attempt to facilitate the end of his leadership of Venezuela.

A day after Maduro was captured by U.S. forces in a nighttime raid on Caracas and forcibly extradited to New York, Leo did not condemn the capture. Rather, in his weekly Angelus address,

he asked that the good of Venezuelans "prevail over any other consideration and lead to overcoming violence and embarking on paths of justice and peace" in order to "build a peaceful future of collaboration, stability, and harmony" with special attention to Venezuela's poorest.

Each of the points expressed by the pope sounded an awful lot like an indictment of the situation to which "*Chavismo*" — the socialist political philosophy adopted by Hugo Chavez and continued under Maduro — had subjected Venezuelans for 27 years.

Obviously, that same call for respect for sovereignty also applies to the United States' newfound involvement in Venezuela, which President Donald Trump has described as "running" the country by taking control of its oil industry.

In the days that followed, Leo gave two more key signals on Venezuela. In a Jan. 9 address to Vatican-accredited diplomats, he asked "that the will of the Venezuelan people be respected." Then, on Jan. 12, he met privately with Venezuelan opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner María Corina Machado, who asked that he intercede for the release of all political prisoners and a transition to true democracy.

"I had the reassurance that the Holy Father knows very well what is going on in Venezuela," said Machado at a Washington, D.C., press conference. "He knows what the Catholic Church has been through because of the persecution and repression of our bishops, priests, and nuns. And I believe that he is not only concerned but actively helping and supporting a peaceful transition process to take place."

Meanwhile, both Parolin and his second-in-command, Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, are no strangers to Venezuela: the former once served as the Vatican's ambassador to Venezuela, while the latter is Venezuelan by birth.

But neither of them — nor anyone else — could have predicted that the U.S. would attempt to co-govern Venezuela alongside the *Chavistas* who created the country's crisis.

After Parolin met with Machado in Rome, he told journalists that the Holy See had "tried to find a solution that would avoid any bloodshed, perhaps reaching an agreement with Maduro and other representatives of the regime, but this was not possible."

In his view, the cardinal added, "the country needs to be democratized."

Overall, the Catholic hierarchy has largely earned praise among ordinary Venezuelans for its solidarity with the victims of the *Chavista* regime. Among those responsible for that approach is Cardinal Baltazar Porras, the retired archbishop of Caracas and an outspoken critic of the Maduro regime, who was blocked from leaving the country in December and had his passport revoked.

But there have also been episodes that have sowed mistrust between the country's Catholic leadership and citizens.

The latest one came after the son-in-law of opposition leader and president-elect Edmundo González, Rafael Tudares, was imprisoned for a year. His wife, Mariana González, took to social media to claim that she was the victim "of three episodes of extortion, coming from people linked to the authorities of this country, as well as people related to the Church and individuals who claimed to represent important organizations.

Mariana claimed that government officials tried to coerce during meetings "in spaces where the Archbishopric [of Caracas] operates, among other places.

The current archbishop of Caracas, Raúl Biord, denied the allegations and repeated his call for the release of political prisoners.

One day later, Tudares was released from prison. The news was announced with a photograph showing Tudares and Mariana accompanied by a delegation that included Biord, an image that confirmed to critics that the figures denounced by González indeed had the power to intercede for his release.

Biord's predecessor, Porras, responded by also demanding the immediate release of all political prisoners in Venezuela and warned that "evil, mistakes, and sin" can also be found within the Church.

Soon after Venezuelan president Delcy Rodríguez's interim government announced plans to approve a general amnesty for political prisoners arrested since 1999, Porras' passport was returned to him.

