MLK breakfast discusses racial categories/cultural disparities

Tom Ziegler
Staff Writer

In 1856, Margaret Garner fled slavery in Richwood, Ky., with her children and husband, Robert, only to be recaptured in Cincinnati. As the posse moved in on their hiding place, Mrs. Garner decided she would rather kill her children than see them return to slavery — successfully killing her youngest daughter and wounding the other three children. Mrs. Garner’s tragic story was presented by Northern Kentucky University’s Mourning the Creation of Racial Categories at the annual Martin Luther King Jr. breakfast, Jan. 15, at Our Savior Church, Covington. The annual event recognizes and honors Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his vision of racial equality. Joan Ferrante and Lynnissa Hillman of MCRC were the guest presenters. Together they shared the Garner Family story through forms of contemporary art.

“Inspire the pain and suffering (physically and emotionally) that you would have to be going through to believe you are better off killing your own children than to return to a life of slavery,” Ms. Ferrante said.

The MCRC presentation was followed by speaker Philip Stowers, who discussed the disparity of the healthcare system among races. African Americans, he said, are more vulnerable to certain illnesses and diseases sometimes due to living conditions and healthcare plans they are trapped in — topics that have heightened during the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

“We have to remember that things such as diabetes and other pre-existing conditions are more common amongst African Americans. There are usually fewer grocery stores and resources available within walking distance of communities that are predominately black,” Mr. Stowers said.

The event ended with a question-and-answer session or for anyone that wanted to speak on issues and topics they felt like sharing. Discussions included treating all individuals as equal human beings and let us carry on his work for equality and justice,” Archbishop Gomez urged.
States were still living on seven military bases in the United States. About 34,000 Afghan evacuees were in immediate and certain danger. According to a December article on Military.com, about 34,000 Afghan evacuees from Afghanistan allies, people who have worked for the U.S. or NATO during the U.S. War in Afghanistan, 2001-2021. Last year, President Joe Biden invited to stay for dinner, despite the fact that they are in a terrible situation. As the President Joe Biden has expressed, the President has a special place in her heart as she has traveled twice to the Middle East and has great respect and admiration for their culture. “They’re really the most giving, welcoming people,” she said. “I really see no downside to renting to us,” said Kelsi Sievering, community resource coordinator, KRM, Covington. “In many cases, will never happen. “We’re really realistic and upfront with them,” she said.

Kentucky Refugee Ministries, working to make Ky. home for evacuees

Laurie Keeney
Editor

Dish soap. Bathroom and kitchen cleaner: Sponges. Paper towels. Laundry detergent. Trash bags. Toilet paper. Shampoo. Soap. Light bulbs. Parts of the list reads like a typical list to the grocery store. But then other items are included that suggest this might be a bridal registry.

Place settings of flatware and dishes, pots and pans, mixing bowls, kitchen utensils, can opener, waste baskets, towels, sheets, blankets, pillows and pillowcases; or a baby shower — baby items.

The commonness of the items identifies a common humanity — basic necessities, items that make a house a home. They are all items listed in the “Required Items for Apartments for the KRM Refugee Clients Checklist.”

KRM — the Kentucky Refugee Ministries — opened a satellite office in Covington last year. The secular, non-profit agency began its work in Louisville in 1980 and added a sub-office in Lexington in 1998. KRM is a local affiliate of Church World Service — one of nine national resettlement agencies located in the U.S. Among KRM’s current clients are evacuees from Afghanistan — allies, people who have worked for the U.S. or NATO during the U.S. War in Afghanistan, 2001-2021.

Last year, President Joe Biden ended the war in Afghanistan and, in August 2021, drew all military troops. As the Taliban reclaimed government control of the country, the U.S. evacuated over 70,000 people — men, women and children — whose lives were threatened in a certain danger. According to a Dec. 2 article on Military.com, about 34,000 Afghan evacuees were still living on seven military bases in the United States.

“I know the accommodations are not great, certainly not permanent,” said Kelsi Sievering, community resource coordinator, KRM, Covington.

KRM hired Ms. Sievering to head its Covington office three months ago, but she tells us she has been doing this work for decades. The Afghan evacuees have a special place in her heart as she has lived twice in the Middle East and has great respect and admiration for their culture.

“They’re really the most giving, welcoming people. I think, in the entire world,” Ms. Sievering said, noting that evacuees working with Afghan evacuees are often invited to stay for dinner, despite the fact that they are in a new country living on gift cards.

“These are people that have nothing when they come here, and they still want to share what they have. I just think that’s more telling than anything,” she said about the evacuees she is working with.

KRM Covington is expecting to receive 30 cases — about 60 individuals — for placement in Northern Kentucky. Ms. Sievering said that number will grow as many evacuees have family members who are also evacuees and would like to live here once they are reunited. She explained that each evacuee — even older children — are assigned their own case worker and are often referred to different agencies and then sent to different places. It takes some time for them to reconnect.

Typically the most immediate need is housing. Fortunately, Ms. Sievering said, many of the evacuees coming into NKY already have family or friends who are willing to welcome them into their home for a while. That is welcome news given the shortened timeline her office receives that an evacuee is coming. Typically, she said, it takes years for a refugee to make it through the refugee process, with only about one percent of those applying for refugee status being accepted. Local affiliates are notified three weeks in advance of a refugee’s arrival so that they can make housing arrangements and gather the necessary supplies. With the Afghan evacuees the pre-arrival window is about two days.

“That’s the tricky part,” she said.

Fortunately, Ms. Sievering said, many of the evacuees have family members who are also seeking volunteers to fill some specific client needs. Home Setup Volunteers are needed to make sure that all of the items on the checklist are ready and waiting for evacuees when they arrive. “It’s making the beds, putting dishes away — making a household,” Ms. Sievering said.

Transport Volunteers, especially On-Call Transport Volunteers, are an urgent need. Transport Volunteers take clients to the store or to appointments. On-Call Transport Volunteers do the same thing, but on an unscheduled basis. Clients, Ms. Sievering said, learn quickly and often need help with shopping once or twice. KRM translators can provide a list of items the client is looking for: “Especially if it’s their first time, the grocery store can be very overwhelming; they need a chance to look around and browse the aisles,” she said.

Transport volunteers have also taken clients to local events and places — like the local mosque or Fountain Square on New Year’s Eve or to go ice skating. “Things that they don’t get to see if they’re kind of stuck in that temporary housing,” Ms. Sievering said. “Those opportunities and outings are really the most fun and our clients really appreciate them.”

One volunteer has become a real community guide, helping clients learn how to navigate the TANK bus system and showing them local landmarks along the bus routes so that they can gain some independence. “He’s even taken them to the Kenton County Library to get library cards,” Ms. Sievering said, adding that KRM can use more community guide volunteers.

The process to be a KRM volunteer is “a little bit lengthy,” Ms. Sievering said. “Volunteers need to complete some forms, attend an orientation and complete a background check. If volunteers will be transporting people, they also have to have a driver’s license and car insurance.

