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Letters to Pope Francis



PHOTOS BY BETH BOUDREAU AND GLORIA SHAHIN

Above, fourth-graders at St. Joseph Elementary School in Webster show letters and drawings for Pope Francis. At right, David Dzienna shakes Pope Francis' hand Wednesday when bringing the Holy Father Jubilee Year resources from Bayard Inc. and letters and drawings from the school.

Publisher takes students' messages to pope

BY TANYA CONNOR | THE CATHOLIC FREE PRESS

What does God look like? What church does Pope Francis go to and how long has he been following Jesus?

These are among questions local Catholic school students asked the Holy Father.

Their letters were a response to an invitation from the superintendent of Catholic schools, David Perda –

because of an invitation he received from David Dzienna, vice president of publishing at Bayard Inc., whose office is located at Assumption University in Worcester.

Mr. Dzienna was preparing to meet with Bayard publishing houses from different countries and attend a Catholic journalism conference at the Vatican.

SEE LETTERS, 7



Jubilee Year of Hope

Bishop McManus' first journey to a Worcester diocesan pilgrimage church. All are welcome.



WHERE:

St. Paul Church At Divine Mercy Parish, 48 St. Paul St., Blackstone

WHEN:

Sunday, January 26

SCHEDULE:

3-3:45 P.M. Church open for confessions and praying your way through the church with a "Self-guided Tour Booklet" provided by the parish & Pilgrim's Guide passport stamp.

CONFESSORS' LANGUAGES:

Father Michael N. Lavallee – English

Father Cleber De Paula – English, Portuguese, Spanish

Father Doan Nguyen (Diocese of Providence) – English, Vietnamese

4 P.M Bishop McManus leads solemn sung vespers (evening prayer)

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING VESPERS:

Free soup and bread for all pilgrims in parish center. A free will offering is being taken to help defray costs.

GROUPS:

If bringing a group to this event or to the church anytime during the Jubilee Year, contact Father John L. Larochelle, pastor, in advance, at 508-859-6906 or associate@divinemercyparishma.org. Parishioners are available to give group tours of the church.

School kicks off Jubilee Year

BY BETH BOUDREAU
SPECIAL TO THE CATHOLIC FREE PRESS

To mark the beginning of the church's Jubilee Year of Hope, clergy and parishioners at St. Joseph Basilica in Webster and students at its school, St. Joseph Elementary, joined together for a special Mass Jan. 12.

Father Grzegorz Chodkowski, pastor and headmaster, gave a welcome. Father Anthony S. Kazarnowicz, associate pastor, read Bishop McManus' decree designating 10 churches in the diocese, including St. Joseph's, as pilgrimage sites. This year the

Worcester diocese is also celebrating its 75th anniversary.

In a procession, Father Chodkowski carried a processional cross made for the Jubilee Year. Student Council President Oluwatobiloba Akindele carried the framed decree. Joining the procession were parish council members, altar servers, Children of Mary, and other St. Joseph's students, faculty and staff.

Felician Sister Jeanne Marie Akalski, fourth-grade teacher, read "Spes Non Confundit" (Hope Does Not Disappoint) Pope Francis' bull of indiction announcing the Jubilee Year.

Fourth-graders offered spe-

cial readings for which Sister Jeanne Marie sought input from her class. "They all gave ideas and I put it together in two documents," she said.

One was a poem called "A Year of Hope," in honor of the Jubilee, read by Rylan Shemansky. Julia Biela followed with "Together in Faith," a tribute to the Worcester diocese's history and commitment to faith and service.

To conclude the introduction of the Jubilee Year at the Jan. 12 Mass, Father Chodkowski read the Jubilee Year

SEE JUBILEE, 6



PHOTO BY BETH BOUDREAU

Father Grzegorz Chodkowski reads the Gospel at the Jubilee Year kick-off Mass Jan 12 at St. Joseph Basilica in Webster. Altar servers Jon Thomas Belanger and Johnny Marcuccio flank the Jubilee candle and the decree designating pilgrimage churches, including St. Joseph's.

Bethany Catholic Young Adult Group: A new community for men and women in their 20s

BY BILL DOYLE
CFP CORRESPONDENT

If you're in your 20s and looking to boost your Catholic faith with others of your age, the Bethany Catholic Young Adult Group is for you.

Quinn Fuller and Veronica Prytko were searching separately for ways to continue their faith with others and Father Donato Infante, the diocesan director of the Office for Vocations and chaplain at St. Paul Diocesan Jr./Sr. High School, urged them to work together.

When they first met, they discovered that they had both recently read the Gospel story about Mary of Bethany, a village in Judea, who sat at the foot of Jesus while listening to him. So they decided to try to be like Mary, listen to Jesus and grow further in their faith.

Last September, they started the Bethany Catholic Young Adult Group for people aged 20-30 in the Worcester area.

Anywhere from 15-30 young adults, who learned about the group through



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BETHANY YOUNG ADULT GROUP

The Bethany Catholic Young Adult Group at Our Lady of Czestochowa Church on Jan. 15 before a talk on "How to Give a Testimony" by Michael Hoogasian. In the front row, Veronica Prytko is second from the left and Quinn Fuller is third from the left.

social media and word of mouth, have attended each week.

"I want a community," Mr. Fuller said. "I want to be running with people who will keep my faith alive."

The group has met each Wednesday except holidays. At first they met mostly at Mr. Fuller's home parish of Our Lady of Providence at St. Bernard Church and then at Miss Prytko's home parish of Our Lady of Czestochowa after renovation

of the basement hall was completed.

The group offers guest speakers, Mass, adoration, confession and such social events as Friends-giving, trivia nights at Antonio's Pizza and bowling. Bingo nights, WooSox games and movies are also planned.

Michael Hoogasian, theology department chair at St. Paul Diocesan Jr./Sr. High School recently spoke about how to give testimony of your faith. He told the group it was

important to take time to listen to God and understand what he wants from us and why we're here.

"Everything has really fallen into place," Mr. Fuller said, "and I think it's a supreme act of providence every time. I get in my car at the end of the night and I just go, 'Wow, thank you God. That was awesome.' I'm smiling all the way home."

"It's going wonderful," Miss Prytko said. "I've met so many people through it and everyone that I've talked to, they're just so happy to be there, they're happy to meet people and a lot of them that I've talked to, they're like, 'We were searching for some kind of community, we were searching for other people who share the same ideals and values as us, but we didn't know where to look.'"

One of the first times the young adults attended Mass together at St. John Parish, they noticed a young woman about their age. After Mass, they told her about their group and

SEE TWENTIES, 6

Wisdom, strength, humility focus of Inauguration prayers



OSV NEWS PHOTO | CHIP SOMODEVILLA, POOL VIA REUTERS

U.S. Vice President-elect J.D. Vance, former U.S. senator from Ohio, and U.S. President-elect Donald Trump greet Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York after he delivered the invocation during inauguration ceremonies in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol in Washington Jan. 20.

BY MARIA WIERING

(OSV News) – As Catholics prayed across the country for President Donald Trump as he was sworn in as the nation's 47th president Jan. 20, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York was in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in Washington offering an opening prayer during the inauguration ceremony minutes before Trump took the oath of office.

"Be still and know that I am God," Cardinal Dolan began, before evoking pivotal moments in U.S. history where the nation's leaders turned to the Lord.

"Remembering General George Washington on his knees at Valley Forge. Recalling Abraham Lincoln at his second inaugural, 'with malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right.' Remembering Gen. George Patton's instructions to his soldiers as they began the Battle of the Bulge eight decades ago: Pray! 'Pray when fighting. Pray alone. Pray with others. Pray by night. Pray by day.' Observing the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King who warned,

SEE INAUGURATION, 7

Obituary: Father Ralph A. DiOrto Jr., 94, known as the 'healing priest' 6



Open houses planned at Catholic schools; see announcements for details 3,6,8



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| | | | |
|---------------|---|-----------------|---|
| WORLD NEWS | 2 | QUESTION CORNER | 5 |
| NATIONAL NEWS | 3 | COMMENTARY | 5 |
| POPE AUDIENCE | 4 | DID YOU KNOW? | 7 |
| CATHOLIC QUIZ | 5 | AROUND DIOCESE | 8 |

Sodality of Christian Life dissolved by pope, apostolate confirms

BY EDUARDO BERDEJO

(CNA) - The Sodality of Christian Life confirmed on Monday that Pope Francis has decided to dissolve the society of apostolic life without going into further details about how the process will be carried out.

The Sodalitium Christianae Vitae (SCV, by its Latin acronym) issued a statement following the news published on Saturday by Infovaticana, according to which Cardinal Gianfranco Ghirlanda supposedly announced the dissolution to its members gathered for the general assembly that is taking place in Aparecida, Brazil.

The general assembly began on Jan. 6 and will end Jan. 31. Ghirlanda is attending in his capacity as consultant for the process of revising the constitutions of the Sodalitium and is its delegate for formation, a task entrusted to him by the Vatican in 2019.