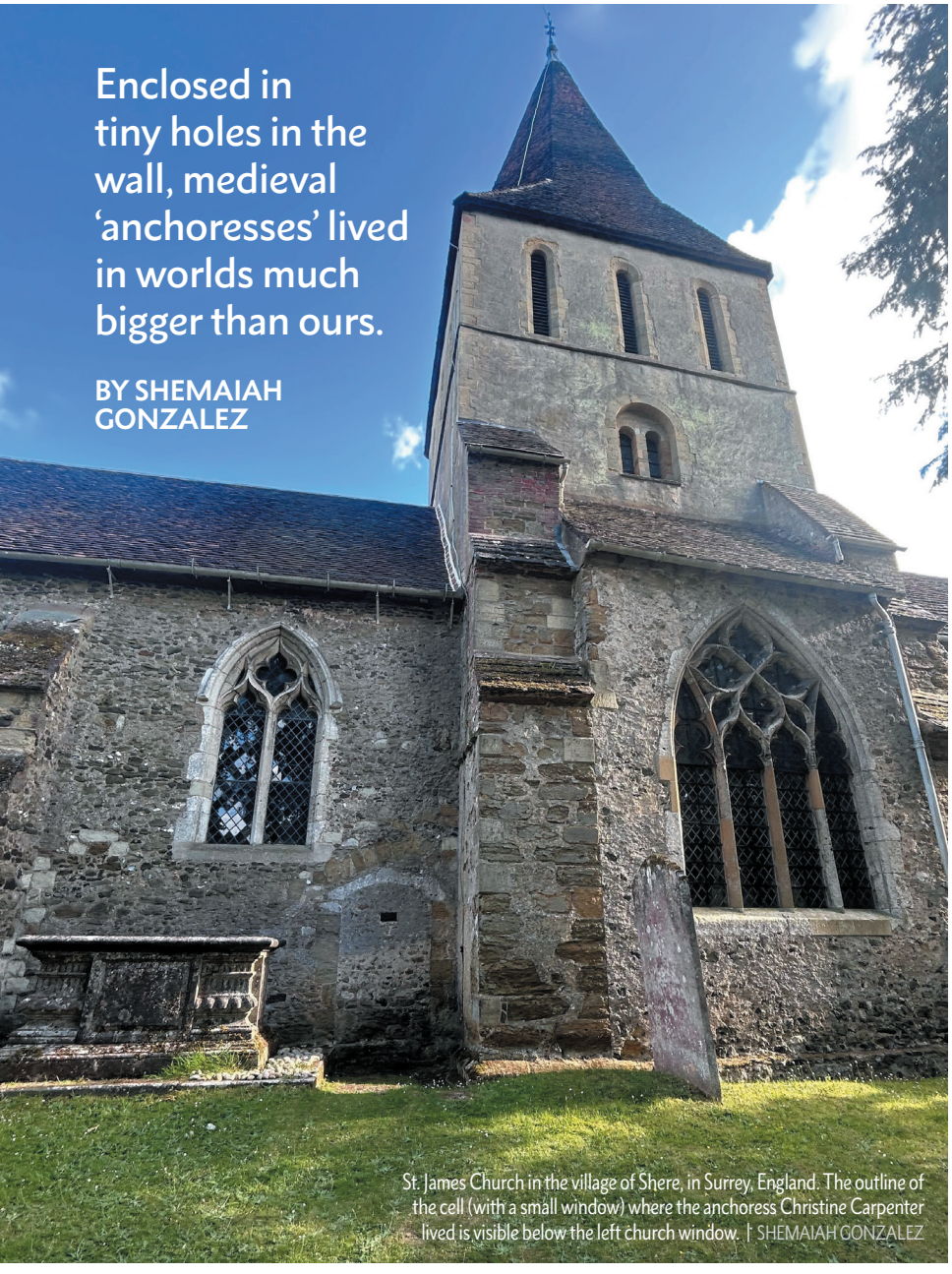
These episodes suggest that the shifting diplomatic approach to Venezuela under Leo is offering new opportunities. But they also confirm that as a new country begins to take shape, rebuilding credibility among the most skeptical Venezuelan Catholics needs to be a priority for the Church.

Jovel Álvarez is a Rome-based correspondent who reports for various Spanish-language outlets. Originally from Costa Rica, he spent years living and working in the Holy Land.



Pope Leo XIV meets María Corina Machado, Venezuelan opposition leader and 2025 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, during a private audience at the Vatican Jan. 12. | CNS/VATICAN MEDIA

A WINDOW INTO THE ETERNAL



Enclosed in tiny holes in the wall, medieval 'anchoresses' lived in worlds much bigger than ours.

