

America

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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DAILY SCRIPTURE
REFLECTIONS

From America's editors and staff
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The Courage to Reject War

I remember seeing the “shock and awe” bombing of Baghdad unfold in the spring of 2003, watching CNN with officemates on the lunchroom TV. I was working in Boston as a software engineer, still a year and a half away from entering the Jesuit novitiate.

As I remember it, the tone of media coverage was excited, as we watched weapons rain down on the Iraqi capital. There had been a long rhetorical build-up to the second Gulf War, including a dramatic presentation made by Colin Powell, then the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the United Nations Security Council, laying out details of an Iraqi weapons program that turned out to have been based on unreliable intelligence reports. Mr. Powell later said he regretted that the speech “will always be a part of my record.”

I also remember excitement about the means of war. “Smart bombs” and GPS-guided munitions were relatively new then, and there was a sense of confidence that American technological superiority would make victory possible with minimal collateral damage. Whether or not the more sophisticated weaponry limited some of the damage initially inflicted on the Iraqi people, the far more lasting damage of the war turned out to be the destruction of stability in Iraq, leading to almost two decades of U.S. military presence in that country and nearly 200,000 Iraqi civilian casualties, as well as contributing to the rise of ISIS and the civil war in Syria.

Looking back on those memories now, I regret that I joined in that excitement, both on the technological front and in terms of accepting the justification for the war. It would be one thing if my acceptance had been primarily political or even due to a lack of attention to the arguments

about the grounds for war—but I knew there were significant moral questions and that the church was speaking out against the rush to war.

Addressing the Vatican diplomatic corps in January 2003, just months before the war, St. John Paul II specifically addressed “the threat of a war which could strike the people of Iraq” and said clearly, “War is never just another means that one can choose to employ for settling differences between nations.” He went on to remind the assembled diplomats that under international law and the U.N. charter, war could not be chosen “except as the very last option and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations.”

There were other Catholic thinkers who made a case for attacking Iraq, twisting themselves into pretzels to explain how Iraq’s alleged weapons program constituted aggression and an imminent threat that, they argued, could morally justify a pre-emptive war according to Catholic just war theory. Confronted with the Vatican’s clear rejection of that position, they responded that the evaluation of particular threats and questions of necessity and proportionality in use of military force were judgments beyond the competence of religious leaders and could be made only by political authorities.

I was aware of both sides of these arguments in 2003, and I am ashamed to say that at the time, I accepted that tortured explanation, one that essentially allowed me to respond to the clear teaching of the Holy Father by saying to myself, “Well, of course the pope should call for peace; but when push comes to shove on geopolitical questions, he needs to stay in his lane.”

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that the pope was far more clear-eyed than the politicians who opted for war in Iraq and the Catholic thinkers who helped provide the war’s putative justification. If I had been reading **America** at the time, which I sadly was not, I would have been familiar with the clear explanation by Drew Christiansen, S.J., in the March 24, 2003, issue of the magazine of how the moral case for what was really a preventive (rather than pre-emptive) war and rejection of the pope’s caution was flawed both in principle and in its particular application to Iraq.

Father Christiansen would later serve as editor in chief of **America** from 2005 to 2012, and passed away in 2022. His picture hangs on the wall above my desk alongside the other former editors in chief, and I wish we could benefit from his wisdom regarding the war in Iran that the United States and Israel have just begun with far less consideration, prudence and moral caution than was applied even in the flawed case for the 2003 war in Iraq.

The moral clarity that we learned from Father Christiansen’s example is, I hope, reflected in the editorial **America** ran online on Monday, March 2, arguing that the administration’s apparent reasoning for the war “not only fails to meet the criteria for military action in any formulation of just war theory or international law, it also fails the test of common sense.” As the war in Iran widens and as we pray for its swift conclusion, may we also recognize that it requires more courage to return to peace even when it is uncertain and unstable than it does to cling to the false security of a bad argument for going to war.

Sam Sawyer, S.J.



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St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, Australia, on Feb. 22. The Archdiocese of Sydney said 338 catechumens are preparing to be baptized at the Easter Vigil and an additional 119 candidates are getting ready "to be welcomed into full communion."

OSV News photo/Giovanni Portelli, The Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney

Cover: Libreria Acqua Alta in Venice
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Lessons learned as a Catholic journalist in Rome

The moral resistance to Trump's politics of rage

In the Our Take of our March issue, “Courageous Voices in the Cacophony,” **America**’s editors highlighted those speaking out against the abuses of the second Trump administration, including its mass deportation campaign and its apparent abandonment of pro-life policies. From nonviolent protestors in Minneapolis to Catholic cardinals, these “beacons of hope,” our editors wrote, are providing a moral example of “courage and faith” and speaking “truth to power.” Our readers had much to say in response.

I honor the bravery and the honesty of all who protest, who speak out, including the editorial staff of **America** magazine. Now we must be patient. It will take much to turn this big ship around.

Carol McShane

The fight against Trump took place in 2024; the opposition lost resoundingly. We must respect the will of the people (democracy) and await the next presidential election. That’s the way things work in our republic.

Bobby C.

One of the lasting strengths of my Jesuit education was the use of deductive reasoning: namely, to gather all pertinent facts in a situation and come to a balanced conclusion. Unfortunately, I find your editorial lacking any review of all sides of the complicated immigration policy and legislation facing our country. Is it possible that of the millions of immigrants who entered the United States in the early 2020s, just a few may have committed crimes and warrant proper arrest?

James Beale

The bishops have created confusion by their hairsplitting. They have also fomented complacency among the comfortable and the timid by their inaction in condemning government tactics. Only a handful of bishops have spoken out. We need all 280 or so active bishops to speak out with one clear voice, in the media and from the pulpit. None that I can tell are denying Communion to Catholic members of the administration. As we said in San Francisco during the height of AIDS, “silence = death.” Still true.

Robert A. Boguski

Mr. Trump was the most forthright candidate that ever ran for president. He spoke of mass deportations all of the time. To be surprised by the implementation of a policy position he spoke about at length and at every single campaign stop is disingenuous.

A man at my parish was one of the millions deported by President Obama. This man went to work one morning and did not come home. A couple of days later, he called his wife from El Salvador (his native country). Compassionate parishioners donated money for her trip to El Salvador. No one protested. No activists cared.

The fact is, the protestors don’t want anyone deported—including the worst of the worst criminals. Americans don’t accept this policy position. No one is against peaceful protests. We can all do better, but everyone should be in the United States legally.

Carlos M.

Speaking about the plight of the immigrant and at once scrupulously explaining the “right to protect the border” without clear condemnation of the evil tactics being employed creates confusion. The church must speak with absolute clarity. The *tactics* being employed are evil. Our public statements need to ruffle feathers.

Karl Schilken

The federal government’s approach is out of all proportion to the scope of the problem of a small percentage of undocumented immigrants that have committed crimes. It is proving to be an indecent and at times violent intrusion into the lives of U.S. citizens and many others with legal status.

It is time for everyone troubled by the current administration’s outrages to express themselves in a continuing visible peaceful method. The orange whistles worn by those in Minneapolis should become our universal protest symbol. It is neither Republican red nor Democratic blue. Clearly nonviolent, it cannot be mistaken for a weapon. Wear it visibly. Let our politicians know your position.

Joseph Dunn

NEW EPISODES WEEKLY

The Spiritual Life

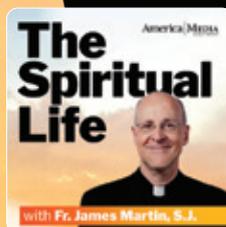
with **Fr. James Martin, S.J.**

What is prayer and how can we pray? How do I know if God is responding to my prayers? What does it mean to live a spiritual life?

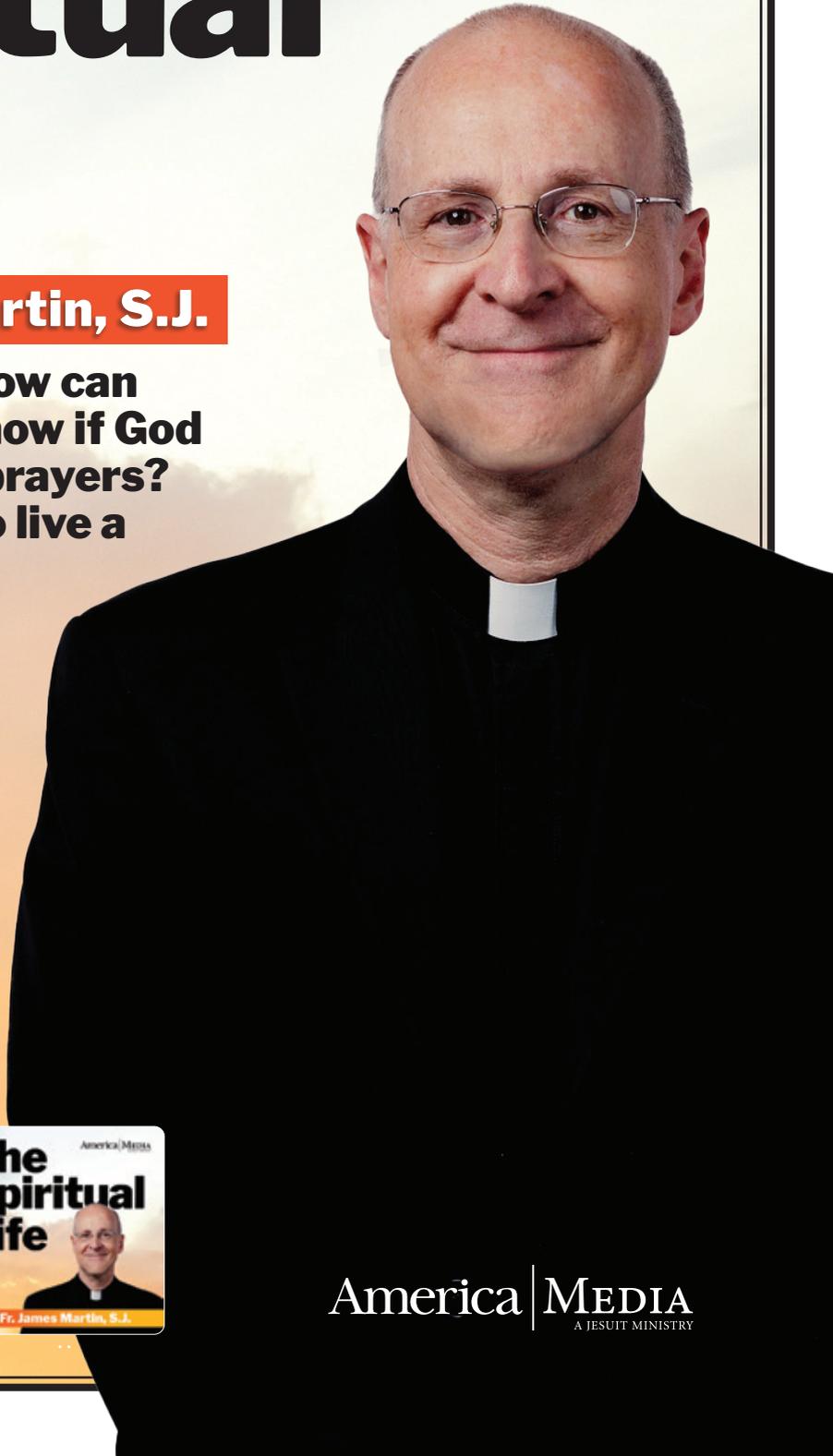
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Ignoring the Climate Crisis Endangers Us All

In the first months of the second Trump administration, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, Lee Zeldin, announced a series of deregulatory efforts, saying, “We are driving a dagger straight into the heart of the climate change religion.” A little less than a year later, the E.P.A. revoked its 2009 endangerment finding, which had provided the legal basis for federal regulation of greenhouse gas emissions by recognizing that they “threaten the public health and welfare of current and future generations.”

While Mr. Zeldin’s description of concern about climate change as a “religion” was sarcastic, there is in fact a religious necessity to care about climate change, both out of a duty of care for creation and also because of its manifest impacts on human welfare. Pope Francis recognized the societal dimension of this responsibility in his encyclical “*Laudato Si’*,” writing that “If everything is related, then the health of a society’s institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life” (No. 142).

The current administration has rejected not only the overwhelming scientific consensus about the severity of climate change, but also the idea that the government has a role to play in addressing it. Mr. Trump has dismantled billions of dollars of investment in clean energy and decades of international cooperation on emissions standards. This all points to the same conclusion: The administration has chosen corporate profit and short-term savings over the long-term health and well-being of the American people.

Its approach cannot be justified even on economic grounds, however,

as the growing costs of climate change will only be exacerbated by unmitigated carbon emissions, despite the E.P.A.’s current claims to the contrary.

There is a lasting economic and scientific consensus that climate change already has an enormous global cost that even conservative estimates place at over \$1 trillion annually by 2050. While some negative impact is now unavoidable, scaling back regulation and investment will aggravate the rise in average global temperatures in the decades to come. The economic boon sought through deregulation is almost certain to be dwarfed by these long-term consequences that society is cruelly passing on to future generations.

The administration’s posture on energy is not just shortsighted but also anachronistic. Obsessions with oil reserves (see Mr. Trump’s insistence that access to Venezuelan oil is a massive strategic victory) rely on an understanding of energy and geopolitics that is stuck in the 20th century. The nation needs oil and natural gas for specific applications as part of a broader constellation of renewable energy sources, but the United States risks being left in the shadow of nations like China that have been developing and scaling sustainable energy technology. Even petrostates like Saudi Arabia are aware of the waning opportunity for economic growth derived from fossil fuels and are working to diversify their economies.

The moral catastrophe of reversal on climate policy is even more significant than its strategic and economic shortsightedness. In “*Laudato Si’*,” Pope Francis addressed “every person living on the planet,” urging us to “care for our common home” and embrace integral ecology—a concept

that asserts that human well-being and material nature are inseparable. He wrote, “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” (No. 139).

Francis was acutely aware that those who will suffer the most from ecological collapse are the poorest and most vulnerable. An exodus of climate refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and elsewhere is aggravating a global migration crisis.

Pope Leo XIV has consistently emphasized the importance of care for creation in the first year of his papacy, in continuity with Francis. In October, he said: “We cannot love God, whom we cannot see, while despising his creatures. Nor can we call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ without participating in his outlook on creation and his care for all that is fragile and wounded.”

So what is to be done? On a personal level, we are called to resist overconsumption and an individualistic culture that seeks to convince us to pass the problem on to the next person, to throw up our hands and say: “Well, my participation is meaningless compared to a polluting corporation, much less a nation, so I might as well give up. Not my problem.” The Gospel calls us to be witnesses against this selfish and defeatist line of thinking, both in our individual actions and in our advocacy with political leaders.

With respect to public policy, many of the Trump administration’s actions are still being litigated in the courts, but climate advocates should be cautious of sole reliance on the judicial system: The rollback on climate action is part of a broader transformation in the structure of government

that is, among other things, benefiting climate skeptics. Prior to recent court decisions (such as *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, *Ohio v. E.P.A.* and *West Virginia v. E.P.A.*), civil servants had more leeway to make regulatory determinations on the basis of expert scientific and economic consensus. This is no longer the case under the new formulations of executive branch authority (more tethered to the will of the president) and legislative intent (requiring more explicit delegations of authority) ushered in by the Supreme Court.

The administration's revocation of the endangerment finding is based on a self-interested interpretation of the law, a dishonest reading of the science and an imprudent assessment of the risks. But those very weaknesses also highlight the need for updates to the Clean Air Act, under which the endangerment finding was issued. Last amended in 1990, it can no longer meet the moment. Congress should debate and pass new legislation that more explicitly addresses the need for the government to respond to the climate crisis.

As Earth Day arrives on April 22, the fact that legislative action to protect the earth seems almost impossible to imagine should only reinforce the need for renewed advocacy for care for our common home. The science, the church's magisterium and the divine call to care for creation are aligned and clear.

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As the son of a police officer, I can say to ICE agents: You do not have to continue.

During one of my many career crises, my mom surprised me by telling me that if I did not like what I was doing, I didn't have to do it.

This stunned me. I considered my parents and their peers as being from a generation that sucked it up, did what they had to do, ground it out and lived out other clichés that add up to engaging in drudgery (and sometimes morally compromising drudgery) to better the circumstances of yourself and your family.

I felt certain that I had misheard her, that I should tough it out the way she and my father had. "Your father wouldn't stay in a job he hated," she responded.

I told her that it was easy for him. He *loved* being a cop.

"Not always," she responded.

That's when she opened up with the story I did not know, and I thought I knew *all* the stories of my father's highly decorated career in the new New York City Police Department.

Early in my father's tenure, he was assigned to the vice squad. He was big and athletic and had a booming baritone, and when he said "Freeze!", you froze—good assets to have in raids.

The vice squad is often considered a division of the police force that goes after victimless crimes, but my father didn't see it that way. They broke up gambling rings, and he knew how illegal gambling ruined people's lives, wrecked families and led to brutality when enforcers were sent out to collect debts. They broke up prostitution rings, and he didn't see those as victimless at all. The sex workers were not there as consenting adults, he thought, but coerced—often as minors—into dead-end lives of exploitation and violence.

But there was a third target of the vice squad. They were also sent to raid

gay bars and shut them down.

My father was a young, mid-century Catholic man who did not question the church teaching that homosexuality was wrong. At the same time, he didn't see any victims when men chose to socialize where and with whom they chose. But he was young and trained in the military, and he obediently did his duty.

During one such raid, as he was making an arrest, he looked up at the man on the next stool and saw the desolate face of a famous singer. A *very* famous singer at the time. It was probably this man's records he put on when he was wooing my mother. He looked to his fellow officer, moving to arrest the mortified crooner, and waved him away. Such an arrest would end up on front pages across the country and lead to his great humiliation, destroying his career and leading to who knows what kind of repercussions.

Simply because of where the guy chose to drink.

My father went home that night and described the incident to my mother. What stuck with him was not the sad face of the singer they had spared but the faces of the men they *had* arrested. They would generally not be prosecuted aggressively, but these arrests could end up costing them their families, their jobs and their reputations. But these men had no hit songs to save them—and the double standard he had applied did not sit well with my father. The compassion and relatability he felt for the singer could not let him unsee the humanity of these other men, and the wrongness of what he was doing.

Suddenly, he could see that there were victims, and he was not the one protecting them.

My mom surprised him, as she surprised me decades later, telling

him he didn't have to keep doing it if he didn't want to. Despite the two of them planning to start a family, and despite the big career opportunities that could come from such a plum assignment early in an officer's career, he didn't have to keep doing a job that felt wrong to him. They would find another way forward.

Ironically, the same church that taught them that the acts of homosexuals were wrong also helped form in him a conscience that led him to turn away from being their persecutor.

After the Vice Squad

He asked for his transfer the next day. He was sent to report for duty at One Police Plaza, N.Y.P.D. headquarters. As police assignments go, this was Baltic Avenue. He worked the mailroom with veteran cops who were described as "broken toys"—men with behavioral problems and drinking issues, bragging about the big arrests they had made while seemingly oblivious to the reality that they had been removed from the street because they were a danger to themselves and others.

Dad considered leaving the department entirely, but this posting proved to be a brief interlude before another high-profile assignment—the Tactical Patrol Force. The T.P.F. was a spit-and-polish unit of the sturdiest young officers, sent in to quell riots and make the big, sweeping organized-crime arrests that put the mayor and commissioner on the front pages.

He was leading this unit in arrests, and his career was off to the races again, when his path took another turn after another principled stand. He asked for the night off on the evening his first child was born, and when this reasonable request, well within his rights, was denied, he took

Federal immigration officers walk away after knocking on a door on Jan. 26 in St. Paul, Minn.



the night off anyway. Saying no to the big time twice is twice too many times, and the next day, he was shipped out to Brooklyn to report for precinct duty.

But being exiled to the outer boroughs, doing anonymous, “flatfoot” work over the next two decades—first as a patrolman, then as a detective—turned out to be the work he *loved*. It was what he had signed up for: protecting and serving people trying to make something of their lives and their neighborhoods.

He never told us that he led the borough in arrests for several years running. He never told us about the decorations he received. But he told us of the family he made among his fellow patrolmen and detectives, and the good people they watched over.