In its statement on Monday, the SCV said: "On Jan. 18 of this year, the website 'Infovaticana' published the news that the Holy Father had dissolved our society of apostolic life. The main information about what occurred was true, but it contained several inaccuracies."

In its text, the Sodalitium does not indicate what the inaccuracies are but clarifies that the leak to the press of this "confidential" information did not come from Ghirlanda but from two members of the sodality who violated "the confidentiality of the case" and who have been expelled from the assembly.

"The assembly recognizes as its own only the news from its official communications; therefore, the assembly disassociates itself from all other news that has come out or may come out from the press related to the assembly, to the Sodalitium, to the Holy Father, in whom we trust and whom we obey,

to Monsignor Jordi Bertomeu Farnós, and to Cardinal Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ," the SCV stated.

According to Infovaticana, the decree of dissolution "refers to the immorality of the founder, Luis Fernando Figari, as an indication of the nonexistence of a founding charism, and therefore, the lack of ecclesial legitimacy for the permanence of the institution."

Figari was expelled from the SCV by Pope Francis in August 2024. The Holy See had already sanctioned him in 2017 and banned him from having contact with any member of this society after it was proven that he committed sexual abuse and the abuse of power.

According to Infovaticano, the Vatican supposedly appointed Bertomeu, a member of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, as commissioner responsible for the dissolution process.



OSV NEWS PHOTO | VATICAN MEDIA VIA CATHOLIC PRESS PHOTO
Pope Francis greets the superior general of Sodalitium, José David Correa, during a private audience at the Vatican Oct. 30, 2021.



OSV NEWS PHOTO | MAAYAN TOAF | GPO | HANDOUT VIA REUTERS
Released Israeli hostage Romi Gonen embraces loved ones at Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, Israel Jan. 19 after being held in Gaza since the deadly Oct. 7, 2023, attack by Hamas, in this handout image obtained by Reuters.

Gaza ceasefire an 'encouraging sign of peace' for the Middle East, US bishop says

BY OSV NEWS

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - The negotiations on a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and the first release of hostages that began Jan. 19 are seen as an "encouraging sign of peace," said Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace.

"At the beginning of this Jubilee Year, it is with great hope that I receive the news of a negotiated ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and the ongoing release of hostages and prisoners," he said in a Jan. 16 statement.

"This is an encouraging sign of peace for a region that has seen far too much bloodshed and destruction. I pray that this peace can take firm and lasting root

'I pray that this peace can take firm and lasting root in the Middle East.'

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan
Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon,
chairman, USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace

in the Middle East, and I renew my gratitude for the crucial, peacebuilding role that the United States has played in this ceasefire and hostage release," the bishop said.

Catholic leaders in the Middle East reacted similarly to the U.S. bishop about these developments, saying it was long past time for an end to a war that has worn people down but emphasizing the agreement reached is just a first step.

Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, told Vatican News that the ceasefire,

announced Jan. 15, is "the necessary turning point we needed."

"In every context, people are happy because this war has worn us down, exhausted us and wounded everyone's lives," the patriarch said, but this is "only the first step," he added, explaining that the process of lasting peace is a long one.

"Peace will take much longer to achieve because the end of the war is not the end of the conflict," he told Vatican Media.

Father Ibrahim Faltas, vicar of the Custody of

the Holy Land, echoed the patriarch's worries about lasting peace being achieved, telling Vatican News that in the 15-month war "no one has won," but "everyone has lost."

"There are forces within both sides, and perhaps especially in the Israeli front, that have ill-digested this first step toward appeasement, and are gearing up to sabotage the agreement in various forms," Father Faltas said.

He also told Vatican News about the first enthusiastic messages he got from wounded Gaza children he helped bring to Italy in the course of the war. They wrote to him in Italian on Jan. 15: "Abuna, abuna!" - "Father, Father! It's over! The war is over!" Father Faltas said. "They moved me to tears."

Bishop Zaidan, for his part, echoed Pope Francis' calls for a "diplomacy of hope" based on truth, forgiveness, freedom, and justice," adding that he wishes "the dense clouds of war may be swept away by renewed winds of peace. This signal of peace can be a beacon of real hope for the Middle East and all regions of the world suffering from war."

In a statement released Jan. 16 by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land said they hoped the ceasefire "will mark an important end to the violence that has caused immeasurable suffering."

"It is a necessary step to halt the destruction and meet the urgent humanitarian needs of countless families affected by the conflict," the statement read.

The bishops' statement echoed remarks made by Father Francesco Patton, the custos of the Holy Land, to SIR, the news service of the Italian bishops' conference, not long after the deal was announced.

The custos of the Holy Land was critical of the international community, saying it had "been glaringly absent during these long months of war" and said it "must now make it clear to everyone that it still exists and maintains a constructive capacity" in guiding both Israel and Hamas.

BRIEFS

Bishops officially request investigation of Abbé Pierre

PARIS (OSV News) - The president of the French bishops' conference has formally requested an investigation into Abbé Pierre, following new sexual assault allegations against the once-iconic priest. Abbé Pierre, who founded the Emmaus Community for the poor, was accused of sexual abuse committed from the 1970s to the early 2000s, with new reports including the rape of a minor. The Emmaus movement has confirmed the allegations, with a commission of independent experts. The French bishops' conference expressed deep sorrow, condemning the actions of Abbé Pierre, once a beloved figure, and the institutions that allowed them to continue - and not only the church. The account of Abbé Pierre is "horrifying," the French bishops said Jan. 13. The church has opened its archives to assist investigations and revealed that church officials were aware of Abbé Pierre's behavior as early as the 1950s but failed to intervene. Locations associated with him are being renamed, and the Abbé Pierre Foundation is rebranding itself. Over 30 verified testimonials published in recent months reveal the usual strategies of manipulation, pressure and blackmail used by Abbé Pierre to lure his victims.

Pope praises Mongolia's 'religious renewal'

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - Some 35 years after the fall of Mongolia's communist regime, the revival of religious practices has played a "pivotal role in building a just and cohesive society," Pope Francis said. Meeting with a delegation of Buddhists from Mongolia Jan. 13, he said that since the 1990s Mongolia "has reclaimed its rich religious heritage while demonstrating its dedication to a successful democratic transition" by "reviving traditional spiritual practices and integrating them into the nation's development." Pope Francis visited Mongolia in 2023, becoming the first pope to visit the country. He also praised Mongolia's "commitment to religious freedom and dialogue among the different religious denominations," which he said has "cultivated a space of mutual respect for all traditions, fostering a society enriched not only by material prosperity but also by values essential to fraternal solidarity." There are an estimated 42,859 Christians in the country, comprising about 1.3% of the total population.

Pope calls Trump's threat of deportation a 'disgrace'

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - On the eve of U.S. President Donald Trump's inauguration, Pope Francis said the new president's threat to begin a massive deportation of immigrants would be a "disgrace." In an interview on Italian television Jan. 19, the pope said that if Trump carries out his threat "it will be a disgrace, because it makes the poor wretches who have nothing pay the bill" for problems in the United States. "This won't do! You don't resolve things this way," the pope told the interviewer, Fabio Fazio, host of a popular Sunday night talk show.

Cardinal urges restraint as retaliatory attacks ignite

JUBA, South Sudan (OSV News) - Cardinal Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla of Juba called for restraint and compassion as retaliatory attacks in South Sudan followed the alleged killings of South Sudanese refugees in Sudan. Violence erupted after a video surfaced showing Sudanese soldiers killing South Sudanese civilians in Wad Madani. At least 29 South Sudanese were reported dead, with children among the victims. In response, South Sudanese youth attacked Sudanese nationals, killing 16 and injuring many others. Cardinal Ameyu condemned the violence and urged South Sudanese to avoid revenge, stressing the importance of unity and healing. He also expressed solidarity with the victims' families.

Palestinian statehood is 'only solution', pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - On the day a ceasefire deal between Hamas militants and Israel went into effect, Pope Francis said he hoped all Israeli and Palestinian political leaders would support dialogue, reconciliation, peace and the existence of two states. "Both the Israelis and the Palestinians need clear signs of hope," he said after praying the Angelus at noon with visitors in St. Peter's Square Jan. 19. "I trust that the political authorities of both of them, with the help of the international community, may reach the right solution for the two states. May everyone be able to say: yes to dialogue, yes to reconciliation, yes to peace," he said. Pope Francis also spoke about the ceasefire deal during an Italian television interview aired that evening, and specifically about the need for a two-state solution. "The possibility exists! I also believe it is the only solution," he said. It takes courage to make peace, he said, adding that "often you lose something in order to make peace, but you gain much more."