BY SHEMAIAH GONZALEZ

St. James Church in the village of Shere, in Surrey, England. The outline of the cell (with a small window) where the anchoress Christine Carpenter lived is visible below the left church window. | SHEMAIAH GONZALEZ

The small chamber is hidden, precious, cleaving against the solid wall of the church. You might have walked past without realizing you were steps from a window into the eternal. A shiver between your shoulders reveals you are on holy ground.

What was once a small window on the side of the church is now cemented shut. In front of it, a sign reads: "Site of the cell of Christine Carpenter Anchoress of Shere 1329." You are standing before the remnant of a medieval anchor-hold.

In medieval England, a small select group of upper-class women voluntarily devoted themselves to God by walling themselves in an anchor-hold. There was no entrance or exit, only two windows from which to interact.

The window on the outside of the church, the larger of the two, was for receiving food and water, discarding waste and receiving visitors, parishioners or even pilgrims petitioning prayer and making confession to a priest. Inside, a smaller window called a squint, held the anchoress' vision, both literally and spiritually; it was from this window that she could see the altar and receive the Eucharist.

The most renowned of medieval anchoresses was Julian of Norwich. Notoriety was completely contrary to the vocation of an anchoress — her goal was to be hidden, humble, and completely dependent on Christ. Yet it was Julian who was the first woman writer of English. A contemporary of Chaucer, her "Revelations of Divine Love" describes her visions of Christ's appearance to her when she was gravely ill and has survived the centuries.

Julian's language is intimate and tender. She uses words like "littleness," "Loveth," and "yearning," that may seem antiquated to the modern reader, yet she is giving language to that which is difficult to describe, a mystical experience. She refers to these experiences as "shewings." She notes a difference between visceral or "bodily sights" and the more ethereal experience of a "ghostly sight."

This is the language of a person whose entire life had been devoted to Christ.

I had always wanted to see an anchor-hold. Although nearly 800 holds were recorded during medieval times, not many survived King Henry VIII's destruction of monasteries. Last summer, my friend Colleen took me out to dinner in the Surrey village of Shere, a darling village with buildings from the 15th century (and where the 2006 film "The Holiday" was filmed).

I spied the anchor-hold from the cemetery surrounding the church and cried out, "Is that what I think it is?!" I



A bishop blessing an anchoress. | WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

began running like a child toward the remnants of the hold, now sealed shut. Colleen was a bit chuffed watching my delight. "I thought you'd like that."

There was a simple sign, verifying my suspicion, "Site of the cell of Christine Carpenter Anchoress of Shere 1329." I run my hands over the frame of the hold and the cement filling up the window. It was a surprisingly moving moment for me. I shifted from absolute delight to tears on standing at this holy place.

I find it interesting that common scholarship, especially from those outside of the Church, regards anchoresses as prisoners, so distraught by the limits of womanhood in a patriarchal society that they were willing to confine or imprison themselves in the walls of a church. They equate it with some sort of madness.

I suppose in a world dedicated to immediate gratification, egoism, and self-interest, one would find it mad to seek only what is eternal. But these women gained freedom in their vocation. It was a refuge from the demands and expectations of society and family to marry and have children. There was massive status associated with becoming an anchoress. You would have been viewed as a saint in the making.

It is curious that only upper-class women were allowed to give their lives in this manner, as one needed a benefactor, usually the anchoress' well-off family but often a wealthy patron who provided support in exchange for prayers.

Christine Carpenter was not of the upper class. As her surname attests, she was the daughter of a carpenter and had to petition the local bishop to be "enclosed." Parishioners attested to her character and virginity and the bishop approved her enclosure. It is unknown who provided patronage for her enclosure.

Because Shere was on a pilgrimage route from Winchester to Canterbury, pilgrims would have stopped to seek Christine's prayers and advice. Christine of Shere, Julian of Norwich, and other anchoresses like them lived in a world much larger than our own. With their eyes fully focused on Christ, in a manner that those of us outside those walls could never attain, they lived beyond time. Seeking what was eternal, they became part of it, seeing what in the Creed is referred to as the unseen.