Ms. Sievering said that her clients are finding Northern Kentucky to be a welcoming place and that they are assimilating well. They are eager to work and would like for family members left behind in Afghanistan to join them here. For their family members in Afghanistan, life is lived in fear, for they are being targeted by the Taliban. Communication with family members is difficult since they must live in remote areas, often without WIFI, and many move weekly to avoid detection.

While KRM is doing their best to offer hope for a happy reunion, Ms. Sievering said, it will take a long time — years — and in many cases, will never happen. “We’re really realistic and upfront with them,” she said.

Elementary School Open Houses

Blessed Sacrament – 1/23, 11:30 am – 1:30 pm
Holy Cross – No Open House
Holy Family – No Open House – call for personal tour
Holy Trinity – 1/30, 12 – 1:30 pm
Immaculate Heart of Mary – 1/29, 9 – 10 am; 1:30 - 2:30 pm
Mary Queen of Heaven – 1/30, 12:30 – 2:30 pm
Prince of Peace – 2/9, 4 – 6 pm (PreK and K only)
St. Agnes – No Open House – private tours
St. Anthony – 1/30, 10 am – 1 pm
St. Augustine – 1/30, 12 – 1 pm
St. Catherine – 1/27, 6 – 8 pm
St. Edward – No Open House
St. Henry – 1/30, 1 – 3 pm
St. Joseph, Cold Spring – 1/23, 12:30 – 2:30 pm
St. Joseph, Covington – 1/30, 12 – 2 pm; and private tours
St. Joseph Academy – tours by appointment
St. Mary – No Open House – call for tour
St. Patrick, Mayville – tours by appointment
St. Patrick, Taylor Mill – 2/6, 12 – 2 pm
St. Paul – 1/30, 1 – 4 pm by appointment
Sts. Peter and Paul – 1/23, 12 – 2 pm
St. Cecilia – 2/1, 5 – 7 pm
St. Philip – N/A
St. Pius X – 1/27, 8:30 am and 12 pm for prospective families; 1/30, 11:30 am and 12:30 pm for in-school families
St. Therese – 2/4, 6 – 7:30 pm
St. Thomas – 1/23, 1 - 3 pm
St. Timothy – 1/22, 9 am – 1 pm
Villa Madonna Academy – 1/30, 1 – 3 pm
Rose Garden Home Mission — creating a culture excited for life

Tom Ziegler  
Staff Writer

The Franciscan Daughters of Mary opened their first mission in 2005, before moving to a larger facility in 2010. Their mission, the Rose Garden Home Mission, offers women pregnancy tests and counseling to help them choose not only life, but the best life for their baby and themselves.

“We take a vow to uphold the dignity of every human person from the moment of conception to natural death. We see the pregnancy center as a way of living that out,” said Mother Seraphina Marie Quinlan. “This counseling is to check in and see where they are at, talk to them about what true love is and the dangers of contraceptives and abortion.”

The Rose Garden Home Mission center is one of three local life affirming organizations being honored at the upcoming Life’s a Ball event hosted by the diocesan Pro-Life Office. Life’s a Ball will be held Feb. 12, at the Airport Marriott, Hebron. Tickets are available by calling Faye Roch, director, Pro-Life Office at (859) 392-1500. The other two honorees are CareNet pregnancy center and New Roc, director; Pro-Life Office at (859) 392-1500. The other year-old to meet Mother Seraphina because, she told Mother Seraphina, “he is only here because of you.” Mother Seraphina said she had shared her excitement about the woman’s pregnancy, and it made the mother realize that she wanted to have this child.

“In the 36 and a half years that the center has been open, I only know of two women who did not choose life,” Mother Seraphina said. “The center is run by 100 percent volunteers, no paid staff anymore, and everything is donated.

“The community in this area just really loves babies and what we do, it is just a beautiful thing. One hundred percent of every donation goes completely to the work,” Mother Seraphina said.

The Franciscan Daughters desire to be a support for every mom in need and to help provide anything needed as the baby grows.

“It is great to see the need we are fulfilling in this area. I love these people, they are family to us, and it is all about serving Jesus through loving others,” Mother Seraphina said.

Sisters — How nun shaped Northern Kentucky

NYK History Hour - 6:30 p.m.  
Wednesday, January 26, 2022

COVINGTON, KY — Since the 1800s, Catholic Sisters have played major roles in Northern Kentucky’s education, health care, social services and more. Called to be faithful women of the church, these women devoted their lives to serving their community.

In the next virtual NYK History Hour on January 26, Dave Schroeder, executive director of the Kenton County Public Library, will discuss how women of modest means and deep faith made our region a better place. The virtual presentation will take place via Zoom at 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, January 26.

To register and participate in the free event, go to: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYZdOmgrDvat6:30 p.m., Wednesday, January 26.

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The poor — “the hidden presence of Christ” — Matthew 25:40

Commentary

“Gaudium et Spius,” the Second Vatican Council’s “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” 1965, entered into dialogue with humanity concern- ing the urgent problems of the world at mid-20th cen- tury. It proclaimed the saving message of the Gospel to illuminate the great spiritual and moral challenges of the times, issues ranging from the development of culture to the moral demands of political and economic life, includ- ing justice and peace.

In the Catholic moral tradition, the bedrock of all morality — personal and social — is the sacred and natural nature of the human person. Reverence for the dignity of the human person, then, grounds a moral imperative that “everyone must consid- er every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means neces- sary to living with dignity so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus (Luke 16:19-21).” (GL, n. 27)

In the 21st century, the globalization of the social ques- tion has opened up new horizons for Christian responsi- bility on behalf of the impoverished, the abandoned, the afflicted, the hungry or the hungry. In reality, that obligation, which binds one as neighbor of “absolutely every per- son,” warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren (CCC, n. 1030).

A “way of life among communities,” the first chapter of the Compendium, closes with the assurance of the bibli- cal hope for “New heavens and a new earth.” The text opens by stating: “The principle of the universal destina- tion has opened up new horizons for Christian responsi- bility in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities.”

The shock of those who have either cared for or neg- lected the needy is triggered by the discovery that the world is identified with the poor, the outcast, and the margin-

ized. The acceptance or rejection of Jesus “hidden in those most in need” reflects the Emmanuel theme (“God- with-us”) found in Matthew. That theme arises in the infancy narrative (Matthew 1:23) at the beginning of the Gospel and at the end in the assurance of the Lord’s faith- ful and ongoing presence with his disciples “until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).”

The apocalyptic vision in Matthew 25 confirms that the poor, the needy, the outcast, and the suffering carry the hidden presence of Jesus. Shepherd, Lord, and Judge. In particular, this pericope serves as a specific founda- tional biblical text for the Church’s moral tradition for the “works of mercy.”

