

FLORIDACatholic

VENICE DIOCESE

Catholic-Jewish gathering recalls Kristallnacht, and the recent violence in the Holy Land

STAFF REPORT

NAPLES | It was on the night of Nov. 9-10, 1938, when members of the Nazi party sponsored anti-Jewish riots (*pogroms*) which attacked Jewish persons and destroyed Jewish owned property in Germany and Austria. Known as “Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass,” this event is regarded by historians as “the Night the Holocaust began” in Europe, which ultimately led to the murder of more than six million Jews.

To remember those events and to stand united in saying “Always Remember!” “Never Forget!” and “Never Again!” the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue of Collier County hosted its 20th annual “Kristallnacht: The Night of Broken Glass” Nov. 5, 2023, at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Naples. The event was co-sponsored by the Diocese of Venice and Jewish Federation of Greater Naples, GenShoah of SWFL, and the Holocaust Museum and Janet G. and Harvey D. Cohen Education Center.

On behalf of the Diocese, Bishop Frank J. Dewane said it is necessary to come together to remember Kristallnacht and the Holocaust which followed, but the commemoration takes place in a global context. This is as the world witnesses the contemporary events of the Oct. 7 terror attacks by Hamas on Israeli citizens, as well as an alarming rise of anti-Semitism nationally and within the Diocese of Venice.

“In the present global setting,

dialogue, diplomacy, and reaching understanding are more difficult and yet ever more needed,” Bishop Dewane said. “Finding receptive ears that listen to the voices that express nuanced perspective, however, is a challenge. The present circumstances give possible rise to disagreements between Catholics and Jews if we are not careful and attentive.”

With its purpose to engage Jews and Catholics in understanding their past history and advancing the causes of mutual understanding and appreciation of their differences as well as their commonalities, Bishop Dewane praised the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue and its important work.

Bishop Dewane stressed how Pope Francis, a lifelong promoter of Catholic-Jewish relations, immediately and unequivocally condemned Hamas’ Oct. 7 brutal violence, and called for the immediate release of hostages, and further supported Israel’s right to self-defense.

“We must all pray that world leaders find just solutions that lead to peace,” Bishop Dewane said. “There is a futility of war. It has no victors, only victims. We must all pursue the gift of peace by any means possible.”

Further, the Bishop said it is not in anyone’s interest to allow the forces of violence and hatred to ignite resentment among people of faith and silence the moral voice of religion.

“The spiritual bonds that unite us through the One True God must



Catholic and Jewish religious leaders, including Bishop Frank J. Dewane, took part in the annual Catholic-Jewish Dialogue of Collier County Kristallnacht: Night of Broken Glass commemoration at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Naples Nov. 5, 2023. Below, congregants listen to an address by Bishop Dewane. (PHOTOS BY BOB REDDY | FC)

be observed. It must allow us to speak candidly to one another, and to stand together for justice, peace, and freedom of humankind,” the Bishop concluded.

Nearly 1,000 attended the commemoration, which included calls for peace and unity among the people of the world. There were also prayers for the victims of the Holocaust and Oct. 7 attacks, as well as for all who are subjected to religious persecution.

PLEASE SEE **KRISTALLNACHT, 2**



Bishop Dewane breaks ground for a Parish Activity Center

STAFF REPORT

LAKEWOOD RANCH | With hundreds looking on and cheering their support, ground was broken Nov. 4, 2023, for the new Our Lady of the Angels Parish Activity Center and rectory in Lakewood Ranch.

Bishop Frank J. Dewane led a brief prayer service and blessing before picking up a shovel to take part in the ceremonial groundbreaking.

“This Parish Activity Center is something that could not have been imagined just a few years ago, and now it is something that is needed for your growing, faith-filled Par-

ish,” Bishop Dewane said.

Father Sebastian Szczawinski, S.A.C., Pastor of Our Lady of the Angels, remarked that he was very grateful for the support and prayers for the campaign which made the groundbreaking possible.

“This is for children and adults who are going to learn about Jesus - how to live a good life, how to live a proper life, connected to Christ,” Father Szczawinski said.

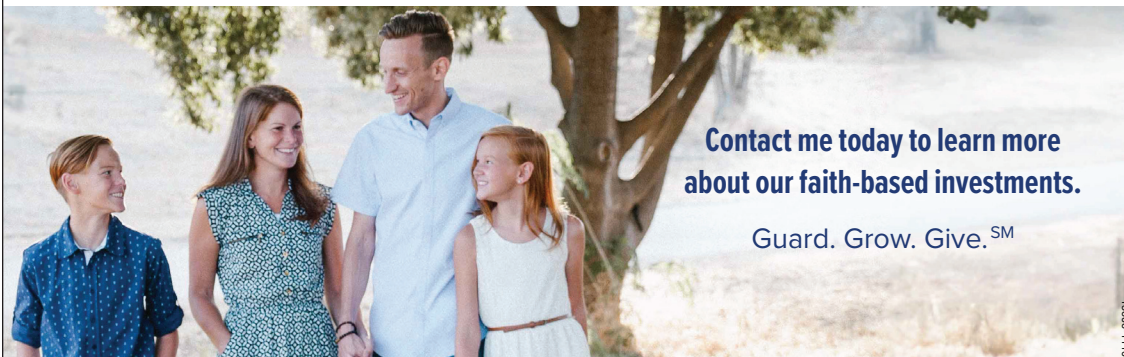
The new 12,580-foot Parish Activity Center will be located on the west side of the Parish property. In

PLEASE SEE **ANGELS, 2**



Bishop Frank J. Dewane joins others in tossing dirt as part of a Nov. 4, 2023, groundbreaking ceremony and blessing for the future Parish Activity Center and rectory at Our Lady of the Angels Parish in Lakewood Ranch. (BOB REDDY | FC)

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A groundbreaking and blessing for the future Parish Activity Center and rectory at Our Lady of the Angels Parish in Lakewood Ranch was led by Bishop Frank J. Dewane Nov. 4, 2023. (BOB REDDY | FC)

ANGELS

FROM 1

in addition, there will be a duplex rectory constructed for the Pastor and Parochial Vicar in the northwest corner of the property. The project is expected to take 12-16 months to complete.

Under the guidance of Bishop Dewane and Father Szczawinski, the Parish ran a "Building Our Future" capital campaign during the past two years to help make the Parish Activity Center and rectory a reality.

The new activity center will more than double the existing facilities and will service the needs of an ever-growing community. The activity center will be a one-story building and will house 10 rooms of various sizes for use in ministries and programs. The new structure will serve the needs of the nearly 500 first- thru 12th-grade faith formation students and support the more than 40 outreach ministries and groups of the Parish. The current Parish Hall, which was recently

renovated, will remain, and be used for meetings and events as needed.

The construction of a rectory will bring the clergy from off-campus living arrangements to be on-campus and within walking distance of Our Lady of Angels. The new duplex will be a two-bedroom, two-bathroom structure.

The architect for the project is PRA Plunkett Raysich Architects, LLP - John Holtz, partner, and the general contractor is ME&S general Contractors, Inc.

Joining Bishop Dewane and Father Szczawinski in the groundbreaking were priests and Deacons who serve the Parish. Members of the Parish Finance Council also turned dirt, as well as many others who were pivotal in making the project a reality.

Our Lady of the Angels serves 3,138 registered families in the growing Lakewood Ranch community with up to seven weekend Masses offered during the peak season. ■

For more information about Our Lady of the Angels, visit olangelscc.org.

KRISTALLNACHT

FROM 1

A poignant moment during the annual commemoration was a candle lighting ceremony. Six candles were lit by Gen Shoah (second and third generation Holocaust survivors). Each lit their candle for the victims of the Holocaust and for a brighter future. A seventh candle was lit for the victims of the Oct. 7 terror attacks.

In addition, Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer, of Bat Yam Temple of the Islands in Sanibel, shared the story of how the Torah — the books of the Hebrew Bible — was a survivor of the Holocaust from the present-day Czech Republic, and was then spared damage during Hurricane Ian in September 2022 when the island and temple were flooded.