Journeying as Pilgrims of Hope
Follow news of the Jubilee Year 2025

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BRIEFS

Pope to Trump: May US prosper, shun all hatred

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - Pope Francis told U.S. President Donald Trump he hoped that the nation would prosper under his leadership and make no room for hatred, discrimination or exclusion. The pope offered his "cordial greetings and the assurance of my prayers that Almighty God will grant you wisdom, strength and protection in the exercise of your high duties," in a message marking Trump's inauguration as the 47th president of the United States Jan. 20. "Inspired by your nation's ideals of being a land of opportunity and welcome for all, it is my hope that under your leadership the American people will prosper and always strive to build a more just society, where there is no room for hatred, discrimination or exclusion," the pope wrote. "At the same time, as our human family faces numerous challenges, not to mention the scourge of war, I also ask God to guide your efforts in promoting peace and reconciliation among peoples," the message said. Pope Francis also invoked "upon you, your family, and the beloved American people an abundance of divine blessings."

Trump's Day 1 includes many executive orders

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - Among the first acts of his second term, President Donald Trump signed a series of executive orders including on immigration, birthright citizenship and climate at an event at Capital One Arena. According to announcements from one of his aides, Trump signed orders rescinding 78 of former President Joe Biden's executive actions, including one which created a task force to reunite families deliberately separated at the border. Another order suspended some U.S. refugee programs, including one for Afghans cleared by the U.S. government to resettle in the U.S. due to threats by the Taliban after they aided the U.S. Trump also signed an order withdrawing from the Paris Agreement on climate. Trump also said he would pardon those charged in connection with the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol building.

Trump's birthright citizenship order challenged

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - A coalition of advocacy groups led by the American Civil Liberties Union filed a federal lawsuit Jan. 20 challenging President Donald Trump's Day 1 executive order seeking to change the interpretation of the 14th Amendment, which grants birthright citizenship. Catholic immigration advocates praised the challenge to that order, with some expressing concern about Trump's immigration actions more broadly. J. Kevin Appleby, senior fellow for policy at the Center for Migration Studies of New York, said it is likely that the courts will strike down Trump's "cruel," as he termed it, birthright citizenship executive order.

Executive order: Two biological sexes

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - President Donald Trump signed executive orders Jan. 20 directing the U.S. government to only recognize two sexes, male and female, and ending diversity, equity and inclusion programs within federal agencies. In an order titled "Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism And Restoring Biological Truth To The Federal Government," Trump directed, "It is the policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female. These sexes are not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality." The order also directed that government-issued identification documents, "including passports, visas, and Global Entry cards, accurately reflect the holder's sex."

National Prayer Vigil for Life takes place

WASHINGTON (OSV NEWS) - Catholics across the country are invited to observe a nationwide prayer vigil which began yesterday and continues today to pray for an end to abortion and a greater respect for all human life. The event is hosted each January by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Pro-Life Secretariat, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington and The Catholic University of America's Office of Campus Ministry. It takes place on the eve of the March for Life, held annually on the Friday closest to the Jan. 22 date of the historic 1973 Roe v. Wade decision by the U.S. Supreme Court of the United States. Roe was overturned by the court in 2022. The 52nd National March for Life is to take place today, Jan. 24.

Notre Dame falls short, but faith shines

ATLANTA (OSV News) - Notre Dame's quest for a 12th national title ended in heartbreak with a 34-23 loss to Ohio State in the College Football Playoff national championship Jan. 20 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. Head coach Marcus Freeman and captains Riley Leonard and Jack Kiser faced the media with heavy hearts but praised their team's perseverance and faith. Leonard, who transferred from Duke for his senior year, thanked Jesus Christ and highlighted Scripture that inspired him, including Matthew 23:12 and Proverbs 27:17. He acknowledged his disappointment but credited Notre Dame's coaches and players for shaping his journey. Kiser, reflecting on six seasons with the Irish, emphasized the program's culture. "It's the people that make this place different," he said.

Trump administration reverses policy to permit ICE arrests at churches

BY KATE SCANLON

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - The Trump administration said Jan. 21 it would rescind a long-standing policy preventing Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents from making arrests at what are seen as sensitive locations, including houses of worship, schools and hospitals.

Prior to his second inauguration, Trump's transition team indicated his administration would scrap the long-standing ICE policy - which prohibits immigration enforcement arrests at such locations, as well as other sensitive events like weddings and funerals without approval from supervisors. Catholic immigration advocates expressed alarm at the announcement.

Acting Department of Homeland Security Secretary Benjamin Huffman directed on Jan. 20 that those guidelines be rescinded, as well as



OSV NEWS PHOTO | MORRY GASH, POOL VIA REUTERS
Donald Trump is sworn in as the 47th president of the United States by Chief Justice John G. Roberts as Melania Trump holds the Bible during the inauguration ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington Jan. 20.

another directive restricting parameters for humanitarian parole, a DHS spokesperson said.

"This action empowers the brave men and women in CBP and ICE to enforce our immigration laws and catch criminal aliens - including murders and rapists - who have illegally come into our country," a DHS spokesperson said. "Criminals will no longer

be able to hide in America's schools and churches to avoid arrest. The Trump Administration will not tie the hands of our brave law enforcement, and instead trusts them to use common sense."

Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, said in a Jan. 21 statement the policy change is one of "many drastic actions from the federal government related

to immigration that deeply affect our local community and raise urgent moral and human concerns."

"The end of the Department of Homeland Security's sensitive locations policy strikes fear into the heart of our community, cynically layering a blanket of anxiety on families when they are worshipping God, seeking healthcare and dropping off and picking up children at school," Bishop Seitz said. "We have also seen the rapid and indiscriminate closure of the border to asylum seekers and the return of the ill-conceived Remain in Mexico policy, violating due process and restricting the few legal options available to the most vulnerable who knock on our door seeking compassion and aid."

Bishop Seitz added that he wanted to assure El Paso's immigrant community that "whatever your faith and wherever you come from, we make your anxieties and fears at this moment our own."

Decades after closure, a Florida Catholic high school reopens in Miami Archdiocese

BY TOM TRACY

KEY WEST, Fla. (OSV News) - A lot has changed in the lower Florida Keys since the 1980s, when declining enrollment led to the closure of the Catholic high school in the oldest and southernmost parish of the Archdiocese of Miami. But a surge in local economic development, tourism jobs and a renewed demand for private and Catholic education in Monroe County culminated Dec. 13 in the dedication Mass and grand opening of a refurbished Basilica High School building and facility at the Basilica of St. Mary Star of the Sea Parish and School in Key West. Miami Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski presided at the dedication Mass and grand opening.

The new facility will allow for full enrollment in 2025 of all four grades under the leadership of principal and president Robert Wright and will serve as an answered prayer for local parents who had few options for private education in Monroe County. The nearest Catholic high school was located in Miami-Dade County, meaning some

families left the Key West area in search of a Catholic education for their children, while others settled for public education.

"For the past 40 years, we have only served students through eighth grade," Angela Wallace, spokesperson for the school, told the Florida Catholic, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Miami.

"However, there has been a significant thirst and demand to reestablish a Catholic high school. Thanks to our incredible community, we began that very endeavor two and a half years ago," she said.



OSV NEWS PHOTO | TOM TRACY
A student gestures ahead of the Dec 13 dedication Mass and grand opening of the new Basilica High School building at St. Mary, Star of the Sea Parish and School Key West, Fla. In the 1980s, the parish school was forced to close its secondary education program due to declining enrollment.

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January 26 - February 1

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EDITORIAL

Don't let Jubilee Year 2025 pass you by

BY OSV EDITORIAL BOARD

On Dec. 24, 2024 Pope Francis ushered in a gift to the Church that comes once every 25 years: a jubilee year, this year themed "Pilgrims of Hope." Jubilee celebrations have been held regularly in the Catholic Church since 1300, but they trace their roots to the Jewish tradition of marking a jubilee year every 50 years.

These years in Jewish history were "intended to be marked as a time to re-establish a proper relationship with God, with one another, and with all of creation, and involved the forgiveness of debts, the return of misappropriated land, and a fallow period for the fields," according to the Holy See.

Though Rome and the Vatican have spent the past year logistically preparing for the influx of pilgrims they will receive in 2025 for the many scheduled Jubilee events – including the highly anticipated canonizations of Blesseds Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati – the Jubilee Year can be celebrated by each of us no matter where we may be. And it should be! Jubilee years are opportunities for great graces for the church and individuals.

Here are three ways Catholics can and should participate.

Read the papal bull

Pope Francis has written a spiritually lovely document for the Holy Year, which encourages Catholics "to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence. The signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God's saving presence, ought to become signs of hope." These signs of hope include a desire for peace, an openness to life, and special attention to prisoners and the sick, migrants, young people, the elderly and the poor. It is a document that summons all Christians right to the heart of Jesus Christ's Gospel, and one that can inspire each of us to live in an intentionally hopeful manner as Jesus' missionary disciples.