“The Catechism of the Catholic Church” incorporates the moral doctrine of the “works of mercy” under the heading of “Justice and Solidarity among Nations.” In the global context of the contemporary world, won- derful but also the poor constitute the criterion by which “Jesus Christ will recognize his chosen ones.” The teaching of the glad tidings to the poor is “the sign of Christ’s presence” (Matthew 11:5).” (CCC, n. 2443)

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Jesus, the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones (cf. Matthew 25:40). This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth. But the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favor an investment in effort to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium (n. 208)

Commentary

“The Reign of God and Justice” in the spirit of the Catholic Conference of Bishops, discussed the concept of the moral demands of political and economic life, includ- ing justice and peace.

In this regard, the Pastoral Constitution cites the tra- ditional universalistic application of the Last Judgment scene narrated in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew (Matthew 25:31-46).

“Two decades later, “Economic Justice for All,” the 1986 Pastoral Constitution, the Father’s care, a welcome and company to the Lord who knocks at the door (cf. Matthew 25:31-46).” (CSDC, n. 58)

The shock of those who have either cared for or neglected the needy is triggered by the discovery that the world is identified with the poor, the outcast, and the margin-

ized. The acceptance or rejection of Jesus “hidden in those most in need” reflects the Emmanuel theme (“God- with-us”) found in Matthew. That theme arises in the infancy narrative (Matthew 1:23) at the beginning of the Gospel and at the end in the assurance of the Lord’s faith- ful and ongoing presence with his disciples “until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).”

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Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium (n. 208)
The Word of the Lord: Rock and redeemer

The readings for the third Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C are: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5b, 6-10; 1 Corinthians 12:13-20 and Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

One of the great spiritual misperceptions of our age is to see the “words of the law,” brought to us before the assembly in the reading from the Book of Nehemiah, as totally external to us. This, in turn, causes us to see God’s law and words of instruction as an imposition on us, in opposition to us and to our freedom. Thus, modern man tends to see the idea of truth, much less The Truth, as in the Word Incarnate Jesus Christ, as a source of potential intellectual, psychological and moral slavery, not a proclamation of “liberty to captives and a recovery of sight to the blind.”

All of this has the tragic effect of putting God at a distance from us, even as he eternally remains Emmanuel—God with us. As that distance increases, the second separated God appears from “our reality” the very possibility of God, God who is God and any and every idea of truth — much less a Divine Revelation of truth — seems impossible. And where truth seems impossible, faith wanes, hope withers, love dissipates and nihilism reigns. Much of the experience of the modern world gives evidence to just such a situation.

At the root of this great spiritual misperception of the age, is a great misperception of the nature of the human person. Reduced to the material and to a certain degraded notion of the “natural” we forget the true nature of man. As Father Hans Urs von Balthasar perceptively notes in a book, “Prayer,” “Man was created to be a hearer of the word, and it is in responding to the word that he attains his true dignity. His innermost constitution has been designed for dialogue.”

It is precisely because of the nature of our creation that we can affirm that “the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.” This, I think, is one of the many things the Second Vatican Council meant when it taught in Gaudium et Spes, “The truth is that only in the mystical union with each there is more than metaphorical. It is real, it is actual, it is a living body, a living organism, where all the members are here unfaithfully, you bring great harm.” (Rumi) “If you are here unfaithfully, you bring great blessing.” (Parker Palmer) “If you are here faithful, you bring great blessing.” (Bunyi)

As Christians, we believe that we are all members of one living organism, the Body of Christ, and that our union with each there is more than metaphorical. It is real, as real as the physicality of a living body. We are not a corporation, but a living body, a living organism, where all parts affect all other parts. Hence, just as in a living body, healthy enzymes help bring health to the whole body, and infected and cancerous cells threaten the health of the whole body; so, too, inside the Body of Christ. What we do in private is still inside the body.

Consequently when we do virtuous things, even in private, like a healthy enzyme, we help strengthen the immune system within the whole body. Conversely, when we are unfaithful, when we are selfish, when we sin, no matter that this is only done in private, like an infected or cancerous cell, we are helping break down the immune system in the body. Both healthy enzymes and harmful cancer cells work in secret, below the surface.

This has important implications for our private lives. Simply put, nothing we think or do in private does not have an effect on others. Our private thoughts and actions, like healthy enzymes or infected cells, affect the health of the body either strengthening or weakening its immune system. When we are faithful, we help bring health to the body; when we are unfaithful, we are an infected cell challenging the immune system within the body.

Whether we are faithful or unfaithful in private affects others, and this is not something that is abstract or mystical. For example, a spouse knows when his or her partner is unfaithful, irrespective of whether or not the affair is exposed. Moreover, the spouse knows this not just because there may be subtle behavioral clues in the infidelity in the other’s body language and behavior. No, she knows this at a gut level, instinctively, because in some dark inexplicable way she senses the betrayal as a strain on the health and integrity of their marriage. This may sound more metaphorical than real, but I invite you to check it out in life. We feel infidelity.

We know some things consciously and others unconsciously. We know through our heads, through observation and others intuitively. We know through our heads, our hearts and our guts, and through all of these faculties, some (because it’s more obvious or because we speak to others) most of which might be hidden from the self. We sense it at a gut level, instinctively, because in some dark inexplicable way she senses the betrayal as a strain on the health and integrity of their marriage. This may sound more metaphorical than real, but I invite you to check it out in life. We feel infidelity.

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Efficiency is my jam. I enjoy putting together a good plan and checking the boxes as I approach the end goal. Because of my love for efficiency, I use an email to a lot to communicate. It’s not only efficient, it also suits my introspective nature, or, I should say, of that, I just like to write.

An e-mail allows me to start a conversation, and it allows me to make sure my e-mails are comprehensive, providing every detail a person needs to know. It’s documentation. Doesn’t make so much that one appreciate a good to do list that you can refer to?

Well guess what? Not everyone enjoys reading my carefully crafted e-mails as much as I enjoy writing them; and, by not seeing their reactions, by not hearing their questions and their needs, I am missing out on important context that could help us work together more productively.

Throughout this time of coronavirus and isolation, we’ve moved toward a more remote society. We’ve uncov- ered some efficiency and it’s not all bad. We use technology to help us do a lot of the things we used to do in per- son. We save commute time through working from home.

As a result, there is a LOT of e-mail and text. By remov- ing that element of human interaction, we’ve saved time. However, as we’ve emerged from the isolation of the pan- demic, many of these tools actually discourage us from seeing “each other” while it is efficient, it is not necessarily an advancement in our ability to build meaningful relationships.

Person-to-person service is central to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Traditionally, when we are not able to serve in a literal visit by a Vincentian volunteer team to a neighbor’s home when they reach out for assistance. Out of necessity, we had to make some adjustments to the way we served our neighbors during the height of the pan- demic. As we continued to reach out on a personal level through phone calls or video chats with those requesting help, it just wasn’t quite the same. Why is this face-to-face experience, in the home of a neighbor in need, so important? Sunnie Lain, one of our associates from SVDP Cincinnati, shared the following insight.