There was a great irony along the way. His former colleagues on the vice squad were disgraced in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots in 1969, as many

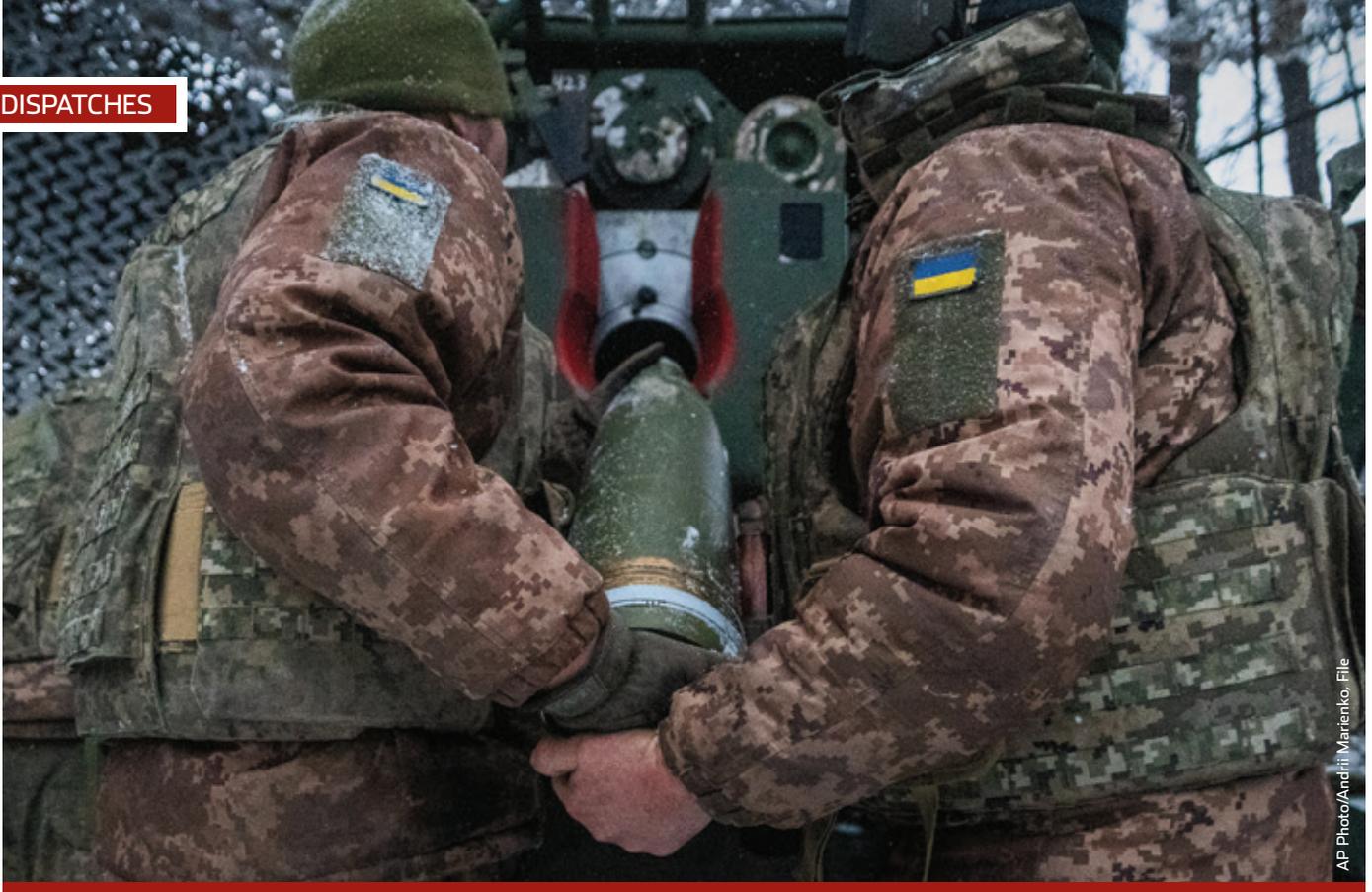
of them were discovered to be shaking down gay bars for bribes. The Tactical Patrol Force, once the department’s shining elite, was left to operate with impunity for too long and got their comeuppance when the Knapp Commission in the early 1970s revealed the unit to be rife with corruption. While my father’s career ended in applause at a community banquet, many of his former colleagues saw theirs end in humiliation and ignominy.

I think about my father as I think about Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and other immigration enforcement officers across this country. I can imagine that ICE agents are, for the most part, trying to do a job as honorably as they know how when they know their mission has been compromised. But finding themselves forced to operate in situations beyond the scope of their training, their orders call on them to undertake operations

that destroy families, violate American principles, violate principles of human decency and perhaps turn them into people they do not recognize, as they take the heat for the administration’s cravenly political agenda. When they remove their masks and look at themselves in the mirror, I imagine them asking questions of themselves that my father once asked.

I think of him and of them, and I want to say: You do not have to continue. There is another way forward for you. It may be inside or outside law enforcement, but please know there is another way. And if my father’s story is any indicator, it is almost certainly a better way.

Edward Hoyt is a freelance writer living in Baltimore. He has written for *Catholic Relief Services*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Catholic Review* and *The Bark* magazine.



AP Photo/Andrii Marienko, File

After four years of war, Ukraine and its people soldier on

By Maggie Phillips

Archbishop Borys Gudziak, the head of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, has visited Ukraine 15 times since 2022. For the archbishop, the son of Ukrainian immigrants, each visit is an act of solidarity with the people of Ukraine amid an ongoing war that began when Russia invaded that country on Feb. 24, 2022. His most recent visit took place in January, ahead of the fourth anniversary of the start of the war.

“In January 2022, when it became clear that a full-scale invasion was imminent, our church in the United States established a three-point plan of response,” he said in a statement to **America**. “To pray, to inform and advocate, and to organize assistance and partnerships with the church and the people in Ukraine.”

Four years into the war, when Russian attacks on the power grid in the middle of a brutal winter have caused suffering for millions, the needs are as urgent as ever. For Ukrainian refugees in the United States, *uncertainty* is the word of the day—over the fate of their friends and fam-

ily back in Ukraine and over their future in their adopted home.

The Archeparchy of Philadelphia performs its humanitarian work in concert with the three other eparchies of the U.S. Ukrainian Catholic Metropolia that it oversees. Formally called the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, it falls under papal jurisdiction but practices a liturgical rite in the Byzantine tradition.

Since the onset of the war, the American eparchies have organized collections to assist people in Ukraine and served as humanitarian hubs for local refugee communities in the United States. The Archeparchy of Philadelphia itself sponsors three local initiatives: a food pantry, a social outreach ministry for refugees and the Healing of Wounds of the War in Ukraine Fund.

Roman Oliynik is the parish priest at Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church in Melrose Park, Pa. Father Oliynik serves as the chief executive officer for the Healing of the Wounds of the War in Ukraine Fund, which the four U.S. Ukrainian eparchies launched in 2024 to address the physical, mental and spiritual healing of those affected by the war.

The fund has distributed \$2.3 million to 93 projects since its launch. Projects in Ukraine include counseling for those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and housing and food for internally displaced persons. In the United States, the fund partners with the nonprofit U.S.

Ambulances to Ukraine, helping the organization cover the expense of shipping the ambulances it collects from U.S. hospitals and donors around the country to Ukraine.

Father Oliynik speaks with obvious pride and affection about one project in particular, a three-week youth summer camp in the Carpathian mountains. Located in western Ukraine, it is among the safest regions in the country.

In the hotly contested city of Zaporizhzhia, Father Oliynik said, many young people have been doing remote learning since the conflict began, meeting in person with teachers only once a month before returning to their apartments amid constant shelling outside.

“There’s no interaction,” he said. The need for this summer escape and a chance to socialize normally has grown acute. In the security and serenity of the mountains, with mental health professionals, counselors and clergy on site, “it’s a safe space,” Father Oliynik said. “Three weeks of safety with no sirens.”

But as the war drags on, he says, donor enthusiasm and giving are flagging. The Healing of the Wounds of the War in Ukraine Fund raised just over \$800,000 in 2025, down from over \$2 million in 2024. “We have to really convince people why and what are the reasons [to give],” he said. “We still have to continue supporting Ukraine.”

For Catholics in Ukraine, there is a particular need for support.

Ukrainian Erasure

Only around 10 percent of Ukraine is Catholic, and according to Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, Russian troops have destroyed or damaged over 600 churches of various denominations in the country.

Archbishop Shevchuk told National Catholic Register in January that after a Russian campaign of arrest, deportation and torture, no Catholic priests remain in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

“The Ukrainian Catholic Church is wiped out every time there is Russian aggression,” Archbishop Gudziak said in his statement to **America**. “Current Russian government policy is explicit and repeatedly articulated: the annihilation of the Ukrainian state and nation, the negation of its culture and language, and the suppression of its religious, ethnic, social and political identity.”

Ukrainians recognize the pattern of erasure. Ukrainian cities like Kharkiv are among the sites from which Russian forces have abducted thousands of Ukrainian children for forced re-education and militarization. “Kharkiv was so

pro-Russian in the past—10, 15 years ago,” Father Oliynik said. Now, he said, “They are not going back to the Soviets.”

Refugee Status

Some 260,000 Ukrainian war refugees came to the United States under a Biden administration program in 2022, Uniting for Ukraine, which allowed them to live and work in the United States for an initial two-year period. Last year, after an executive order from President Trump halted the program, it was unclear whether beneficiaries would be able to reapply for an additional two years. The program resumed in August 2025, although U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is no longer accepting new applicants, and as of October, reapplicants must pay a fee of \$1,000.

Father Oliynik has put the word out at his parish, where he estimates some 40 members are refugees from Ukraine—mostly families with young children—that there is a need for volunteers to help translate documents for parishioners renewing their parole.

Teodora Kopyn, O.S.B.M., manages the archeparchy’s food pantry in Philadelphia, which she said serves a substantial clientele of Ukrainian refugees. “They cannot work anymore,” Sister Kopyn said.

She is reluctant to talk about their reactions to the impact of U.S. foreign policy or domestic politics on themselves or their families. Although she said she knows they are worried for their families back in Ukraine and about their own situations in the United States, Sister Kopyn said she tries to give Ukrainian refugees space so they can feel comfortable.

One thing she will say: “Everyone is looking forward to peace.”

Marta Rubel oversees the Philadelphia archeparchy’s social outreach efforts to refugees. Ms. Rubel is the daughter of Ukrainian refugees who fled the Soviet Union after World War II, and she remembers eerie similarities between the scenes from 2022 and stories from her late parents. “All of a sudden, everything that my mother would tell us materialized on a TV screen,” she said.

She describes the initial reaction among the Ukrainian refugee community to last year’s suspension of Uniting for Ukraine as “sheer panic.” Although U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has resumed processing renewal applications, refugees whose reapplication process stalled last year when the program was suspended may still be awaiting renewal of their humanitarian parole status.

While they are still in the country legally while their applications are pending, it may not appear that way to an

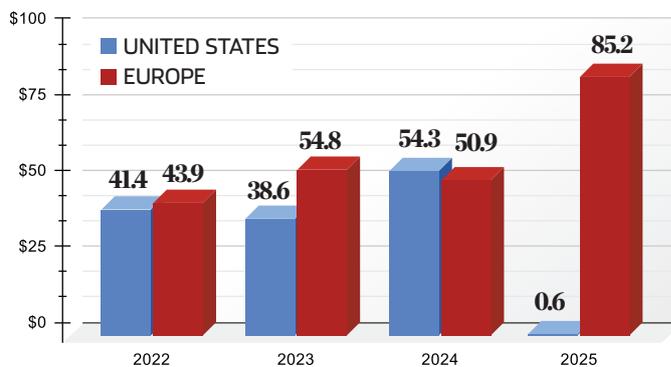
With no new support from Congress or the Trump administration, Ukraine relies on Europe

According to an analysis by the Council on Foreign Relations, since President Donald J. Trump's return to the White House in January 2025, there has been no legislation or other authorizations of significant new aid to Ukraine, though "a substantial amount of the aid appropriated under the Biden administration is still in the pipeline, and deliveries of aid packages have continued." Without new military or humanitarian aid initiatives from Congress, U.S. deliveries of weaponry and ammunition will begin to dwindle in early 2027 and sharply diminish in 2028, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Despite the suspension of American support, the total volume of aid allocated to Ukraine remained relatively stable in 2025 because of significantly expanded support from Europe, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, a German research center. Its researchers report that European military aid rose by 67 percent from the 2022-2024 average, while non-military aid increased by 59

percent. Military aid is increasingly borne by only a small number of countries, while other financial aid now mainly comes from European Union institutions. Thirty-five countries sponsored major arms transfers to Ukraine from 2022 to 2024. Nearly all were wealthy democracies.

Aid allocations to Ukraine (in billions of U.S. dollars)



Source: The Kiel Institute for the World Economy. Original data given in euros, recalculated for U.S. dollars.

immigration official unfamiliar with the administrative nuances. Media accounts like that of Dmytro Kulyk, apprehended by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in a Walmart parking lot while his parole reapplication was evaluated, has generated worries among the Ukrainians in the United States.

"There is tremendous fear because even though you're here legally and you carry your papers," Ms. Rubel said, "there is fear that anybody can stop you at any given moment, anywhere you are and take you somewhere."

Hope for Peace

Although they have received a warm welcome in Pennsylvania, Ms. Rubel said a big obstacle she encounters is the American attention span and the pace of the news, when Ukraine is just one of many stories competing for coverage. "I encounter so many people that when I tell them what I do, it's like, 'Oh, is that still going on?'" But once I mention that yes, it still is, and what a harsh winter they had, people are extremely empathetic and still very giving and very comforting."

Ms. Rubel said some refugees are opting to return to Ukraine rather than try to renew their humanitarian parole when it expires. "They didn't come here with the intent of staying forever," she said. "They do want to go back. They're looking at it as, 'Well, this just speeds up that process. We'll go back, and we'll make do however we can make do.'"

Everyone who spoke to **America** who has visited in the

past year described impressive resilience, ingenuity and at the same time exhaustion among the people who soldier on in Ukraine.

"We have seen too many miracles not to believe," Archbishop Gudziak said. Remembering that even many foreign policy experts did not see the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union coming, he remains hopeful that a peaceful solution is possible:

People of faith cannot but recognize divine intervention—God's providence. We have negligible power, no weapons and very few resources, but God is almighty. We beseech him to convert the hearts of the aggressors, to give wisdom and courage to global leaders to do God's will, and to work miracles to protect his little people. God intervenes in history, and we pray that he do so now—to stop the aggressors and to preserve the dignity he has given to all people, especially the victims of the powerful.

Sister Teodora Kopyn offers a blueprint for Catholics who, like Archbishop Gudziak, hope for a miracle of peace. Rather than focusing on geopolitics, "I'm focusing on helping," she said. "I know what I am doing."

Maggie Phillips contributes from Vicenza, Italy.

Jesuits grapple with fallout from Trump policies on aid, immigration and deportation

What happens in Washington does not stay in Washington. Sometimes nations and people far away from the U.S. capital with the least capacity to manage it are forced to clean up after policy decisions and shifts in the United States.

Fe y Alegría is the largest Jesuit education network in the world, with 1,875 institutions that annually serve more than 760,000 students in 22 nations across Latin America, Africa and Europe. American Jesuits International reports that the Trump administration's termination of the U.S. Agency for International Development has meant the shuttering of Fe y Alegría programs in some of the world's most neglected communities.

In El Salvador, Alejandro Calderón reports the Fe y Alegría program he administers has been forced to close most of its educational and vocational training programs. In 2024, before the cuts to U.S.A.I.D., 8,000 young people graduated from Fe y Alegría's technical programs, ready for work in El Salvador's tourism, restaurant and service sectors.

If discouraging undocumented immigration is the Trump administration's goal, Mr. Calderón wonders why it is closing programs that help young people find jobs and begin professions that mean they may never be forced to emigrate in search of work.

White House "policies have human afterlives, and they end up affecting communities; they end up affecting lives," says Marco Gómez, S.J., the country director of Fe y Alegría in Panama. "These decisions, taken far away, are affecting concrete and real people."

That impact has been especially clear to him as Fe y Alegría has attempted to address a small piece of the global migration drama in Panama City. Among the first immigrants affected by the Trump administration's deportation campaign in February 2025 was a group of about 300 people expelled from the United States to Panama just after President Donald Trump had returned to power. These migrants were victims of "bad timing," Father Gómez says.

As the Biden administration concluded, they had been rushing through the treacherous Darién Gap to reach Central America and then the U.S.-Mexico border. In the end, as Biden initiatives were shut down, they were not given the chance to make asylum claims when they reached U.S. soil.

Following the directions of U.S. immigration officials, the group was ordered onto a plane in San Diego. Most believed they were being moved within the United States to another detention facility where the processing of their asylum claims could begin.



A child from a migrant family participates in a Jesuit Fe y Alegría program in Panama City in July 2025.

They were stunned to deplane in Panama, a nation many had passed through just weeks or even days before in their struggle to reach the U.S. border. Fe y Alegría was asked to step in to assist many of these deportees.

"We had people from Russia; we had people from China, from Vietnam, from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Iran, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan—15 different nationalities," Father Gómez remembers.

According to the stories Father Gómez has heard, the deported migrants had strong claims for asylum protection. Among them were the wives of police and military officers from Afghanistan who had been in flight from the Taliban; a Nigerian woman escaping Boko Haram terror; and a young Iranian man who fled his homeland soon after he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his part in anti-regime protests.

"What we're seeing is not a crisis of migration alone," Father Gómez says. "This is deeper. This is a crisis of belonging."

"No one seems to be paying attention" to the human suffering of the migrants themselves, he worries. But in Panama City, the Jesuits at Fe y Alegría "are promoting human dignity and putting the people in the center," he says.

"These are our brothers and sisters, and [as Christians] we have the responsibility to take care of them."

Father Gómez struggles to understand how the suffering caused by the abrupt shift on immigration and asylum could be acceptable to average Americans.

"Jesus said, 'Who are my brothers and my sisters? Those who do the will of God.'"

"He's not referring to your close circle, your blood relatives only, those who are most proximate to you," Father Gómez says. "He's talking about humanity and how we must take care of each other, and that's what we see. That is [Fe y Alegría's] moral and ethical compass."

Kevin Clarke is *America's* chief correspondent.



As ICE surge in Minnesota winds down, is Arizona next?

A child comes home after school in tears, asking his parents what it means to be undocumented. “Do I have documents?” he asks. They reassure him that he does. He was born in the United States.

During recess, he had been playing soccer with his classmates. His team was celebrating after a goal when a classmate on the opposing team approached, telling him that Donald Trump was going to come for him and his family at night to take them out of the country.

“The boy didn’t want to go back to school,” Idefonso Magana, a union organizer, told *America* in a Spanish-language interview. “From schoolchildren to their parents to the workers to housewives, the Arizona immigrant community is living in fear,” Mr. Magana said.

After Tom Homan, the “border czar,” announced in February that the Trump administration would end its immigration enforcement surge in Minnesota, some local religious and community leaders in Arizona have begun asking themselves if their state is next.

Their fear is not unfounded. In late January, news broke of a 1,500-bed warehouse in the Phoenix area acquired by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. ICE purchased the warehouse in the suburb of Surprise, Ariz., for \$70 million for use as a processing facility.

Last year, the Big Beautiful Bill Act allocated \$170 billion to immigration and border enforcement, including \$45 billion for immigration detention centers.

“We could just be scratching the surface of what’s possible, given the size and the scope of what these detention centers can do,” Tim McManus, the supervising organizer for Valley Interfaith Project in Phoenix, told *America*. “Private prisons and others are making a lot of money daily with everybody that’s on a bed in one of these detention centers, so they’re opening more and more of them.”

Mr. McManus has helped organize “know your rights” workshops for immigrant communities at churches throughout the Southwest. After one event, a group of participants told him that knowing your rights would not be enough.

“This is not about being able to express your rights,” they told him. “We’re watching people get grabbed at Home Depot and thrown into vans. There’s not an opportunity to express your rights and have a civil back and forth that then allows you to go home.”

As a result of that conversation, Valley Interfaith Project leaders pivoted and began helping families prepare for the potential deportation of a family member. Families should have their assets in order and have a plan for their children, Mr. McManus said, and undocumented immigrants should apply for legal status if they have an avenue to do so.

“When we do these sessions, we have to operate as if everybody in that room could end up in detention,” he said. “How do we prepare for that situation? We try to give some

Hundreds protest in Prescott, Ariz., on Jan. 11 after the killing of Renee Good in Minneapolis on Jan. 7.

sense of security that at least they have some things in order, should the worst happen.”

In Arizona, Mr. McManus helped organize sessions in churches like St. Louis the King Church in Glendale, a parish that celebrates Mass in five different languages every weekend. According to Deacon Joe Stickney, the church has also been welcoming visits from the Arizona State University Immigration Law Clinic to assist in document preparation.

St. Francis Xavier, a Jesuit-run church in Phoenix, has done the same.

Mr. Magana is a parishioner at St. Francis Xavier. He immigrated to the United States from Mexico in the 1990s, after the North American Free Trade Agreement gutted the economy in his home state of Michoacan, he said. Mr. Magana became a U.S. citizen in 1997.

At weekly gatherings at St. Francis, Mr. Magana has heard other parish families report about immigrant families exploited by landlords, who know that undocumented tenants cannot report them; a worker injured on the job being threatened with ICE by his employer to discourage a legal claim to reimburse his medical expenses; and green card holders unsure if they should seek to renew their status because they worry that attending a court hearing could lead to their deportation.

Fear in the community is widespread, said Robert Fambrini, S.J., the pastor of St. Francis Xavier. But despite the fear, so far attendance at Spanish-language Masses has not diminished. “Perhaps the church is a space where they feel comfortable, where they feel community,” he said.

J. D. Long García is a senior editor at *America*.



Aid workers assist African migrants landing in Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain, in August 2024.

The church in Spain helps win an immigration victory

Even as the European Union prepares measures to make it easier for member states to remove migrants from the bloc, Spain approved on Jan. 27 an amnesty that will allow at least 500,000 immigrants to regularize their residency status.

In a context of increasing hostility toward immigrants in Europe and the United States, Spain stands out as one of the few states that remains welcoming to migrants. The Spanish Episcopal Conference called the move an “act of social justice and recognition of so many migrants who, through their work, have long contributed to the development of [Spain].”

The amnesty measure was issued as a royal decree—similar to an executive order in the United States. The church in Spain had worked hard on several fronts to combat fear of immigrants, even as that is often stoked by some hard-right politicians in Spain.

The mass deportation effort in the United States stands as the diametrical opposite of how Spain has chosen to deal with its large population of irregular residents. Spain’s tradition of generosity on immigration has proven economically and socially beneficial for the country, according to Fernando Redondo, director of the Department of Immigration at the Spanish bishops’ conference.

Economic reports at the national and international levels, he wrote in an email to *America*, demonstrate “how part of the growth and prosperity of the Spanish economy is due to immigration.”

According to Mr. Redondo, immigrants make up 20 percent of the active workforce in Spain. Since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, Spain has enjoyed above-average economic growth compared with other European countries, and immigration has been a major contributor to that.