Seek out an indulgence

Indulgences – a remission of the temporal punishment a person must endure for his or her sins – have long been a part of jubilee celebrations. The Vatican has outlined clear rules for how Catholics can gain indulgences on its website, and the most typical of these include the following sequence: visiting a pilgrimage site, going to confession, receiving holy Communion and praying for the intentions of the Holy Father. But there are also plenty of other acts that can lead to an indulgence, including carrying out an act of charity or participating in a work of mercy.

Make a pilgrimage

Pilgrimages are a traditional part of jubilee years. Every Catholic ideally should visit his local cathedral – or other locally designated Jubilee pilgrimage site – at some point during the year. Though there are not holy doors in every diocese for this Jubilee as there were during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2015-16, a local pilgrimage offers a fitting opportunity for prayer and reflection. The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington has also been designated as a special place of pilgrimage for the year by the U.S. bishops, so if you find yourself in the nation's capital, be sure to stop by. Finally, many tours to Rome and the Vatican are available for 2025, should circumstances permit. Despite the crowds, there is no better time to visit the Eternal City than during a jubilee year. Visit worcesterdioocese.org/jubilee to learn more.

During this Jubilee Year, make a point not to let it pass you by. As Pope Francis writes, "For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus."

– The members of the OSV Editorial Board include Father Patrick Briscoe, OP; Gretchen R. Crowe; Paulina Guzik; Matthew Kirby; Peter Jesserer Smith and Scott P. Richert.



Pope Francis greets a child at the conclusion of his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Jan. 15.

CNS PHOTO | LOLA GOMEZ

The most beloved of the Father

POPE FRANCIS

Today we will talk about children. Last week we focused on how, in his work, Jesus repeatedly spoke of the importance of protecting, welcoming and loving the little ones.

Yet, even today in the world, hundreds of millions of minors, despite not being of the minimum age to undergo the obligations of adulthood, are forced to work and many of them are exposed to particularly dangerous work; not to mention the boys and girls who are slaves to trafficking for prostitution or pornography, and forced marriages. And this is rather bitter. In our societies, unfortunately, there are many ways in which children are abused and mistreated. Child abuse, of whatever nature, is a despicable act, it is a heinous act. It is not simply a blight on society, no, it is a crime! And it is a gross violation of God's commandments. No child should be abused. Even one case is already too many. It is therefore necessary to awaken our consciences, to practice closeness and genuine solidarity with abused children and young people, and at the same time to build trust and synergies between those who are committed to offering them opportunities and safe places in which to grow up serenely. I know a country in Latin America, where a special fruit grows, very special, which is called arándano [a species of cranberry]. Harvesting the arándano requires tender hands, and they enslave children to harvest it.

Widespread poverty, the shortage of social support tools for families, the increased marginality in recent years along with unemployment and job insecurity are factors that burden the youngest with the highest price to pay. In the metropolises, where the social divide and moral decay "bite," there are children engaged in drug dealing and the most diverse illicit activities. How many of these children have we

seen fall as sacrificial victims! Sometimes tragically they are induced to become "executioners" of their peers, as well as damaging themselves, their dignity and humanity. And yet, when on the street, in the neighborhood of the parish, and these lost lives present themselves before our eyes, we often look the other way. ...

It pains us to recognize the social injustice that drives two children, perhaps living in the same neighborhood or apartment block, to take diametrically opposed paths and destinies because one of them was born into a disadvantaged family. An unacceptable human and social divide: between those who can dream and those who must succumb. But Jesus wants us all free and happy; and if he loves every man and woman as his son and daughter, he loves the little ones with all the tenderness of his heart. That is why he asks us to stop and listen to the suffering of the voiceless, the uneducated. Fighting exploitation, especially child exploitation, is the way to build a better future for the whole of society. Some countries have had the wisdom to put children's rights in writing. Children have rights. Look yourselves on the internet to find out what children's rights are.

And so, we can ask ourselves: what can I do? First of all, we must recognize that, if we want to eradicate child labor, we cannot be complicit in it. And when is this the case? For example, when we purchase products that involve child labor. How can we eat and dress, knowing that behind that food and those garments there are exploited children, who work instead of going to school? Find out where those products come from. Awareness of what we purchase is a first act in

order not to be complicit. Some will say that, as individuals, we cannot do much. True, but each one can be a drop that, together with many other drops, can become a sea. However, institutions, including church institutions, and companies must also be reminded of their responsibility: they can make a difference by shifting their investments to companies that do not use or permit child labor. Many states and international organizations have already enacted laws and directives against child labor, but more can be done. I also urge journalists – there are some journalists here – to do their part: they can help raise awareness of the problem and help find solutions. Do not be afraid, denounce these things.

And I thank all those who do not turn away when they see children forced to become adults too soon. Let us always remember the words of Jesus: "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40). St. Teresa of Calcutta, a joyful worker in the vineyard of the Lord, was a mother to the most disadvantaged and forgotten girls and boys. With the tenderness and attention of her gaze, she can accompany us to see the invisible little ones, the too many slaves of a world that we cannot abandon to its injustices. Because the happiness of the weakest builds the peace of all. And with Mother Theresa, let us give voice to the children:

"I ask for a safe place where I can play.
I ask for a smile from someone who knows how to love.
I ask for the right to be a child, to be the hope of a better world.
I ask to be able to grow as a person.
Can I count on you?"

Joe Biden: When the last hurrah met Catholic lite

Four years ago, this column praised the courage of Archbishop José Gómez of Los Angeles, then-president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), for his Inauguration Day letter to President Joe Biden. In an entirely respectful tone, the archbishop pledged the bishops' support for the president's goal of healing our divided country while raising concerns about the abortion license as "a matter of social justice." Americans, Archbishop Gómez wrote, "cannot ignore the reality that abortion rates are higher among the poor and minorities, and that the procedure is regularly used to eliminate children who would be born with disabilities."

That letter reflected a deep consensus among the American bishops. Yet the Vatican tried to delay its publication, as did several bishops whose batting averages in USCCB elections consistently fall below the Mendoza Line. Some of those bishops then marked the limits of their collegiality by petulantly and publicly deploring Archbishop Gómez's letter.

What are those Gómez critics thinking now?

For President Biden, who threatened to "shove my rosary beads" down the throat of anyone who suggested that his was the party of secularism, led, over the next four years, the most rabidly pro-"choice" administration in American history – with the president as cheerleader-in-chief for an unrestricted, unregulated abortion license, on which he doubled down after the Supreme Court's 2022 Dobbs decision consigned a spurious federal "right" to abortion to constitutional oblivion. That cheerleading took many forms; it was grotesquely summed up by Biden's awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor, to Cecile Richards, longtime chieftain of Planned Parenthood. [Editor's note: Ms. Richards passed away Jan. 20, after this column was written.]

But that was not all.

During the Biden administration, gender ideology – a frontal assault on the biblical idea of the human person and a threat to religious freedom – became embedded in virtually all federal agencies. Thus it was no surprise that the administration promoted "Pride Month" and the LGBTQ+ agenda, even as it became empirically demonstrable that "transitioning" did not improve mental health outcomes over time, and that surgical interventions and puberty blockers with gender-dysphoric youngsters deserved condemnation as child abuse.

And that was still not all.

In pursuing an agenda that could be properly described, not simply as "un-Catholic" but as anti-Catholic, President Biden worked hand in hand with another Catholic of the same generation, Nancy Pelosi: who, like many other senior officials, helped hide the president's cognitive deterioration from the public – until that deception imploded after Biden's zombie-like performance in the June 2024 presidential debate. Pelosi (whose denial that she was involved in the president's post-debate defenestration suggests deficient Eighth Commandment catechesis during the 1950s at St. Leo's parish in Baltimore's Little Italy) and Biden then arranged to hand the Democratic nomination to Kamala Harris: who was, if anything, even more fierce-



THE CATHOLIC DIFFERENCE

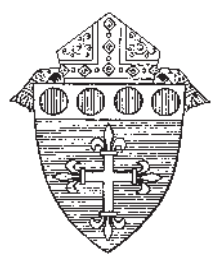
George Weigel

ly devoted to the deconstruction of the biblical idea of the human person via the abortion license and the LGBTQ+ agenda than Biden and the former House speaker.

I would like to feel pity for the now-former president, but that's a steep climb. Those who have watched him for decades have long known that Joe Biden is a not-so-bright combination of glibness, ambition, and gall, with a tenuous grip on the truth of his own curriculum vitae and zero understanding of Catholic ethics as applied to life issues. That an arrogant belief in his own indispensability led him to put the country at risk by denying the reality of his own incapacities makes pity even harder to come by. It should also be said, however, that some responsibility here may have to be borne by Biden's pastors in the nation's capital and in Delaware. Did they make any attempt to appeal to his piety in bringing him to recognize the error of his moral judgments about public policy, or to help him get to grips with his personal circumstances? If not, why not?