The event's keynote was by Rabbi David Maayan, assistant director of the Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies at St. Leo University in Tampa. The topic: "Theologies of the 'Other': Catholics and Jews After

the Holocaust."

The commemoration concluded with the singing of "God Bless America," and Bishop Dewane leading everyone in a moment of silence for peace.

Among the dignitaries participating in the commemoration were, Michael A. Feldman, co-founder of the Holocaust Museum of Southwest Florida; Dr. Nat Ritter, Board Chair of the Jewish Federation of Greater Naples; Marty Gauthier, Dialogue Catholic co-chair; Yvonne Holtzman, Dialogue Jewish co-chair and member of Gen Shoah; Rabbi Ariel Boxman of Temple Shalom; Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer, Bat Yam Temple of the Islands; Shelley Lieb, co-chair of Gen Shoah; Rabbi Adam Miller, Temple Shalom; Rabbi Ammos Chorny, Beth Tikvah; Father Robert Kantor, Pastor of St. Agnes Parish in Naples; Father Robert Garrity, of Ave Maria University; and Father Casey Jones, Pastor of St. Elizabeth Seton, the host Parish. Also present were more than two dozen youth who are in the Confirmation program at St. Agnes Parish. ■

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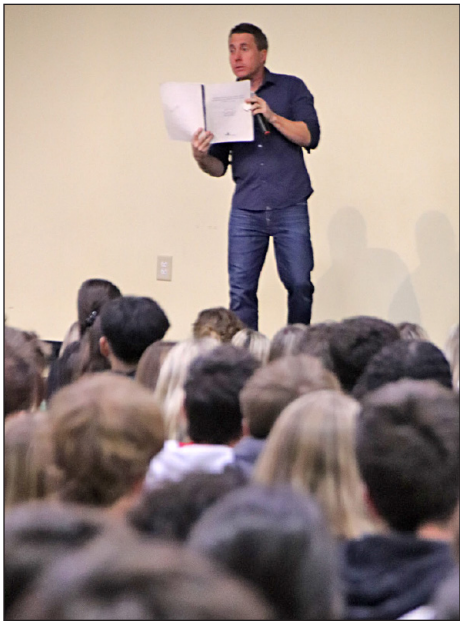
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Jason Evert, a Catholic author and chastity speaker, talks to students at Cardinal Mooney Catholic High School in Sarasota Nov. 6, 2023. (BOB REDDY | FC)

High schoolers hear chastity talk

STAFF REPORT

SARASOTA | Jason Evert, a Catholic author and chastity speaker, was a featured speaker at both Cardinal Mooney Catholic High School in Sarasota and Bishop Verot Catholic High School in Fort Myers Nov. 6, 2023.

The founder of Totus Tuus Press and the Chastity Project, an organization that promotes chastity primarily to high school and college students, Evert spoke of the need to return to the virtue of chastity.

“The virtue of chastity cuts through a lot of the confusion,” Evert said, adding that practicing chastity can help a couple find out why they are really together.

Throughout his presentation, he engaged the students with real life stories from the more than 1 million teens he has spoken to through the years. Keeping the presentation light, Evert said the response from the students at both Bishop Verot and Cardinal Mooney was typical, with the students listening intently while also beginning to think about the topic that can be uncomfortable to talk about with their peers.

For anyone who may have made mistakes in the past with their chastity, Evert said, “It doesn’t matter what your past is — anyone can start over.”

He said no one is “damaged goods” and that everyone can live a life of virtue and chastity until he or she is married. He told the young people if they’ve been trying to take their love life into their own hands, now is the time to “empty the hands” to God.

“This is the love of God,” Evert said. “It doesn’t matter where you’re at right now, how far you think you are, He’s here to welcome you home.”

To help the students achieve this, Evert provided several resources that answer many of the tough questions and provide guidance going forward on their path of healing. Much of this information is available online at the Chastity Project website, <https://chastity.com/>.

Evert said the goal of his talks is to offer a chance at Salvation for the students — nothing more, nothing less. “This is about offering hope. Jesus will do the rest.” ■



At left, students at St. John Neumann Catholic High School in Naples participate in Mass on Nov. 3, 2023, celebrated by Bishop Frank J. Dewane. At right, following Mass, Bishop Frank Dewane greeted the students and their grandparents. (PHOTOS BY BOB REDDY | FC)



Grandparents honored at Neumann

STAFF REPORT

NAPLES | Grandparents, a vital link to the past, and most importantly to the Faith, were welcomed to St. John Neumann Catholic High School in Naples for a special celebration.

A Grandparents Day celebration Nov. 3, 2023, opened with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Frank J. Dewane, as students sat with their grandparents in the Our Lady of the Angels Chapel. A luncheon followed in the Student Life Center.

During the Mass, Bishop Dewane spoke about the wisdom and knowledge of the faith that older people can share with the young. The Bishop prayed for all grandparents, those present and those who were unable to attend

the Mass; but also for those who have gone before us, leaving a void in the lives of their grandchildren.

The Bishop encouraged the grandparents to impart their wisdom by passing along their stories of the family and faith, building the traditions upon which their grandchildren can now stand.

“Grandparents, you are to be the messengers of the word and tradition of the faith life within your family,” Bishop Dewane said. “Leave your impressions upon the family. Speak to them, show them, demonstrate to them, in a spiritual way, who you are.”

Bishop Dewane challenged the grandchildren to take up the traditions learned from their grandparents — the good, the strength, and the knowledge they have from life’s ex-

perience. “They will tell you the truth. It is my prayer that the generations go forward sharing the wisdom they have, the grace they have been given by the Lord, and the strength that is our Catholic faith.”

Several grandparents and their grandchildren complimented the Bishop for speaking so clearly about their respective roles in the Church — one as mentor and example, the other as respectful listener and observer.

Following the Mass, one grandparent noted that she is proud her grandchildren attend a Catholic High School. “My grandchildren are getting the best education. I tried to pass the faith along to my own children and grandchildren. It is rewarding to see that lesson is being passed down to my grandchildren and enhanced here at St. John Neumann.” ■

Thousands attend Hispanic Fall Festival

STAFF REPORT

SARASOTA | Beautiful weather accompanied a day filled with food, fun, entertainment and lots of smiling faces for the 19th annual Hispanic Festival at St. Jude Parish in Sarasota.

An estimated 10,000 people gathered at St. Jude for this event Nov. 4, 2023, a celebration of both the individual nations and the unified culture of a diverse Parish.

Held annually in early November this festival is the oldest one in Sarasota County to feature authentic Latino food, music and culture. The day includes musical performances and ethnic dancers as well as food from many nations. Throughout the Parish grounds were tents full of a wide variety of foods that left many mouths watering. People attend the event annually from as far away as Naples and Clearwater. It has become a much anticipated and beloved event for the ethnically diverse Sarasota Parish.

The celebration of more than a dozen countries lasted from morning until sunset. Throughout the day, there were performances, offering folk and modern music, and dance. Many proudly wore clothing representing their country of origin.

Martha Perez, 11, enjoyed trying a variety of foods, including papas rellenas from the Cuban food tent, which is a meat-filled potato ball. The highlight of the day for the young girl was the various dancers who wore colorful dresses. “It was so wonderful to see



The thousands who participated in the 19th annual Hispanic Festival at St. Jude Parish in Sarasota, enjoyed dancing. (BOB REDDY | FC)

them dancing to such beautiful songs.”

Father Celestino Gutierrez, Pastor of St. Jude, officially opened the Hispanic Festival with a prayer. This was followed by a “Parade of Flags” as each country represented at the festival was announced, and the respective flags brought forth cheers.

As a bilingual Parish, the members of both the English and the Spanish speaking congregation at St. Jude participated and

volunteered to staff the booths.

Whether it was the food, the music, the dancing, or the joy of being around so many happy people, the Hispanic Festival was a success by any measure.