Immigrants have become fundamental to several labor sectors in Spain, like agriculture, hospitality, elder care and construction, and they help offset Spain’s “demographic winter,” caused by dropping birth rates among native-born Spaniards. Mr. Redondo also lauded the diversity and vitality immigrants bring to Spanish society, including to the Catholic Church.

Opponents of the amnesty will likely challenge the legitimacy of the decree in court.

Bridget Ryder contributes from Spain.



Finding Room for All

From coast to coast, the Sisters of Mercy help the unhoused feel welcome

By Helene Stapinski

At 8 a.m. on a frigid day in December, Libby Fernandez, R.S.M., rolls her electric tricycle out of an alley next to her home and heads onto the streets of Sacramento, Calif. Every block or two, she stops pedaling and rings her bicycle bell, gently rousing people sleeping in doorways, in tents or atop flattened cardboard boxes, before the police arrive to clear them out.

Sister Libby calls each of them by name, like a mother lovingly nudging her children awake on a school day, except these are grown men and women, some whose hands are covered in grime, some suffering from walking pneumonia. She climbs down from her seat and opens a small wooden cabinet, which an architect friend designed for her, that sits on the back of her trike. Inside are thermoses of coffee and hot chocolate.

“Good morning, Jerry,” she says cheerily to a 60-year-old man lying atop torn cardboard on the sidewalk of 19th Street. Jerry was hit by a car several years ago and still suffers from the trauma, with a bad limp and a damaged eye. His dog, Zadie, was recently taken by the city, but a lawyer

from Loaves & Fishes, a local nonprofit program serving unhoused people, is trying to get her back.

“Can I get you something hot to drink today?” asks Sister Libby. “A Cadillac?”

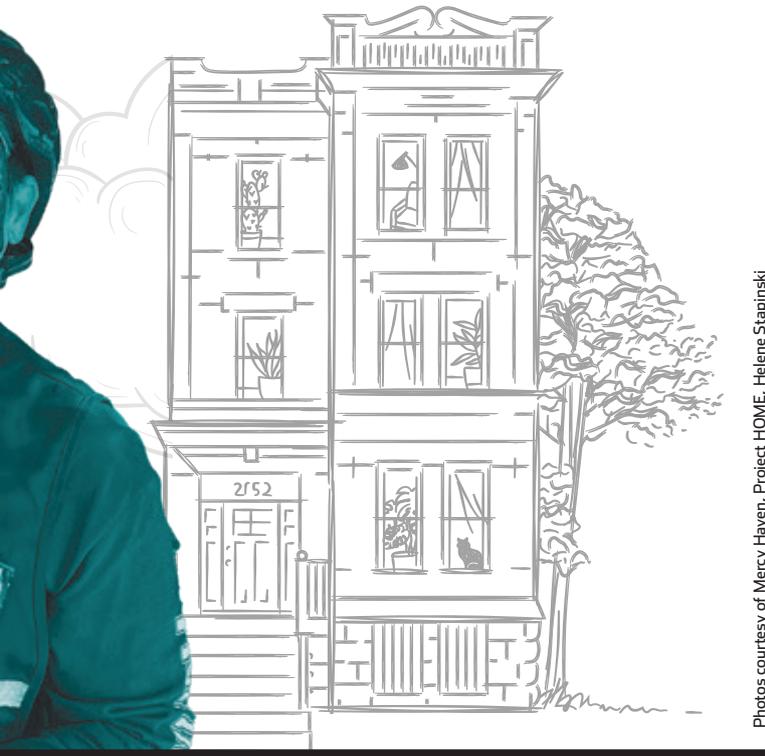
“Yes, please,” he says. Sister Libby fills a cup half with coffee and half with hot chocolate—known on the local streets as a Cadillac—and hands it to him.

“Some new socks? Gloves? A granola bar?” she asks brightly.

“Sure,” says Jerry, smiling. They chat for a while about how much he misses Zadie. As Sister Libby pulls away on her trike, heading to her next stop, Jerry yells after her. “Thank you!”

Sister Libby and a legion of volunteers across the city will hand out scores of granola bars, chocolate, deodorant, hand sanitizer, flashlights and clothing on this 41-degree day to people whom many others will simply ignore, people who have grown more and more invisible in the city despite their rising numbers. In Sacramento County alone there are more than 9,000 unhoused, who often gravitate to the area because of the typically mild weather.

Sister Libby is not alone. From coast to coast, the Sisters of Mercy lead thousands of fellow sisters, lay volunteers and employees—including some formerly unhoused—to fight a growing homelessness problem, which worsens each year due to rising rental prices and the difficulty for the long-term unemployed of finding jobs. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the homeless population in the United States increased 18 percent in



Photos courtesy of Mercy Haven, Project HOME, Helene Stapinski

Pat Griffith, R.S.M., Mary Scullion, R.S.M., Katherine Nolan, R.S.M., and Libby Fernandez, R.S.M., are among the Sisters of Mercy who work to meet the needs of their neighbors.

sustenance and clothing, as well as delivering a kind word and a show of respect.

“You have to get to know them and their stories,” explains Sister Libby of the people she serves, a bike helmet covering her short salt-and-pepper hair. “Then you can build trust and care for them. Everyone has to feel safe. Then the questions become deeper, like ‘How can I help you?’”

On this particular morning, she stops her trike for Renee, a 55-year-old woman who has been on the streets for seven years because of alcoholism. Libby compliments Renee on her new purple walker. “My other one got stolen,” Renee says, exasperated. “I lost everything in it. I fell asleep for too long and somebody just walked off with it.”

While preparing coffee for her, Sister Libby chats with Renee about Renee’s cousin, Ruben, who is also homeless and whom Sister Libby is trying to help get an apartment. “I haven’t seen him in a while,” Renee says. But moments later, several blocks away, Sister Libby spots Ruben wearing a black hooded sweatshirt.

“When you get your place, I’ll pay for your security deposit,” she tells him. “Don’t forget.”

Fellow Sister of Mercy Luz Eugenia Alvarez, an educator who works as one of Sister Libby’s pedalers, keeps coats, shoes and granola bars stocked in her car at all times, pulling over when she sees someone in need. The experience has taught her to be grateful for the roof over her own head, but also not to fear people experiencing homelessness—to see them as fellow human beings worthy of God’s love.

“They look you in the eyes, and that expression of gratitude is hard to describe,” she says. “I feel like I meet Jesus in those people that I meet on the street every day.”

Mercy in Philadelphia

Both Libby and Luz served early in their careers in Philadelphia, crossing paths with Sister Mary Scullion, who has become legendary in the world of those who assist the unhoused and has created a model for the work many others do.

On a freezing day in the City of Brotherly Love, Sister Mary makes the rounds of the housing and community spaces she has created. It seems everyone she passes knows her name, and she theirs. She is known among the people she serves, but also by the woman with the walker named Catherine who is making her way to the apartment Sister Mary helped build, the doorman at the fancy Rittenhouse Hotel where she sometimes parks her car, and the city’s wealthiest, whom she unflinchingly taps for multil-

2024, to over 770,000.

The Mercy sisters, founded by Catherine McAuley in 19th-century Ireland, believe strongly that their charism calls them to take action and serve God through helping the poor, sick and marginalized. Sheltering the homeless, in particular, is one of the seven corporal works of mercy. In their early years, the Sisters of Mercy were nicknamed the Walking Sisters, because of their hands-on work on the streets of Dublin.

Sister Libby began her group, Mercy Pedalers, eight years ago, when the idea came to her on a solo retreat at Crater Lake National Park in Oregon. She grew up as an Air Force brat, one of seven children. Her family moved to 15 different locations before settling down on the West Coast. Before joining the Sisters of Mercy, she spent seven years in the Air Force herself. She got her master’s degree in social work, joined the order and went on to lead Sacramento Loaves & Fishes for two decades, where she oversaw 15 programs and a 100-person staff feeding, clothing and offering services to the homeless.

Sister Libby is now 65, but she is nowhere near retired. She rides her trike about 90 minutes each day on a six-mile loop, visiting several dozen people and recruiting others to help. She solicits and stores donations, and she organizes 200 volunteers in California, which has the biggest homeless population in the country—nearly 25 percent of the total number nationally. The volunteers work from their bikes, trikes and cars, helping the unhoused survive the cold winter and in every season handing out



‘I feel like I meet Jesus in those people that I meet on the street every day.’

lion-dollar donations.

She has met popes and presidents, has received funding from the rock star Jon Bon Jovi and was named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by Time magazine in 2009. Sister Mary has also been arrested several times for protesting and handing out sandwiches in places that don't want her or the homeless hanging around; she has filed lawsuits against the city when neighborhoods tried to stop her efforts and has been called everything from a saint to an "urban terrorist."

Sister Mary, now 72, started in ministry by working in a soup kitchen as a college student in Philadelphia, which inspired her to spend a week living with the homeless on the streets of the city in 1978 to better understand the people she was serving. Ten years later, she founded Project HOME with her business partner Joan Dawson McConnon. More than 1,000 housing units have been developed by the organization since then, and their staff has now grown to 500 people.

"Mary has this gift of engaging with everyone around her," says Ms. McConnon, a mother of three and former accountant, whose financial savvy helped make their work possible. "Whether it's a staff member or a person on the street or John Middleton, who owns the Philadelphia Phillies, Mary lets them know that they matter. She's focused on them in that moment. They see that she's a person of integrity willing to deliver on her deep moral convictions."

Sister Mary and Joan handed the reins of their organization over to new leaders to carry on their mission in early 2025. These days, Sister Mary lives in a small one-bedroom apartment in a residence she founded for young L.G.B.T.Q. people, who often wind up on the streets after they come out to their parents. But her outreach is still wide, and she is still teaching and setting an example for those who are taking up the mantle.

On the morning of my visit in December 2025, Sister Mary starts her day at the Honickman Learning Center Comcast Technology Labs, one of the ministries of Project HOME. The center provides education and employment opportunities for the community through literacy training and access to technology. It is named for the soft drink distributor Harold Honickman and his wife, Lynn, two of

the wealthiest people in Philadelphia and friends of Sister Mary, and is located on Judson Street, which had one of the worst crime rates in the city in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Sister Mary lived here during the crack epidemic, her window once shot through with bullet holes. It's now a beautiful street that also hosts a row of neat brick houses bearing the metal nameplate *Project HOME*.

From there, Sister Mary puts her sneakers to good use, walking quickly to check in with residents at several affordable residential properties, some located in the most expensive parts of the city. She then moves on to the secondhand clothing store—Project HOMEspun Boutique—which is run by a formerly homeless man named David Brown, who sports a red beard, a white kufi on his head and a white kanzu beneath an embroidered black-and-white vest. His house and work keys and ID card dangle from a lanyard around his neck.

"Before Sister Mary, I was treated like a statistic," says Mr. Brown, 69, who has been employed and housed by Project HOME for 14 years. "But the Sisters of Mercy would come and sit and talk to me and make me feel like I was loved and I was wanted."

Now he's part of their HOME solution. Mr. Brown says: "We give people the H, which is housing. And then the O, which is opportunity, like they gave me with this job, then the M, which is medical, and then the E, education, which I got at the Honickman Center. But it's all about being willing to do for yourself. And they help give you the will to do that, too. 'None of us are home until all of us are home,' that's Sister Mary's motto."

Sister Mary's next stop is the Hub of Hope drop-in center at Suburban Station across from City Hall, beneath the shadow of the William Penn statue. The Hub, placed underground to attract those living in the subway, offers coffee, washer/dryers, TV and a place to rest away from the cold streets, with van service at the end of the day to a local shelter.

Sister Mary humbly passes the credit on to those who work with her, particularly Joan, who she says is deeply spiritual. "It takes a vast network of people from all walks of life who are all committed to ending homelessness," says Sister Mary in her Philadelphia accent. "Charism is not only for nuns. It's alive in our laypeople and donors as well."

Sister Sue Sanders, president of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, who leads more than 2,200 women religious in North and South America, says that the order has a long history of building housing for the homeless in the United States, starting with the Sisters of Mercy in Omaha, Neb., in the early 1980s. But with fewer vocations to replace those retiring, many of the sisters' organizations have embraced greater collaboration with the



Libby Fernandez, R.S.M., rides her electric tricycle through the streets of Sacramento, Calif., on her way to deliver hot drinks and support to the unhoused population there.

local lay community.

“When you don’t have a ton of people coming up behind you,” says Sister Sue, “you have to find people who are trained, capable leaders to assume elected positions in the congregation. And we have to make sure we maintain the Catholic identity. What we have to do is create a runway to the future for these ministries and prepare people to assume them.”

Sister Mary says that to be successful, her organization also has to listen to those whom they serve. “You learn from the residents what worked, and you continue to tweak it as you go,” she explains, and employing those with “lived experience” is important to their mission.

Monique Taylor, who lived on the streets for a decade with an opioid addiction, now works as a special initiative outreach worker for Project HOME in the city’s Kensington neighborhood, which made national headlines in October when a team of F.B.I. agents and local police swooped in and arrested 33 drug dealers.

Ms. Taylor, 61, a small brunette dressed in ski bibs to protect against the cold, believes law enforcement is not enough to solve the city’s drug problem. She understands how people wind up “using,” back on the streets again and

again, without the treatment to deal with the root causes of their problems.

“I know what it’s like to want to go home, but you can’t because this drug don’t let you go nowhere,” says Ms. Taylor, who said she has been clean for 11 years. “I know what it’s like to have that guilt. And how everyone thinks, once an addict, always an addict. But that’s a lie. And I’m living proof.”

If she can get one person off the street a day, into a shelter and into treatment, she’s happy. “What a gift to be able to see the power of God’s grace and mercy,” she says, shaking her head, “because without it, I don’t know where I’d be.”

Mercy in New York

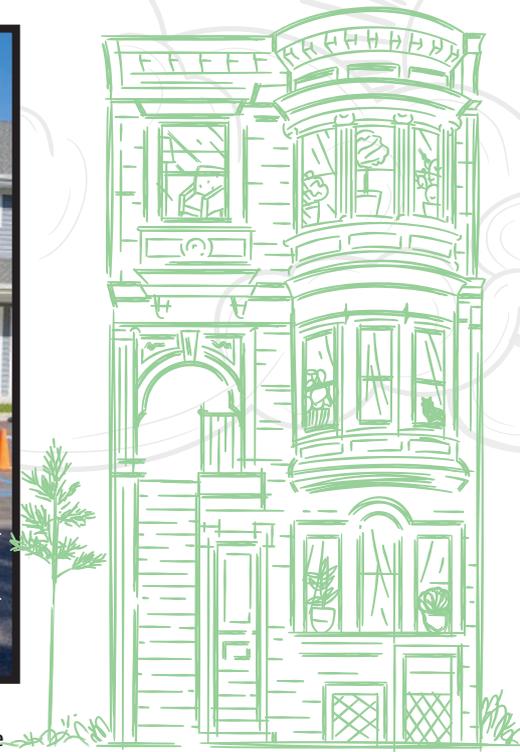
On a cold winter morning, two cars pull up outside Mercy Haven food pantry in the hamlet of Islip Terrace on Long Island, in New York. Among those unloading dozens of boxes of venison, calamari and dried goods from the hatchbacks is a mother named Shanice who spent three years in a homeless shelter and temporarily lost custody of her young daughter.

She now has a job at the pantry and a two-bedroom apartment in supportive housing, which she shares with her daughter, thanks to the staff and the sisters at Mercy Haven.

Mercy Haven is a nonprofit started by two more Sisters of Mercy that is helping unhoused people who struggle



Pat Griffith, R.S.M., and Katherine Nolan, R.S.M., in red shirts, stand with representatives from the Town of Islip, project funders and Tamika, a resident, at the official opening of the new housing community in October 2022.



with mental illness. By addressing the root causes of homelessness, their team of 109 social workers and staff not only house people but help with medication and health insurance, diagnosis and treatment, education, and employment and job counseling. Programs like Breakthrough, their homeless education outreach center, help identify those in need and provide them with housing and services either through their organization or partner organizations.

The project had its beginnings in the mid-1970s when Pat Griffith, R.S.M., was working as a schoolteacher at St. Patrick School in Bay Shore, Long Island. She and her students would see people with mental illness who were recently released from state hospitals wandering up and down the streets outside the school.

“I didn’t know people with mental illness before that,” explains Sister Pat, 77, a grey-haired woman with glasses and a thick New York accent. “And so I had the same questions the kids had. Why do they talk to themselves? Why aren’t they friendly? Who were these people and how did they wind up here?”

In response, she opened a hospitality center at St. Patrick Parish, which welcomed people off the street and offered them cake, coffee and conversation. This led to the formation of a soup kitchen and eventually to the establishment of Mercy Haven. In 1985, she asked fellow sister Katherine Nolan, R.S.M., a foster care social worker from Queens, to help her find money to purchase a hotel to provide housing and services for the mentally ill.

The two women religious secured \$1.6 million in state

grants as well as loans from the McAuley Institute and Leviticus Fund to purchase a hotel in Bay Shore. But then delays caused by a fire at the site, as well as community and local political opposition to the project, meant it would be four years until the organization could open its first group residence, which served a dozen people. The home still stands, its rooms still full.

“People didn’t want the mentally ill living on their street,” explains Sister Pat, standing outside the residence on a quiet dead-end block.

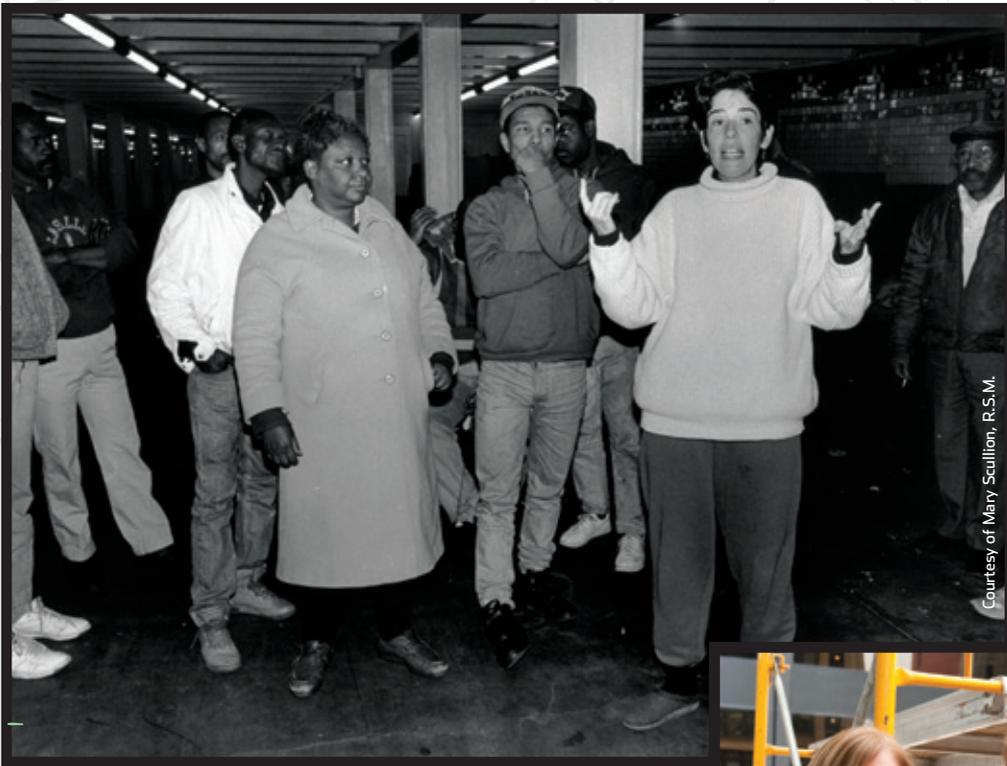
“They still don’t,” says Sister Kathy, 82.

There were bomb threats and warnings from neighbors who told them not to walk on the street alone. Because of the bomb scares, the Bay Shore house had to be evacuated two times. Despite these threats, the sisters persevered, and Mercy Haven now owns and operates 38 houses and rents another 40, providing both temporary and permanent shelter for more than 300 people, including families. Their food pantry serves 1,000 people a month.

Sister Pat is about to retire and pass the day-to-day work on to the next generation as represented by a laywoman named Donna Donaghy, a mother of five who has worked with Mercy Haven for four years. Ms. Donaghy has hit the ground running and is already looking for property for a medical respite program that would serve 20 people in need of recuperative care.

“I have big shoes to fill,” says Ms. Donaghy, nodding over at Sister Kathy and Sister Pat. “I’m also not a nun.”

“It’s never too late, honey,” jokes Sister Kathy, touch-



Courtesy of Mary Scullion, R.S.M.

Mary Scullion, R.S.M., speaks to unhoused people in the Philadelphia subway in 1993.

ing her shoulder and laughing.

Like Project HOME, Mercy Haven employs people with lived experience of mental illness and homelessness to help them stay on track and to minister to other residents. One such employee is 58-year-old Lisa, a graphic designer with schizophrenia. She said she went undiagnosed for decades, sleeping only two or three hours a night for 30 years.

“I was a workaholic,” explains Lisa, a Long Island native, “which helped me move through life.” But her yearslong struggle left her suicidal, in and out of seven different mental hospitals and eventually homeless.

At Mercy Gardens apartment complex in Central Islip, a Mercy Haven property that opened in April 2022, Lisa has not only found a permanent place to live but also designs flyers for the organization and teaches art to fellow residents as part of their Resident Empowerment and Achievement Program, known as REAP. “I’m very lucky,” she says. “I realize that God loves me after all. I thought he had it in for me.”

Her one-bedroom apartment is the home of an artist. Jazz plays in the living room, purple curtains hang on the window, a drafting table stands in the corner of her bedroom, a disco ball lamp throws circles of light on the ceiling, and a string of red letters over the kitchen cabinets reads LOVE. Downstairs in the communal space are tables for drawing during and after art class and a piano for playing and singing.