First, Vincentians seek to “see the face of Christ” in those we serve. We actively seek out opportunities to spend time with the people we serve and to develop relations- ships with them. The time we spend with our neigh- bors is not transactional, rather, it is relational. We strive not only to bring material assistance but hope to those we visit. Second, we are best able to assess the needs of the peo- ple we serve in this personal environment. Many times we (Continued on page 14)
We Choose Life

Pro-Life Office of the Diocese of Covington

Mission Statement
The Pro-Life Office of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, guided by our bishop, promotes the sanctity and legal protection of human life from conception to natural death through prayer, pastoral care, public policy and education.

How to make abortion unthinkable
Whether or not abortion is legal, pregnant women need material and emotional support. Can we promise every woman raised under Roe that she will find pregnancy care and compassion in her neighborhood? Pro-life groups in every state are already laying plans to that end, working to strengthen safety nets, broaden existing community-based solutions and increase engagement from churches, voluntary organizations and private donors.

At the state level, the need is equally pressing. Consider Texas, where abortions have steadily declined since the 2006 launch of Texas Alternatives to Abortion (A2A), a state program to level the socioeconomic playing field and help women choose life. A2A's objective is to provide comprehensive, wraparound social services to expectant and parenting women, including job training and placement, financial independence and budget instruction, classes in life skills and child development, adoption counseling, stress intervention, housing, car seats, diapers, clothing and strollers. Approved agencies accompany mother and child to age three (or even five, through private donations). Catholic Charities is among the approved agencies. In 2020, A2A served 102,000 individuals, and in 2001 Texas funded the program’s funding to $1 million. It is crucial that states enact pro-family public policies, fund pro-parenthood priorities and improve and streamline adoption procedures. The bottom line is that women choose life when they know they have support.

Laura Streitmann
Executive Director
Cincinnati Right to Life

Since the 1973 landmark pro-abortion decisions of the US Supreme Court, Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton, over 61 million unborn babies have been denied the right to life outside our nation. Sold the lie that abortion is healthcare, too many people have been misled to believe that a fetus is simply a dump of cells and blocks of tissue to be disposed of. Abortion, originally sold by advocates as “safe, legal and rare,” has increasingly become a matter of convenience, a rational, modern choice that has quickly become a deadly way of life.

What is the direct cost? By successfully selling death for nearly 50 years, abortion supporters have cost us unique and unredeemable people made in the image and likeness of God. We have lost siblings, cousins, classmates and friends. Many would have been grandparents now; we are in the second generation of lives lost to that sales pitch.

The societal impact of casual abortion has been appalling, destroying families and causing hidden pain among those with an abortion experience. Of Kentucky’s 4,104 abortions in 2020, one-third were repeat. And because abortion targets black neighborhoods aggressively, that demographic which represents a 10th of the U.S. population suffers one-third of all abortions.

But change is in the air. On Dec. 1, 2021, the Supreme Court heard arguments in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, concerning Mississippi’s ban on abortion after 15 weeks’ gestation. The majority ruling, expected in June, may dismantle the legal fiction about fetal viability and the so-called right to abortion invented in 1973. That high court decision may cancel federal protections for abortion providers and send abortion regulation back to state legislatures, over half of which stand ready to protect unborn lives.

This is both a challenge and an opportunity for the pro-life community, for Catholics can see that protecting women and their unborn children will...
VATICAN CITY — St. Joseph’s work as a humble carpenter serves as an example of the dignity of hard work that today is often denied to those in need, Pope Francis said.

“Many young people, many fathers and mothers experience the ordeal of not having a job that allows them to live peacefully; they just live day by day. And how often the search for work becomes so desperate that it drives them to the point of losing all hope and the desire to live,” the pope said Jan. 12 during his weekly general audience.

The value of hard work, he added, is also exploited in today’s world where many people, including undocumented workers, are forced to do grueling tasks for unfair wages, and children, “who should be playing,” instead are “forced to work like an adult.”

“They are our brothers and sisters, those who earn their living this way, with jobs that do not recognize their dignity. Let us think about this; this is happening today in the world!” he said.

Pope Francis was continuing his series of audience talks about St. Joseph, reflecting on his work as a carpenter.

The work of a carpenter or woodworker at that time, the pope explained, involved not only crafting tools or furniture but also building houses. From an economic point of view, “it did not ensure great earnings.”

Pope Francis said the fact that St. Joseph, as well as Jesus, practiced carpentry and reminded him “of all the workers in the world, especially those who do grueling work in mines and factories” as well as “those who are exploited through undocumented work” and the “victims of labor” who are injured or die on the job because of unsafe working conditions.

He also called on Christians to remember those who are without work and who return home every day, unsuccessful in their efforts to “earn their bread.”

“Earning bread is what gives you dignity and if we do not give our people, our men and women, the ability to earn bread, this is a social injustice in that place, in that nation, in that continent,” the pope said. “Leaders must give everyone the ability to earn bread, because this earning gives them dignity.”

Departing from his prepared remarks, the pope called for a moment of silent prayer for those who lost their jobs during the pandemic and for those who, “crushed by an unbearable burden, reached the point of taking their own lives.”

“I would like to remember each of them and their families today. Let us take a moment of silence, remembering these women, who are desperate because they cannot find work,” the pope said before bowing his head in prayer.

Pope Francis called on those present to think about what they can do “to recover the value of work” and what the church can do “so that work can be redeemed from the logic of mere profit and can be experienced as a fundamental right and duty of the person, which expresses and increases his or her dignity.”

He concluded his talk with a prayer to St. Joseph recited by St. Paul VI in 1969, asking for the saint’s intercession to “protect workers in their hard, daily existence” and to defend “them from discouragement.”
Supreme Court takes up former football coach’s firing for praying on field

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court announced Jan. 14 that it would hear an appeal from a former high school football coach in Washington state who says his rights to freedom of speech and religion were violated when he was fired in 2015 for praying on the football field after team games.

Joseph Kennedy, former assistant coach at Bremerton High School, outside of Seattle, is asking the court to reverse a lower court decision in 2017 that sided with the school district. The decision said Kennedy had acted as a public official by praying with athletes who wished to join him in prayer in view of other students and parents.

Kennedy first appealed his case to the Supreme Court in 2019. The justices chose not to consider it but didn’t rule it out completely. Justice Samuel Alito, joined by Justices Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, wrote in a separate concurrence that the time wasn’t right to review the case because it had “unresolved factual questions.”

First Liberty, a law firm specializing in religious freedom cases, is representing Kennedy, described on its website as “Coach Joe.” It also asks for support for Team Kennedy, which is asking the court to reverse a lower court decision in 2017 that sided with the school district. It includes a photo of Kennedy in front of the court with a football.

It is not clear if the court will hear oral arguments in this case in April or next term. Kennedy, who said he made a personal commitment to thank God after each game, won or lose, since he started coaching in 2008, made it a point to kneel by the sideline after the game by himself for quiet prayer. Eventually he was joined in this practice by many of the team members.