Few words from anchoresses survive, but Julian gives us a glimpse into this tender space in which they lived. Julian described Christ as "our clothing, that for love wrappeth us and windeth us, halseth us and all becloseth us, hangeth about us for tender love, that he may never leeve us" (139). St. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians that when we are baptized, we are clothed in Christ. We become a new creation, connected to him.

This sensory metaphor reminds us that Christ should be as close as our own skin. Christ was real to these women. He held them, cared for them, and was as close as their own skin. Christ's love was available, present, and accessible to these women.

In 1332, three years after her enclosure, Christine left her anchor-hold. There is no documentation as to the reasons she left, but within months, she petitioned the pope to be granted permission to again be walled.

I imagine that the world was too loud, too distracting. I imagine Christine found the loss of intimacy with Christ frightening. This world was too ordinary when his love could be had. I believe not wanting to lose that intimate presence of Jesus is why she returned. Like the Psalmist, Christine prayed: "*He* is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust."

There is a word Julian of Norwich used more than others in her "Revelations": "becloseth." The word meant to be closed in, to be confined, to shut out what is open, to "becloseth" in Christ.

It was when these women confined themselves in Christ, surrendered themselves to him for every need, that they found they were truly free.

Shemaiah Gonzalez is an essayist and speaker living in Seattle and the author of "Undaunted Joy: The Revolutionary Act of Cultivating Delight (Zondervan, $19.19)."



St. Julian of Norwich. | SHUTTERSTOCK



AD REM
» ROBERT BRENNAN



Ashes are placed on a child's forehead during Ash Wednesday Mass Feb. 22, 2023. | OSV NEWS/BOB ROLLER

A 7-year-old's Lenten lesson

We were still vacuuming the odd leftover pine needles from the Christmas tree when a glance at the calendar told us that Lent was looming on the near horizon.

When I made mention of this, our grandson immediately asked about Ash Wednesday. Since he is still more than a year away from his first confession and first holy Communion, we know how much he relishes being able to fully participate in such an important liturgical event. He also likes to look in the mirror the rest of the day to make sure his ashes have not faded away.

He has put our family on the clock by also announcing he is giving up ice cream for Lent. He has gone even further by stipulating that this act of self-denial will include refraining from our Friday ritual of getting "yogurty" ice cream from our local frozen yogurt vendor.

It may not sound like the biggest sacrifice this side of Abel's altar, but if you were 7 years old, it might be seen in more Homeric terms.

This is not the first time our little guy has gotten our spiritual attention. Lent got real for him last year when he made a similar pronouncement — that he'd be forswearing his favorite snack: Goldfish. (For those without a 7-year-old, this is a little fish-shaped cracker whose crumbs can be found in every kindergarten through second-grade classroom on the planet.)

We were supportive but also a little patronizing last year. It seemed quaint and a little cute that he wanted to try to give up something that he really liked. But everyone else in the house believed our grandson had outkicked his self-discipline coverage, and sooner or later a surprise raid on the pantry would leave behind a trail of Goldfish crumbs leading from the kitchen to the chipmunk-stuffed cheeks of a little boy.

But no crumbs were ever discovered. Our grandson remained as stoic as a hermit in a cave in the Sinai. The only thing missing was the hair shirt.

Days turned into weeks and weeks filled out the 2025 Lenten calendar, and our grandson never wavered. We attended the Easter Vigil, a first for him last year, and on the drive home he proclaimed with joy that he "did it!"

I may have grandfatherly fashioned blinders on when it comes to this little boy, but I have enough perspective not to suggest he grasps the theology of

Robert Brennan writes from Los Angeles, where he has worked in the entertainment industry, Catholic journalism, and the nonprofit sector.

the hypostatic union, understands the totality of the concept of the Trinity, or reads the "Summa Theologica" by candlelight every night.

He can be petulant, tends to talk back, and leaves his LEGO bricks all over the house — I have the bruises on the bottom of my feet to prove it.