“The great thing about Mercy Haven is that they have something happening all the time,” says Lisa. “Isolation is



Courtesy of Mary Scullion, R.S.M.

The Project HOME founders Joan Dawson McConnon and Mary Scullion, R.S.M., meet with the musician (and Project HOME supporter) Jon Bon Jovi.

a big part of mental illness, so meeting in that community space with people is really important.”

Sometimes, she says, she worries that her new reality is just a dream and that when she wakes up, she’ll find that she never left the mental hospital. “It’s hard to believe sometimes. All of this. But these really are the best years of my life,” she says, her eyes wide, her smile wider as she looks around at her couch, her tea kettle and the big picture window with the light pouring in. “I’m definitely home.”

Helene Stapinski is a journalist and author of four books including, most recently, The American Way: A True Story of Nazi Escape, Superman and Marilyn Monroe. Reporting for this story was supported by a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc.



Rosalyn Thackston

Movements of the Spirit

Can a new approach to confirmation help combat rising rates of disaffiliation?

By Maurice Timothy Reidy

On a cold Tuesday night in December, in the early days of the Advent season, at the Church of St. John in Westminster, Md., an experiment is underway. It is shortly after 5 p.m. and the pews in the large, modern church are starting to fill with families. The priests and pastoral staff are on the altar preparing for the liturgy. In the nave, Bishop Adam Parker, fully vested and leaning on

his crozier, greets visitors as they enter the church.

So far, so normal: just another confirmation ceremony, one of dozens that take place in the Archdiocese of Baltimore every year.

But there is something different about this class of confirmandi. It is a large group, over 100 people, from two parishes. There are teenagers and preteens, as you might expect, but also a group of young children, just 9 years old, who can be easily spotted when they stand before Bishop Parker and prepare to receive the sacrament. For that is when the bishop must, as he recites the sacred words, reach down to anoint their foreheads.

In 2025 the Archdiocese of Baltimore decided to

change the confirmation age from between 14 and 16 to the age of 9. It will take a few years for all the parishes in the archdiocese to make the shift, but St. John's is one of the first. The decision has provoked some anxiety. Are 9-year-olds ready? Will they take part in Catholic life once they have received the sacraments? But Archbishop William E. Lori, after consulting the signs of the times and speaking with diocesan leaders, decided it was time for a change.

"In reaching this pastoral decision, I asked the question, 'When is the most fruitful moment in the life of a young person to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit in confirmation?'" Archbishop Lori explained in a video announcing the decision. "And how can this grace of the Spirit help us reverse the troubling trend of young people disaffiliating from the church at earlier and earlier ages?"

Indeed, if there is one piece of data driving this decision, it is the fact that many young people begin the process of leaving the church at roughly the same age at which they receive confirmation: 13. Bishop Parker spoke about the move to lower the age on the **America** podcast "Preach."

"We felt that if the age of disaffiliation is more in the middle school years, then let's do a couple of things by lowering the age of confirmation to age 9," he said. "Let's get the family more involved. Let's get the parents more involved in that preparation. And let's get the grace of the sacrament to these young folks at an even earlier age, and that allows that grace to build within them."

For the last seven years I have taught confirmation preparation in my home parish in Westchester County, in New York. In the Archdiocese of New York, as in many dioceses, the age of confirmation roughly coincides with middle school years: We begin in fall of seventh grade and the students are confirmed in the middle of eighth grade. I traveled to Maryland to see how another diocese is approaching the sacrament. What I discovered on my visit and in subsequent conversations with theologians and pastoral leaders was a lively debate touching on many of the most critical issues facing the church today.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore, the oldest diocese in the country, does not claim to have found a silver-bullet solution to the problem of keeping young people engaged in the faith. But they are following the data and trying something different. In a church that moves slowly and tends to do things the way they have always been done, that is a reason enough for a closer look.

Not a Graduation

If you want to start an argument with a sacramental theologian, describe confirmation as a "graduation sacrament."

It is, they will strenuously insist, not that: It is a sacrament of initiation, just like baptism and the Eucharist. That is why new Catholics normally receive all three sacraments together during the Easter Vigil liturgy.

In the early church, confirmation was part of the baptismal rite, but it was pushed later as the church grew so that bishops might connect with new Christians. Over time, the age for first Communion was also moved later, to what was described as the "age of discretion." The exact age varied but often drifted to as late as 14, while confirmation was celebrated around 12. Then, in 1910, Pope Pius X moved the age for Holy Communion to 7, leaving confirmation on its own.

The next century saw a variety of approaches to the sacrament. And as Timothy Gabrielli writes in his 2013 book, *Confirmation: How a Sacrament of God's Grace Became All About Us*, the arguments around confirmation often reflected the tenor of the times. "Confirmation, unlike any other sacrament, has served as a cipher for Catholics' place in the wider American context and as a location for working out that identity," he writes.

The key moment, in retrospect, came in the 1970s, when pastoral leaders looked to theology and the sciences to help determine the best age for confirmation. They landed on adolescence as a critical moment in a young person's development and thus an appropriate moment for the graces of the sacrament. In his book *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court*, Father Paul Turner describes these developments:

Teens who reflected on their personal experience deepened their personal involvement with faith. This they ritualized in a sacrament. Many theologians believe this put more teeth into the sacramental experience, removing its magical tendencies for those who celebrated the sacraments without much interior renewal. And educators reflecting on their experience with teens discerned that this was a new Spirit-filled occasion in the church.

But in the long history of the church, confirming teens—an experience most of us who have grown up in the last 50 years share—is actually an anomaly.

"In the end, the Catholic Church has never taught that it is a sacrament for a teenage commitment," Father Turner tells me in a conversation from his home base in Kansas City, Mo. "And in fact, any time the Vatican has been pressed...you get the impression they'd like it younger than older."



Many young people begin the process of leaving the church at the same age as when they receive confirmation.

Timothy Gabrielli points to another factor at play: the influence of Protestant culture, in which individuals make a public commitment to the faith through adult baptism.

“There’s this consistent anxiety, among Catholics, particularly in the U.S., about infant baptism,” Professor Gabrielli tells me. “So...we’re surrounded by evangelical populations who don’t buy that—infant baptism—and [there is] this kind of sense that we got to have something that is a replacement for believers’ baptism. And so maybe confirmation is that thing.”

But there were risks to this approach, which became evident as the decades passed. If confirmation is presented as a moment of commitment, and most of religious education builds to that moment, then what happens next?

“[It] had this totally unintended effect,” Professor Gabrielli says. The hope was that “if we get them committed, then they’ll be in. Instead, it was, ‘No, I’ve made my choice. I’ve got my sacraments. I’m done.’”

Confirmation became graduation.

The Gifts of the Spirit

Kenn deMoll is the director of “formation and innovation” at St. John’s Church and an enthusiastic booster for lowering the age of confirmation. When Archbishop Lori began considering the move a few years ago, Mr. deMoll sent him a 30-page letter making his case for the move. For a year he worked in a diocese in Montana where the confirmation age was also lower.

In a country as large as the United States, there has been room for different approaches to confirmation, often depending on the personal preferences of the local bishop. (Efforts to get the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to agree on a national practice, going back to the introduction of the adult catechumenate in the 1980s, have failed.) That is why the age can range widely, from 7 to 16. Some dioceses have opted for what is known as the “restored order” approach—meaning that confirmation is given before first Communion, in keeping with ancient church tradition and



Rosalyn Thackston

Archbishop William E. Lori confirmed Thomas Serio on May 16, 2024. The Archdiocese of Baltimore recently moved the confirmation age to 9 years old.

with the goal of restoring the Eucharist to its pride of place.

It is still early, but Mr. deMoll is encouraged by the rollout of the new program. He is particularly excited about the involvement of families. One major reason for the move was to shift away from a “drop off” approach to religious education, where parents had little involvement with sacramental preparation, to one built on family faith formation.

Working closely with families has helped him to see the challenges they face. “I don’t think anybody starts out being like, ‘I’m just not going to be all that into my faith,’ right?” he tells me. He says many people feel: “We live very busy lives. We’re very stretched. We’re pulled in 1,000 different directions.”

“And so I think a lot of times, parents operate from the sense of, OK, ‘I’ve got all these fires. How do I control it? How do I manage things?’”

To address these challenges, St. John’s has tried to reduce the number of requirements for confirmation. The idea is to make sacramental preparation a positive experience, one that brings a sense of peace and connection, rather than another item on a long to-do list. If the experience is a positive one, perhaps families will be more likely to stay

involved after they have received the sacraments.

This represents a shift from traditional confirmation preparation programs. When I was confirmed, I was required to complete a certain number of service hours and to write a report on the saint I chose for my confirmation name. But these requirements were not a church-wide mandate. The guidelines issued by the U.S.C.C.B. for sacramental catechesis are more elementary. A candidate, among other requirements, must be able to recognize the role of the bishop and identify the signs and symbols of the sacrament.

In Mr. deMoll's view, 9-year-olds can "100 percent" meet the standards set by the U.S. bishops. But he is aware that some parents and religious educators are skeptical. Introducing them to a new approach will take time.

One consequence of moving confirmation to teenage years is that it is sometimes seen as a sacrament of maturity. But Mr. deMoll warns against that.

"I think it robs and takes away the spiritual experiences kids can and do have," he says. "I think there's a reason Jesus said, 'Let the little children come unto me.'... As we get older, our hearts tend to solidify. I think we kind of get a bit narrower in our thinking."

"I think the best time to give them those gifts of the Spirit is when they're younger," he adds, "so they can take full effect in people's lives."

Toward a Deeper Communion

Larry Fraher has been involved in youth ministry in the Diocese of Phoenix for decades. He was there 20 years ago, when Bishop Thomas Olmsted made the move to confirm young people in third grade rather than at age 16, in keeping with the "restored order" approach to the sacraments of initiation. It was a big jump, but Mr. Fraher confirms Mr. deMoll's instincts: 8- or 9-year-olds can comprehend the basic facts about confirmation.

"It depends on how we teach," he tells me. "How do we portray this idea that the spirit is coming to animate you, animate your baptism, bring you into a deeper communion with the church?"

But Mr. Fraher also has more sobering observations to share. "The problem that I'm finding—and I'm just gonna go ahead and say it—is that the parents don't understand that this isn't graduation," he says. "This is the big fight I have on a regular basis."

"How do we reintegrate a Catholic worldview in the family as opposed to just a supply-demand mentality about the sacraments?" he wonders. How do you fight the sentiment that "I go, I get my sacrament, I'm good until I get married"?

Here is where confirmation preparation runs against a



Elizabeth Serio

Bishop Adam Parker stands with Felicity Serio and her confirmation sponsor Chrissie Dhanagom on May 1, 2025.

hard reality of the need for evangelization. Religious practice has plummeted in recent decades. And it seems that these trends are affecting even those parents who are sending their children for the sacraments. They may be willing to make certain commitments to their children's faith, but for other reasons—which can vary from the demands of youth sports to their own questions about the integrity of religious institutions—they are choosing not to go beyond "what's required."

Another wrinkle: Many parents feel insecure talking about faith themselves. So even if their child has a strong experience in religious education—perhaps on a retreat or on a service trip—that experience may not develop roots at home.

"Mom and Dad may not have had a very solid experience of retreat, or maybe they haven't had a really solid experience of Jesus," says Mr. deMoll. The goal then becomes finding models of ministry that allows families to find a shared spiritual framework.

Understanding that there may be no single solution to these challenges, the Archdiocese of Baltimore is allowing pastoral leaders to experiment with different programs. At St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parish in Crofton, Md., confirmation preparation happens mostly in the home, with two

How do we make sacramental preparation a positive experience, rather than another item on a to-do list?

in-person sessions with pastoral staff as well as a half-day retreat. This helps young people and their parents learn to talk about their faith together, with guidance from the parish.

But confirmation preparation is just one part of youth ministry at St. Elizabeth's—and perhaps not the most important. Middle school ministry is particularly critical.

“This formation is what is going to give them the groundwork for high school and college when there’s so many other things that are...pulling at them,” says Sarah Jarzembowski, the director for marriage and family life at St. Elizabeth’s.

The idea is to give young people a solid foundation in their faith so they are less likely to drift away from the church when they hit their teenage years. This is the trend Archbishop Lori is trying to reverse, and this is what Ms. Jarzembowski and her team are squarely focused on. Their website lists several opportunities for middle school students, from bowling nights to faith sharing and service projects.

“Great things are happening, I’m loving it,” says Ms. Jarzembowski. “We just need to get this middle school piece.... Because if that piece does not become solid, then we’re just moving the exodus level [the age when young people start to drift away from the church], and that defeats what the archbishop is looking for.”

Follow the Data

The data tells us a lot about when young people leave the church. It doesn’t say as much about whether moving the confirmation age to a younger age can help reverse this trend. But one study from 2012 contains some interesting findings. In an article in the journal *Catechumenate*, Angela Darrow Flynn looks at dioceses where the “restored order” approach has been implemented and compares them with neighboring dioceses where the confirmation age is later.

In most of the dioceses, before restoring the order of the sacraments, “the number of confirmandi was fewer, sometimes dramatically so, than the number of children



Erica Marquette

Archbishop William E. Lori confirmed Alina D’Souza on Feb. 12 at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Crofton, Md.

receiving first Eucharist.” This makes intuitive sense. In my experience, some families, while excited to have their children receive their first Communion, do not continue through the five additional years to confirmation. By restoring the order of the sacraments—in most cases, by administering the sacraments in the same grade—it is to be expected more children will be confirmed.

But another finding is also clear from Ms. Flynn’s study: “When the sacraments of initiation have been restored to their ancient order in the United States, overall participation in faith formation has usually decreased.” This confirms the fears of some youth ministers: Namely, that without the “carrot” of confirmation, many young people will simply choose not to take part in faith formation programs.

Yet that is not the end of the story. Ms. Flynn found a few dioceses where the rates of participation stayed the same even after the confirmation age was lowered. In one, the Diocese of Spokane, the number of young people participating in faith programs increased. No further research into this was done, but the results suggested that these dioceses were doing something right.

In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, spreadsheets and other technology are being used to track students and gauge their rates of participation. Meanwhile, each parish is look-

ing for creative ways to keep young people involved. On the night I attended confirmation at St. John's, the printed program for the event encouraged young people to stay committed—"Confirmation is just the beginning of your journey as a disciple"—and listed several ways to nurture their faith, including special days of retreat and a free, one-year subscription to *Hallow*, a prayer app. There were also three age levels of youth ministry advertised, with weekly formation and special events.

Thomas and Felicity Serio were both confirmed at St. John's Church in Westminster, Thomas in 2024 and Felicity in 2025. Both were 9 at the time. Thomas was surprised when he learned that the parish would start confirming students at a younger age. "I didn't even really know much about confirmation to that point, but that's when I started learning a lot about it," he told me in a Zoom conversation that included his mother, Elizabeth Serio, and his sister.

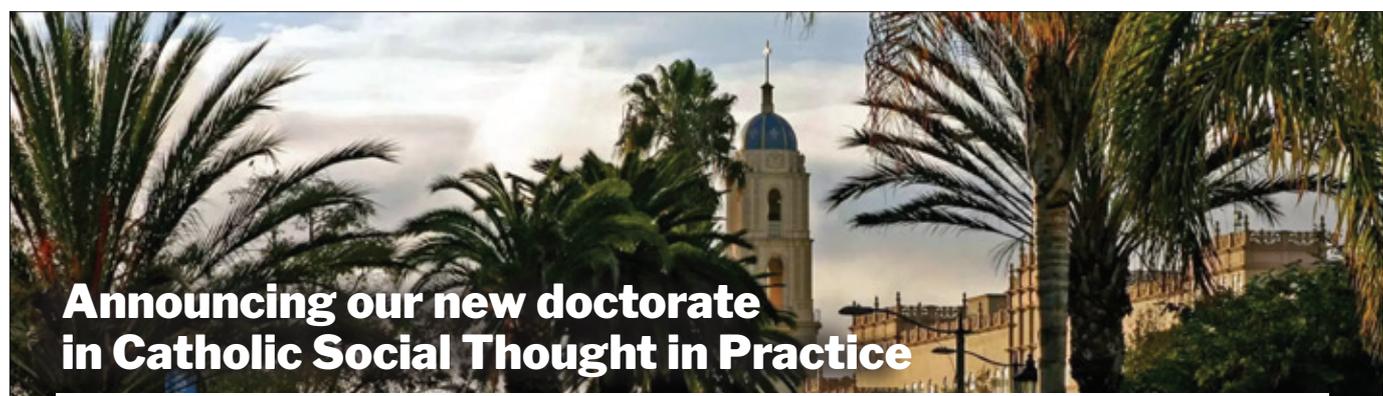
Thomas, an altar server at St. John's, chose Benedict as his confirmation name. Felicity, who sings in the children's choir, chose Therese, after St. Therese of Lisieux. About her confirmation day, she recalls: "I was really excited that my cousins and my aunt were there, and I was also a little nervous about everything. But I was mostly excited and happy and joyful."

Elizabeth Serio, like many of her generation, was confirmed as a teenager. But she welcomed the experience of accompanying her children at a younger age. "It was just a joy...to walk through this process with my kids when they were younger," she tells me. "I find at this age, there's such a thirst for knowledge, and they're like sponges, absorbing all of the information around them."

Reviewing my conversation with Thomas and Felicity, I was reminded of something I read from Father Jay Peterson of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Mont., where children are confirmed at a younger age. We all come to a better understanding of the sacraments over time, he said. His advice on confirmation day has stayed with me as a parent, as a religious educator and as a baptized Catholic:

"I point to the sponsors and the rest of the assembly, and say that we all have a responsibility to help these children grow into the meaning of the sacrament of confirmation."

Maurice Timothy Reidy is the deputy editor in chief of America. Reporting for this story was supported by a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc.



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Crucified Joy

A faith sturdy enough for real life

By John Stanczak

There is a stubborn desire that seems to follow every human being like a shadow: We want to be happy. We can dress it up in different vocabulary—fulfillment, flourishing, peace, wholeness—but the longing remains recognizable. It shows up in our decisions, our regrets, our prayers and the quiet ache we carry when life feels thin.

And yet, there is an equally stubborn fact that follows just as closely: Suffering is unavoidable. Bodies break down. Relationships fracture. Loss arrives, on schedule or otherwise. Even when circumstances look stable from the outside, the interior landscape can feel restless, numb or quietly exhausted.

For Christians, the tension can feel especially sharp because the language of joy is so bold in the tradition. Scripture does not merely recommend joy; it commands it. Saints testify to joy with a confidence that can sound foreign to those of us who are just trying to get through the week.

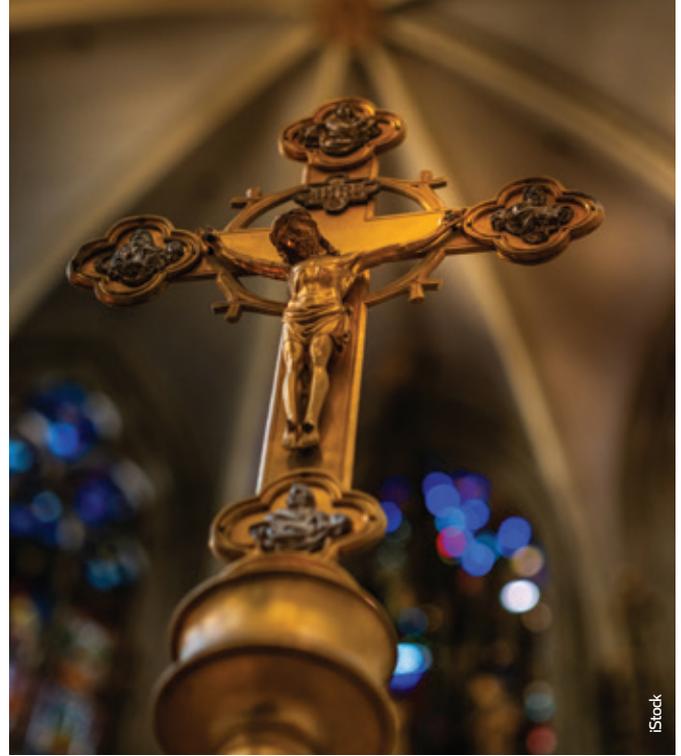
Meanwhile, faithful people encounter grief, illness, betrayal, depression, anxiety and doubt. Many do not lose faith so much as they lose the emotional atmosphere they assumed faith would provide. The question that emerges is often whispered rather than spoken: What does *joy* mean when life contradicts it?

A Sturdy Joy

A credible Christian account of joy has to resist two temptations. The first is sentimentality: a joy so bright and uncomplicated that it becomes unbelievable and, eventually, cruel. The second is cynicism: a posture that treats talk of joy as naïve, a religious gloss that obscures the world as it really is. Christian joy cannot be merely a spiritual mood or a polished personality trait. It must be honest about suffering without giving suffering the final word. It must be sturdy enough to survive real life.

One way to name that sturdiness is “crucified joy.” The phrase may sound severe, but it clarifies what many believers eventually discover through experience: Christian joy is not joy that bypasses suffering, not joy that depends on good circumstances or bright feelings. It is joy that can pass through suffering and remain rooted in love, meaning and communion with God. It is joy that looks the cross in the face and refuses to believe the cross is the end of the story.

The modern world tends to confuse happiness with comfort. We aim for ease, entertainment and positive



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emotion—and then feel bewildered when those things fail to carry the weight of a life. This is not because pleasure is the enemy; it is a genuine good. Good meals, laughter with friends, music, beauty, intimacy, play—these are not distractions from spiritual life but part of what makes life human. The trouble is not that pleasure exists; it is that pleasure is fragile. It comes and goes.

We adapt quickly. A culture built on consumption can manufacture novelty on demand, but it cannot guarantee meaning. It can keep us stimulated, but it cannot keep us whole.