One player’s parent said their son, an atheist, felt like he had to join in prayer or face potential loss of playing time. School district officials told Kennedy to stop the postgame prayers in keeping with a constitutional amendment clause prohibiting the government from favoring one religion over another.

Kennedy asked the school to just give him 15 seconds to kneel on the field for silent prayer when the players were off the field, which the school district officials denied, calling it a violation of policy. Instead, the school district offered to give the coach a private space to pray or said it would allow him to pray after the crowd had left the stadium.

A description of the case from scotusblog.com, a website about the Supreme Court, said Kennedy’s announcement that he would not comply prompted a large group of supporters — including parents, a state legislator, and members of both teams — to join him at the 50-yard line after a game in October 2015.

After that, the school district placed Kennedy on paid administrative leave. During a performance review, the head football coach said Kennedy shouldn’t be rehired because he violated the school district’s policy.

Kennedy did not seek to be rehired for the coaching position and instead filed a lawsuit in federal District Court claiming the school district violated his First Amendment rights.

The lower court sided with the school district, which led Kennedy to the Supreme Court in 2019 and again last year, pleading his case, which has gained some national attention.

He told the justices the ruling against him by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit put the religious expression of hundreds of thousands of teachers “on the verge of extinction” and that its “chilling effects elsewhere around the country are palpable.”

Kennedy’s lawyers argued that the Supreme Court has long held that teachers and students do not have to give up First Amendment protections while at school.

The Bremerton school district, represented by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, urged the court not to take up the case, saying Kennedy’s appeal distorted or ignored facts.

In its brief, it said the school district “faced a stark choice: Either let its employee dictate how school events would be run — even if that threatened the safety and religious freedom of the students — or take the steps necessary to curb the practice.”

The case has friend-of-the-court briefs from 24 states, several religious groups and two former pro football players.

John Bursch, senior counsel and vice president of Alliance Defending Freedom, a religious liberty firm, praised the court’s decision to take up this case. In a Jan. 14 statement, he said that if the lower court’s opinion remained intact, its “overt hostility to personal religious practice would drum the faithful out of public life.”

“We look forward to the Supreme Court considering the arguments in this case and affirming the constitutionally protected freedom of public officials to prayerfully practice their faith during working hours,” he said.

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WASHINGTON — A federal appeals court sent a challenge to the Texas abortion law back to the state’s Supreme Court Jan. 17.

The decision leaves the law in place and is expected to delay action on reviewing a challenge to this law, which bans most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy.

Abortion providers had asked the U.S. Supreme Court in early January to order the appeals court to send the challenge back to the federal District Court in Texas that had previously blocked the law.

The 2-1 decision by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, based in New Orleans, stressed that the court was being consistent with the Supreme Court’s ruling on the Texas abortion law in December. The nation’s high court said the law could remain in effect while clinics continued to challenge it.

The appeals court justices wrote in the majority opinion that they were trying to avoid causing “needless friction” with the state court over how the abortion law is interpreted.

Texas Right to Life called the decision “great news for Texas because such action is more likely to ensure a just and favorable ruling, compared to that which could be expected from a pro-abortion federal district judge, to whom the abortion industry asked to send the case.”

Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights, a group challenging the Texas law, said in a Jan. 17 statement that the appeals court “defied a Supreme Court ruling and delayed a reckoning” on the state’s abortion law.

“Texas Right to Life said in its Jan. 17 statement that sending the lawsuit to the state’s Supreme Court was “appropriate because the only defendants left in the case are state agencies.”

The appeals court ruling said the state should examine if the Texas attorney general, the state’s medical board and other licensing officials can take action to enforce violations of the abortion law.

The state’s law currently allows individuals to sue abortion providers for abortions that take place and says the individuals could be entitled to $10,000. The Supreme Court allowed the challenge to the abortion law to continue in lower courts if it focused on the role Texas medical licensing officials play in enforcing the state law.

When the Supreme Court first ruled against blocking the Texas abortion law last September, the Texas Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state’s Catholic bishops, said this was the first time since Roe v. Wade that the nation’s high court “has allowed a pro-life law to remain while litigation proceeds in lower courts.”

Last December, the Supreme Court examined Mississippi’s ban on most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy and heard requests to overturn the court’s 1973 Roe decision that legalized abortion.

In the oral arguments, the majority of justices seemed willing to let the state’s abortion ban stay in place.

If the court ultimately sides with Mississippi, it would be the first time the court would allow an abortion ban before the point of viability — when a fetus can survive on its own that most consider to be at 24 weeks.

A ruling allowing Mississippi’s law to go forward could lay the groundwork for abortion restrictions in other states.

The nation’s high court could potentially rule on the Mississippi case before the Texas Supreme Court issues its decision on the Texas abortion law.

Pro-life advocates in Dallas take part in a March for Life rally Jan. 15, 2022.
ZHANGJIAKOU, China — Chongli, a popular resort town and venue for the main skiing events during the upcoming Winter Olympics, holds a history of persecution and massacre of Catholics in the region during the imperial and communist regimes.

The attention on China, host of the Feb. 4-20 Winter Games, has focused on the coronavirus pandemic, diplomatic boycotts due to crimes against humanity against Uyghur Muslims, constant trampling of human rights and an intensified crackdown on religious freedom. But ucanews.com reported the Olympics have brought to the fore a little-known massacre of Catholics in Hebei province and the neighboring Chahar region during the anti-Christian insurrection, Chinese civil war and Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong.

The greater Chahar region, which includes Xuanhua and Xiwanzi-Chongli dioceses, has been a Catholic stronghold since the arrival of missionaries in the late 17th century and early 18th century. The first bout of persecution against Christians started in 1723 when the Manchu-Qing emperor banned all Christian missions in mainland China, ucanews.com reported. The ban prompted missionaries to move outside of the Great Wall at Kalgan — now Zhangjiakou — and to settle in Xiwanzi village.

The ban was lifted in 1858.

More missionaries, notably Belgian priests from the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, or Scheut Fathers, arrived and contributed to making the region a haven for Catholic missionaries and the faithful.

The 1899-1901 Boxer Rebellion, an anti-foreign, anti-colonial and anti-Christian uprising, sought to destroy Westerners, including Christians who enjoyed privileged positions in China. Supported by the imperial Chinese army, the Boxer militia carried out brutal campaigns against Christians across northern China, including today’s provinces of Hebei, Shanxi and Chahar. Many faithful were killed and about 5,000 took shelter at the Cathedral Church of Xiwanzi and survived the massacre, according to Bitter Winter, a magazine on human rights and religious liberty.

Later, many Catholics joined the anti-communist side after the end of World War II. The communists started to view Catholics as enemies colluding with foreign forces. For instance, the communists detained and tortured 33 Trappist monks of Our Lady of Consolation Trappist Abbey at Yangjiaoping of Xuanhua, leading to their deaths in 1937.