This would not be the first time God got our attention utilizing imperfect couriers. And the message this little boy was delivering rang in my ears at the end of last Lent and cannot be ignored for this Lent. I gave up nothing last Lent, though I had grandiose plans of reading Scripture every day and carving out time every morning for contemplation. And with every passing 24 hours' worth of Lent, my commitment grew weaker while my then 6-year-old grandson remained resolute.

I may be tempting fate here, but my grandson's most recent Lenten declaration has inspired me. I have told him I will be joining him on his journey this year. Since not eating ice cream is what my doctor has been telling me for years, my sacrifice may resemble more Cain's than Abel's, but I will do it out of a sense of solidarity with my spiritual better. At the same time, I plan to give the adult part of Lent another try. My grandson will supply me with the inspiration, and the new Crux Lenten Challenge on my phone's Ascension app will hopefully keep me on track.

If I make it, it will be less about my own capacity for self-control but more about my grandson's example of "dying" a little for a greater glory. And I do not want to trivialize my grandson's efforts. If you ever saw him with a bowl of regular or "yogurty" ice cream in front of him, you would understand just how sacrificial this Lent is going to be for him.

So, take heart, all who are contemplating a more meaningful Lent this year. And remember, that if wolves and lambs, and leopards and goats, and calves and lions can all be led by a child — so can we all.

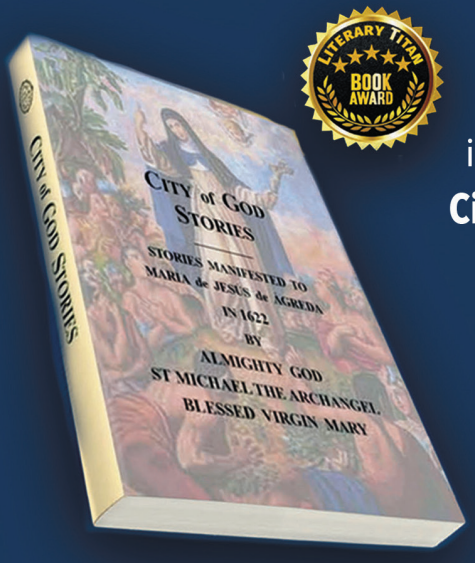
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See 5 STAR Review:
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DESIRE LINES
» HEATHER KING

The prophetess who shaped a pope



Ida Friederike Görres. | WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Ida Friederike Görres (1901-1971), a German Catholic intellectual and author, wrote presciently of the perils of an increasingly secularized society, the Church's ongoing struggle against calls for reform, and the centrality of sainthood.

Perhaps her best-known title is "The Hidden Face" (Ignatius Press, $16.89), a psychological-spiritual study of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

Other works include "The Nature of Sanctity: A Dialogue" (1932), "Broken Lights: Diaries and Letters, 1951-1959" (1964), and "The Church in the Flesh" (Cluny Media, $22.95).

"Bread Grows in Winter" (Ignatius Press, $18.95), originally published in 1970 and out last year from Ignatius Press, is a collection of essays written in the wake of Vatican II.

Beautifully translated by Jennifer S. Bryson, and with an introduction by Bishop Erik Varden of Norway, so relevant are its themes that it could have been written yesterday instead of more than 55 years ago.

Görres' articulated huge emotions and thoughts, half-formed in my case, that as a convert have brought me mutely to my knees, if not to tears, for almost 30 years.

If asked to explain my inexplicable and enduring attraction to the tabernacle, for example, my childlike, block-letter thoughts would be: The Church is the one place that would have me. The Church is my Mother.

Görres says that, too, but a lot more intelligently, eloquently, and stirringly.

The Church, she insisted, can neither be truly understood or loved by those who regard her in strictly institutional terms.

Instead, she wrote, the Church is "the strangest creation of God, so unique in kind, so large, so contradictory, so colorful that no single person can take stock of her and figure her out, and certainly no outsider can ever take her all in, let alone understand and judge her."