Joy is different. Joy is deeper and more stable. It is less a feeling than a posture of the soul—an orientation toward love, truth and goodness. It can include pleasure, but it does not depend on it. It can remain present even when pleasure is absent because its roots lie in relationship and purpose, not in sensation. In contemporary psychology, one often hears distinctions between happiness as comfort and happiness as meaning; between positive emotion and the deeper experience of purpose, belonging and integrity. Christian language is not identical to these frameworks, but it resonates with their core insight: A good life is not simply the most pleasant life. It is the truest life—formed by love and directed toward what ultimately matters.

Spiritual Realism

This distinction matters spiritually because many believers—often unintentionally—treat faith as an emotional contract: If I pray sincerely, I will feel consoled; if I live rightly, I will feel “at peace”; if God is near, I will feel uplifted. There is some truth here. The spiritual tradition, especially in Ignatian terms, acknowledges consolation:

real experiences of hope, clarity, gratitude and love that can accompany prayer and discipleship. But when believers treat consolation as the proof of God's presence, they set themselves up for crisis. Feelings fade. Seasons change. Life grows complicated. Spiritual desolation arrives—dryness, heaviness, agitation, the sense that prayer is empty or that God is distant. If we have been taught that faith equals uplift, then desolation feels like failure. We assume something is broken: in us, in God or in the entire Christian story.

A mature faith refuses that bargain. It allows consolation to be gift rather than proof. It learns to live with emotional fluctuation without turning every shift into a verdict. And it begins to recognize a difficult but liberating truth: The absence of bright feeling is not the absence of God.

Here the Bible's spiritual realism is bracing. Scripture does not present joy as the opposite of sorrow; it presents joy as the capacity to remain related to God within sorrow. The psalms are the clearest evidence. They are not curated for composure. They contain praise, yes—but also protest, anger, confusion, fear, despair and blunt complaint. The psalms assume that faithful people will sometimes sound unpolished. They make room for a prayer life that includes the full range of human emotion. This is not a minor detail; it is spiritual permission. Many Catholics have been formed—sometimes by family culture, sometimes by religious culture—to equate holiness with emotional tidiness: being calm, controlled, “fine.” But the psalms sanctify lament. They teach that suffering does not disqualify a person from prayer; it may become the very place where prayer becomes honest.

Jesus intensifies, rather than softens, this realism. The Gospels do not hide his tears. He weeps at the tomb of a friend. He sweats anguish in Gethsemane. He cries out from the cross. If the Son of God can grieve, then grief is not faithlessness. And if the central act of salvation runs through abandonment, betrayal and death, then Christianity cannot be reduced to a project of emotional comfort. Christian joy is not a bright mask worn over pain. It is something that can coexist with pain because it is anchored beyond pain.

Nowhere does the tradition sound more paradoxical than in the beatitudes. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” “Blessed are those who mourn.” “Blessed are the meek.” To modern ears, these sound like conditions to avoid, not a map of happiness. But the beatitudes are not romanticizing suffering. They are reorienting our sense of what it means to flourish. God's favor is not reserved for the strong, the successful, the untroubled. Jesus calls “blessed” precisely those who know their dependence, who grieve, who hunger for righteousness, who refuse to make peace with injustice. The

beatitudes do not deny suffering; they reveal that suffering is not a sign of spiritual disqualification. They announce a kingdom that does not run on self-sufficiency.

Joy and Grief

This matters because so much of what threatens joy today goes deeper than discomfort. Modern life fragments people. We are overstimulated and underconnected, constantly informed and rarely at rest. Many are not merely tired; they are depleted—emotionally, relationally and spiritually. We tighten our grip on control because uncertainty frightens us, but control eventually becomes fear in disguise. We carry shame, not merely believing we have failed but believing we are failures, and shame corrodes joy because it attacks the self's capacity to receive love. We live increasingly isolated lives, and loneliness is not just a social problem; it is a spiritual wound. And in both secular and religious spaces we are often pressured toward a kind of “toxic positivity,” the demand to be fine, upbeat, grateful, inspirational. But denial is not hope. Denial is avoidance, and avoidance tends to deepen pain.

In this setting, talk of joy can become dangerous if it functions as a spiritual eviction notice: Feel better, move on, don't be dramatic. The Christian tradition cannot allow that. It must insist that joy is compatible with grief, that hope is compatible with tears and that God is not offended by honest suffering.

This leads us to the cross—not as an emblem, not as a slogan, but as the center of the Christian imagination. When people suffer, they often ask, “Why?” Why did this happen? What is the lesson? What am I supposed to learn? Sometimes explanations help. Often they do not. Explanations can become a way of distancing ourselves from pain—ours or another's. At worst they become cruel: tidy theologies that reduce wounds to moral lessons, as if the point of grief is to produce a neat insight.

Christianity's answer is not finally an explanation but a presence. The cross is the claim that God is not a spectator to human pain. God does not save from a distance. God draws near—so near that betrayal, abandonment, humiliation and death are taken into the divine life and transfigured from within. This does not make suffering “good.” But it means suffering is not godless territory. For someone in pain, that difference is enormous. It allows the prayer: “I do not understand, but I am not alone.” It makes trust possible without requiring immediate emotional relief. It offers communion rather than a lecture.

And yet there is a day in the Christian calendar that many believers ignore precisely because it is too close to real life: Holy Saturday. Between Good Friday and Easter lies a day of silence and waiting. No miracles. No clear answers.



What does joy mean when life contradicts it?

No felt resolution. Just absence.

Many people live large portions of their lives in a Holy Saturday key. They are not in acute crisis anymore, but they are not restored either. They function, but they are fragile. They keep going, but they cannot pretend. Prayer feels unanswered. Hope is not triumphant but stubborn. Holy Saturday is what it feels like to stand in the middle, where you cannot force resurrection into being.

Patient Endurance

A spirituality that cannot hold Holy Saturday becomes distorted. On one side lies simplistic optimism: Everything happens for a reason, just stay positive. On the other side lies hardened despair: Nothing changes, don't bother hoping. Crucified joy offers a third posture—waiting without collapsing. Not passive resignation, but patient endurance: an active form of trust that refuses to dictate God's timeline. In Ignatian terms, it means not making major decisions in desolation, not interpreting dryness as failure, continuing the practices that anchor one's life while the heart catches up. Holy Saturday teaches the spiritual discipline of staying.

This is also where talk of “redemptive suffering” needs careful handling. The Christian tradition has sometimes spoken of suffering offered in union with Christ, participating in redemption. But the phrase can be misunderstood in ways that are emotionally and spiritually dangerous. Not all suffering is sanctifying. Some suffering deforms people. Some pain is simply wrong and should be resisted, healed or escaped. The Gospel never requires a person to glorify harm, and the church should never pressure people to remain in situations that degrade them. A mature Catholic account of suffering must include the moral clarity to name abuse as abuse, injustice as injustice, and to seek safety, justice and healing.

Properly understood, redemptive suffering is not about seeking pain; it is about refusing to let pain define the story. Suffering can become redemptive when it is joined to love—when it is borne without bitterness, offered without self-hatred, and held within the hope of resurrection. This does not erase wounds. It transfigures them, slowly, often invisibly, sometimes only in fragments. Crucified joy is not the cheerfulness of someone who has never been wounded; it is the seasoned hope of someone who has been wounded and is no longer ruled by the wound—someone who can still risk love, still act with compassion, still believe that meaning is possible.

Credible Witness

This brings us, finally, to the communal shape of joy. Joy is not a private accomplishment. It is relational, and it cannot be sustained by sheer willpower. The Christian answer to suffering is not “try harder.” It is communion—with God, with others, with the body of Christ.

People heal through connection: through friendship that tells the truth, spiritual accompaniment that refuses to rush, shared worship that re-centers identity and acts of service that reawaken meaning. Sacraments matter here not as religious decorations but as anchors. They locate the self inside a story larger than the self. They remind the weary person that grace is not something one manufactures but something one receives. Practices matter too: prayer that tells the truth, the Examen's steady attention to where God is present and where one is resisting, small habits that reintroduce order and beauty when life feels chaotic.

Often joy returns indirectly—as the byproduct of becoming free. It sneaks back when shame loosens its grip, when isolation gives way to belonging, when a person stops demanding that God prove himself through feelings and begins to recognize a quieter fidelity at work. Joy grows not only in moments of uplift but in the long obedience of love: staying, listening, forgiving, beginning again.

Crucified joy does not deny pain. It refuses to grant pain the final word. It names the paradox at the heart of Christianity: that life comes through death, that love can endure loss without surrendering hope, that God's presence is not limited to moments of consolation. In a culture addicted to either relentless positivity or sophisticated despair, crucified joy offers a more realistic option: a joy that can weep, a hope that can wait and a faith that can stay rooted even when the heart is tired.

That kind of joy does not cheapen suffering. It dignifies it by placing it within a story where love is stronger than death and where the final horizon is not tragedy but communion. And that, perhaps, is the most credible witness Christians can offer a weary world: not the performance of constant happiness but the quiet insistence that even here—even in grief, even in silence, even in waiting—God is present, and the story is not over.

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America | MEDIA
A JESUIT MINISTRY

AMERICA'S RETREAT DIRECTORY

Planning a retreat? We've gathered a selection of retreat houses to help you find the setting that best supports your spiritual journey. Before you explore the list, here are a few essentials to guide you.

What is a retreat, and why consider one? At its core, a retreat is dedicated time set aside for prayer and reflection. Many retreats include silence, personal meditation and opportunities for faith-sharing. Most retreat houses also provide access to spiritual directors or guest speakers who can accompany you and help deepen your spiritual life.

Which type of retreat is right for me? There are several formats to consider, depending on your spiritual needs.

- Directed retreats offer daily one-on-one meetings with a spiritual director to reflect on your prayer journey.
- Guided retreats focus on a particular theme such as women's spirituality or healing, and often include talks and optional spiritual direction.
- Preached retreats involve listening to spiritual reflections or talks, followed by personal prayer and sometimes group sharing.

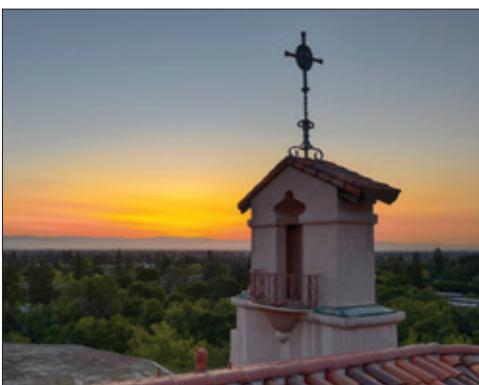
How do I find the right retreat? The retreat houses in this guide are a great place to start. Their experienced staff can help you find a retreat that fits your needs and goals and may even connect you with a spiritual director if desired.

Come seeking rest. Leave renewed in spirit, strengthened in faith and grounded in hope.



Bellarmino Jesuit Retreat House
 420 W. County Line Road, Barrington, IL 60010
 (847) 381-1261 • jesuitretreat.org • info@jesuitretreat.org

Bellarmino Jesuit Retreat House is located on 80 acres of rolling meadows and wooded countryside 40 miles northwest of Chicago. Bellarmino offers silent retreats for men and women based on St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. Other offerings include day-long spirituality programs, 12-step recovery retreats, and directed retreats. Learn more at jesuitretreat.org.



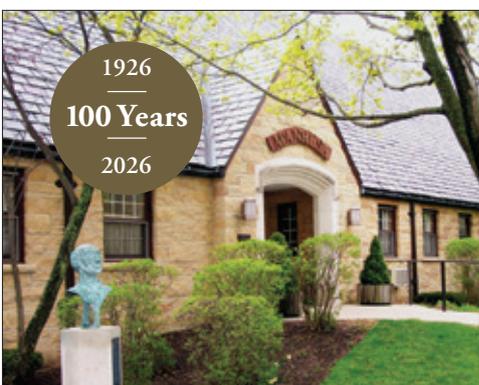
The Jesuit Retreat Center of Los Altos
 300 Manresa Way, Los Altos, CA 94022
 (650) 917-4024 • jrclosaltos.org • retreat@jrclosaltos.org

Overlooking the Silicon Valley, yet a million miles from it, the Jesuit Retreat Center of Los Altos in California considers The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius an inspired tool for spiritual growth. We offer silent and non-silent, individually directed and group retreats for men, women, couples, religious communities, and people in recovery.



Loyola on the Potomac, A Jesuit Retreat House
 9270 Loyola Retreat House Rd./ P.O. Box 9, Faulkner, MD 20632
 (301) 392-0801 • email: registrar@loyolaretreat.org
loyolaonthepotomac.com

Loyola on the Potomac sits on 235 wooded acres overlooking the Potomac River in historic Southern Maryland. Our 2026 retreats include 5 and 8-Day Directed and Private Retreats: May 26 – June 3, June 23 – July 1, July 14 – 22, and August 6 – 14. Each Fall we offer a Retreat for Veterans, October 23-25, and we start our Ignatian Weekend Retreat series in September. *Come Aside and Rest Awhile.*



Manresa Jesuit Retreat House
 1390 Quarton Road, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304
 (248) 644.4933 • manresa-sj.org • frontoffice@manresa-sj.org

Experience the spiritual serenity of Manresa's 39 wooded acres with river, outdoor stations, labyrinth, meditation areas and nature trail. Attend individual or conference retreats, days of prayer and reflection, programs, workshops, an Internship in Spiritual Companionship and more. See details and schedules on our website.



San Alfonso Retreat House
 755 Ocean Ave, Long Branch, NJ 07740
 (732) 222-2731 ext. 159 • sanalfonso retreats.org
info@sanalfonso retreats.org

San Alfonso Retreat House and Conference Center, a ministry of the Redemptorist fathers and brothers, is situated on eight acres on the New Jersey coast, providing a setting of great natural beauty to meditate and pray, reflect and study, and to be still and listen.



Siena Retreat
 5637 Erie St., Racine, WI 53402
 (262) 898-2590 • sienaretreatcenter.org
retreats@sienaretreatcenter.org

Located on Lake Michigan between Chicago and Milwaukee, Siena Retreat Center offers nourishment for the spiritual journey and retreat space for individuals and groups. Amenities include private bedrooms, on-site Bookstore, outdoor labyrinth, and lakefront access. Siena Retreat Center is an ideal space for retreat groups as well as individuals. www.SienaRetreatCenter.org.



Spiritual Ministry Center
 4822 Del Mar Avenue, San Diego, CA 92107
 (619) 224-9444 • spiritmin.org/ • spiritmin@rscj.org

Religious of the Sacred Heart offer year-round directed and private retreats, including the 30-day Spiritual Exercises and self-directed sabbaticals. We are one and a half blocks from the ocean in comfortable townhouses with large private rooms and baths. Our silent retreat house in naturally beautiful environs invites relaxation and prayer.



Jesuit Spiritual Center at Milford
 5361 South Milford Road, Milford, OH, 45150
 (513) 248-3500 • jesuitspiritualcenter.com
reservations@jesuitspiritualcenter.com

The Jesuit Spiritual Center at Milford, located outside Cincinnati, Ohio sits on 37 beautiful park-like acres along a scenic river, providing a tranquil place for prayer and renewal. In the Ignatian tradition, weekend retreats and 8-day personally directed retreats are offered year-round. Visit www.jesuitspiritualcenter.com for our complete retreat listing.

A Legacy of Mercy

Defending migrants, blessing gay couples and remembering Pope Francis one year after his death

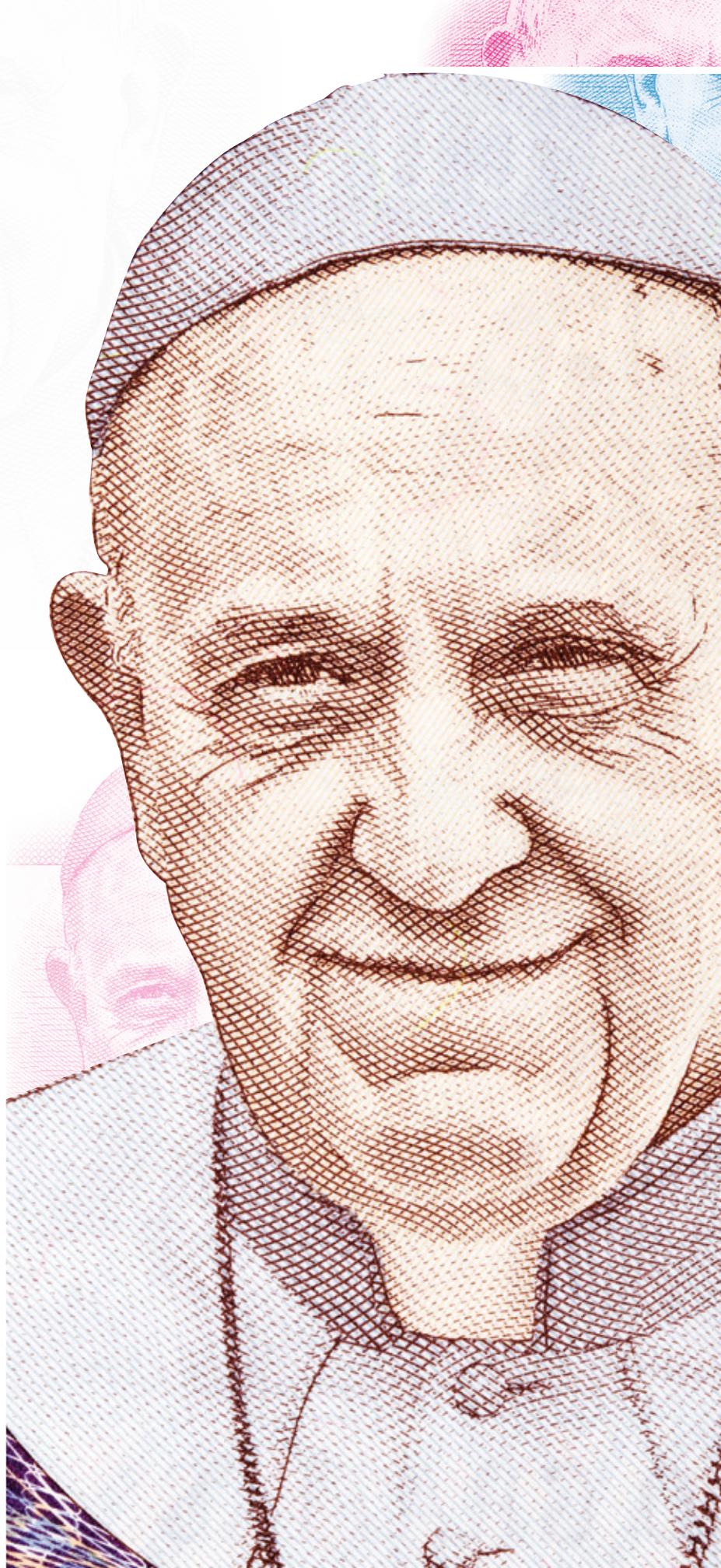
By Joe Hoover

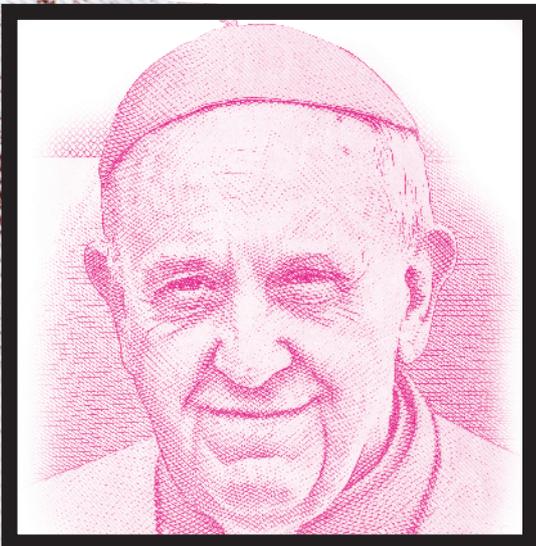
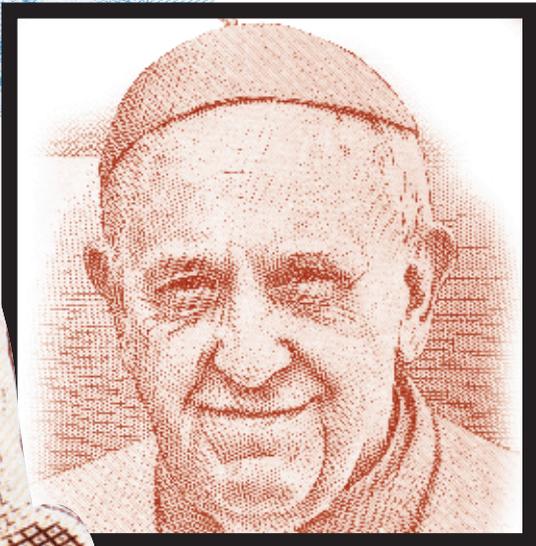
Among all the news articles I have read in the past couple of years, I am not ungrateful that one poignant, below-the-fold story has remained with me, a glow-in-the-dark star stuck to a ceiling. When Pope Francis visited Indonesia in September 2024, *The New York Times* reported about a group of transgender women in South Jakarta enthusiastically preparing to attend the papal Mass at the Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta. The reporter, Emma Bubola, described them donning feathers, glitter and rosaries. One of the women explained, “Pope Francis deserves our best outfit.”

The subhead of the article put it succinctly: “For many trans women living on the fringes of the nation’s society, the Catholic Church is a haven, and Pope Francis a personal hero.”