In the worst violence in 1946, the communists attacked Xiwanzi village. About 1,000 civilians, mostly Catholics, were tortured and killed. Two years later, the communists recaptured and ravaged Chongli.

Following the communist takeover of China in 1949, Catholics in the Chahar region and other parts continued to face abuses and persecution.

In September 1951, the communists arrested Belgian-born Bishop Léon Jean Marie De Smedt of Xiwanzi and other clergy in Kalgan. The bishop died in prison two months later due to harsh treatment. The communist regime banned the Legion of Mary by terming it a “counter-revolutionary force.” Between 1952 and 1954, all 27 foreign clergy from Xiwanzi Diocese were expelled.

In 1957, the communists set up the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the state-sanctioned body to control the Catholic Church in China. Catholic bishops, clergy and faithful who refused to join the association were abused and tortured.

In 1958, Bishop Leon Yao Liang of Xiwanzi was sentenced to 28 years in labor camps and prison. During the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution, all religions, including Catholicism, faced severe persecution, with most churches demolished or damaged. However, Catholics in Chahar were not spared after the end of the brutal campaign, Bitter Winter reported.

From 1990 to 2011, at least a dozen clergy, including bishops and hundreds of local Catholics, were arrested, tortured and jailed in Chahar.

In the most high-profile case, Bishop Augustine Cui Tai of Xuanhua was arrested in 2007 when he was still a priest. Chinese authorities rearrested him 2013 soon after his ordination with approval from the Vatican. His whereabouts remain unknown.

“Since his arrest in 2007, he has not been able to spend Easter in the diocese,” ucanews.com reported in 2020.

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Newsworthly


The weekly TV Mass from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption is broadcast locally on The CW, Sundays, noon to 1 p.m. Viewers can tune-in on the following channels: antenna 12.2; Spectrum 117 or 25; Cincinnati Bell 17 or 517; and DirecTV 25.

Knights of Columbus pancake breakfast — Jan. 23, after the 8 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. Mass, All Saints Parish, Walton, parish hall. Benefits the seminarians of the Diocese of Covington.

Annual Men’s Stag — Jan. 28, 7-11 p.m., Sts. Peter and Paul School, California, Social Center. Proceeds benefit Catholic Order of Foresters awards program.

St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas, hosts “A Night in Paris,” a Parisian delight with music, French cuisine, wine and bourbon bar, Jan. 29, Tower Park Mess Hall. Admission and raffle tickets online at stcatherineofsiena.org or by calling 331-0761.

First Friday Mass Feb. 4, 6:45 a.m., St. Francis of Assisi Chapel at Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria.

Bishop Brossart High School 23rd annual Jack and Pat McGarr Memorial Euchre Tournament, Feb. 5. Register online at McGarrEuchre22.givesmart.com. Questions, e-mail jackmcgarreuchre@gmail.com or text/call 250-4924.

Society of St. Vincent de Paul is seeking high school, college and professional artists to participate in creating works of art with thrift store finds for its “Creative Compassion” fundraiser. Sign up online at www.svdpnky.org from now until Feb. 7. Artists receive a $50 gift certificate to shop a SVdP NKY’s thrift store, free admission for two to the event. E-mail marypat.behler@svdpnky.org.

Newport Central Catholic High School inducts its twenty-first class of inductees to Athletic Hall of Fame: Michelle Bowman Atallah ’88, Danielle Hausfeld ’11, Eric Gearding ’86, Jake Giesler ’11, Terry Mann ’66, Jeff Martin ’81, Courtney Sandfoss ’10, and Jeff Smith ’02. Also honored “Teams of Distinction” 2009, 2010 & 2011 Girls State Champion Track Teams. Ceremony is Feb 19, 2022 in the Newport Central Catholic Gymnasium. Social hour at 6 PM, dinner and the induction ceremony at 7 PM. $25.00 cost and reservations and payment will be accepted prior to Feb 11. For more information contact the NCC School Office at (859) 292-0001.

Women’s Retreat Feb. 25-27 — join Msgr. William Cleves and Deacon Dave Profit as they show how changing the way we see others and ourselves can help us in our faith journey. Friday, 5:30 p.m. — Sunday after 11 a.m. Mass. $175, registration deadline Feb. 11. Register at staserenretreatcenter.org. Call 441-2003, ext. 301 or e-mail csmith@covdio.org.

New Hope Center’s Father Daughter Dance March 5 & 6, 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Fort Thomas Mess Hall. 6th-12th graders and their fathers, $45 per father-daughter couple – $15 each additional daughter. Semi-formal attire, scholarships available, dinner served. Reserve tickets at www.givingforhope.com.

Society of St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky is hosting its second annual art fundraiser event, “Creative Compassion.” March 31, Drees Pavilion, Covington. Tickets available online at www.svdpnky.org. Cost $65. For information e-mail marypat.behler@svdpnky.org.

Bengals stripes and pearly whites

Sixth grade students at St. Philip School, Melbourne, showed their stripes to cheer on the Cincinnati Bengals in the NFL Wild Card round, Jan. 15. The Bengals beat the Oakland Raiders to overcome a 31 year-old playoff drought.

School of Distinction

Villa Madonna Academy High School, Villa Hills, was named a Cognia School of Distinction. Cognia is a global organization committed to school improvement. Villa is one of 59 schools and 20 systems around the world to earn the award. Every five years, Villa completes Cognia’s rigorous accreditation process and earned a 2021 School of Distinction award for its commitment to excellence in education and service to learners. Pictured are Pamela McQueen, principal, (left) and Joe Cordonnier, dean of academics, (right) hold the Cognia plaque of recognition.

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Principal

Saint Mary Academy (SMA), a National Blue-Ribbon School of Excellence in Louisville, KY, is searching for an experienced Catholic principal for the 2022/2023 academic year. A parish ministry of Saint Bernadette, SMA seeks to build a foundation for lifelong learning by opening hearts to faith, minds to knowledge, hands to service, and eyes to the world so as to achieve extraordinary lives. We are a growing Catholic school community with strong parental support. Our current enrollment is 450 students from Pre-school through eighth grade.

Inquiries and resumes may be sent to: Principalssearch@stmaryacademy.com

The deadline for applications is January 21, 2022.

NOVENA

NOVENA TO SAINT ANTHONY FOR A SICK CHILD.

St. Anthony, your love for the Infant Jesus inspired Him to reward you by seeing and holding Him in your arms. Help us to see and love Jesus in all the poor and suffering children in the world, particularly (name child) whom is afflicted with (name condition). Intercede for (name the child) asking our compassionate Lord Jesus to heal him/her so that he/she may be immediately restored to health. Amen. R.V.B.