As he fades from public view, Joe Biden strikes me as a strange hybrid of pre-conciliar, "Last Hurrah"-style, ethno-tribal Catholicism and post-conciliar Catholic progressivism. He was an accidental president, nominated because his party gagged at the thought of the Vermont Menshevik, Moscow honeymooner Bernie Sanders, as its presidential candidate. Yet this accidental president, who reached the office he craved long after whatever ability he had to meet its demands had dissipated, did grave damage to Catholic public witness in the United States. He did so at a time when liberal Protestant wokery, evangelical Protestant lust for access to power, and secularist aggressions combined to make a mockery of serious moral reflection in the American public square, and the insights of Catholic social doctrine were sorely needed.

As they still are.



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The Good News of salvation

Gospel: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

In the "Introduction to the Gospel of Luke" in *The Word on Fire Bible: The Gospels*, editor Elizabeth Scalia writes "The great strength of Luke's Gospel ... is how accessibly, rationally and convincingly he presents a narrative that must necessarily challenge, even defy reason." Scalia continues, "In comparison with the other Gospel writers, Luke is the one who gives us a distinct, richly detailed account of the ongoing interplay between God and humanity, heaven and earth ..."

As we begin to read Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21, we learn that St. Luke compiled his Gospel "after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence ... so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received." Indeed, St. Luke's words make it clear that in writing his Gospel, he sought to convict people of the truth of the Christian faith. As Elizabeth Scalia observes in the above paragraph, in his efforts St. Luke used accessibility and rationality to this end. In 1:3, St. Luke addresses his Gospel to the "most excellent Theophilus." The footnotes on this verse in *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament* explain that Theophilus is "otherwise unknown in early sources. He may be a distinguished figure or high-ranking official of the Roman government." The footnotes go on to observe that "A similar dedication serves to preface Luke's second volume, the Book of Acts."

In Luke 4:14-21, St. Luke details Jesus' movements after his desert temptation. Luke 4:14 tells us that "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit..." Prior to this, St. Luke notes that Jesus was "filled with the Holy Spirit after his baptism and "was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days ..." It is important to note that in his gospel narrative, St. Luke seeks to show that the Holy Spirit directs the intimate details of Jesus' life, including all his travels, encounters with crowds and individuals and his performing miracles according to the Father's plan.

Sadly, however, though Jesus allowed himself to be led by the Holy Spirit throughout his public ministry, this docility did not prevent him from experiencing suffering. In Luke 4:16-21, Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth to give the people there the Good



SUNDAY'S
GOOD NEWS

Father
Michael N.
Lavallee

News that the kingdom of God was at hand. As Jesus enumerates in 18-19, the kingdom of God, which was breaking into human life through him, would include the poor becoming glad, the captives being set free, the blind seeing and the oppressed being liberated. This Good News which Jesus delivered to the citizens of Nazareth, in the synagogue, embodied the Old Testament principles of jubilee. The footnotes on these verses in *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament* teach us that "as part of Israel's economic legislation, a jubilee was celebrated every 50 years. It signaled the remission of debts, the release of slaves and the return of ancestral property to its original family owners." Yet, as Jesus proclaimed the joy of jubilee to the Nazareth

citizens, coming to them in himself, they refused to accept his message. This rejection is detailed by St. Luke in 4:28-30.

It seems that the Nazareth citizens' familiarity with Jesus prevented them from having faith in him. Luke 4:21 tells us that Jesus was unambiguous with them, stating that "This scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus was making it clear to the citizens of Nazareth that standing before them, preaching good news to them, was the ultimate fulfillment of their heart's desires. It was Jesus who could make them truly glad, free and restored to physical and spiritual health. Unfortunately, they were unable to receive these good things because they could not accept Jesus.

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21 invites us to desire, more ardently, the liberation, restoration and freedom Jesus came to give us. In this new year 2025, may nothing keep us from fully receiving the Good News of our salvation.

Hidden blessings in being lost

About a year and a half ago my friend Ken and I climbed Mount Liberty in Franconia, New Hampshire. The Liberty Spring Trail leads to the ridge, and 3/10 of a mile from there is the peak. The trails are tough. It was as though God had poured down tons of stones that landed everywhere. We had to carefully choose each step. Of course it rained off and on too. We made it to the peak, ate our lunch, and headed back. An hour later we looked at each other and said that we should have reached the cutoff already. We retraced our steps to the Peak and found that we had not left exactly the same way that we had arrived. The 3/10 of a mile trail is apparently a spur trail, not the Ridge Trail as indicated by the Appalachian Mountain Club guidebook and map. The Franconia Ridge Trail, which we had left on, is the only other trail on the map. We were never off of a marked trail.

A couple of phone calls from home told us that my son was monitoring our progress on my laptop's "Find My iPhone" app with my wife. In the dark, with rechargeable flashlights and our phones for light, and falling frequently, we made it back to the car. We had begun hiking at 9 a.m. and came down at 10 p.m. We were always on marked trails.

Our life of faith can be like that. We are on "marked trails" in the Church, doing what we have been taught, following what we have learned, and yet our faith doesn't seem to be cutting it. It isn't really making us feel alive or bringing much purpose to us. It isn't really making a difference in our lives, and many things around us seem to be telling us that we are wasting our time trying to practice our faith. There are a few reasons why this might be so. It could be that we are not very focused on our faith, on our prayer or on our moral values. It could be that our faith is not addressing who and where we are in



HIDDEN
BLESSINGS

Bob
Wondolowski

life now, and where society is now. St. John XXIII recognized that the Church was in this position, and he called the Second Vatican Council, which over the years has brought tremendous growth to the Church in many different ways. It could also be that there is much more to our faith - our lived faith - that we have not yet been introduced to.

The hidden blessing in being lost on marked trails in the Church is that there are people who can monitor our progress, and lovingly lead us to deeper truth, deeper meaning, deeper love of God. They can help us to make more sense out of our lived faith. These people might be parish priests, spiritual directors, confessors, lay people who are deeply engaged in various aspects

of our faith: prayer, worship, evangelization, social justice and the like. They could be our friends, who are living a life of deep faith. These are people who can lead us into smaller communities of faith, where we can share faith on a more intimate level than we typically do before or after a Sunday Mass. They can lead us from the more general moments of our faith to more specific moments of our faith like prayer life, the need to forgive someone, a situation that calls me to greater charity.

CATHOLIC QUIZ

CatholicQuiz of the Week™ Third Sunday in Ordinary Time January 26, 2025

1. In the Book of Nehemiah, what was read to the people on the eve of the dedication of the rebuilt city walls of Jerusalem?

- a. the census of the people
- b. the book of the law
- c. the story of creation

2. In the Book of Nehemiah, who was the priest-scribe who read to the people from the book of the law?

- a. Nehemiah
- b. Melchizedek
- c. Ezra

3. According to the psalmist, "The precepts of the LORD are right, _____ the heart."

- a. saddening
- b. correcting
- c. rejoicing

4. What image does Paul use to explain to the Corinthians Christ's relationship with believers?

- a. the temple
- b. the body
- c. the shepherd

5. Which of the synoptic gospels begins with a prologue?

- a. Matthew
- b. Mark
- c. Luke

6. To whom did Luke address his Gospel?

- a. Timothy
- b. Theophilus
- c. Onesimus

7. Where was the synagogue where Jesus read a passage from Isaiah the prophet about bringing glad tidings to the poor?

- a. Bethlehem
- b. Nazareth
- c. Jerusalem

Answers and References

- 1 • b. the book of the law (Nehemiah 8:3)
- 2 • c. Ezra (Nehemiah 8:8)
- 3 • c. rejoicing (Psalm 19:9)
- 4 • b. the body (1 Corinthians 12:12)
- 5 • c. Luke (Luke 1:1-4)
- 6 • b. Theophilus (Luke 1:3)
- 7 • b. Nazareth (Luke 4:1)

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QUESTION CORNER

Is kneeling to receive Communion allowed?

Q: I have been hearing that the norm in the United States is to receive Communion standing. Does this mean that people who try to kneel for Communion are breaking canon law? (Florida)

A: You are correct that receiving holy Communion while standing is the local norm for the United States, but this doesn't mean that those who choose to kneel for Communion are doing anything wrong or "illegal."

The relevant section of the church's law can be found in the current 2012 edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) - i.e., the official "instruction book" for how Mass is to be celebrated.

In the GIRM, paragraph 160 we read: "The norm established for the Dioceses of the United States of America is that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling."

Read in context, the word "norm" here is not used in the sense of "firm rule that can never be violated." Instead, it's more like the standard default option in the United States. Within certain parameters, specific bishops' conferences or regions are legitimately empowered to decide on such "default options" that align most closely with local needs and cultural sensitivities (meaning, of course, that in other countries standing for holy Communion might not be the norm).

However, what is interesting about the United States' GIRM 160 is that it seems to make a point to respect the desire or "wish" of an individual communicant who prefers to kneel. Although the current American GIRM clearly indicates standing as the normal posture for holy Communion in this country, it does not seek to impose this on those members of the faithful who personally feel more comfortable receiving Communion while kneeling.