Yet if Francis’ inclusiveness made him a hero to some, it made him a headache for others and came with some blowback, as did other areas of his papacy. His casual communication style was startling in a church used to solemn, careful pronouncements from Rome. His comments occasionally were “clarified” by follow-up press releases from the Vatican. (I admit my own frustrations with him at these moments.) His inclusive, pastoral nature often ruffled the feathers of those who thought he was loosening the borders of church teaching, of who was on the “right” side of moral error and who was not.

Pope Francis died one year ago on April 21, Easter Monday, at his apartment at the Casa Santa Marta in Vatican City at the age of 88 after a 13-year papacy. He succumbed finally to cerebral stroke and cardiovascular collapse after a prolonged sickness. Even though he had made one final Easter ride through St. Peter’s Square in the popemobile the day before, his death did not come as a surprise. He had been in the hospital for 38 days prior with respirato-





istock/johan10

ry illnesses, including bronchiectasis and double pneumonia.

Tens of thousands of people came to the Vatican to view his body and encomiums came in from across the globe. One of the most widely circulated on social media was from Bob Dylan, even though it wasn't actually from Bob Dylan (which, for what it's worth, is very Bob Dylan). "Pope Francis was a voice of mercy in a time of noise," wrote whoever (maybe ChatGPT?), "He walked with humility, spoke with fire and dared to love the unloved."

Now that we have moved past the time of eulogies and poetic quotes, it's worth asking: How do you measure the legacy of Pope Francis? What shines even brighter now, with the benefit of distance, a year's time? What resonates even more clearly now?

His most obvious legacy at this moment, at least in the United States, would be his ardent defense of the rights of migrants. It was crystallized in a letter he sent to the bishops of the United States last February excoriating the policy of detainment and deportations about to be unleashed by the Trump administration. The letter was an extraordinary, specific condemnation from the head of the church (and, frankly, the moral authority of the world) of a presidential administration planning to marshal the full force of the federal government to carry out grave, troubling and violent acts against our own people.

"I have followed closely the major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations," Francis wrote. "The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality." He encouraged the faithful "not to give in to narratives that discriminate against and cause unnecessary suffering to our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters."

The pope acknowledged that nations had a right to regulate migration, yet he said that regulation "cannot come about through the privilege of some and the sacrifice of others. What is built on the basis of force, and not on the truth about the equal dignity of every human being, begins badly and will end badly."

In the wake of Minneapolis (and the other ICE-invaded cities), in the shadow of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, the demonstrations and boycotts and shutdowns and smoke grenades and tear gas and skirmishes in the streets that the presence of masked federal agents stalking and snatching up people of all stripe and status has incurred, in the contrails of the outrage and pain and violence and essentially, as one headline put it, the unraveling of America in that city, this line



The pope's response, 'Who am I to judge?', created an epic cultural shift.

from Francis is worth repeating: "What is built on the basis of force and not on the truth about the equal dignity of every human being, begins badly and will end badly."

Look what happened to that cold, terrorized, brave northern metropolis and you see that Francis knew what he was talking about. His prophetic voice about the moral catastrophe unfolding in the United States right now is where Francis' legacy burns the most brightly.

Yet, in its own, less dramatic way, amid his urgent vital defense of migrants and any other number of causes Francis spoke up about, it was his quieter and simpler outreach to the L.G.B.T.Q. community that was perhaps the most singular and astonishing. A pope of the Catholic Church, a man in his 80s who sits on the chair of Peter and commands something grand and a bit ominous called "the magisterium," with all its dogma and all of its "hard teachings" on any number of sexual prohibitions...becomes a *hero for Indonesian trans women*? Really? What on earth has happened here?

Mercy was the pope's pillar of fire for everything he did and spoke about—mercy not merely in terms of lenience on criminals and sinners, but with a definition rooted in the corporal works of mercy: bestowing compassion on all those who struggle and live on the margins. Washing the feet of juveniles in a detention center; praying at Lampedusa on behalf of migrants who had drowned in the Mediterranean; staying in daily contact with the members of Holy Family Church, bombarded and under siege in Gaza City during the war, and numerous other acts signified his pastoral priority of mercy.

And in very simple ways the pope exhibited mercy to the gay community. A mere five words by Francis to a reporter's question about the possible presence of gay priests in the Vatican seemed to build a 5,000-mile footbridge from Rome across the Tiber toward the L.G.B.T.Q. community across the globe. The pope's response, "Who am I to judge?," created an epic cultural shift for the church's relationship toward a group that has felt barely tolerated, if not entirely scorned, by the church. He also had audiences with trans men and women and insisted that pastors baptize the children of gay couples among other gestures towards the gay community.

The place where the pope's mercy toward the L.G.B.T.Q.

community most came under fire was in a "declaration" called "Fiducia Supplicans" that sought to "broaden and enrich" the meaning of the very nature of priestly blessings. In short, the church released a document that proposed the possibility of simple blessings of couples in irregular situations, including gay couples.

And a segment of the Catholic church lost its mind.

After the release of "Fiducia Supplicans," I wrote my own story about reactions to the declaration, noting that it "has met with resistance or even outright rejection in parts of the world. Some lay Catholics, bishops and confraternities of priests have condemned it. The bishops' conference of nearly an entire continent declared, with little subtlety, 'No blessings for homosexual couples in the African churches.'"

One canon lawyer called "Fiducia Supplicans" "a manifest disaster that should be revoked and withdrawn by the Holy See."

I was skeptical of the declaration myself and described the wording of the document as almost sounding "jesuitical." It declared that it was possible for a priest to bless a couple but not their union *as a couple*. How do you do that? It is confusing! Why not allow blessings for just the individuals in the irregular unions but not the couple itself?

Nevertheless, in the two plus years since "Fiducia Supplicans" was released, you could say my own view on the matter has been "broadened and enriched." Or maybe I've just *lightened up*, started to have an ounce more mercy on everyone and everything, even papal declarations. The fact is, developments in doctrine, the reframing of precepts, new ways of looking at ecclesial matters—they *are opaque* at first. They *can be* confusing. They do *scandalize the faithful*. They do require study and discussion and debate and sometimes even a tectonic prayerful shift in thinking to absorb their meaning.

Even longstanding teachings need close study to be absorbed and understood. Consider the traditional church teaching that salvation only comes through Christ and the church and yet those who sincerely seek God and, through no fault of their own, don't know Christ and the church can achieve salvation. You want confusion, fodder for high dud-geon and debate, and a call for study and prayer?

The rhetorical scaffolding to declarations like "Fiducia Supplicans" came from the foundational document of Francis' papacy, "Evangelii Gaudium" (which his successor Pope Leo is also holding forth as a roadmap for the church today because it is superb; read it). One passage crystallizes the pastoral thrust of Francis' entire papacy by describing what evangelization is *not*:

A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian





Pope Francis greets the faithful in St. Peter's Square at the end of the closing Mass for the Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers at the Vatican on April 6, 2025.

CNS photo/Paul Haring

elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ and others.

This is more true than many of us churchmen would like to admit.

In considering “*Fiducia Supplicans*,” one could take a few hours and write up a stirring academic explication of the document, setting down all kinds of robust defenses and justifications against its many detractors; all very well and good in the Catholic intellectual tradition.

And/or one could simply say of the church: *We are making this work*. We are plumbing the depths of Catholic spirituality and the Christian faith and finding ways to invite gay couples deeper into the realm of God’s mercy through the office of a simple blessing. We have decided to do that and we are doing that. Deal with it.

Living out an active mercy like this is an antidote for those of us who (like me to be sure, and any number of sandy-haired, Western, pertinacious master’s-level theologians) operate from moral syllogisms. But Christian mercy moves like cool water through any other number of human impossibilities. It offers a baffling mystical counter to what we know to be true: *A dead human cannot rise from the grave. Lazarus is a dead human. Lazarus cannot rise from the grave*. How did that one work out for us?

Everything is reversed. The lame walk, blind see, deaf hear, dead come to life. Our faith in a nutshell. Gay couples

can’t receive a blessing. A gay couple receives a blessing.

Probably the best way to measure the legacy of the vicar of Christ a year after his death is to measure our own closeness to Christ himself. Ultimately it is not about Francis; it is about us. Did his witness draw us nearer to the savior of the world? Are we living with more “Christ-consciousness,” and inviting others to do the same? Are we more merciful? (Even toward Francis himself!) And is our mercy not just for “other people” but ourselves, too? The ones we are harshest toward often reside in the mirror. To restate the old populist cry: “We are the ones we have been waiting to show mercy to.”

Have we let go, more and more, of trying to wrap up the world in our ways of judging and proceeding instead of widening it out for God’s way of doing things? Have we become, even in the least bit, the kind of people that terrified migrants would find welcome with, or that a group of outcast women in a country hostile to their very existence would put on their best outfits for? One way to measure the impact of this pope is to answer this question: Who visits you, confides in you, lays their glitter before you? Who finds in you shelter and haven? Who?

Joe Hoover, S.J., is *America’s* poetry editor and producer of a new film, “The Allegory.”

Among All People

To understand Christian hospitality, look to the host

By Timothy P. Schilling

Embracing the idea of hospitality and actually putting it into practice are two different things. Human beings, though wonderful and beautiful, can also be confounding, conflictual, worrisome and dangerous. Perhaps nobody knew this better than Dorothy Day, who, once she opened her houses of hospitality, found herself at times challenged by people who suffered from any number of ills, including just being plain cranky. Even at their best, human relations are not easy.

I noticed this in my own parish after we started literally keeping the doors to the church open. As I stopped in to pray one day, I heard snoring coming from one of the pews. An unhoused man had decided it was a good place for a nap. I couldn't blame him. More generally, we notice that a small but significant portion of the people who knock on the parish door—perhaps in response to an evangelization initiative—have mental health issues. Welcoming people in such cases can involve forms of caregiving that we don't feel equipped to provide. How should we respond?

How, moreover, are we to show good hospitality in general? When new people show up in our church, do we even see them? Is the eucharistic celebration itself welcoming? Do we invite them to coffee? Do we introduce them to others?

According to the Bible, hospitality is our duty. Leviticus 19:33-34 reads: "When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love

for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt."

Abraham and Sarah put this into practice when three strangers show up outside their tent. They greet the men and provide them with a resting place, a foot bath and a good meal (Gn 18:1-8). By doing so, they unwittingly serve God directly, in an encounter that previews Jesus' teaching: What you did for the least of these, you did for me (Mt 25:31-46).

For the Christian, this matter of hospitality would seem to be straightforward, a given. But lately, it has seemed to me that the word *hospitality* sums up the challenge of discipleship. Doesn't hospitality mean simply welcoming God and neighbor into one's life, in line with the two chief commandments proposed by Christ (Mt 22:37-40)? The reality is more complicated.

My hope is that we Catholics can deepen our commitment to hospitality, both in our parishes and in our daily lives. I note that in the course of the day I face this challenge repeatedly. I've begun to ask myself: Have I written people off in advance, to the degree that I won't even talk to them? When I do enter into a conversation with someone, am I really listening? Beyond that, am I willing to enter into an actual friendship with that person? Without thinking, I answer yes or no to such questions all day long.

Even in prayer, it is possible to shut others out. We tend to glamorize being an individual, independent—the perfect product of modern Western culture. Not long ago I realized that often when I pray the Our Father I do so in an individualistic way. Though the words of the prayer include *our* and *us* and *we*, I mostly think in terms of my own needs and relationship with God. Even when I say this prayer in unison with others at Mass, I barely sense that *we* are



We must remember that we are interdependent and responsible for one another.

doing this together on behalf of ourselves and all people. No wonder Pope Francis constantly reminded us that no one is saved alone. We must remember that we are interdependent and responsible for one another.

I have resolved to work on this, and it occurs to me that Mass is the ideal place to do so. Here God has invited us in. Here the readings challenge us to open our hearts. Here we are invited to the table—both the eucharistic table and, by way of that, the heavenly banquet. From this place we are sent to open our hearts to our neighbors.

Calling us to attention is the *host*. Note the etymological richness of this word. It comes from the Latin *hostia*, which means “victim,” but it also goes back further to the Indo-European root *ghosti*, which means “stranger” and “guest.” Deriving from this origin are a number of modern words that enjoy a familial relationship. These include *guest*, *hospitality*, *hostel*, *hospital*, *hostile* and *hostage*. Our eucharistic host, thus, by association, points to God, who is at once the one who welcomes us, the guest we

receive and the victim who has been sacrificed on our behalf.

I pray our communion will help us to show true hospitality to others, especially now, when so many of us struggle to welcome the stranger, whether the migrant, the refugee or the person who lives differently or thinks differently. Our “Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II” expresses it well:

Holy Father, we humbly beseech you to accept us also, together with your Son, and in this saving banquet graciously to endow us with his very Spirit, who takes away everything that estranges us from one another. May he make your church a sign of unity and an instrument of your peace among all people....

Amen.

Timothy P. Schilling serves on the staff of the Center for Parish Spirituality in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He is the author of *Lonesome Road: A Memoir of Faith*.



AP Photo/Chris Pizzello

George Saunders Loves Telling Ghost Stories

By Michael O'Connell

Now that Toni Morrison has passed, and with apologies to Alice McDermott and Bruce Springsteen, a compelling argument can be made that George Saunders is now the greatest living American Catholic writer.

His place among the best living American writers is secure. He was recently awarded the 2025 Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters by the National Book Foundation, having previously won the Booker Prize, the Folio Prize, the PEN/Bernard and Ann Malamud Award for Excellence in the Short Story, and the Story Prize, as well as fellowships from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Guggenheim, Lannan and MacArthur Foundations. He is also a New York Times best-selling

author in multiple genres.

While Saunders is not often included in discussions of the best Catholic writers, in both his upbringing and his thematic concerns, his work fits solidly in the Catholic literary tradition.

Saunders is now a practicing Buddhist, but he grew up Catholic and often cites the significance of his Catholic formation on how he understands the world. In 2013, he told *The Awl*:

I loved growing up Catholic.... They expected you to understand that there are truths that are not overt, but implied, and that the best way to imply

that kind of truth is through metaphor and ritual. I think that once you get immersed in that kind of beauty, and really feel it, even once, you will always be looking for that.

He expanded on this idea in a conversation with *Image* in 2016, saying: "I was raised in parochial schools.... I think I've always had a need, because of that intense period, for mystery and metaphor and beauty—really because of the power of the Catholic Mass. Catholicism was central to my way of thinking and being in the world—a moral system and an aesthetic system."

As recently as January of this year, he was telling *The New York Times* about the importance of his childhood Catholicism on forming his moral imagination, and particularly his desire to understand people's motives and to resist simplistic and reductive judgment. Catholicism also oriented him toward an understanding of the world that transcends simplistic biological determinism. As he told *Image*:

[We] think that it just so happens that in this generation we are fully equipped to know all that there is, and that we can know it logically and via the senses, period. And this inclination leads us to be very rational and data-reliant and pragmatic and mystery-denying—and yet mystery is real. We have no satisfactory answers for any of the biggest questions.

One approach Saunders employs to shake up both characters and readers alike is to unsettle us with the bizarre premises of his stories. In this, his approach is reminiscent of that of Flannery O'Connor, who famously declared that to reach a hostile or indifferent audience, "you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures." In Saunders's fiction, readers are continually confronted by perplexing scenarios, and given little guidance to help orient themselves as to what is actually going on.

Part of the joy of reading a Saunders story is the gradual process of coming to understand, for instance, why human beings are being used as lawn ornaments or wall art, or why people seem to be living fulltime in weird theme parks, or why sentient Twinkies are running amok. His latest work, the novel *Vigil*, begins with the narrator plummeting out of the sky and then landing with her partially clothed upper torso fully embedded in the earth. Even for Saunders, it is a strange beginning.

The Lingering Souls of the Dead

We quickly come to learn that the narrator is a ghost who has been sent to comfort a man on his deathbed. This puts any reader already conversant with Saunders's work on relatively familiar ground, because George Saunders loves ghost stories—not the kind intended to scare readers, but ones in which ghosts are central and often sympathetic characters, providing a glimpse into the spiritual nature of existence.

There are two distinct types of ghosts who regularly appear in his fiction: First there are the souls of the recently dead, who are gifted with a sort of mystical insight in the moments immediately after death, and who are on their way to whatever lies beyond the mortal realm. We see this type of ghost at the end of some of his best stories, including "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline," "CommComm" and "Escape From Spiderhead."

Then there are the lingering souls of the dead who are stuck, unwilling or unable to move on to whatever is next. This is the state of most of the characters in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Saunders's masterful first novel, though we also see ghosts of this type in "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline," in the Civil War-era family that haunt the grounds of the park, and in "CommComm," where the ghosts of the narrator's parents, murdered during a home invasion, linger on in their house, unaware that they are dead.

In all of these instances, Saunders uses his ghostly characters to explore questions of meaning and value, truth and goodness, sin and transcendence. In this, his ghost stories are less like the work of, say, Shirley Jackson or Stephen King than they are of Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*, where the presence of ghosts is intended to edify or transform both the characters in the story and the reader. Indeed, *Vigil* bears more than a passing resemblance to *A Christmas Carol*, which Saunders declared on his popular Substack newsletter Story Club to be his "favorite book of all-time."

Saunders explains that he loves Dickens's classic story so much because it explores "what (as the years pass) seems to be the dominant question of western culture, or maybe any culture: Why is it that some people get everything and others get not much at all? What are we to make of this? The miracle of the book is that it takes on this deep, dark, potentially lecture-laden topic, and makes it so much fun."

A New Take on a Classic

Vigil does something similar; it uses the visits of multiple ghosts to interrogate the nature of power and influence, and grace and salvation, and it is a very fun, quick read. There is a kind of manic energy to the various ghosts that appear, and Saunders leads us on some very strange, and very amusing, excursions away from the deathbed. But



Saunders uses his ghostly characters to explore questions of sin and transcendence.

instead of centering Scrooge's human perspective on the various ghosts, *Vigil's* point of view comes from one particular ghost: Jill "Doll" Blaine, who is attempting to provide comfort to a dying oil executive named K. J. Boone.

Boone, like Scrooge, is rich, but unlike Scrooge he is not isolated—he has a wife and daughter who love and comfort him in his final hours—and he seems to have fully enjoyed his wealth and his power. While Scrooge's death plays a key role in the fourth section of *A Christmas Carol*, he is not actually on his deathbed, and indeed, he is able to put off his death by changing his ways. When *Vigil* begins, Boone has only hours to live, and it is clear that he cannot escape his fate. The key question of the novel then becomes not if he will change, but if he will accept that he was wrong in how he lived.

One of Jill's ghostly powers is the ability to enter into the sphere of other people's thoughts. When Jill first approaches Boone, she notes his supreme sense of self-satisfaction:

I scanned for doubts regarding things he had done or left undone; things he might have said but had not; mistakes to which he had not yet fully admitted, any of which might keep him from attaining that state of total peace so to be desired at this juncture.

And found nothing, or nearly nothing.

He was as sure of himself as ever a charge of mine had been.

Jill believes that this facade of surety will begin to crack once Boone begins to die, and that it is her role to provide comfort "in whatever way I might"—which, in her understanding of existence, means to champion a sort of fatalistic determinism, to reassure her charge that he was "an *inevitable occurrence*, upon which, therefore, it would be impossible, even ludicrous, to pass judgment" (emphasis in original).

There is another ghost who visits Boone on his deathbed, though, and he is there to keep Boone from moving peacefully on to the next realm. He tells Jill, "To comfort one who remains willfully ignorant of what he has done is

to provide no comfort at all.... If you truly wish to comfort him, bring him to admit his sin, then repent it."

This nameless ghost is the inventor of some form of combustion engine (he is a 19th-century Frenchman, so I suspect he is Étienne Lenoir, who is credited with inventing the internal combustion engine in 1848) and is wracked by guilt over the role his invention went on to play in global warming. While Jill wants to provide comfort through the idea of guiltless fatalism, he tells Jill this is "facile": "Tell me, do you believe it? ... The guilty are innocent, the sinner and the saint may both sit at the right hand of the Father, enjoying equal portions?"

Our understanding of what exactly K. J. Boone has been guilty of expands as the novel moves along. At first we simply see him as a powerful oil executive (which would be reason enough for guilt), but we later learn that he set up and funded multiple think tanks devoted to denying climate change, and then later still we discover that he wrote and delivered an influential address called the "Aarhus speech"—which is described as "one of the most irresponsible speeches any American has ever delivered" and which his co-writer later called a sin "against the world, and against God"—which ended any chance that the United States would transition away from using fossil fuels.

By the end of the novel, Saunders has given the reader the impression that no single person in history has done as much to contribute to the ongoing climate disaster as K. J. Boone. He also shows us, in increasingly vivid ways, how this disaster is unfolding across the globe. At first we see the various swings of extreme temperature experienced by a schoolgirl in Pennsylvania; later we witness an invasion by the ghosts of countless bird species that have been decimated by climate change; toward the end of the novel we meet a man from India who was killed along with his family as a result of severe drought.

It is in light of these tragedies that the anonymous ghost wants Boone to admit to and repent of his own role in the ongoing climate catastrophe, and over the course of the novel he goes to great lengths to get Boone and Jill (and the reader) to understand the scope of the problem and the depth of Boone's complicity in it.

Jill, who died in 1976 at age 22, was unaware that any of this was happening, and she is horrified; she is even more appalled once she learns that Boone is entirely aware of all of it, and feels no remorse over his role in it. The main conflict of the novel hinges on whether or not he will accept that his actions were wrong, though we also follow Jill's crisis of faith over what she sees as her calling.

A Challenge to Moral Generosity

Saunders is a compelling writer because his work focuses

on the strange movement of grace, and his stories continually approach questions of redemption and salvation in surprising and fresh ways. I will not spoil how this all plays out in *Vigil*, but I will confess that I found it hard to get too invested in the possible redemption of this particular individual. I am writing this in a week when the Environmental Protection Agency announced that it would no longer count the cost to human lives when considering air pollution standards, and when we learned that U.S. carbon emissions had once again started to climb this past year. I find that I do not particularly care if a rich oil executive, the man apparently singularly responsible for both the governmental and industrial denial of climate change, is saved.