She plunged headlong into the pressing questions and tasks of today's believer. "Look how they hate each other!" she began the essay "Demolition Troops in the Church," mimicking those inside and outside who rub their hands with glee at the seemingly perpetual dissension in our ranks.

"The Council was a great, auspicious sowing; now we see many dismaying

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things sprouting up, poisonous things that threaten to choke the first fruit."

She decries the jettisoning of habits, rituals, structures, and traditions that have held the Church in place for 2,000 years, while at the same time wholeheartedly acknowledging the stuffy deadness, self-righteousness, and empty faith of those who observe the traditions without love, thought, or a spirit of repentance.

The reality of the Church in the flesh must be experienced as a living, ever-evolving whole, grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation, that places demands on its members.

To that end, she asks, "Why are we so ashamed of the fact that we are offered more of the message and understanding of Christ through and in the Church than those 'outside'?"

The impulse, she explains, is "part of a powerful psychological wave sweeping the world today: the turmoil … the shame of the haves before the have-nots … the noble urge 'not to have it better than others.' "

But proclaiming Christ doesn't mean we "own" Christ. It means we love him, and as with all people, places, and things we love, we long to share him. To withhold that impulse only impoverishes us and all those who might come to love Christ as well.

"This magnanimous urge to put oneself on an equal footing with the poor, with the lowly… makes sense only if my divestment really benefits others. What cripple would benefit if healthy people got crutches and seemed to be limping? Which blind person would be helped by others' gluing their eyes shut?"

In times of crisis, we need patience, nerves, humor, and a "particularly alert attention to actual movements of the Spirit of God."

We perhaps rely less on professional theologians, who are subject to "the seduction of innovation at any price, by ambition and vanity, sensationalism, and competition for celebrity status" — those trying to be relevant, to comply with the spirit of the times, and who are "occasionally seduced even by an excessive, pitiful identification with error."

Our hope lies, as it always has, she suggests, in the conscience of the "little ones," the rank-and-file members of the faithful, wholly unremarkable and almost wholly invisible, with their "readiness to make ultimate sacrifices for the unity of the Church."

By 1950, Görres had experienced a physical breakdown that rendered her virtually housebound for the remainder of her life. She continued to write prolifically.

She died the year after "Bread Grows in Winter" was published.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, delivered a eulogy. Görres, he observed, had maintained that the Church is "not a system, an idea, an ideology, a structure, a society, but the tremendous living establishment, which has existed since the apostles until today, fulfilling her history from century to century, growing, unfolding, struggling, ailing, recovering, living out her destiny and maturing toward the return of the Lord."

We are a Church of sinners, not elites, Görres insisted to the end. "I trust the suffering in the Church." "I believe in the praying Church made up of laity and priests, the forbearing, the atoning Church." "I believe in the hidden saints."





LETTER AND SPIRIT
» SCOTT HAHN

Scott Hahn is founder of the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology; stpaulcenter.com.

A Lenten feast

The Church has kept its Lenten fast — in one form or another — since the time of the early Fathers. Ash Wednesday this year falls on Feb. 18, and once more our conversations turn to what we'll "give up" for the 40-ish days that follow. Dessert? Television? Alcohol? Social media? Meat? There are many possibilities. We really should be doing something.

Fasting is a prayer of the bodily senses. We willingly give up one thing or another so that we can focus on Jesus Christ. The practice is integral to biblical religion. It's always been there. In the Old Testament, we see that Moses and Elijah fasted. In the New Testament, Jesus did, as did the apostles after him. Jesus even left instructions for fasting, assuming the practice would continue in the age of his Church. He didn't say "If you fast …" He said "When you fast …" (Matthew 6:16–17).

Thus, in Lent, the Church calls every Christian to observe some kind of fasting.

Spiritual writers down the centuries, however, have observed that we should not identify Lent with its fast — because it's really a time of feasting. As we fast with the body, we feast with our soul. In fact, it's the bodily fast that makes the spiritual feast possible. Lent detaches us from the delectable things of this world so that we can practice giving everything to God.