I think one reason why there might be some confusion on this issue is that the same paragraph in an earlier edition of the American GIRM from 2003 states that "The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel.

It should also go without saying that holy Communion should always be received in a spirit of humility, and it should never be an occasion to show off or draw attention to ourselves.



QUESTION
CORNER

Jenna Marie
Cooper J.C.L.

Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm."

The 2003 GIRM's mention of the need for "catechesis" for those who opt to kneel rather than stand for Communion has ambiguous implications. That is, it might be interpreted that those who knelt were doing something wrong and were in need of correction. But on the other hand, it could also be read as the church's concern that those who opted to kneel were doing so for appropriate reasons and not merely suffering from scruples. In any case, the current 2012 GIRM is the document actually in force today, so the precise meaning of the 2003 GIRM is somewhat of a moot point.

What does this all mean for us practically in our lives of faith?

First of all, on a very basic level, it is important to be courteous to our fellow communicants, and avoid any-



A pilgrim crosses herself after receiving Communion while kneeling during Holy Qurbana July 20, 2024, at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Eucharistic Congress. Holy Qurbana is the name for Mass in the Catholic Church's Syro-Malabar rite.

OSV NEWS PHOTO | BOB ROLLER

thing that causes a disruption to the smooth and orderly distribution of holy Communion during Mass. It should also go without saying that holy Communion should always be received in a spirit of humility, and it should never be an occasion to show off or draw attention to ourselves.

By the same token, we should avoid forming negative judgements about our brothers and sisters in Christ based on how they receive Communion. Those who choose to receive on their knees are not necessarily doing so because they think they are "more Catholic than the pope;" rather, it is more charitable to assume that those who kneel are expressing a genuine Eucharistic piety in a way straightforwardly permitted by law.

Likewise, those who receive standing are not less devout, less respectful or less in awe of the great gift of the sacrament. They are simply receiving in the ordinary, customary way for their country.

TWENTIES: Activities bring young adults together

FROM PAGE ONE

invited her to come out for food and drinks with them. She's attended every meeting since.

"I think it has gone far above my expectations," Mr. Fuller said.

Miss Prytko, 25, of Millbury graduated from St. Mary's Jr./Sr. High School and Assumption University. She is a paralegal for veteran's benefits in Providence.

Mr. Fuller, 22, of Worcester was a member of the last graduating class of St. Peter-Marian High School in 2020 and he graduated from Northeastern University last May. He's a substitute teacher at Venerini Academy.

Mr. Fuller said God led him to become involved in the Catholic Center at Northeastern and he didn't want to lose the momentum his faith had developed. So, he searched for a ministry to join when he returned home to Worcester but didn't find a group for young adults no longer in college.

Miss Prytko had never before taken part in a religious group. She had wanted to join campus ministry in college, but the pandemic hit. She enjoyed attending a trivia night with other Catholics near Boston last year and decided to try to form a similar group in Worcester.

Mr. Fuller said he didn't know any of the people in the group before they began meeting and Miss Prytko didn't know many of them except her sisters.

"God has really blessed us," Mr. Fuller said, "and it's not all about the numbers. He has blessed us with a community and he's blessed all those people who were clearly looking for community and have now found it."

Miss Prytko said the goal of the group is to form a community of young Cath-

'The group targets those in their 20s ... which is kind of a critical time. When you look at parish ministries, that's one of the groups that there's not a whole lot going on.'

Timothy Messenger

director, diocesan Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry

olic adults, grow further in their faith and hopefully form friendships for a lifetime.

Timothy Messenger, director of the diocesan Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, has helped promote the new young adult ministry.

"I think it's great," Mr. Messenger said. "Young adult ministry is something that's really much needed. The group targets those in their 20s, college age, post-college age, which is kind of a critical time. When you look at parish ministries, that's one of the groups that there's not a whole lot going on. We have a children's ministry, CCD. We have youth ministry. It's kind of a hard age to target, I think. So it's good to have these opportunities."

It's an age when many leave the church after graduating from college. Some eventually return, but some don't.

A couple of young adults who came to Mass with the group mentioned that they hadn't been in awhile.

There is no entry fee to join the group. The only cost is for pizza or bowling.

Miss Prytko said the group may attend Mass together on Ash Wednesday on March 5 and that Father Infante will likely speak to the group at some point.

Mr. Fuller would like his group to succeed to the point where it inspires

young adults in other cities in the diocese to form groups of their own. He'd also like to see his group continue to thrive long after he and Miss Prytko leave.

"I would hope that in 50 years," he said, "I don't care if it's called Bethany or not, I don't care if I'm even remembered, but I would like there to be something for people who are 20-30, people in this age group, to have something where they can meet each other and continue their spiritual journeys as they transition into family life. Then there would hopefully be something for them afterwards."

For more information, visit neworchester.org/bethany or contact bethany-catholicgroup@gmail.com.

JUBILEE: Poem focuses on anniversary of diocese

FROM PAGE ONE

prayer, which students will also recite at school.

Students served as lectors, brought forward the gifts at the offertory and led the music as the St. Joseph School Children's Choir, under the direction of organist Maria Helena Czarnecka-Cieslak.

After Mass students were treated to donuts and juice in the rectory.

The day set a hopeful and joyful tone for the year ahead, inspiring those present to embrace the Jubilee message and carry its lessons into their daily lives.

Together in Faith

*Seventy-five years, a journey divine,
A tapestry woven through God's holy design.
From parishes bustling to quiet pews,
The Diocese thrives with Gospel news.*

*Priests and parishioners, young and old,
Stories of service and faith retold.
Schools and shelters, a helping hand,
Together we answer the Lord's command.*

*In Worcester's streets and beyond we pray,
Building His church in a steadfast way.
With hearts united, we humbly proclaim:
"Forever in Christ, we glorify His name."*

A Year of Hope

*This is the year where hope will rise,
A light that shines in endless skies.
With hearts so young and faith so strong,
We lift our voices in joyful song.*

*Through every trial, every fear,
God's gentle whispers calm and cheer.
He guides our steps, He holds our hands,
And leads us toward His promised lands.*

*We stand as one, both big and small,
And answer to our Savior's call.
To share His love, to walk in grace,
And see His glory face to face.*

*Our hope is built on Christ alone,
Who calls us near and leads us home.
With dreams that bloom and spirits free,
We sing of faith and victory.*

*So let this year of hope inspire,
To lift us up and take us higher.
In God we trust, in Him we stand,*

POEMS COURTESY OF ST. JOSEPH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, WEBSTER

Felician Sister Jeanne Marie Akalski, fourth-grade teacher at St. Joseph Elementary School in Webster, sought input from her class and crafted the two poems above for the 75th anniversary of the Diocese of Worcester and the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope.

OBITUARY

Father Ralph A. DiOrio Jr., 94, the 'healing priest'

Father Ralph Anthony DiOrio Jr., 94, referred to as the "healing priest" and founder and director of the Apostolate of Divine Mercy and Healing, passed away on Monday at Life Care Center of Auburn.

Father DiOrio was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on July 19, 1930. He was one of three children of the late Ralph Anthony DiOrio, Sr., and Ismalia "Mollie" (Pazienza) DiOrio. His closest relatives include his sister, Jude Ann DiOrio, a brother Louis DiOrio and his wife Mary, along with many nieces, nephews, and an abundance of other relatives and friends throughout the world.

At age 15, Father DiOrio entered the minor seminary of the Missionary Fathers of St. Charles in Chicago, Illinois. In 1949 he entered the Immaculate Conception Novitiate in Staten Island, New York, and professed his first religious vows on Oct. 7, 1950.

He prepared for the priesthood at St. Charles Seminary, Staten Island, and Sacred Heart Seminary, Melrose Park, Illinois.

He was ordained a Missionary Father of St. Charles by Bishop Raymond Hillinger on June 1, 1957, in Holy Name Cathedral, Chicago, and served in parishes in Illinois, Ontario, Canada, Ohio and New York.

In 1961, he was given the

job of assistant master of novices at the Immaculate Conception Novitiate, located in Cornwell, New York, where he taught at nearby West Point Army Academy.

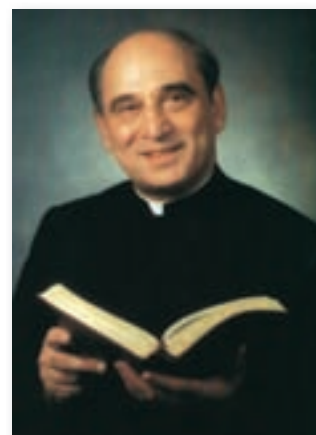
He came to the Diocese of Worcester on March 29, 1968 and served as associate pastor at the parishes of St. Anna, Leominster; Our Lady of Mount Carmel-St. Ann, Worcester; Our Lady of Loreto, Worcester; St. Bernard, Fitchburg, and St. John, Worcester.

In 1972, Father DiOrio received a master's degree in education and psychology from Fitchburg State College, along with supplemental training in social work psychology. He furthered his studies at the University of Ponce in Puerto Rico and at Worcester State University.