This is surely part of Saunders’s point—he wants to present us with an extreme case. If we say we believe in redemption, forgiveness and grace, *Vigil* asks us, “Even here?” Saunders, after all, is the author of nonfiction essays like “Who Are All These Trump Supporters?” and “The Great Divider,” where he embedded with the Border Patrol, pieces in which he goes to places filled with people he is in complete disagreement with and tries to understand where they are coming from—not to excuse them, or to erase the differences, but because he believes we cannot exist as a society if we do not at least attempt to understand one another.

But I found that *Vigil* ran up against the limits of my own moral generosity. Reading the novel led me back to a conversation reported in Interview in 2017 between Saunders and Zadie Smith, in which they discussed, among other things, *A Christmas Carol* and the power of ghosts in fiction. Smith argues:

[A] ghost can be a very powerful but also manipulative element. For example, I do find the values in *A Christmas Carol* significant. It is important not to be mean and stingy and not to give up love for money. All true. But by the end of it, you could also see that there’s also a kind of a sentimental protection of capital, right? Because in the end, everybody gets to keep their money. The poor stay poor. Scrooge just gets to feel better about himself. And all is right with the world.... [This] has historically been a comfort for the bourgeois.... You can read *A Christmas Carol* and not change in any way.

Saunders mostly agrees, and then says, “there are some things fundamentally off about the stance of the book. And maybe that’s okay; maybe every book is flawed, and great books, as flawed as they might be, articulate a moral argument that the reader then carries forward. The critique to this model is, of course, to ask: Should a book be ever so perfect that you come out of it with complete moral agree-

ment that can be sustained? If that’s the case, wa-hoo, you know? Wa-hoo.”

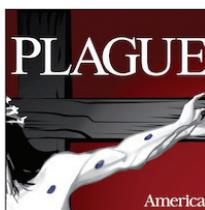
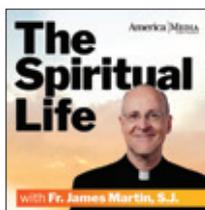
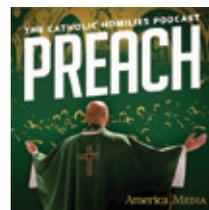
I am not sure I am entirely satisfied with the ways in which *Vigil* wraps up the various moral issues that it raises; but my own uncertainty, and the fact that I keep tossing them over in my mind, speaks to the deftness with which Saunders presents them. And I am certain that I enjoyed spending time with Jill “Doll” Blaine and the various other ghosts who populate this short, provocative novel, as well as wrestling alongside them with the weighty questions that Saunders weaves into this compelling ghost story. Wa-hoo.

Michael O’Connell lives in Ann Arbor, Mich. He is the author of *Startling Figures: Encounters With American Catholic Fiction*, editor of *Conversations With George Saunders*, and co-editor of *The Journal of David Foster Wallace Studies*. His Substack newsletter is *Nothing Gold*.

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Sheed & Ward's Unfinished Business

By Carole Sargent

What a pleasant life we could have had, I often felt, if we just wrote books and lectured; whatever made us start a publishing house?

—Maisie Ward, *Unfinished Business*

When Maisie Ward titled her 1964 memoir *Unfinished Business*, it was in part a reference to her iconic Catholic publishing house, Sheed & Ward, which turns 100 this year. Had she and Frank Sheed left it in good enough shape for successors? Her anxiety now seems justified, for since 1973, it has journeyed from one owner to the next. But as readers mark the centennial of the Sheed & Ward publishing house, we celebrate what “the Sheewardians”—as that unlikely Catholic power couple sometimes called themselves—meant back in their heyday. They created a global readership of both Catholic and interfaith intellectuals by

aiming, as Frank Sheed put it, “just above the middle of the brow.” They normalized Catholicism and ecumenical dialogue for Americans in a way that launched the radio and television stardom in the 1950s of an Illinois-born author they championed, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, whom Pope Benedict named venerable in 2012. One could argue that they also helped make both the Kennedy and Biden presidencies possible.

Mary Josephine Ward, known as Maisie, was born in 1889 on the Isle of Wight and considered herself both Victorian and Edwardian, growing up at what she called “the tail end” of an important and once-wealthy English Catholic family. They inhabited a world where visiting “Uncle Henry and Aunt Gwendy” meant going to Arundel Castle to see the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk. Norfolk was a historically Catholic title. England was still mostly Anglican at

There were no exclusively Catholic publishers at the time Sheed & Ward was founded. It was an almost immediate success.

the time, and could be deeply hostile to its Catholic minority.

Ward's parents were prominent authors and editors, with a roster of friends that read like the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Alfred Tennyson, the lord and poet laureate, was their neighbor on the Isle of Wight, even visiting to congratulate the family and see the new baby when Maisie was born. Tennyson's friend, the extraordinary early photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, made portraits of the family. Sir Walter Scott's granddaughter was related by marriage. William Makepeace Thackeray's daughter became Maisie's confidante. Lewis Carroll's nephew worked for Maisie's father. H. G. Wells, despite his anti-Catholicism, was a social friend of the family, as was Aldous Huxley.

Maisie called herself "a grandchild of the Oxford Movement," implying suffering as well as pride, because it upended the lives of all four of her grandparents. Grandfather William George Ward was a mathematics don at Balliol College, Oxford, who left the Church of England in a firestorm of Tractarian rhetoric in 1845.

He was the very first convert of the Oxford Movement, a group of former Anglicans hoping to debate England back to Catholicism. Called Tractarians (but only while they were still Anglican), they included, alphabetically and among many others, Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson, the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, Cardinal Henry Edward Manning, Cardinal John Henry Newman and Newman's mother, Jemima, and Mother Lurana White and Father Paul Wattson (the latter now beatified), who co-founded the Society of the Atonement known as Graymoor in Garrison, N.Y.

For the disgrace of becoming Catholic, Maisie's grandfather lost his university post, graduate degrees, and in many ways his country, for in those days, wrote Maisie, "the Church of England stood for England."

Maisie Ward so loved books by the Loreto nun and international bestselling author Mother Mary Loyola that she transferred to Mother's Bar Convent school in York for high school. Another teacher was the aforementioned Monsignor Benson, who published *Come Wrack! Come Rope!*, about English Catholic persecution, and the 1907 dystopian novel *Lord of the World*, which a century later would be a favorite of both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. Maisie became a standout in Latin and French, which would come in handy later in her life.

The Sheeds' son, Wilfrid, wrote in *Frank and Maisie: A Memoir With Parents* that if the 1910s had been less sexist, "She might have become a don, which would have been cur-

tain for little me." But women's higher education wasn't anyone's priority.

Instead of going to college, Maisie made her London society debut. At her first ball, she recalled feeling like Jane Austen's Caroline Bingley, enjoying the paintings far more than the dancing. Instead of making small talk with interested young men, she kept trying to discuss the Catholic faith. Her social salvation came when she volunteered as a medical assistant during World War I, working side-by-side with heroic Daughters of Charity nuns who were nurses. She re-read the books by her old family friend Cardinal Newman, vowing to continue his mission to "lay again the foundations of Catholic thought," a daunting prospect in postwar England.

In 1919 Maisie joined the Catholic Evidence Guild, a movement of street preachers, as a charter member. Picture the former debutante standing high on a wooden platform in Speakers' Corner at Marble Arch in Hyde Park, London, intoning Catholic theology to a jeering crowd, with mounted police hovering nearby for protection. It became obvious why London society's teas had bored her so.

Frank's Life So Far From Either England or Rome

Maisie's future husband, Frank Sheed, was born in Sydney, Australia, in 1897. Though he was baptized Catholic (his mother's family was Irish Catholic), he was raised Protestant. He remembered his mother's parents as "the type who dream of the Pope and wake up in a cold sweat screaming 'Rome!'" His father was an ardent Methodist who traveled for work. While their father was away for months on end, Frank's mother took the children to Catholic Mass and catechism. When the father returned, so did Methodism, along with Marxist dinner-table harangues and anti-Catholic pamphlets for the kids.

Yet Frank's Catholicism never wavered; he credited his mixed-faith upbringing with forcing him to use his mind in regard to religion, putting him well on the road to a career defending Catholicism in his folksy, amiable and mildly bawdy way.

Frank graduated from the University of Sydney in 1917. Three years later, he visited London during a summer break from law school and met members of the Catholic Evidence Guild. He initially had no intention of settling in London, but then along came the force of nature that was Maisie Ward.

Frank Sheed was 22 to Maisie Ward's 30, but she thought he sounded brilliant whenever he stood on the speaker's box arguing for the Catholic Evidence Guild.



Dorothy Day published her first book, *Houses of Hospitality*, with Sheed & Ward.

Frank interspersed witty evidence for the Catholic faith with effortless Latin that Maisie understood from her York days as a classics student. She was so captivated that she sent a congratulatory postcard to this Frank Sheed fellow, and he became her able lieutenant. Maisie had improbably and at last found her intellectual and spiritual match.

In accepting Maisie's leadership in the Guild, Frank lived what we would now call feminism, contending that "the best man must always have the job, even if that man happens to be a woman." He maintained a career-long ability to recognize and publish the writing of intellectual women.

Their professional relationship gradually turned personal. Frank asked Maisie to marry him just before returning to Australia to cram two years of law school into one and finally finish. She said she'd think about it. She then went to Lourdes with her mother to beg Our Lady for the answer.

Afterward, she sent Frank a cable saying yes but in Latin, so nosy postal workers wouldn't read it; 55 years later, after Frank died, that cable was found in his coat pocket. The family considered Maisie's choices—such as preaching from streetcorners and marrying a loud, young Australian—to be "untidy" (her word), expressing dismay through euphemistic phrases such as "Maisie has chosen her own line" and "She has made her own friends."

Through Maisie, Frank stepped into an orders-of-magnitude higher place in society, one they would navigate together brilliantly.

20th-Century Catholic Influencers

The idea of a Catholic publishing house came from Maisie's mother, Josephine, and in October of 1926 she put up the initial money. Josephine had the know-how because of long experience as a popular and prolific Catholic novelist. In fact, the new press would one day publish her well-reviewed last novel, which F. Scott Fitzgerald praised to the most influential literary critic of the era, Edmund Wilson.

There were no exclusively Catholic publishers at the time, so the original Sheed & Ward occupied a necessary niche and was an almost immediate success. The original

Ward in the name was not Maisie but her brother, Leo, who had left the Jesuits after a miserable novitiate. He was depressed and aimless, and their mother hoped publishing books might distract him, but his heart was never in it. Leo Ward soon discerned a call back to the diocesan priesthood, where he remained for life, and Maisie took his place at the press.

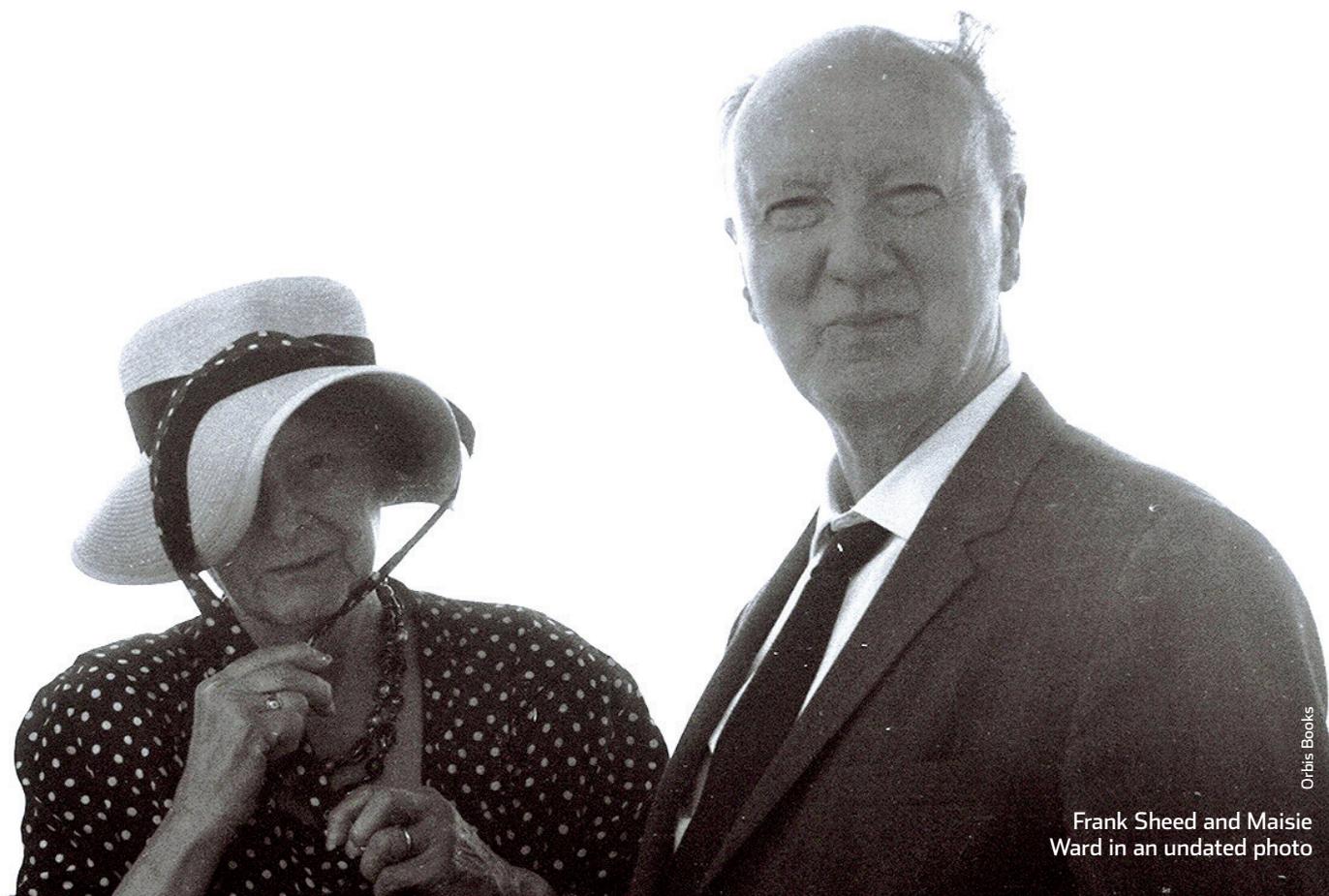
G. K. Chesterton was a family friend of the Wards and had known Maisie since her childhood. He was one of the first authors to publish with Sheed & Ward, remaining with them for the rest of his life (though his "Father Brown mysteries" were published by an earlier and rival press). He became godfather to their son, Wilfrid. Chesterton's close friend, the French-English author Hilaire Belloc, also offered the Sheedwardians a book and continued to publish with them. The British priest C. C. Martindale, S.J., gave them his manuscript, *Christ Is King*, as a rather amusingly self-serving wedding gift, and became one of their steady authors.

They had some early good luck, including being banned in Ireland for a book about marital sex, which boosted their popularity everywhere. The Catholic historian Christopher Dawson and the pacifist philosopher E. I. Watkin soon agreed to publish with them. In 1927, while Maisie was pregnant with their daughter, Rosemary, she corrected the page proofs of another new author, the biblical scholar Hugh Pope, O.P. While these are not household names today in the United States, their stature at the time in Great Britain shows what a glittering, if intellectually niche, world Sheed & Ward inhabited.

Karl Adam's German classic *The Spirit of Catholicism* became their first bestseller in 1929. The English edition would inspire Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton and Flannery O'Connor, and their Italian translation influenced Pope Paul VI, who drew on it for his first encyclical. Instead of waiting around for manuscripts, the Oxford chaplain and radio broadcaster Monsignor Ronald Knox (their most published author) said the Sheedwardians spent energy "digging out and hounding on English Catholics to write the sort of books they ought."

At first Frank went alone on lecture tours in the United States, but eventually Maisie joined him. They attracted rapt listeners on both sides of the pond who turned into believers, but they also continued to draw hecklers. Maisie wrote, "One atheist heckler in London attacked us for two years, another in Leicester for four; both became Catholics, the Londoner converted his mother and his brother and himself became a speaker." Two hecklers became Cistercian monks.

During World War II, the Sheedwardians became part



Orbis Books

Frank Sheed and Maisie Ward in an undated photo

of the Manhattan neighborhood of Morningside Heights and the Catholic community at Corpus Christi Church (Thomas Merton had been baptized Catholic there in 1938). Maisie and Frank emceed packed meetings for young people, teaching them to defend the faith while being heckled. Two of those teenagers, Megan Rice and Anne Montgomery, grew up to become Catholic sisters and antinuclear activists, later serving prison time for peace and crediting their Sheedwardian experience for teaching them to handle conflict and adversity in living their faith.

A Catholic Intellectual Revival

“I give Frank a mass of untidy notes. He says ‘Hey Presto’ over them and they turn into a bestseller.”

—Msgr. Ronald Knox in Maisie Ward’s memoir, *Unfinished Business*

Sheed & Ward became the bestselling Catholic publisher in the world. It launched the Catholic Book-of-the-Month Club and then consistently sat atop it. It was proud of being a driving force of the U.S. Catholic intellectual revival of the 1940s and ’50s, as well as products of the English one

that preceded it.

Using Maisie’s inheritance from her mother’s estate, it launched an office in New York in 1934, on the 100th anniversary of the Oxford Movement. The company received praise for translations of the Danish-Norwegian Nobel laureate Sigrid Undset, already well-known as the author of the blockbuster trilogy *Kristin Lavransdatter*, and the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, who through the Sheedwardians became friends with Thomas Merton and François Mauriac.

Dorothy Day published her first book, *Houses of Hospitality*, with Sheed & Ward. Her Catholic Worker cofounder, Peter Maurin, used to stop by to chat with Frank and draft his now-famous “Easy Essays,” some of which they published. Day was so deeply shaken by Maisie Ward’s death in 1975 that she sat for hours beside her good friend’s coffin.

Maisie used the isolation of the World War II years to finish the first of her two biographies of Chesterton. She also read Caryl Houselander’s work in *Grail* magazine and nudged Frank to invite Houselander to write her first book, *This War Is the Passion*, establishing her as what Maisie called “a writer of power and originality.” Houselander be-



As publishers, the Sheeds were comfortable challenging the Vatican from time to time, but not outright defying it.

came a Catholic best-seller, and in 1962 Maisie published an acclaimed biography of her.

Sheed & Ward's London office was bombed during the Blitz and completely destroyed. Only decades after the war, in 1997, did Maisie's biographer reveal that Frank had worked for British Intelligence during the war. He wrote reports on pacifists, including Dorothy Day, whom Britain deemed communist. Frank defended her in his secret correspondence with British Intelligence, while nevertheless arguing with Day personally about the war because he supported U.S. military intervention against Nazi Germany.

Though the couple never became truly wealthy, and sometimes struggled financially, they always hobnobbed comfortably. They typically summered with the Time magazine titans Henry and Clare Booth Luce, who gave their son, Wilfrid, a car. They also appeared on radio and early television well before their popular author, then-Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, did so.

Wilfrid, who became a novelist published in *The New Yorker* and was a columnist for *The New York Times Book Review*, remembered many evenings spent with “unexplained little men from the Continent turning up to play croquet, comic priests in black dickeys bellowing songs round the piano (my father played as if his pants were on fire), and always plenty of gossip steaming hot from the Vatican or chancery.”

Complex Politics and the Church

“If one had to boil the Sheed/Ward American mission down to one sentence, it would be that Frank and Maisie finally gave Catholics permission to think without benefit of clergy.”

—Wilfrid Sheed, *Frank and Maisie: A Memoir With Parents*

Many conservatives revere the Sheewardians because of Chesterton and Newman and their nurturing of Catholic theology, but it is more difficult to pigeonhole their politics. Frank declared himself apolitical, and his memoir,

The Church and I, brims with compassion over whether the divorced should receive Communion (he argued they need it), whether contraception is ever acceptable (he said yes, but with caveats) and why he sought the perspectives of other faiths (he was strongly ecumenical). Both he and Maisie backed the U.S. war effort in World War II but were appalled at the use of the atom bomb on Japan.

On first blush, one might easily guess Maisie would have been the more conservative of the two, given her heritage, British social standing and devotion to both Newman and Chesterton. However, in other areas she took progressive positions, and her *New York Times* obituary in 1975 claimed she admitted a “bias towards the left.” For example, she started a real estate aid society in England, buying decrepit properties and renovating them for affordable housing. She interviewed draft resisters in prison.

She also devoted two full chapters of her memoir, *Unfinished Business*, to the French worker-priest movement, quite possibly influenced by her friendship with Dorothy Day. This was the same movement that attracted the passionate antiwar activists Daniel and Philip Berrigan when they were both young priests. However, Maisie's soft spot for principled radicals only went so far. When a group of 72 French worker-priests who broke with Rome hoped to publish their manifesto with Sheed & Ward, Maisie said it wasn't for them. As publishers they were comfortable challenging the Vatican from time to time, but not outright defying it.

The couple struck very public and historically progressive stances on race. They were influenced deeply by their close friend, the founder of Harlem's Friendship House, Servant of God Catherine de Hueck Doherty. They called her The B, for the Russian baroness that she was, and she was one of two Catholic baronesses they knew. She publicly advocated for interracial dialogue and even marriage, still then illegal. Maisie and Frank hosted mixed-race faith conversations for young people in Harlem in the 1940s and '50s, eras when such intermingling was almost unheard of. Sheed & Ward published important books by two African American Catholic women: Elizabeth Laura Adams in 1942 and three books by Helen Caldwell Day in the 1950s, including the landmark *Color, Ebony* about her experiences as a Black Catholic in the deep South.