The proceeds of the Hispanic Festival go to support the various outreach efforts of St. Jude Parish, including a food pantry and other programs which help countless families throughout the year. ■



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40 Days for Life campaign: A peaceful protest

STAFF REPORT

SARASOTA | All life is sacred! For this reason, each fall and spring hundreds gather in front of abortion facilities in the Diocese of Venice praying that unborn children can be saved from the scourge that is abortion.

The 40 Days for Life fall campaign concluded Nov. 5, 2023, with local efforts taking place in Naples, Sarasota and Fort Myers. The campaign began Sept. 27.

Prayer warriors from Parishes and Diocesan Catholic schools stood faithfully in front of the three Planned Parenthood abortion facilities. One participant in Naples from St. John the Evangelist Parish said she participated in the prayer vigil “because we want to save lives.”

A peaceful, rather than confrontational effort the fall 40 Days for Life prayer campaign took place in more than 681 cities worldwide. The Diocese of Venice has participated since 2007, the year of the first national campaign. To date, 23,664 babies have been saved (277 during the 2023 fall campaign) and 145 abortion centers have been closed.

Many of the moms seeking help are directed to nearby pregnancy help centers. In the case of Sarasota and Naples, there are Community Pregnancy Clinics (CPCI), pro-life, free clinics that provide ultrasounds and extensive support for pregnant mothers. CPCI has medical offices in Naples, Fort Myers and Sarasota.



Its mobile van was present at Fort Myers for many of the 40 days, but in particular on days when surgical abortions were scheduled.

In addition, the Diocese of Venice is also a proud partner in the “Walking with Moms in Need” initiative of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. This program educates the Parish staff and ultimately the faithful on where to send a pregnant woman for assistance and is available in both English and Spanish.

Jeanne Berdeaux, Diocese of Venice Respect Life Director, said

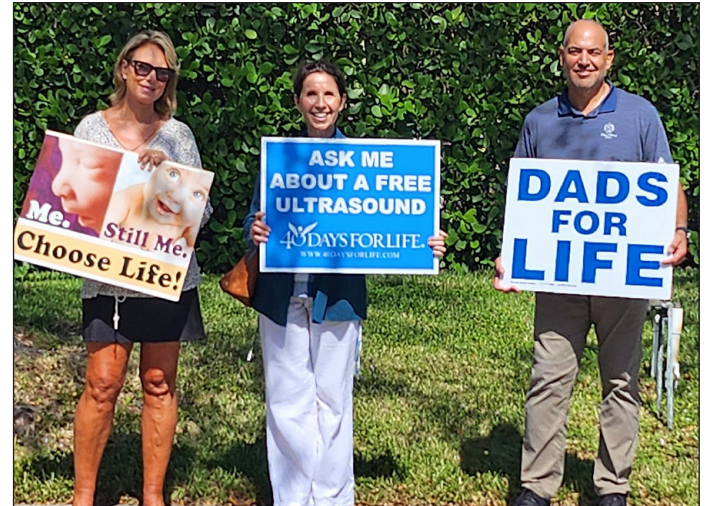
“Walking with Moms in Need” lets the mother know she is not alone in her journey. With the support she needs, more women will decide to parent or make an adoption plan rather than think that abortion is her only option.

“With the ‘Walking with Moms in Need’ program, the Catholic Church works alongside the pregnancy help centers, maternity homes and after birth homes as they continue to work diligently with each mom, the dad and other important family members,” Berdeaux said.

Now that the fall 40 Days for Life

campaign has concluded, there will still be prayer warriors who will stand vigil in front of these local abortion facilities throughout the year. Contact your Parish respect life coordinator for details about when the nearest prayer vigil is scheduled. ■

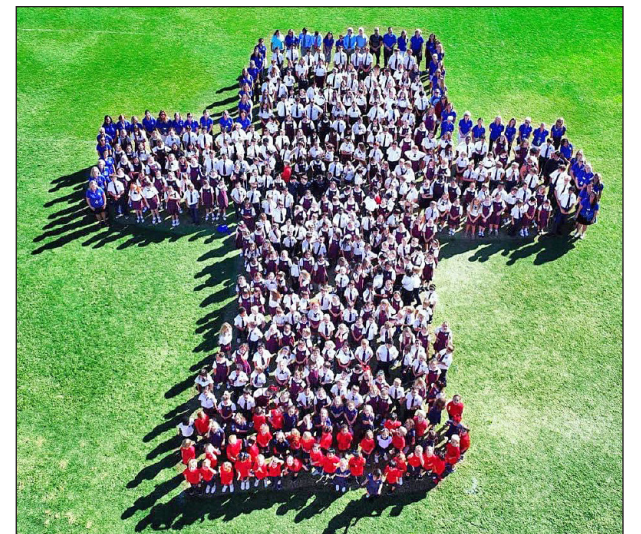
The 40 Days for Life spring campaign begins Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2024, and concludes on Palm Sunday, March 24. To learn more about how you can help protect life from conception until natural death, visit www.dioceseofvenice.org/respectlife.



At left, this sign and its crosses represent the millions of unborn babies killed through abortion on display in front of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Naples throughout the fall 40 Days for Life campaign. Above, prayer warriors are seen Nov. 3, 2023, in front of the Naples Planned Parenthood abortion facility on Goodlette-Frank Road. (COURTESY PHOTOS)



Above, the Our Lady of Grace Parish International Food Festival in Avon Park included cuisine and fun from around the world Nov. 5, 2023. At right, students at St. Ann Catholic School stand on a field in the shape of a cross Nov. 6, 2023, in Naples. (COURTESY PHOTOS)



NEWSbriefs

Students gather in the form of a cross

Students at St. Ann Catholic School in Naples gathered Nov. 6, 2023, on the soccer field to stand in the form of a cross. An annual tradition, students enjoyed a fun day outside and gathered to form of an important symbol of the faith. The school has experienced rapid growth in recent years with enrollment topping 425, up 40 percent since 2020.

Parish honors cultures and tastes the world

Our Lady of Grace Parish in Avon Park hosted its annual International Food Festival Nov. 5, 2023, in the Parish Center. Participants had the opportunity to “taste the world,” sharing the flavors of their culture with food from many different countries and regions, such as Colombia, Germany, Haiti, Ireland, Is-

rael, Italy, Mexico, Philippines, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and more. There were even hot dogs, ice cream, and popcorn for the little ones.

Parish, Knights support vocations

The 25th anniversary of the priestly ordination of Father Bob Kantor, Pastor of St. Agnes Parish in Naples, was a cause for celebration Oct. 28-29, 2023, which served to support vocations and honor Father

Kantor. The fifth Sunday of a month is used for charitable causes outside of the Parish, and a second collection was held to raise funds for the Florida Knights of Columbus Charities Vocations Fund. More than \$8,000 was collected to be used in support of seminarians studying for the Diocese of Venice. Father Kantor serves as State Chaplain for the Knights' Florida State Council. The timing of the support coincides with National Vocations Awareness Week, which was Nov. 5-11.

Program helps unaccompanied minors fulfill their dreams

Miami's Catholic Charities helps refugee minors achieve success and self-sufficiency

ROCÍO GRANADOS
La Voz Católica staff

MIAMI | Noé Pérez immigrated to the United States at the age of 16. Like most young people from his native Guatemala, he was looking for better opportunities and to help his mother, who raised him and his four siblings alone.

He entered the United States through the Arizona border as an unaccompanied minor. He was sent to a shelter, and later to a care center in Texas. Then, when Pérez was about to turn 18, he was transferred to the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (URMP) of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Miami.

For a few months, Pérez lived in two foster homes: first with a Black family and later with a Cuban family. With the latter, "I learned a little Spanish," he said, because when he arrived in the U.S., "I didn't speak much Spanish and even less English; I only spoke Mam" (a Mayan language used in the northwestern region of Guatemala).

While living with the foster family, he began attending high school to earn his GED diploma. Upon reaching the age of 18, he had to leave the placement with the foster family. But he continued his education, went to college and began working part-time. Soon after, he dropped out of school because he had borrowed money in order to migrate here, "and I had to work, washing dishes to pay off that debt," Pérez explained.