We trade earthly satisfactions for heavenly ones. Fasting is a discipline to remove distractions, sharpen spiritual senses, and align our desires with God. Following the Lenten path, we find ultimate satisfaction in him rather than temporary pleasures.

The fundamental problem isn't with the things of this world. God made them to fascinate and delight us. He made them so that we would seek him — who created those good things and gave them to us in love. But we tend to stall at the delight and fascination. We forget to move on to thank and praise their Creator.

It has been our problem since the beginning. Adam and Eve wounded the whole world by giving it the whole of their hearts, instead of subordinating it to its Maker. That's what disobedience brings about.

People can make an idol of anything. St. Paul spoke of those whose "god is the belly" (Philippians 3:19). It seemed silly to the people of Israel that the folks in neighboring countries would exchange "the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals, or reptiles" (Romans 1:23). But that's what we do — in fact, that's what the Israelites did — when they favored the worldly over the heavenly.

When we give up something for Lent, we're not saying that what we're giving up is bad. If it's bad — if it's sinful — we should reject it out of hand, no matter the season of the year.

When we fast from it — give it up for a little while — we're acknowledging its goodness and our very human weakness. We're making the choice to feast our spirit on the Maker rather than feast our bodies on what God has made.



"Elijah Fed by Ravens," workshop of Roelant Savery, 1576–1639, Dutch. | WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

LA CATHOLIC EVENTS

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Prayer: The Longing of Our Hearts. Holy Spirit Retreat Center, 4316 Lanai Rd., Encino, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. With Sister Nodelyn Abayan, SSS. Visit hsrcenter.com or call 818-784-4515.

Welcoming and Turn-Over Ceremony of the Official Replica of Nuestro Padre Jesus Nazareno. Holy Family Church, 18708 Clarkdale Ave., Artesia, 10:30 a.m. Celebrant: Bishop Rufino Coronel Sescon Jr., bishop of Balanga, Philippines. Reception to follow. Text RSVP by Feb. 1 to Florence Sabagquit at 562-500-8528 or Noel Motus at 562-282-3071.

Journeying with Jesus: Lenten Workshop. Santa Rosa de Lima Church, 668 S. Workman St., San Fernando, 4-7 p.m. Hands-on workshop for catechists who minister to elementary-age children. Learn creative ideas to help children and families live a Lenten season centered in Jesus Christ. Cost: $25/person by Feb. 6, $35/person for late registration. Visit lacatholics.org/events.

Valentine's Day Couples Dinner and Mini Retreat. Mary & Joseph Retreat Center, 5300 Crest Rd., Rancho Palos Verdes, 5-9 p.m. With Rev. Jim Clarke, Ph.D. Retreat discusses ways to deepen courage in marriage. Cost: $150/couple, includes dinner. Call José at 310-377-4867, ext. 250 or email jsalas@maryjoseph.org.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Rite of Election. Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, 555 W. Temple St., Los Angeles, 3 and 6 p.m. All catechumens preparing for baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist are invited to join the 2026 Rite of Election session. Call Leticia Perez at 213-647-7595 or email lperez@la-archdiocese.org.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Catholic Singles Network Visit to America 250 Exhibit. Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, 18001 Yorba Linda Blvd., Yorba Linda, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Call Celeste at 661-916-2727 or visit CatholicSinglesNetwork.com.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

Ash Wednesday Mass. Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, 555 W. Temple St., Los Angeles, 7 a.m., 8 a.m., 12:10 p.m. (livestreamed), 5:15 p.m., 7 p.m. Spanish Mass. Confessions available 11 a.m.-12 p.m. Visit lacatholics.org/events.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19

RECongress Youth Day: "Real Love Carries the Cross." Anaheim Convention Center, 800 W. Katella Ave. Inspiring speakers, interactive exhibits, music, liturgy, and prayer for middle- and high-schoolers. Visit recongress.org to register and for more information.