Music Director

St. Catherine of Siena parish in Ft. Thomas, KY is looking for a Music Director. 2 Masses per weekend and other occasional services such as holy days, penance services, etc. Must be a good general musician, have good vocal and keyboard skills (prefer organ and piano), and be able to direct our adult and children’s choirs. Must be familiar with the Catholic liturgy, or be willing to be educated in it. Please direct inquiries or resumes to Fr. Stel Bankemper, at 1803 N. Ft. Thomas Ave., Ft. Thomas, 41075, or e-mail at stbankemper@stcattherineofsiena.org.

Cafeteria Manager

St. Therese is in need of a full-time cafeteria manager. Monday through Friday during the school year. Duties include food preparation, serving, daily cleanup, helping with deliveries, and other tasks as needed. Candidates may contact Jackie Kaiser at jkaiser@covdio.org, or call 859-392-1536.

Bud Budget Blinds and Tailored Living is currently hiring professionals in the installation department for blinds, shades & garage familiar. We are a small business looking for the right person to become a part of this well-established franchise. We are a Christian based company and as such are concerned about the people who represent us. Regular hours are 9AM to 5:30PM. Mon-Fri. Salary is based on experience. Range $25-32/hr. Pay increase after probationary period and an insurance stipulation. Acceptable in December after employees first full year of employment. Position requires the ability to lift, move & install products up to 50lbs. Must be able to operate small hand tools. Training of installation processes are provided. Valid drivers license and a good driving record a plus. Drug testing required. Interested candidates are to call extension 2 at (859) 488-0078, at any time. Please leave a message with your name and number, if no one answers calls will be returned.

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Caregiver for your loved ones needs. Graduate of Mount St. Joseph College with 17 years experience specializing in elder care. If you need a break from caregiving please contact Angie Garrison. $38 per hour / min. 25 hrs week. Reference and police available. (859) 801-4344 / Agarrison1351@gmail.com

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May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified; loved and preserved throughout the world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus pray for us. St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us. St. Jude, help of the hopeless, pray for us. Say this prayer 9 times a day. By the 8th day your prayers will be answered. Say it for 9 days. Thank you St. Jude. Amen. J.B.

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For other difficulties, contact Emily Baffen at (859) 392-7590 or mbaffen@covdio.org.

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VATICAN CITY – In a time when social networks can tend to divide people, Christian media must instead work to unite men and women, Pope Francis said.

Meeting with a delegation from the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land in Rome to commemorate the 100th anniversary of their bimonthly magazine, “Terrasanta,” the pope encouraged the group to continue to highlight stories of genuine brotherhood, especially “the fraternity between Christians of churches and confessions that are unfortunately still separated, but which in the Holy Land are often already close to unity.”

“Communication, in the time of social networks, must help to build community, or better still, fraternity,” he said.

Founded in Jerusalem in 1921, the magazine is published in six languages — Italian, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Arabic. Although it is now published in Milan, the magazine continues to report on the church, current and historical events, archaeological findings as well as people and cultures in the Holy Land.

Pope Francis began his address to the 44-member delegation — led by Franciscan Father Francesco Patton, custos of the Holy Land — by excusing himself for remaining seated due to leg pain.

“Excuse me if I remain seated, but my leg hurts today. It hurts, it hurts when I stand. This way it’s better for me,” he said.

The pope has suffered for several years from sciatica which, according to the Mayo Clinic, can cause sharp pain that radiates along the path of the sciatic nerve, which branches from the lower back through the hips and down each leg.

In his talk, the pope congratulated the delegation on the centenary, and praised the group’s work in making known the Holy Land, a place that is “the historical and geographical environment in which the word of God was revealed and incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, for us and for our salvation.”

The magazine, the pope said, also plays a vital role in informing the world about “the life of the Christians of the various churches and denominations, but also that of Jews and Muslims, to attempt to build a fraternal society in a context as complex and difficult as that of the Middle East.”

He also praised their efforts in reporting from areas of conflict in the Middle East, including Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Gaza.

“I know that you try to present stories of goodness, those of active resistance to the evil of war, those of reconciliation, those of the restoration of dignity to the children robbed of their childhood, those of refugees with their tragedies but also with their dreams and their hopes,” the pope said.

Pope Francis encouraged the members of “Terrasanta” to continue their work which he said enriched the faith of many, especially “those who do not have the opportunity of making a pilgrimage to the holy places.”

“This is valuable for believers throughout the world and, at the same time, supports the Christians who live in the land of Jesus,” the pope said. “And I want to take advantage of this opportunity to express my closeness to them. I always remember them, also in prayer. Please, when you return home, convey my greeting and my blessing to the families and Christian communities of the Holy Land.”

Pope: Communication must build communion, fraternity

Junno Arocho Esteves
Catholic News Service

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"Sing 2" (Universal) Writer-director Garth Jennings’ follow-up to his 2016 animated jukebox musical finds that comedy’s ensemble of animal entertainers aiming for the big time, Led by the koala theater owner who brought them together in the kickoff, the singers and hoofers aspire to become headliners in a fabled, Las Vegas-like city. To do so, they’ll have to follow through on their impresario’s rash promise to a lupine media magnate that their show will feature a legendary lion rock star who, for 15 years, has been one of the world’s most famous recluses. Amid the wild scramble that follows, Jennings’ script deals with a series of topics, such as self-doubt and the ability to deal with setbacks as well as bullying, privilege and popularity, that may especially resonate with teens. It also highlights themes of empathy, honesty and the means of coping with grief. Too scary for little kids, this film, fueled by familiar tunes and buoyed by enjoyable humor, is on target for most others.

Characters in peril, brief mature references. CNS: A-II; MP AA: PG.

For full reviews of each of these films — go to catholicnews.com and click on “Extras,” then choose “Movies.”

Catholic News Service (CNS) classifications are:
- A-I — general patronage;
- A-II — adults and adolescents;
- A-III — adults;
- L — limited adult audience;
- O — morally offensive.

Let’s sit and visit
(Continued from page 2)

receive a call for utility or rent assistance, but when we visit the neighbor in their home, we see that they also need furniture or clothing for their children, a need that was never mentioned during the phone call. As Blessed Frederic Ozanam, the Society’s founder, said, “The knowledge of social wellbeing and reform is to be learned not from books nor from the public platform, but by climbing the stairs to the poor man’s garret, sitting by his bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him.”

Third, it is more comfortable and less embarrassing for our neighbors to have someone come to their home as a visitor than to have to report to another site. So many people in poverty have to accommodate multiple “helping agencies” schedules — we seek to come when it is convenient for them, because, as St. Vincent de Paul said, “the poor are our masters.” Maintaining the dignity of the people we serve is critical.

While we have gained some efficiency through technology over the last two years, one of our objectives as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul moves forward is to simply “take a step back” and root ourselves in the importance of human relationship. We are reminding ourselves of the value of a good, old-fashioned friendly visit, knowing that “seeing” each other is how we best connect to one another. It can lift us all to new heights.