He admits that living with the foster families helped him a lot.

"When I arrived, I had no idea what life was like (in this country). The families helped me; they encouraged me to keep studying. There was a moment when I thought about leaving the program because I needed money. But they encouraged me and told me, 'Stay in school, because that will further empower you.' I listened to them and I believe that it helped me a lot," he said.

Until the age of 20, when he be-



Danielle Anderson, coordinator of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program of the Archdiocese of Miami's Catholic Charities, speaks with some of the minors who are in the program during a Christmas gathering in December 2022. (ROCÍO GRANADOS | LVC)

came independent, he lived in a house with other young people his age who also participated in the Catholic Charities program.

This program "has been very helpful to me, with school, with the basics of life, like financial matters and getting my driver's license," Pérez said. "I am very grateful to them."

He bought his own car recently and said that, so far, that's what has made him happiest.

On his 23rd birthday in January of this year, Pérez left the program. He now takes a vocational course in mechanics and works in an auto parts store.

INCREASING NUMBERS

In the last two years, the number of families and single adults entering the country through the southern border has increased considerably, as has the number of unaccompanied minors.

According to a report by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, more than 152,000 unaccompanied minors entered the country in fiscal year 2022. Most are from Central American countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, and about 72% are over the age of 15.

Upon arrival at the border, unaccompanied minors are generally turned over to authorities and placed in the custody of the federal government. The Department

of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is responsible for holding these minors in facilities that provide educational, social, health, and legal services until they can be reunited with their families or sponsors. Due to the huge influx of immigrants arriving daily, the government is accelerating family and sponsor verification processes to remove these minors from the shelters in the shortest possible time.

Unlike minors who have family members or sponsors to reunite with in the U.S., those who do not have a parent, relative or guardian who can take care of them here are granted refugee immigrant status and come under the guardianship of ORR.

ORR can send minors to independent state-licensed and federally funded facilities nationwide. One such facility is Miami Catholic Charities' Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (URMP), which shelters minors between the ages of 14 and 17 under its guardianship.

"These minors have their immigration status already confirmed for the most part. They may be refugees, they may have special immigrant juvenile status, they may be victims of human trafficking, or Cuban and Haitian arrivals," explained Jackie Carrión, director of Community Services at Catholic

Charities.

The program focuses "on helping these adolescents become successful adults and be able to live independently and not be a burden on society," said Mónica Farías, URMP director. She also pointed out that youths entering the program "end up with a vocational certificate, a trade, their own transportation, and some have attended college and earned an associate's degree."

'ALL THE CARE THEY NEED'

The program involves placing minors in foster families, as unaccompanied refugee minors "need foster parents because they enter the country without a legal guardian to make legal decisions about their lives; to be able to send them to school, take them to the doctor. In short, so they can give the children all the care they need," said Farías.

She said foster parents who participate in the program have had a good experience. Many have been in the program for more than a decade, others for three to five years. This is because the program considers foster parents members of a team, and all decisions are made with them, whether regarding transportation for the children or coordinating medical appointments.

In addition, "they are provided

with financial assistance thanks to the donations we receive," Farías told La Voz Católica.

However, more foster parents are needed to care for a larger number of minors.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

When children turn 18, they must leave foster care "because most of them don't have legal status," said Danielle Anderson, URMP coordinator. Although they receive Special Immigrant Juvenile classification, "there is a huge backlog of applications for them to get their green card, so they have to wait years for the government to catch up on those applications."

Upon leaving foster care, the young people go live with other youths, who also are in the program, in semi-independent, program-sponsored homes until the age of 23, as long as they are in school and working.

"Once they reach the age of 23, they are trained to live independently," said Farías.

In the nearly 10 years that Farías has worked in the program, she has seen hundreds of young people who have achieved their dreams when migrating to this country.

What has surprised her the most, she noted, is their resilience.

"That ability to overcome and to continue the connection with their relatives, thinking all the time about how they will help the families they have left behind," said Farías.

When she hears them talk about poverty, about persecution, about gangs, she, a native of Argentina, knows "that when they leave (their countries), it's because there's no way they can support themselves. They come here with that American dream. Seeing the dreams of these children, seeing how they overcome and mature to reach those dreams, is what keeps me working with them."

Last August, at the first Miami Opportunity Summit, organized by Catholic Legal Services of the Archdiocese of Miami, it was reported that an estimated 200,000 immigrants arrived in South Florida in the last 18 months. The drivers of this dramatic migration are the political and economic crises that currently afflict Central and South American countries, as well as the lack of opportunities, violence, and the drug cartels, among others. ■

VANDALISM AT CALIF. CHURCH A POSSIBLE HATE CRIME



Paint is seen across the front of the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Stockton, Calif., Nov. 5, 2023, in an attack of vandalism that police were investigating as a hate crime. (OSV News photo/courtesy Diocese of Stockton)

STOCKTON, Calif. | The Stockton Police Department was investigating whether a hate crime was behind an act of vandalism that left white paint streaked across the front doors of the 81-year-old Cathedral of the Annunciation in Stockton. White paint also was seen on a walkway, a landscaping area and a flatbed trailer parked near the church. Police believe the paint was left there around 5:45 a.m. Nov. 5. A post on the cathedral parish's Facebook page thanked the pastor, Father John Foster, for his quick action before the 7 a.m. Sunday Mass to get the police out to record the incident. The post also thanked the parishioners who volunteered their pressure washing equipment and the church's maintenance person for cleaning off the paint. Stockton Bishop Myron J. Cotta said he was "deeply saddened" by the vandalism but expressed gratitude for the parish staff and parishioners "for their swift assistance in managing the situation." He also thanks the police for their "prompt response." Across the country, on the night of Oct. 24, a vandal damaged the 150-year-old crucifix outside the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston by swinging from the feet of Christ. Christ's arms, torn from the torso, were hanging from the cross. Michael Patzelt, 37, of Attleboro, Massachusetts, was arrested in the incident and charged with assault and malicious destruction of property.

NATION

Mass marks centennial of founding of first seminary in U.S. for Black seminarians

BAY ST. LOUIS, Miss. | The first four African Americans to be ordained Catholic priests at St. Augustine Seminary in 1934, "stood tall in the midst of segregated times," said retired Bishop J. Terry Steib of Memphis, Tennessee. "They were the men who stood tall, who served the Lord in some trying times. These are men who are role models for us," the bishop said at a recent Mass celebrated to mark the centennial of the founding of the first seminary in the U.S. to train Black men for the priesthood. Located in the Diocese of Biloxi, it was originally established by the Divine Word Missionaries as the Sacred Heart Preparatory Seminary in 1920 in the Mississippi Delta city of Greenville. The seminary moved three years later to Bay St. Louis, which is between New Orleans and Biloxi. Between its inception and closure in 1968, the seminary produced numerous priests, nine of whom later became bishops, including Bishop Steib, principal celebrant of the centennial Mass Oct. 29 on the seminary grounds. In the church's history among people of color in the U.S., the opening day of "the first seminary for young men of their race with a vocation to the priesthood ... will be long remembered as an epoch-making forward step," said Bishop Steib.

WORLD

Cameroon bishop condemns killing of dozens in Egbekaw village

YAOUNDÉ, Cameroon | The bishop of Mamfe in Cameroon's volatile South West region has strongly condemned the Nov. 6 "massacre" in Egbekaw village in his diocese that left at least 20 people dead and several others injured. "Up till this moment, we cannot find any reasons to justify this heinous act," Bishop Aloysius Fondong Abangalo of Mamfe explained. The attack was carried out by gunmen suspected of being separatist fighters. "It was a very horrible incident that started around 3 a.m. when we started hearing threatening voices," said Enu Hannibal, a security officer working for Caritas Mamfe. "They started knocking on people's

doors threatening to kill all of them. Those who opened their doors were killed. Those who didn't open their doors, the assailants forced them open, and shot them. People's houses were also burnt, and we later on discovered charred bodies in those burnt houses. Some were raped before being killed. Even children were killed. I was a witness to what happened," he told OSVNews. In a Nov. 6 press release shared with OSV News, Bishop Abangalo vehemently condemned "the atrocious act," saying the massacre "of so many innocent men, women and children ... is an intrinsically evil act because it violates the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue: You shall not kill."