After his incardination as a diocesan priest in 1973 he was named associate director of the diocesan Spanish-speaking apostolate.

On Mother's Day 1976, Father DiOrio was blessed with the gift of healing. After a period of discernment, he established and directed the Apostolate of Divine Mercy and Healing, a non-profit charitable organization which continued for over 40 years.

The highlights of Father DiOrio's career are numerous. They include one memorable open-air service in India, where 250,000 were in atten-



Father Ralph A. DiOrio

dance. Other services took him to Mexico, most of North America, Europe, India, the West Indies, the Leper Colony in Molokai, Hawaii and the Pacific. He also drew large crowds to the Worcester Memorial Auditorium, Madison Square Garden, Carnegie Hall and Las Vegas. His philanthropic endeavors helped build a Children's Hospital in Alleppey, India and a chapel for the nuns in St. Lucia. He was fortunate to have had five encounters with St. John Paul II and St. Teresa of Kolkata. Stories about his ministry have appeared in newspapers and magazines, on radio and on national television. He was also an author of 11 books, numerous pamphlets, and had an extensive media ministry and website. Father DiOrio initiated a local Italian

radio program called "The Catholic Hour," which he designed and directed from 1963 to 1967.

In 1980 his biography, *The Man Beneath the Gift*, written with Donald Gropman, was published by William Morrow & Co.

In 1992, Anna Maria College in Paxton, acknowledged him with an honorary doctorate in the humanities. In 1997, he received a bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. He also held Massachusetts teaching certificates in Italian, Latin and Spanish.

Because of his religious and humanitarian work, he received numerous honors and awards.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in Father DiOrio's memory to the Priest Retirement Fund, c/o Diocese of Worcester, 49 Elm Street, Worcester, MA 01609 or the non-profit foundation, the Father Ralph A. DiOrio, Jr. Foundation, Inc., c/o Debra Seaman, 263 South Street, Auburn, MA 01501.

Visitation will be at St. Joseph Church, 10 H. Putnam Road Ext., Charlton from 3-7 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 28 with a vigil service at 7 p.m. A funeral Mass will be celebrated by Bishop McManus on Wednesday, Jan. 29 at 11 a.m. in the church. A private burial will follow. Britton Funeral Homes, Inc. is conducting arrangements.

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CELEBRATE Catholic Schools Week 2025

January 26 - February 1

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LETTERS: 'Why did you want to become Pope Francis?' - Fourth-graders' letters hand delivered to the pontiff

FROM PAGE ONE

While there, he was hoping to have a "personal encounter" with the pope, arranged by Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, delegate for Catechesis of the Vatican Dicastery for Evangelization, which is overseeing Jubilee Year celebrations.

Mr. Dzienna said he met the bishop in person at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis last summer, which prompted the idea of showing the pope Bayard's Jubilee Year resources.

"I know he likes to see things from kids," Mr. Dzienna said of Pope Francis. He asked Superintendent Perda about getting letters from students too.

The superintendent figured Felician Sister Jeanne Marie Akalski, fourth-grade teacher at St. Joseph Elementary School in Webster, would help. On Jan. 10, he contacted the principal, Beth Boudreau.

"The kids were so excited; Sister Jeanne was in tears," Mrs. Boudreau said. "It's so nice to see Sister Jeanne ... recognized for the work she does with her kids."

"It is an incredible honor to have been selected for such a meaningful project," Sister Jeanne told Superintendent Perda in a Jan. 15 email. "The excitement and enthusiasm among my students were truly inspiring as they thoughtfully crafted their letters, knowing they were participating in something extraordinary. This experience has not only enriched their understanding of the Church but also instilled in them a profound sense

of connection to our Holy Father. Your support in making this possible has left a lasting impression on them and on me."

In her letter to the pope, Sister Jeanne said, "In guiding my students to craft their messages, I have witnessed their faith flourish and their hearts grow in love and compassion."

She told The Catholic Free Press that, last November, she had them write questions for Pope Francis, but they had not yet sent letters.

Some students would have considered this just another job, but "these kids looked at it as a joy," said Sister Jeanne, a teacher for about 60 years. "They accept every challenge [and] remind me every day why I chose my vocation. ... I told them it's a once-in-a-lifetime dream come true. ... I said, 'You can write anything you want.'"

She said she read them about the pope's life and told them he has a sense of humor. Some of their letters reflect these things, "but they wrote from their heart too," she said.

"If I had to be honest this felt very lucky to be writing to you out of all grades, all schools and Catholic schools in the Worcester Diocese," admitted Julia Biela in her letter. She said she became an altar server "because I heard a sign from God saying I should." "This Jubilee, I wish to be closer to God," wrote Anna Wozniak. She asked, "What does God look like and how was God before He made the earth? Did He just live in a dark endless atmosphere?"

Ariel Corbin wrote, "I go to a church called St.

'The excitement and enthusiasm among my students were truly inspiring as they thoughtfully crafted their letters, knowing they were participating in something extraordinary.'

Sister Jeanne Marie Akalski
fourth-grade teacher, St. Joseph Elementary School in Webster

George" and asked what church the pope goes to. "Is it true you have about 1000 people that come to Sunday Mass?" queried Michael Kamangu.

Jennifer Yawson told about having cake at her church for her birthday and asked what Rome looks like.

"Why did you want to become Pope Francis?" wondered Sophia Bengtson.

Christopher Bourgeois, like some of his classmates, asked, "How long have you been following Jesus?" He added, "I've been following Jesus for about two and a half years since I moved," (the length of time he's been at St. Joseph's).

Gabby Fernandez informed Pope Francis, "I learned about you when I was in Pre K3." She continued, "Also I go to church every Sunday no matter what." She said her mom and dad do too, and she helps her mom around the house.

"My class is learning about Carlo Acutis, he was a Holy person, just like you," Samuel Brunnett said of the millennial teenager to be canonized in April. Julian Gibbons called

Blessed Carlo his inspiration and Cecilia Coan said "he was always close to God, like me."

"I learned that Carlo was a normal teenager with strong faith, and he performed many miracles with his relics," wrote Gabriella Powaza. "This project helped me understand how Catholicism is not only for adults, but kids too."

75 Years of the Diocese of Worcester DID YOU KNOW?



CFP FILE PHOTO

Consecration of the cathedral

Following a major renovation of St. Paul Cathedral, the church was consecrated on January 26, 1997 for the first time since it was completed in 1875. Bishop Daniel P. Reilly anoints the altar with the holy oil of Chrism.

INAUGURATION: Cardinal appeals for wisdom

FROM PAGE ONE

without God 'our efforts turn to ashes,' we, blessed citizens of this one nation under God, humbled by our claim that 'In God We Trust,' gather indeed this Inauguration Day to pray," he said.

Cardinal Dolan prayed "for our president Donald J. Trump, his family, his advisers, his Cabinet, his aspirations, his vice president; for the Lord's blessings upon Joseph Biden; for our men and women in uniform; for each other, whose hopes are stoked this new year, this inauguration day."

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops did not release an Inauguration Day statement Jan. 20, but did post an Inauguration Day prayer on X. "Assist with your spirit of counsel and fortitude the President of these United States, that his administration may be conducted in righteousness, and be eminently useful to your people over whom he presides," it began. "May he encourage

due respect for virtue and religion. May he execute the laws with justice and mercy. May he seek to restrain crime, vice, and immorality."

The prayer also asked that the "light of your divine wisdom direct the deliberations of Congress" and for all U.S. citizens, "that we be blessed in the knowledge and sanctified in the observance of your holy law."

In a Jan. 20 statement, Louis Brown Jr., executive director of the Christ Medical Foundation, a Catholic health care ministry that works to protect religious freedom for medical professionals and patients, said that with the new administration, the organization had "great hope for the renewal of a culture of life, justice and human dignity for all Americans."

A former political appointee at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the first Trump administration, Brown said that "we offer prayers for President Donald Trump, his admin-


istration and our elected leaders that they be guided by Our Lord, that they may do justice, protect life, protect our country, and respect and defend human freedom."

In his inauguration invocation, Cardinal Dolan referred to King Solomon's appeal "for wisdom as he began his governance."

"God of our fathers, in your wisdom you set man to govern your creatures, to govern in holiness and justice, to render justice with integrity," the cardinal prayed. "Give our leader wisdom, for he is your servant aware of his own weakness and brevity

of life. If wisdom, which comes from you be not with him, he shall be held in no esteem. Send wisdom from heaven that she may be with him, that he may know your designs."


"Please, God bless America, please mend her every flaw," he continued. "You are the God in whom we trust, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen."



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*Sunday Mass (repeat) Monday at 6 p.m.