University Series Speaker Series. Fifteen participating parishes and campuses within Ventura County, San Fernando Valley, and Santa Barbara County are offering 88 presentations in both English and Spanish from Feb. 19 to March 27. Times and addresses vary depending on date. Visit theuniversityseries.org or call 805-496-0222, ext. 119.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20

RECongress 2026: "Wrapped in Mercy, Hope Renewed." Anaheim Convention Center, 800 W. Katella Ave. The three-day event runs Feb. 20-22 and includes more than 140 workshops offered in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, daily liturgies, Sacred Space, and resources. Visit recongress.org to register and for more information.

Centering Prayer Silent Weekend Retreat. Holy Spirit Retreat Center, 4316 Lanai Rd., Encino, 2 p.m.-Sun., 1 p.m. With Sister Chris Machado and the Centering Prayer Retreat Team. Visit hsrcenter.com or call 818-784-4515.

"World Famous" Lenten Fish Dinners. St. Cornelius Church, 5500 E. Wardlow Rd., Long Beach, 5-7 p.m. Held Fridays in Lent, except March 20. All meals served with side dishes, dessert, and beverage. Adults: $15/person, ages 13-17: $10/ person, kids under 13: $5/person. Visit angelusnews.com/events for full menu.

Women's Recovery Weekend Retreat. Mary & Joseph Retreat Center, 5300 Crest Rd., Rancho Palos Verdes, 6 p.m.-Sun., Feb. 22, 1:30 p.m. With John McAndrew, MA, MDiv. Retreat offers space to reflect, reconnect, and strengthen spiritual foundations. Cost: $450/single room, $365/shared room, meals and accommodations included. $195/person for commuters. Call José at 310-377-4867, ext. 250 or email jsalas@maryjoseph.org.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Lenten Retreat: Catholic Daughters of America, Court of Our Lady of Victory. St. James Church, 415 Vincent St., Redondo Beach, 8 a.m. Mass, 9 a.m.-12 p.m. retreat. Men and women welcome. Facilitator: Father Mark Warnstedt. RSVP to Lisa Malgeri at lisa_malgeri@yahoo.com.

Marriage Preparation Session. St. Augustine Church, 3850 Jasmine Ave., Culver City, 8:45 a.m.-5 p.m. Two sessions available per month, one in English and one in Spanish. Engaged couples and those already in a civil union are welcome to attend. All sessions require in-person attendance of both bride and groom for the full eight-hour session. Cost: $150/couple. Visit familylife.lacatholics.org.

God's Healing for Families. St. Didacus Church, 14235 Astoria St., Sylmar, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. With Father Bob Garon, Maria Velasquez, LMFT, and Dominic Berardino. Topics include: Breaking Generational Curses and Your Place in the Family of God. Cost: $25/person through Feb. 17, $35/person at the door, space permitting. Includes catered chicken lunch. Visit events.scrc.org.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Stations of the Cross. Calvary Cemetery, 4201 Whittier Blvd., Los Angeles, 2 p.m. Held every Sunday in Lent. Visit catholiccm.org/stations or call 323-261-3106.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Soup and Cinema: "Pier Giorgio Frassati: If I Didn't Have Love." St. Bede the Venerable Church, 215 Foothill Blvd., La Cañada Flintridge, 6 p.m. Presented by Father Darrin Merlino, CMF. Bring soup, bread, dessert, or drinks to share. Call 818-949-4300.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Taize Prayer. Holy Spirit Retreat Center, 4316 Lanai Rd., Encino, 7 p.m. Led by Sister Chris Machado, SSS, and Sister Marie Lindemann, SSS. Visit hsrcenter.com or call 818-784-4515.

Elixir Piano Trio Concert. St. Bede the Venerable Church, 215 Foothill Blvd., La Cañada Flintridge, 7:30 p.m. Tickets: $20/person. Available at bede.org. Call 818-949-4300.

Taize Reflections on the Stations of the Cross. St. James Church, 415 Vincent St., 7:30 p.m. Join the St. James choir and instrumentalists.

Items for the calendar of events are due four weeks prior to the date of the event. They may be emailed to calendar@angelusnews.com. All calendar items must include the name, date, time, address of the event, and a phone number for additional information.

Happy Valentine's Day

from the Bob Smith Family & Staff!



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