Italy grants citizenship to ill 8-month-old refused further treatment in UK

ROME | The Italian government granted citizenship to Indi Gregory, an 8-month-old child suffering from a degenerative disease who is at the center of a legal battle in the U.K. to keep her on life support. After a Nov. 6 emergency meeting, the Italian Council of Ministers said the resolution granting citizenship was made after the Vatican-owned Bambino Gesù children's hospital expressed its willingness to offer treatment for the child who suffers from mitochondrial disease, an illness that prevents cells from producing energy. "The Italian government has also communicated to the hospital management and the family its commitment to cover the costs of health treatments that are deemed necessary," the council said. In a statement released by Christian Concern, a nonprofit advocacy group working with the family, Indi's father, Dean Gregory, said Italians had given him and his wife, Claire, "hope and faith back in humanity." "The Italians have shown us care and loving support and I wish the U.K. authorities were the same," he said. "I'm very proud to say Indi has Italian citizenship and I thank the Italian government and the Italian people from the bottom of my heart." Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni also commented on the decision, expressing her support to the family and her willingness to protect the infant's life.

VATICAN

Doctrinal dicastery says transsexuals can be baptized

VATICAN CITY | If it would not cause scandal or confusion among

other Catholics, "a transsexual -- even one who has undergone hormone treatment and gender reassignment surgery -- may receive baptism under the same conditions as other faithful," said a document from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. The document, signed Oct. 31 by Pope Francis and by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, was posted on the dicastery's website Nov. 8. A note published with it said the document was a response to letter submitted in July by Bishop José Negri of Santo Amaro, Brazil, "containing some questions about the possible participation in baptism and weddings by transsexual persons and homo-affective persons." The questions about weddings involved whether transsexual or other LGBTQ+ persons could be witnesses at a Catholic wedding. The response to both questions was that "there is nothing in current universal canonical legislation that prohibits" either from serving as a witness at a Catholic marriage. Responses to the questions about baptism were longer, more nuanced and urged pastoral prudence to minister to the people in question, safeguard the sacrament and prevent scandal.

Pope to address U.N. conference, inaugurate 'Faith Pavilion'

VATICAN CITY | Pope Francis will travel to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates Dec. 1-3 to address the U.N. climate conference and to help inaugurate the Faith Pavilion where religious leaders and organizations will meet to share information and strategies for convincing governments to take real steps to protect the environment. The conference, commonly known as COP28, "can represent a change of direction, showing that everything done since 1992 (with the adoption of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change) was in fact serious and worth the effort, or else it will be a great disappointment and jeopardize whatever good has been achieved thus far," the pope wrote in "Laudate Deum" ("Praise God"), a follow-up document to his 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home." Releasing the schedule for the pope's trip Nov. 9, the Vatican said he would address the conference Dec. 2 -- the closing day of the World Climate Action Summit -- and spend the rest of the day in "private bilateral meetings," although the Vatican provided no indication of which religious or government leaders he would be meeting.

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Catholic community at Cornell University responds to hate posts with prayer, outreach

OSV NEWS

ITHACA, N.Y. | Just how deeply can words pierce? A troubling gauge surfaced at Cornell University during the final days of October.

That's when several online posts threatening extreme violence against Jews on campus were discovered. The threats -- which law enforcement traced to a Cornell student and resulted in his arrest -- touched off fear and anguish across the Ivy League institution, prompting a notable police presence in the ensuing days.

The incident reflected the religious and ethnic tensions, often involving Jews and Muslims, that have escalated at colleges nationwide since the Israel-Hamas war began Oct. 7.

The Cornell Catholic Community has responded to the recent crisis with extensive prayer and outreach.

During the 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass in Sage Chapel Nov. 5, celebrant Father Daniel McMullin praised students for "the kindness you have shown one another, especially to our Jewish friends and Muslim friends."

Kevin Salazar, student president of the Cornell Catholic Community, said it's imperative for his fellow Catholics to set aside religious and political differences at such a pivotal time.

"To support those who are made

vulnerable, that's what Christ would do," remarked Salazar, 20.

According to an FBI report filed Oct. 31, the bureau received a call from Cornell University Police that an anonymous online post had been made Oct. 29 stating that somebody was "gonna shoot up 104 West" -- referring to Cornell's 104 West dining hall, which specializes in kosher food.

The FBI said that later on Oct. 29 it became aware of more threatening messages on a college-related discussion forum. They included an Oct. 28 post in which a writer threatened to stab and slit the throats of male Jews; rape female Jews and throw them off a cliff; behead infant Jews in front of their parents; and "bring an assault rifle to campus and shoot all you pig Jews."

The FBI said it traced the posts to Patrick Dai, a 21-year-old Cornell junior from the Rochester suburb of Pittsford. The FBI report noted that Dai admitted to making the graphic posts and was arrested Oct. 31, on charges of making a threat using interstate communications. Dai appeared in federal court in Syracuse Nov. 1, was being held without bail and was suspended from Cornell.

Salazar, a senior from San Diego, called the messages "a shock -- a new level, not a general antisemitic trope. It was a very clear, direct threat without any sort of window dressing or dog whistle. It's just un-



Father Daniel McMullin distributes Communion during a Nov. 5, 2023, Mass at Cornell University's Sage Chapel in Ithaca, N.Y. (OSV News photo/Mike Latona, Catholic Courier)

real."

"The level of hatred was so contrary to Christ's messages of peace and accepting your neighbor," remarked Colin Murphy, 19, a member of the Cornell Catholic Community's service committee.

"Ugly, just ugly," added Father McMullin, director of the Catholic communities at Cornell and Ithaca College, shaking his head.

The disturbing incident prompted an Oct. 30 visit to Cornell from New York Gov. Kathy Hochul. Security on campus was ramped up, particularly in areas frequented by Jewish students, such as 104 West and the adjacent Cornell Center for Jewish Living.

Father McMullin told the Catho-

lic Courier, Rochester's diocesan newspaper, that police were stationed at Anabel Taylor Hall, where offices of Catholic, Jewish and Muslim life are all located near each other. "We've always had a positive relationship," he said.

Salazar, a close friend of William Barkoff, student president of Hillel at Cornell, said Barkoff "was obviously quite distraught" about the hate posts. Salazar added that Barkoff and other Jewish students skipped classes and avoided being out in public all week.

According to Hillel International, a Jewish campus organization, there are approximately 3,000 undergraduate and 500 graduate Jewish students at Cornell, comprising 22% of the student body.

Murphy, a Cornell junior from Philadelphia, said fear enveloped the entire campus. "There was definitely tension until that person was actually caught. I didn't feel like we were safe from the possibility of violence."

"Everyone was on edge. No one knew how serious the threat was," Salazar observed, citing a spate of shooting massacres in recent years at U.S. colleges, high schools and elementary schools. He added that it's disheartening for Cornell to be the subject of international headlines for all the wrong reasons.

Due to widespread distress about the posts, Cornell officials canceled classes Nov. 3, when the Cornell Catholic Community was involved in several prayerful and supportive initiatives. The regularly scheduled 12:15 p.m. Mass that day -- celebrated in the Anabel Taylor Hall chapel -- included special readings for times of war or civil disturbance. Father McMullin said the liturgy was attended by approximately 35 people, three times the normal number.

"The Mass is the highest and most effective way Catholics and, indeed, anyone can work for peace," remarked Matthew Hall, associate director of the Cornell and Ithaca college Catholic communities.