Karen Zangel is executive director, Society of St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky.
New Jersey Catholic bishops decry passage of expansive new abortion law

TRENTON, N.J. — New Jersey Catholic bishops unequivocally condemned the Freedom of Reproductive Choice Act, an expansive abortion bill they said was passed with extraordinary haste by the state Senate and General Assembly a day earlier. Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy, who is Catholic, signed the bill into law during a Jan. 13 ceremony in Trenton.

A replacement for the rejected Reproductive Freedom Act of October 2020, the new measure was passed by the Senate 23-15 and by the Assembly 46-22 with eight abstentions. Although abortion has long been legal and accessible in New Jersey, the new bill codifies it as constitutionally protected law, making any pro-posed law to limit or outlaw abortions null. The bill’s proponents have argued that it protects a legal right to abortion in the state if the Supreme Court were to overturn its 1973 ruling in Roe v. Wade that legalized abortion nationwide. “Any law, rule, regulation, ordi-nance, or order, in effect on or adopted after the effective date of this act, that is determined to have the effect of limiting the constitution right to freedom of reproductive choice and that does not conform with the provisions and the express or implied purposes of this act, shall be deemed invalid and shall have no force or effect,” the bill states.

In their letter, the bishops expressed their “profound disappointment and deep concern about the passage of this act, which codifies into state law an individual’s right to an abortion, including late-term abortions. This law departs from the fundamental Catholic teaching that all life is sacred from concep-tion to natural death.

Ukrainian priests appeal for prayers, support as Russian threat grows

WARSAW, Poland — “Two priests in Ukraine asked Western church leaders for support, especially in anticipation of a widely expected Russian invasion. “While our TV news shows tanks and army units deploying on our borders, the war in our country is continuing — but the church in the West is saying little,” said Msgr. Gregory Semenkov, chancellor of the Kharkiv-Zaporizhia Archieparchy. “As faithful Catholics, we’re nothing against Russians and provide regular Russian-language Masses, while our bishops’ conference, being neologitically, has never taken a position on whether Ukraine should join NATO or the European Union. But these invasion preparations are posing severe hazards for us.”

The priest spoke to Catholic News Service Jan. 14 as talks between NATO and Russian officials, the first in two years, failed to reach agreement on Moscow’s demands for an end to Western military backing for countries formerly belonging to the Soviet Union. Msgr. Semenkov said most Catholics believed a “major Russian show of force” was likely after the failure of East-West talks. He told CNS that Ukraine’s Catholics were uncertain how Russian forces would treat their church, but added it had been agreed that priests and nuns should decide for themselves whether to leave or stay in the event of a “military aggression.”

Kazakh bishops’ official says Catholics ‘shocked’ by January riots

WASHINGTON — Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee for Religious Liberty, expressed particular concern that such rights are violated by rising incidents in recent years of vandalism at churches, where buildings have been damaged, stat-ues toppled and other damage incurred. One such incident occurred Dec. 5 when a marble statue of Our Lady of Fatima near the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington was vandalized. Mary’s hands and nose were cut off, her face scratched and the cross on her crown broken off.

“Our great tradition of religious freedom has allowed beauty to flourish in our cities and across the American landscape,” the cardinal said in a statement released by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Jan. 14. “Diverse religious communities have built beautiful houses of worship, adorned with stained glass, statues, and symbols of faith, in earthly reflections of the glory and majesty of God. “In the midst of a popular culture that too often caters to our basest appetites, sacred art and architecture calls all of us to think about ultimate things. All Americans bene-fit from these religious displays,” he added.

Catholics urge prayer, protect religious rights on Religious Freedom Day

WASHINGTON — Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York called on people to promote religious freedom as a treasured right for all Americans as the country commemorates Religious Freedom Day Jan. 19. The cardinal, who chairs the U.S. Bishops’ Committee for Religious Liberty, expressed particular concern about violence against women, two Irish bishops say after teacher’s murder

DUBLIN — Following the violent death of a 23-year-old school-teacher in a midlands town, two Irish bishops have questioned societal attitudes toward women and reiterated Pope Francis’ con-tention that violence against women is an insult to God. On Jan. 18, the funeral of Ashling Murphy took place in the small rural parish of St. Brigids in Mooneen, County Offaly Irish President Michael D Higgins, Prime Minister Micheal Martin, as well as other government officials, civic and religious leaders attended. They were there to express the grief and outrage of the nation over the killing of the talented musician, sportswoman and devout teacher in broad daylight while she was jogging along a canal bank in Tullamore the afternoon of Jan. 12. Thousands of people stood along the funeral route to express solidarity with Murphy’s grieving family. Vigils were held across Ireland, Britain and beyond over the weekend, to remember Murphy and all the women who have died through gender-based violence in recent years.

Since 1996, 344 women have been killed violently in Ireland, according to Women’s Aid. Before the final Prayer of Commendation at the funeral, Bishop Tom Delahunty of Mounth told mourners, “We walk on a mild and sunny afternoon in January should be a happy event, promising the brighter and warmer days of spring and summer. Instead, a ‘day of mourning’ which deprived a kind, talented, loved and admired young woman of her life’ had united the country in grief.
VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis approved “Pilgrims of Hope” as the motto for the Holy Year 2025.

The motto aims to give a concise sense of the full meaning of the jubilee journey, Archbishop Rino Fisichella told Vatican News Jan. 13.

The words “pilgrims” and “hope” also represent key themes of Pope Francis’ pontificate, said the archbishop, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, which is in charge of the Holy Year planning efforts.

The archbishop said the pope approved the motto Jan. 3 and that he is awaiting further instructions from the pope. In the meantime, the council already is working with Vatican and Italian authorities on the best way to welcome a large number of visitors during the year.

Traditionally for holy years, the celebrations begin with the pope opening the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica on Christmas Eve and ends with the sealing of the door one year later. The holy doors of St. John Lateran, St. Paul Outside the Walls and St. Mary Major are opened for the year, too.

A holy year or jubilee is a time of pilgrimage, prayer, repentance and acts of mercy, based on the Old Testament tradition of a jubilee year of rest, forgiveness and renewal. Holy years also are a time when Catholics visit designated churches and shrines, recite special prayers, go to confession and receive Communion to receive a plenary indulgence, which is a remission of the temporal punishment due for one’s sins.

Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed the first Holy Year in 1300 and decreed that they would be celebrated every 100 years. But just 50 years later, a more biblical cadence, Pope Clement VI proclaimed another holy year. Pope Urban VI thought holy years should be celebrated every 33 years as a reminder of the time Jesus lived.

Finally, in 1470, Pope Paul II established the celebrations every 25 years, which has been the practice ever since. However, special anniversaries have called for special holy years, for instance, in 1933 to mark the 1,900th anniversary of Jesus’ death and resurrection and in 1983 to mark the 1,950th anniversary.

Pope Francis, seeing a need to emphasize God’s mercy and to encourage Catholics to return to the sacrament of reconciliation, declared an extraordinary Year of Mercy, which ran in 2015-16.