OUTSIDE WORCESTER DAILY MASS

- Auburn Ch. 191 at 9 a.m.
- Boylston Ch. 191 at 9 a.m.
- Charlton Ch. 191 at 9 a.m.
- Fitchburg (Thursday – Friday) Comcast Ch. 8 and Verizon Ch. 35 at 9:30 a.m.
- Holden Ch. 191 at 9 a.m.
- Leicester Ch. 191 at 9 a.m.
- Millbury Spectrum Ch. 194 and Verizon Ch. 28 at noon.
- Northborough Spectrum Ch. 191 and Verizon Ch. 31 at noon.

- Oxford Ch. 191 at 9 a.m.
- Shrewsbury Ch. 28 and 328 at 9 a.m.
- Spencer Ch. 192 at 9 a.m.
- Sutton (Monday – Thursday) Spectrum Ch. 194 and Verizon Ch. 29 at 9 a.m.
- Upton Access TV Ch. 192 at 9 a.m.
- Webster Access TV Ch. 192 at 9 a.m.
- West Boylston Ch. 191 at 9 a.m.

SUNDAY MASS

- Athol/Orange Ch. 13 and 135 at 10:30 a.m.
- Auburn Ch. 191 at 10 a.m.
- Boylston Ch. 191 at 10:30 a.m.
- Charlton Ch. 191 at 10 a.m.
- Fitchburg Comcast Ch. 8, Verizon Ch. 35 at 10:30 a.m.
- Holden Ch. 191 at 10 a.m.
- Millbury Ch. 194 at 10 a.m.
- Oxford Ch. 191 at 10 a.m.
- Spencer Ch. 192 at 10 a.m.
- Templeton Ch. 8 at 10 a.m.
- Upton Access TV Ch. 192 at 10 a.m.
- Webster Access TV Ch. 192 at 10 a.m.
- West Boylston Ch. 191 at 10 a.m.

CATHOLIC RADIO PROGRAMMING

- 5:45 a.m., Morning prayer, WTAG, 580 AM and 94.9 FM
- Eternal Life Radio, WQPH 89.3 FM Fitchburg
- EWTN.com/radio
- EWTN Global Catholic Radio (24-hour Livestream)

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Around the Diocese

The Catholic Free Press welcomes information on events from parish and diocesan groups. Items should be received two weeks prior to event. Mail to: Calendar, The CFP, 49 Elm St., Worcester, MA 01609, email to: calendar@catholicfreepress.org or fax: 508-756-8315.



EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION

Around the Diocese

VISIT CATHOLICFREEPRESS.ORG/THE-EUCCHARIST

FOR A COMPLETE LISTING OF EVENTS VISIT WORCESTERDIOCESE.ORG/EVENTS

THIS WEEK —
SAT., JAN 25 —
FRI., JAN. 31

Robert Barron's video series, "The Mass." Walk through the Liturgy with Bishop Barron 6:30-8 p.m., **Wednesdays**, Jan. 29; Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26; March 12, and 19; at St. Mary's campus, 17 Waterville St., North Grafton. Optional \$15 fee to purchase study guide. To register contact Darlene at dfarland@ourladyofhopegraffton.org.

BEREAVEMENT MINISTRY-WORCESTER: "At the Foot of the Cross" Bereavement Ministry meets the last **Wednesday** of the month (Jan. 29) at 6:30 p.m. in Our Lady of Loreto Parish Center, 37 Massasoit Rd.

YOUNG ADULT BIBLE STUDY-UXBRIDGE: The St. Mary and Divine Mercy Young Adult Group will meet 7-8:30 p.m., **Thursdays** for Bible study in the Good Shepherd parish center, 77 Mendon St. All young adults, ages 18-29, are welcome! Contact Jared Guertin at 508-244-7467.

DIVINE MERCY CENACLE-WESTBOROUGH: The St. Luke the Evangelist Divine Mercy Cenacle groups meet **Thursdays** in the parish center behind the

church, 70 West Main St. To join or for information contact Andrea Malo at andreamalo@gmail.com.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS NIGHT/ FAITH & FAMILY NIGHT: Join the Catholic Schools at the Worcester Railers for Catholic Schools Night and Faith & Family Night **Friday**, Jan. 31, for a 7:05 p.m. puck drop. Worcester Railers vs. Adirondack Thunder at the DCU Center, 50 Foster St., Worcester. Tickets start at

\$15, and all tickets come with a Railers hat. Contact Dan Guertin at DanG@railershq.com or 508-365-1765. Doors open at 6 p.m. All sales are final, no refunds or exchanges. Visit fevo-enterprise.com/event/CatholicSchools371.

month of **March** with 31 chances to win \$100, \$50 or a gift card worth \$50. Calendars can be purchased by calling Carolyn Hicks at 508-865-3263.

PORK ROAST DINNER-NORTHBRIDGE: St. Peter Parish will host a pork roast dinner 5:30 p.m., **Saturday, Feb. 8** in the parish hall, 39 Church Ave. Tickets are \$17/ dinner and include salad and dessert. To go meals will be available for pick up around 5 p.m. and all

orders must be purchased in advance by calling the parish office at 508-234-2156 or email parishoffice@stpeterrockdale.org.

DIOCESAN SCOUT SUNDAY MASS-WORCESTER: Blessed Sacrament Church, 551 Pleasant St., will host the Worcester Diocese Scout Sunday Mass at 10 a.m., **Feb. 9**, followed by refreshments in the parish hall. There will be free limited edition Scout patches available.

UPCOMING

CALENDAR RAFFLE FUNDRAISER: The Guild of Our Lady of Providence is sponsoring a calendar raffle. \$10 for the



CATHOLIC SCHOOL OPEN HOUSES

2 p.m., **Sunday**, Jan. 26, to tour and meet staff.

OPEN HOUSE-NORTHBOROUGH: St. Bernadette School (PreK-8), 266 Main St., will hold its Catholic Schools Week open house 1-3 p.m., **Sunday**, Jan. 26, to tour and meet staff. Contact Michele Walsh at admissions@stb-school.org or 508-351-9905 for info or if you can't make open house.

OPEN HOUSE-SHREWSBURY: St. Mary School (PreK-8), 16 Summer St., will hold its Catholic Schools Week open house 1-3 p.m., **Sunday**, Jan. 26, to tour and meet staff. Register at school.stmarysparish.org or contact admissions@stmarysparish.org.

OPEN HOUSE-UXBRIDGE: Our Lady of the Valley Regional School (PreK-8), 75 Mendon St., will hold its Catholic Schools Week open house 12-2 p.m., **Sunday**, Jan. 26, to tour and meet staff. Visit ourladyofthevalleyregional.com.

OPEN HOUSE-WORCESTER: Our Lady of the Angels School (PreK-8), 1220 Main St., will hold its Catholic Schools Week open house 11:30

a.m.-1 p.m., **Sunday**, Jan. 26, to tour and meet staff. Visit ourladyoftheangels.us.

OPEN HOUSE-WORCESTER: St. Peter Central Catholic School (PreK-8), 865 Main St., will hold its open house, 1-3 p.m., **Sunday**, Jan. 26. St. Peter's has openings in grades PreK-8. Contact Mary Beth Soucy at marybeth.soucy@stpetercc.com or 508-791-6496. Visit stpetercentralcatholic.com.

OPEN HOUSE-GILBERTVILLE: St. Aloysius Catholic School will hold an open house on **Tuesday**, Jan. 28 from 3:30- 5:30 p.m. Tours and shadow days are available for students presently in Kindergarten through Grade 7. Call the school at 413-477-126. More information can be found at staloyuscs.com.

OPEN HOUSE-WORCESTER: St. Paul Diocesan Jr/Sr HS, 144 Granite St., will hold its open house, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., **Saturday, Feb. 1**. Contact admissions@saintpaulknights.org or 508-852-5555. Visit saintpaulknights.org.

OPEN HOUSE-GARDNER: Holy Family Academy (PreK-8), 99 Nichols St., will hold its Catholic Schools

Week open house 5-7 p.m., **Wednesday, Feb. 5**, to tour and meet staff. Contact admissions@holyfamilyacademy.org or 978-632-8656.

INFO SESSION-WORCESTER: Notre Dame Academy (all-girls school, 7-12), 425 Salisbury St., will hold its admissions info session for prospective students 6-6:45 p.m., **Thursday, March 6**. To register, visit bit.ly/4a9SzPD.

APPLY NOW-WORCESTER: Venerini Academy (PreK-8), 27 Edward St., is accepting applications for 2025-26. Contact 508-753-3210. Visit veneriniacademy.com.

TOUR & APPLY-WEBSTER: All Saints Academy (PreK-8), 48 Negus St., is scheduling tours and taking applications for admission. Contact Ellen Tagg, assistant head of school, at admissions@allsaintswebster.org or call 508-943-0257.

APPLY NOW-WEBSTER: St. Joseph School (PreK-8), 47 Whitcomb St., is accepting applications for 2025-26. Contact info@sjs-webster.com or 508-943-0378. Visit sjs-webster.com.



CELEBRATE Catholic Schools Week 2025

January 26 - February 1

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