The Cornell Catholic Community also conducted its First Friday Holy Hour in the chapel beginning at 5:15 p.m. Hall noted that Catholic students were invited to hang out in the building during the afternoon and invite their non-Catholic friends, including those who showed up for other Friday prayer services -- Shabbat for Jewish students and Jummah for Muslims. In addition, Salazar attended the Shabbat dinner that was open to non-Jewish members of the Cornell community. He noted that Cornell University President Martha Pollack also attended the dinner.

On Nov. 1, Hall added, Cornell Catholic Community's weekly Wednesday night community dinner featured discussion about Catholics' relationships with the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

During that event, Father McMullin discussed the Second Vatican Council documents "Dignitatis Humanae" (Declaration on Religious Freedom), and "Nostra Aetate" (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) -- promulgated in 1965 by St. Paul VI -- affirming the right of all to religious freedom and calling for healthier relations between Catholics and adherents of non-Christian religions.

Whereas the hateful posts attributed to Dai by the FBI have triggered a new level of tension at Cornell, Father McMullin said that for several weeks students have been sharing concerns with him during pastoral counseling, spiritual direction and confession about what they perceive as rising hostilities on campus.

"The Middle East, and the recent spate of incendiary and hate speech, has been a part of nearly every conversation," he said.

Yet leaders of Cornell Catholic Community refrain from offering opinions about who is right and wrong when it comes to politics and war, Father McMullin added.

"It isn't our place to pick sides. It's our place to be pastoral, sensitive and aware," he explained.

In a Nov. 1 statement, meanwhile, Pollack said the university will continue to address antisemitism in programming, speakers, policies and support services.

"We will not tolerate antisemitism at Cornell; indeed, we will not tolerate hatred of any form, including racism or Islamophobia," she stated.

Her stance was welcomed by Murphy, who said that "as a campus, we need to do a better job" of having open, respectful and peaceful dialogue about religion and politics.

"The bedrock of good democracy is peaceful debate," Salazar agreed. ■



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Dominican Father on Israel-Gaza peace possibilities: 'too many wounds on both sides'

OSV NEWS

PARIS | It was only six days after he left the Holy Land when Father Jean-Jacques Pérennès learned about the deadly Hamas attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7. For the French Dominican, who until Oct. 1 has been a director of the legendary French biblical and archaeological school -- École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem, founded in 1890 -- the satisfaction of "having been able to carry out my mission at the École Biblique," was overshadowed by a "profound sorrow at leaving the Holy Land in a dramatic situation."

Born in 1949, Father Pérennès has traveled the world as a Dominican, and he has lived in countries like Pakistan or Iraq. He spent 30 years in the Muslim world. In Cairo, he ran the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies.

For Father Pérennès, the human tragedy both in Israel and in Gaza is one thing that is difficult to cope with. The other is the loss of many projects that were running in the region -- particularly in Gaza, preserving the Christian legacy -- which causes the priest's "immense grief."

"We were running a magnificent project to restore the Saint Hilarion monastery in Gaza, a beautiful site which we hoped to see classified by UNESCO *(as a world heritage site)," the priest said, adding that "dozens of young Gazans, boys and girls," were trained by the biblical school "enthusiastically learning stone-cutting, excavation work, and photo-

grammetry."

"It was a prospect for the future for young people who had been confined since birth to a small territory, from which no one could escape," Father Pérennès said, showing also the scope of current human tragedy of Gazans trapped in 140 square miles territory.

For the Dominican, in the current war between Israel and Hamas, "we are faced with two forces bent to the destruction of the other," he said, pointing to "Hamas, which has never hidden its refusal of the existence of the State of Israel," and "Israeli policy, led by a coalition including Likud (Prime Minister's Benjamin Netanyahu's party) and the settlers, determined to wage a real war to eradicate Hamas."

Father Pérennès expressed "sadness but also anger," as for him, the situation "was partly foreseeable," he said. The priest added that, in his opinion, the Netanyahu government "has sought to use Hamas to prevent the emergence of a Palestinian political project in capacity to carry forward the project for a genuine state, which has now become impossible."

"Except, perhaps, for the scale of the massacres and the Israeli security fiasco, it is staggering to realize how predictable this deterioration was. The Netanyahu government's nationalist and bellicose policy has created the conditions for this worst-case scenario," the Dominican said.

On Oct. 7, Hamas fighters infiltrated southern Israel, killing 1,400 Israelis in a surprise terrorist



Palestinians react after seeing the damages at a U.N.-run school sheltering displaced people following an Israeli strike in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip, Nov. 2, 2023. (OSV News photo/Fadi Whadi, Reuters)

attack. More than 200 Israelis are still being held captive in Gaza. The death toll in Gaza has surpassed 10,000 since the beginning of the war as of Nov. 6, including 4,000 children, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

A U.N.-run school, serving as a shelter in a refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, was struck Nov. 4, according to the U.N. agency assisting Palestinian refugees in Gaza, UNRWA. The strike killed 15 people and injured more than 70, according to the Hamas-controlled Ministry of Health in Gaza.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a surprise visit to the occupied West Bank Nov. 5, where he met Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas,

before traveling to Iraq to meet the country's prime minister.

Abbas told Blinken that the PA would be open to a return to power in Gaza but only if a "comprehensive political solution" was found to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Father Pérennès denounced, however, "the lack of courage of the international community."

"It acted as if a just solution to the Palestine question could be written off," he said. "It is clear that the continued colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem (600,000 Jewish settlers living on occupied Palestinian land according to a 2017 Amnesty International report), the unjustified maintenance of restrictions on freedom in the Palestinian Territories, the

immunity of settlers who attack Palestinian Bedouins and Palestinian farmers, the systematic repression -- could only increase animosity and lead to more violence," the dominican said.

"In the last several years, I witnessed many injustices and deprivations of freedom on a daily basis," he told OSV News.

Once the Abraham Accords, a series of treaties normalizing diplomatic relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, facilitated by the U.S. Administration, was signed in 2020, Father Pérennès was already talking about "a peace that was slipping away," expressing skepticism about the treaties.

"They were designed to rebuild ties between Israel and its Arab neighbors, but they in no way involved the Palestinians," he said.

"Israel managed to re-establish economic and sometimes political relations with several Arab countries," he pointed out, yet in his opinion "this could not contribute to peace, as Israel continued its policy of ethnic cleansing, trying to expropriate as many Palestinians as possible from the Old City of Jerusalem and certain districts of East Jerusalem."

"The climate was getting much worse, even in the eyes of a grand part of the Israelis: a third of them were considering leaving the country," he said.

"Today, we cannot see how any negotiations can begin," Father Pérennès added. "Israel does not even want a humanitarian truce. The massacres perpetrated by Hamas in the Negev (desert) re-activated in the soul of the Jewish people a major trauma engendered by the Shoah and centuries of pogroms," he said of the Oct. 7 attack that brought back the worst nightmares of the Holocaust in the collective memory of Jews.

"It is not easy to leave people you love when they are in trouble," Father Pérennès said of leaving the Holy Land right before the war broke out. "Beyond the tens of thousands of victims and the material destruction, a cycle of fear, even hatred of others, has been set in motion for generations," he said of the situation.

"The difficulty of not getting carried away by emotion, of trying to look for ways forward, is huge," the priest said of a possible peaceful solution. "From a human point of view, we cannot see how these two peoples will be able to find the possibility of living together peacefully. There have been too many wounds on both sides," he said. ■




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Jordan's Christians cancel celebrations in solidarity with Gaza

OSV NEWS

AMMAN, Jordan | Churches in Jordan are canceling Christmas celebrations in solidarity with Gaza as violence in the Palestinian enclave mounts.

The leaders of Jordan's Council of Churches announced Nov. 5 the cancellation of all festivities and events to express deepening concern over the escalating humanitarian crisis engulfing Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Viewed as a poignant gesture of respect for the innocent victims and the reverent sacrifices made by those in Gaza and the West Bank, the council has called for a solemn observance of Christmas through prayer and religious rituals. It said that Christmas bazaars, gift distributions for children, decorative initiatives and scout parades would be canceled.

"We canceled the external celebrations of Christmas. The decision was made to focus on the spiritual meaning of Christmas -- the birth of Jesus. It's solidarity with the people of Gaza," Father Rifat Bader told OSV News. He directs the Catholic Center for Studies and Media in the Jordanian capital.

"We will focus only on the religious celebration, including worship services and songs inside the churches and nothing outside the churches," Father Bader explained.

He told OSV News that one of his cousins is a Dominican Sister of the Most Holy Rosary of Jerusa-

lem serving in Holy Family Parish in Gaza and is in constant contact with her. She is one of two Jordanians who along with an Egyptian nun serve the Christian community and ordinary citizens in Gaza City.

"The Rosary Sisters, the Missionaries of Charity founded by St. Teresa of Calcutta, and the Sisters of the Incarnate Word are doing a great, courageous job serving the people of Gaza," Father Bader said.

"They are putting aside their own personal fears in order to take care of the people with whom they are living day and night inside the church. These are heroes in Gaza, and we pray God will protect them in order to continue the Christian presence in Gaza," the priest explained.

Father Bader said Jordanians and Jordan's population of Palestinian descendants "also are suffering together with the people of Gaza. We are the closest country to Palestine, to Gaza, that is why we are not celebrating Christmas with joy this year."

More than 10,000 people have been killed in Gaza since Israel launched its military offensive one month ago, according to the Hamas-controlled Health Ministry. That toll is expected to rise in the coming days as Israeli troops battle Hamas militants in Gaza City's narrow streets and the vast network of tunnels below.

Israel declared war on the Islamist militant group after it carried out brutal attacks Oct. 7, kill-



People visit a Christmas market in the city of Fuheis near Amman, Jordan, Dec. 18, 2021. Churches in Jordan are canceling 2023 Christmas celebrations in solidarity with Gaza as violence in the Palestinian enclave mounts, the leaders of Jordan's Council of Church Leaders announced Nov. 5. (OSV News photo/Muath Freij, Reuters)

ing 1,400 in southern Israel and kidnapping more than 200 people. News reports since then have put the number of hostages at more than 240.

The United Nations estimates that 1.5 million Palestinians have been internally displaced in Gaza, with many civilians trying to flee southward, but that journey is difficult due to destruction to the roads caused by Israeli bombing. The Israeli military has surrounded northern Gaza -- including the densely populated Gaza City -- as waves of powerful airstrikes continue to bombard the besieged enclave.

"All the Christians in Gaza's Hayy Zeitouna district took a public decision to go to the two churches -- the Latin Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church was attacked," Father Bader explained.

The Greek Orthodox Church of St. Porphyrius sheltered hundreds of Palestinians, mainly Christians, displaced by the war, according to religious officials. The Israeli military strike Oct. 19, killed some 18 people and injured at least 30.

"Those who were in the Orthodox Church came to the Latin Catholic Church and now you find more than 700 people sheltering

and sleeping inside the (Holy Family) church. They are living like the first-century Christians sharing everything together," Father Bader said.

Jordan's King Abdullah II has led Arab calls for a ceasefire in the conflict as Palestinian civilian casualties mount. He has long advocated for a two-state solution to the long-standing Israel-Palestinian crisis.

Meeting Arab officials and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken Nov. 4, King Abdullah "reaffirmed that the security or military solution will not succeed in ending the Arab-Israeli struggle," according to Jordanian state TV. The U.S. has asked for brief humanitarian pauses to get aid in, but Israel has refused both.

On Nov. 7, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel would consider "tactical little pauses" in Gaza fighting to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid or allow the exit of hostages held by Hamas militants.

Meanwhile, the Jordanian Air Force successfully completed an airdrop of badly needed medical supplies Nov. 5 to its field hospital operating under difficult conditions in Gaza.

Israel's blockade and recent siege of Gaza have put some hospitals out of service, and aid deliveries through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt have so far been inadequate, humanitarian agencies report, expressing fears of a collapse of essential services in Gaza. ■

Religious sisters who fight human-trafficking are honored for their work

OSV NEWS

On Oct. 31 in London, the spotlight was on the exceptional contribution of Catholic religious sisters to the anti-trafficking movement at the inaugural Sisters Anti-Trafficking Awards, or SATAs.

The SATAs are co-hosted by the Arise foundation, the Conrad H. Hilton Foundation and the International Union of Superiors General, which represents about 600,000 women religious from 80 countries. Organized for the first time, the SATAs brought together 200 people from across and beyond the anti-trafficking and Catholic spheres.

The event in London honored Sister Seli Thomas of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate from India, Sister Patricia Ebegebulem of the Sisters of St. Louis from Nigeria and Sister Francoise Jiranonda of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres from Thailand. The three women "have demonstrated courage, creativity, collaboration and achievement in the protection of their communities from human trafficking," Arise said.

Former British Prime Minister Theresa May delivered a keynote address stressing the importance of front-line leadership, including Catholic sisters and survivors of trafficking, in the fight against this

exploitation. May spoke after her recent launch of the Global Commission on Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking, which she will chair.

May discussed the ability of sisters to spot vulnerabilities and build better lives for survivors. "Local groups are key to eradicating slavery," she said. "We also need to provide better opportunities for those who have survived slavery," May added.

In her keynote address, she also drew attention to the importance of listening to the voices of survivors of trafficking when making policy and developing business practices.

British athlete and Olympic gold-medalist Mo Farah, who last year revealed he is a survivor of human trafficking, said during the ceremony that "while many people feel powerless against this crime and look the other way, Catholic sisters are doing the work daily, bravely, humbly, across the communities all over the world."

"Whatever faith or values we hold, we can all look to those women for wisdom and inspiration. And that is why I'm here today," emphasized the distance runner, who also is a gold medalist in World and European championships.

Sister Patricia, from Lagos, Nigeria, won the Human Dignity Award

for lifetime achievement in addressing exploitation. She established and is running a shelter for victims of human trafficking, organizing support services for returning survivors of sex trafficking. She runs mass awareness programs across high-risk rural areas and schools, and is a national leader on the issue of trafficking.

"Stopping trafficking is an uphill task, but I will not say it is impossible," Sister Patricia said in a video produced by Arise. "Because with God, nothing is impossible."

Sister Seli, from Krisnanagar, India, won the Common Good Award for courage and creativity in addressing exploitation. She aims to prevent young people from being exploited by reaching out to the children of Krisnanagar's brothel district as well as running awareness camps and training women. Sister Seli provides free legal aid, and conducts seminars and workshops for the villages, schoolteachers and students on safe migration and human trafficking. She has helped rescue exploited girls and prosecute traffickers.

Sister Francoise, from Bangkok, won the Servant Leadership Award for excellence in network building. She has opened two schools, which protect vulnerable young Thai

women from the sex trade.

"For me personally, the fight against human trafficking is an important duty," Sister Francoise said. "We have to prevent youth from becoming victims," she said of her work in a country that is a traffickers' hotspot, pointing to education as the most important element of prevention.

The schools operated under Sister Francoise's guidance teach young women vocational skills for free after high school and raise awareness. She was the director of Talitha Kum Thailand, whose prevention efforts and advocacy work were recognized by the Thai government. Talitha Kum is an international umbrella organization of anti-trafficking efforts by women religious, based in Rome.

On July 30, the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, the U.N. called on governments, law enforcement, public services and civil society to assess and enhance their efforts to strengthen prevention, identify and support victims, and end impunity for traffickers.

The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime noted that globally, national responses to trafficking, "particularly in developing states, appear to be deteriorating."

Detection rates fell by 11% in 2020

and convictions plummeted by 27%, illustrating a worldwide slowdown in the criminal justice response to trafficking, according to the U.N. office.

The COVID-19 pandemic, it said, also changed the characteristics of trafficking, "pushing it further underground and potentially increasing the dangers to victims by making the crime less likely to come to the attention of the authorities."

Forty-one percent of victims who manage to escape their ordeal reach out to the authorities on their own initiative, the U.N. agency said, calling this "another clear sign that anti-trafficking responses are falling short."

The primary targets of traffickers, according to the organization, are "those who lack legal status, live in poverty, have limited access to education, health care, or decent work, face discrimination, violence, or abuse, or come from marginalized communities."

Women religious "are the largest force against human trafficking in the world. There are over half a million Catholic sisters in the field, a significant proportion of which are working against human trafficking," Arise said in a Nov. 1 press release, which noted that Talitha Kum "alone has over 6,000 members." ■

Waiting for the coming of Jesus

Sunday, Nov. 12

Memorial of St. Josaphat, bishop and martyr and the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wis 6:12-16; Ps 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8; 1 Thes 4:13-18; Mt 25:1-13

Our readings this weekend put our focus on the end times. Like the wise virgins in the Gospel, we need to be prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. We learn from St. Paul of our reason to hope for our deceased loved ones. With the gift of wisdom described in the Book of Wisdom, we can always be prepared, at the same time having the wisdom that allows us to live in this world, remaining vigilant for the world that is to come.

It is difficult to live in a state of constant preparation. Imagine that you are awaiting the visit of friends, a visit you are very excited about. They have told them that they will arrive within the week, but they do not have a phone with them, and have no way to contact you. Days pass by, and they do not come. Yet you rely on their prom-

ise. You want to make sure everything is ready when they arrive, but it is tough to keep the house clean and tidy, to have the children well dressed, to have fresh and tasty food ready each day, in case that is the day they arrive.

We are asked as Christians to live our lives always waiting and ready for the coming of Jesus. There are many things we need to take care of in our daily lives, but it is important to ask ourselves every day if we would be ready for the coming of him whose return is the center of our hope, our reason for being, if it were to come today. The examination of conscience we should do every night serves this purpose exactly.

Here there is a connection between our hope for our loved ones who have died and our hope for ourselves. The words of St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, written about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus,

represent the first words in the New Testament about the problem of death. St. Paul insists that we have nothing on them. They and we will share the glory and the joy of heaven: "Thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thes 4:17). St. Paul had a powerful promise for those who were expecting the imminent return of Christ and were confused by his delay and a powerful promise for us: "Thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Few of us like talking about death, perhaps even less when it seems as if it may be coming close. I remember more than once approaching a hospital room to which I'd been summoned, only to have a family member say: "Father, just pretend you were in the neighborhood. We don't want Grandpa to think he's dying." In this month when we pray for our beloved dead, with hearts full of hope, it is also important to pray for us to be prepared for our own death. Tra-

ditionally, we prayed to be spared from an unprovided for death. That is still a very good thing to pray for, that we may be prepared for that moment and be able to meet God without fear at the end of our lives.

The prayer over the offerings that we will pray this Sunday expresses the connection between the events of the Paschal mystery (passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus), our daily life, and eternal life for which we hope: "May this sacred offering, O Lord, confer on us always the blessing of salvation, that what it celebrates in mystery it may accomplish in power." May our participation in the liturgy of the Church help us always to unite our lives to Christ's perfect sacrifice and share his glory in heaven. May our sharing in the Eucharist strengthen our hope for our loved ones who have died and prepare us to welcome Christ when he returns for us. ■

Father Alfredo Hernandez is rector/president of St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Boynton Beach.



SUNDAY WORD
Father Alfredo Hernandez

Pope encourages children to speak up, work for peace

CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

VATICAN CITY | In a celebration of life, peace, joy and harmony, thousands of children representing young people on every continent greeted Pope Francis during an afternoon event in the Vatican's Paul VI hall.

Children from different parts of the world, such as the Amazon and favelas of Brazil, sang on stage, and Italian pop star Mr. Rain performed his hit single, "Super Heroes."

The event Nov. 6 was sponsored by the Dicastery for Culture and Education and was attended by more than 6,000 children from different parts of Italy and other parts of the world.

Dedicated to the importance of peace, fraternity and respect for others and creation, the event was titled, "Let Us Learn from Boys and Girls," to focus attention on children's simple and sincere desires for peace and harmony in the world.

"There is much to learn from you," the pope said. "I am always happy when I meet you because you teach me something new every time. For example, you remind me how beautiful life is in its simplicity and how beautiful it is to be together!"

"Two big gifts God has given us," he said, are life and being together with simplicity.



A girl listens to Pope Francis answer questions from children from different parts of the world during the event "Let Us Learn from Boys and Girls" in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Nov. 6, 2023. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

The pope encouraged the kids to embrace their adolescence, which is "a wonderful age" and to make their thoughts, feelings and experiences heard by adults.

He asked the children to remember all the other kids their age who are suffering from war, hunger, climate disasters and poverty.

"You know there are bad people who do bad things, they make war and destroy. Do you want to do bad things?" the pope asked. After the children yelled, "No!" he asked, "Do you want to help?" to which they replied with enthusiasm, "Yes!"

The pope cut short his prepared speech in order to dedicate more time to questions from the children, who asked him questions about climate change, wars, his friends, his work habits and what he dreams about at night.

"I don't know what I dream because I am asleep!" he joked as the kids laughed. Sometimes, he said, he dreams about things he remembers when he was a child. "Dreaming is beautiful," he said, because it shows something alive is stirring inside.

With each question, the pope

had a tidbit of wisdom for the kids to remember, making them repeat each phrase a number of times.

His words of advice included: "Whoever destroys the earth, destroys us." "Take care of nature because nature takes care of us." "Work gives us dignity." "Do not waste food." "Let's work for peace." "Peace is made with the heart and an outstretched hand." "Children's voices are needed" because "kids are messengers of peace." "When you are angry, drink a glass of water before you respond."

When a 9-year-old boy from Syria asked the pope, "Why do they kill kids during a war and no one defends them?" the pope said, "This shows the wickedness of war."

That innocent civilians and children are killed in wartime, he said, "is cruelty," and he led the children in praying the Our Father for all children killed in wars.

He urged all the children to work for peace after a 12-year-old girl from Palestine asked whether there would be no more peace if World War III broke out.

"We have to work for peace," the pope said, asking everyone wave to the girl so she could let the people back in Palestine know that everyone there said "Hello."

"Peace is beautiful!" the pope said, as the children repeated it loudly. ■

SCRIPTURE readings

Thursday, Nov. 9

Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome

Ez 47:1-2, 8-9, 12; Ps 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9; 1 Cor 3:9c-11, 16-17; Jn 2:13-22

Friday, Nov. 10

Memorial of St. Leo the Great, pope and doctor of the Church

Rom 15:14-21; Ps 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4; Lk 16:1-8

Saturday, Nov. 11

Memorial of St. Martin of Tours, bishop

Rom 16:3-9, 16, 22-27; Ps 145:2-3, 4-5, 10-11; Lk 16:9-15

Sunday, Nov. 12

Memorial of St. Josaphat, bishop and martyr & the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wis 6:12-16; Ps 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8; 1 Thes 4:13-18; Mt 25:1-13

Monday, Nov. 13

Memorial of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, virgin

Wis 1:1-7; Ps 139:1b-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-10; Phil 2:15d, 16a; Lk 17:1-6

Tuesday, Nov. 14

Wis 2:23-3:9; Ps 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19; Jn 14:23; Lk 17:7-10

Wednesday, Nov. 15

Wis 6:1-11; Ps 82:3-4, 6-7; 1 Thes 5:18; Lk 17:11-19

Thursday, Nov. 16

Wis 7:22b-8:1; Ps 119:89, 90, 91, 130, 135, 175; Jn 15:5; Lk 17:20-25

Friday, Nov. 17

Memorial of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, religious

Wis 13:1-9; Ps 19:2-3, 4-5ab; Lk 21:28; Lk 17:26-37

Saturday, Nov. 18

Wis 18:14-16; 19:6-9; Ps 105:2-3, 36-37, 42-43; 2 Thes 2:14; Lk 18:1-8

Sunday, Nov. 19

Prv 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; 1 Thes 5:1-6; Jn 15:4a, 5b; Mt 25:14-30

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