“Logically, once you recognize the equality of the... races, where are you to stop?” wrote Maisie in 1962. “If you really believe that two Catholics are both members of Christ's mystical body, by what right can you prevent them from becoming one flesh in the sacrament of marriage?” It is clear from Frank's progressive writing on race in his memoir, *The Church and I*, that he agreed.

So What Becomes of Sheed & Ward Now?

Maisie died in 1975 in New York City at the age of 86. Frank died six years later in Jersey City, N.J., at the age of 84. They were survived by their daughter, Rosemary, their son, Wilfrid, and seven grandchildren.

In 1973, Sheed & Ward was acquired by the Universal Press Syndicate, which then sold the company to the National Catholic Reporter in 1986. In 1998 the Priests of the Sacred Heart acquired the company and its backlist. Rowman & Littlefield bought its U.S. assets in 2002. Bloomsbury Publishing then purchased that house in 2024. Senior editor Richard Brown, who works for Bloomsbury, led the brand for four years. What's next is not known.

Recent Sheed & Ward books reflect Brown's vision of "engaged Catholicism": Emily Reimer-Barry's *Reproductive Justice and the Catholic Church: Advancing Solidarity with Pregnant Women*; Ish Ruiz's *LGBTQ+ Educators and the Catholic Church: Embracing Synodality, Inclusion, and Justice*; and Christine Schenk, C.S.J.'s *Bending Toward Justice: Sister Kate Kuentler and the Struggle for Parish Rights*, about a canon lawyer and Catholic sister who challenged the U.S. bishops in a Vatican court and won.

While this recent output is solidly on the progressive side of the conversation, there is no political agenda or theological litmus test with these books, Brown said in an interview. Instead, "Sheed & Ward offers a platform for a new generation of Catholic authors to draw on Maisie and Frank's legacy."

Sheed & Ward, Brown noted, always published "the most significant authors of the day, wrestling with their tradition's relationship to culture and faith, and doing it in a way that non-specialists can understand and appreciate. Some of these books may celebrate the church; some may challenge and critique it. But all of them will serve the mission of what Maisie and Frank founded almost a hundred years ago: a vibrant, vital ecosystem of ideas that contribute to a better, more informed understanding of faith and life."

Carole Sargent is the author of *Transform Now Plowshares*; Megan Rice, Gregory Boertje-Obed, and Michael Walli and the founding director of Georgetown University's Office of Scholarly Publications. With Drew Christiansen, S.J., she co-edited *A World Free from Nuclear Weapons: The Vatican Conference on Disarmament and Forbidden: Receiving Pope Francis's Condemnation of Nuclear Weapons*, both from Georgetown University Press.

ST. PAUL REFLECTS

By Daniel Luttrull

What I am I am by grace.

Still, Stephen's face invades my stupors—stilled, upraised, afire. He hurled such honed desire the cosmos, like a canvas, caught and tore and God outpoured in chance apocalypse.

Struck by his stricken countenance, I tracked his gaze, but all my scaling eyes observed was a single pigeon trace the curve of the sealed sky. As Stephen died, I thought the bird reflected a flash of glimmering light.

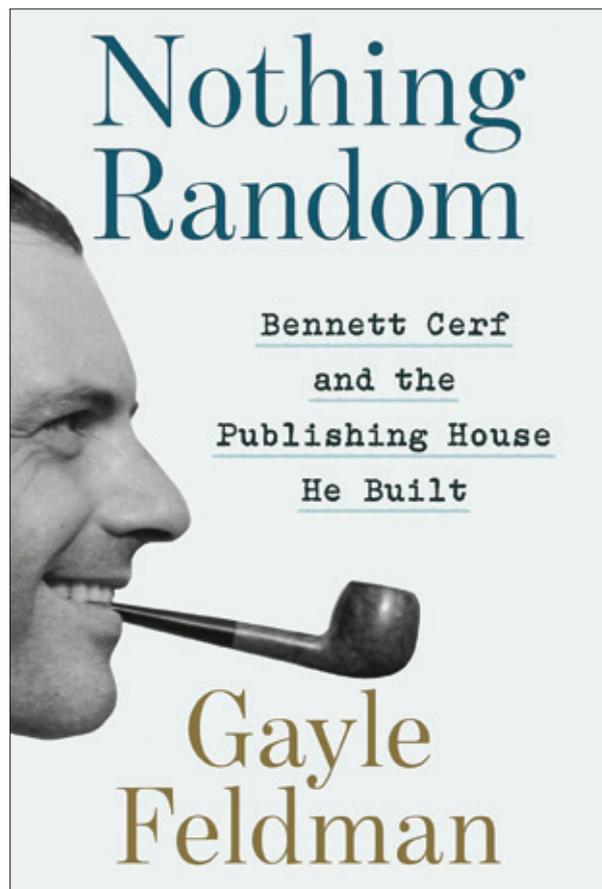
How could you describe a state like mine? I saw the timeless enter time and still did not believe. My infant faith emerged, sputtered and huffed in agonal breath, and blued and cooled in the newer, purer air.

There, as to one untimely born, our Lord appeared, breathing his searing life into my faith.

This grace was not in vain.

Daniel Luttrull is an assistant professor of English at the University of Mary in Bismarck, N.D.

EDITOR OF THE PEOPLE



Random House / 1,072p \$40

“I might be considered a much more distinguished publisher if I hadn’t had so much fun on the side.”

These words were spoken with the confidence of a man who knows he is the subject of an *Esquire* feature. His photo catches him mid-laugh, brown eyes squinting behind horn-rimmed glasses, salt-and-pepper hair slicked back. The bookman looked the part of a raconteur. He added a quip: “Ask the average man how many publishers he knows by name—it’ll be Bennett Cerf.”

It was true. In 1953, a decade earlier, Cerf had profiled Marilyn Monroe for the same magazine—a feature written with the casual tone of someone writing about a fellow star.

Counting its front and back pages, Gayle Feldman’s new biography of Cerf, *Nothing Random*, clocks in at a hair under a thousand pages. The book contains a 12-page key to major characters and nearly 150 pages of double-columned notes. Such expanse is unsurprising. Cerf co-founded Random House in 1927, and when a publisher releases the story of its patriarch, thoroughness is to be expected.

As Cerf confidently proclaimed, he was one of a kind, a literary paradox. For 16 years, millions of Americans had

watched him on Sunday nights on the TV show “What’s My Line?” He collected jokes, puns and riddles into books that sold more than five million copies. When he was only 27, he and his business partner, Donald S. Klopfer, bought the Modern Library from Horace Liveright.

Random House came two years later. Cerf’s authors included luminaries ranging from Truman Capote to Gertrude Stein to Dr. Seuss. Cerf was consequential in publishing some of the most important writers and books of the 20th century, among them the U.S. edition of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint*. He counted Nobel Prize winners in his roster.

In today’s atomized literary culture, the idea of a long-time editor-writer relationship is rare—not to mention a writer loyal to a publisher. Cerf’s biography is a window into the past of American literary culture.

Feldman is the perfect writer for the job. On staff at *Publishers Weekly* for 40 years, she knows book culture inside and outside the covers. Feldman basks in the light of Cerf’s literary star, but her book isn’t a hagiography. The volume mostly earns its length, although some sections are replete with namedropping and asides that momentarily lose the focus. (Feldman worked on the book for over 20 years. One can only imagine the amount of material she accumulated.) The best sections of the biography are about the business of books and their writers.

Feldman unpacks Cerf’s paradoxes. She ascribes his success to his flexibility:

It’s precisely because Cerf was open to so many worlds, high and low, mass and class; and to so many people—he loved being a New York switchboard to the famous, but also took pleasure in chatting with all the regular Joes and Janes—that he accomplished so much.

Columbia University was the early crucible for Cerf’s wit; there he learned “how to write amusingly and fast for publication,” a skill that he later turned into popular newspaper and magazine columns and the occasional jacket copy. He talked to the right people and talked to them well. He read widely and documented his reading in his diaries. His entries document “the excitement of a mind opening to the possibilities and worlds in them, and of quick, instinctive reactions that would serve him well later on.” Although Cerf was publicly playful, he was ultimately all business: “He never wasted time; competed fiercely to win,” Feldman writes, “always wanted more; was never satisfied with himself.”

He had to be tough on himself, because the literary



Feldman basks in the light of Cerf's literary star, but her book isn't a hagiography.

culture was unforgiving. As Feldman notes, young Jewish men like Cerf and Liveright couldn't rise in the "generally antisemitic old [publishing] houses," so they "had to start companies themselves." The going wasn't easy. In the early days of Modern Library, before air conditioning, Cerf and company would use castor oil to "cure" their covers ("the fake leather bindings had been a selling point"), but the materials "went rancid in humid heat." In the summer, the publishing office, as Klopfer said, "stank to high heaven."

But the victories started to accumulate. One particular win was for both the publishing house and the literary culture. James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* had originally been serialized in *The Little Review* from 1918 through 1920, but the following year the book was banned in the United States. Cerf, eyeing the book for American publication, contrived a seizure by U.S. customs, leading to an infamous censorship trial. Random House won. Cerf was thrilled and used the controversy to move books.

Feldman affirms Cerf's devotion to the "three cardinal rules of bestseller promotion," which include "an ounce of imagination pre-publication is worth a pound of advertising after a book is out; advertising sells a book that's already selling; a bestseller is helped by strokes of luck—the publisher's job is to know when and how to exploit them."

The house was successful, to be sure, but not infallible. Random House readers rejected the work of a young John Cheever—who seemed to be a risk—two months before he published his first story in *The New Yorker*. In the decade to come, Random House would pass on books by other eventual greats: Elizabeth Bishop, Bertolt Brecht, Karel Capek, Martha Gellhorn, Anaïs Nin, Flann O'Brien and Jean Rhys.

Cerf could be honest about his own missteps. When Eugene O'Neill wrote his most Catholic play, "Days Without End," Cerf wanted endorsements from the church. O'Neill knew the folly in such direct ecclesiastic support. "No, I *certainly cannot consent*," O'Neill wrote to the publisher. "Lay off the Catholic stuff!" Feldman is correct to note that O'Neill's acceptance of Catholic mysticism was different from institutional allegiance. Cerf, she notes, "didn't mind being told he was wrong, as long as he could offer opinions."

Another Catholic Cerf valued was St. Thomas Aquinas. A two-volume selection of his works was planned, the goal being to print 10,000 sets and sell enough in five years to "recoup the investment." Cerf, though, hadn't realized that "every Jesuit school in the country was waiting for an edited version of the saint's words. Within three weeks, all 10,000 sets were sold." A monsignor at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York soon "offered to sell enough of the Church's own paper to make another 5,000 sets," ultimately leading to a

most unusual next act: Random House purchased part of the regal Villard Houses behind the cathedral. One editor, Jason Epstein, told Cerf's wife that he "felt like he was in heaven."

Cerf valued his relationship with Random House authors and was a frequent correspondent. "Such epistolary conversation knitted relationships with the faith and attention writers need to thrive," Feldman notes, "but Bennett also craved *their* approbation."

Some, like James Michener, noticed Cerf's advice could be both perceptive and sly. "Whenever you go into a strange town, stop at the bookstore," Cerf advised. "Tell the owner and especially the clerks how much you appreciate their support, because they're the ones who keep you alive." Cerf told Michener to autograph all copies of the books in the store and say it was "for their special customers," but also because "then they can't ship the unsold books back to us." Cerf was both a man of the people and a man who understood the people.

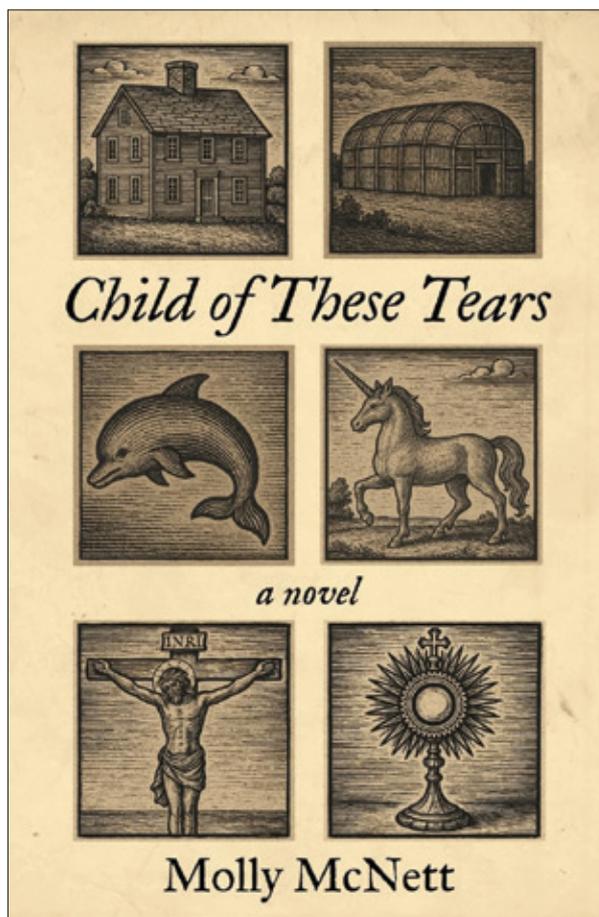
In 1962, Random House lost a giant: Nobel Prize winner William Faulkner died at 64. Cerf and Klopfer hopped on a plane in New York, along with William Styron, then a rising young novelist. Once they landed in Memphis, Styron saw a woman staring at the group—actually, one in particular. "Bennett Cerf! You're Bennett Cerf," she yelled. "Good Lord God, never thought I'd meet *you*."

The woman asked why Cerf was in Memphis. Cerf replied he was there for William Faulkner's funeral.

The woman responded: "William *who*?"

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NOT MET WITH WORDS



Slant Books / 200p \$19

Child of These Tears opens on a world that is, like ours, in flux.

Many competing claims to space and place, many differing points of view, and many languages meet in Hartfield Falls, a New England settlement of English villagers that is raided by Native American warriors. More than a few inhabitants, including young children, are killed, while others are taken captive and marched toward Canada. Sarah Baker and her daughter Constance are among the captives. Along the road Constance and her mother are separated. But while the girl is rescued by French trappers and handed over to a peaceful Mohawk tribe, Sarah is returned to Hartfield Falls to watch her husband John spiral from what appears to be a post-traumatic mental illness.

This is merely the beginning of the novel's dramatic arc, shaped more by the process of recovery from trauma than by the trauma itself. And nature's impressive power to recover its own is as much on display as grace's transformative and revivifying efficacy.

Molly McNett's story displays the difficulties of transla-

tion, the irreducibility of meaning, and the frustrating limitations of human nature and society. She achieves her best effects by fully honoring the perception of her characters, taking them at their own word, instead of defaulting to the posture of helpless uncertainty and unresolved doubt that hampers the achievements of so many contemporary novels. McNett's text has authority in that sense, the courage of its characters' convictions, even as its author dissolves into the background: nowhere absent yet everywhere invisible, applying Flaubert's advice ("An author in his book must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere.") to good effect.

In an online launch event for the book that was later released as a podcast episode, McNett opened up about her faith journey, from her Protestant upbringing through connections with Jewish family members to a fascination with contemporary mystical and contemplative writers, including Thomas Merton and Simone Weil. She also described an aspect of her writing process that has a kinship with her character John Baker's journaling process. From a little shelf of books, Baker collects quotations, which he copies down; copying leads to meditation; and meditation leads to a further search for quotations.

Though McNett's shelf is no doubt better supplied than Baker's, McNett hews closely to historical realities, choosing to record with her characters' eyes rather than with her own. This ocular shapeshifting continues masterfully in McNett's renditions of other characters' private journals, published broadsides and often testy or anxious correspondences (of which the invented 18th-century titles alone are a pure delight).

Narrating John Baker's search in particular, McNett successfully captures something real that is not often confessed to by lovers of books: the feeling of futility when, through your searching of texts, you arrive at the reason for that search and discover that it was always, though unconsciously, some sort of self-justification project—innocuous, perhaps, but not entirely innocent. To reveal the moment when the flaw in John Baker's logic becomes as obvious to him as it is to the reader would be to spoil one of the novel's major character transformations, though not necessarily the most moving or compelling.

For me as a reader, the most compelling transformation takes place in the fictional soul of one Simon Floquart, S.J., a priest who is less an unlikely Christ figure than that still rarer subspecies of literary phenotype: a *believable saint*. Floquart is a man of inner contradictions: greedy, impatient, comfort-seeking; understandably (but also perhaps a little excessively) preoccupied with the twinges and aches in his own emotional scars, but also idealistic and genuinely contemplative; and still more, when it comes to the point,



capable despite his flaws of actively willing another's good at his own expense.

The way in which McNett traces, in scalpel-sharp, deftly handled detail, exactly how God's providence uses not only Floquart's virtues but also his weaknesses to save both his own soul and that of another character demonstrates not only exquisite fictional craft but tremendous spiritual insight.

The "good priest" as a narrative archetype is, perhaps, enjoying a certain revival at the moment. This revival benefits us all the more to the extent that it reveals how a person need not be ordained to the priesthood to embody some of the traits most fitting to that role and most fully blazoned forth by its faithful fulfillment.

There is also a kind of consecration to the way in which Sarah Baker carries her griefs, a burden as heavy as a crossbeam. We see a kind of shepherding take place when Nistenha, a Native woman, tends to the material and spiritual needs of Constance, in every way from combing the little girl's untended hair to teaching her the words of hymns and the Mass. Father Floquart's later, decisive role in Constance's fate is prepared for and made possible by these less obvious sacrifices. The vivid reality of this spiritual connection is made tangible in a moment of startling revelation toward the end.

Because it so profoundly evidences the *a fortiori* reality of the spiritual over the material—both are necessary and real and deserving of our respect, but how much more the spiritual than the material—and because of its use of polyphonic, or multiple-voiced, narrative strategies, McNett's novel has often, and rightly, been compared to George Saunders's astonishing and innovative *Lincoln in the Bardo*. There are even structural and phrase-level similarities, in particular one repeated, antiphonal line of quoted internal monologue that quite closely samples the voice of that novel's own lost child.

But the book's epigraph from the writings of a Carthusian monk reads, in part: "One by one I shall forget the names of individual things. You who sleep in my breast are not met with words." The "you" here is of course God. The novel's revelation that our efforts to articulate our experiences of reality are at once deeply necessary to our own souls but also totally needless from God's perspective is at once a gentle rebuke and a backhanded encouragement: a vital perspective-taking for all of us wordy creatures, as well as a spur toward better speech and better writing.

This incisive insight, and the novel's travel among many languages, recalls to mind not so much Saunders's legacy as Jon Fosse's. Fosse, the recent Nobel laureate whose acceptance speech reached for a description of his lifelong hope to use language "to say the unsayable," frequently meets the

McNett's novel has rightly been compared to George Saunders's astonishing and innovative *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

same mark not only in his magisterial *Septology* but also in his many shorter fictions and plays, which carry the minimalist influence of Beckett, Brecht and Ibsen—not Christian writers, but existentialist ones, whose immediacy and urgency have nevertheless found new purchase in teaching Christian writers anew the importance of the unvarnished candor with which this faith's narrations began.

In making space for multiple voices, faithful candor and authentic Christic imagination, McNett's novel, like Fosse's, travels a good distance toward making the unsayable sayable.

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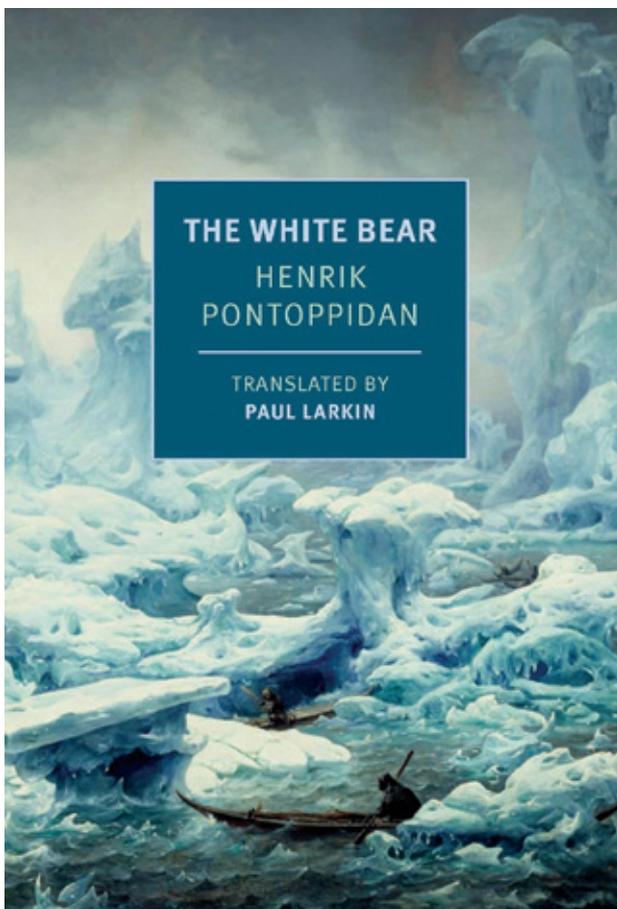
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PARABLES OF A PRIEST



NYRB Classics / 168p \$17

There is a revealing moment in Henrik Pontoppidan's novella *The Rearguard* in which Jørgen Hallager, a Danish social realist painter temporarily living in Rome with his new wife, Ursula Branth, writes home to his comrades of his impressions of the city.

"I swear," he laments, "you can walk through a hundred galleries down here without seeing a single reference to ordinary life and the struggles of the common people." Then comes the hedged corrective: "Only a few of the very oldest Christian painters, albeit in their stilted depiction of Christ's persecution, have expressed a genuine indignation at the evisceration of truth and justice here on earth."

Hallager is a committed revolutionary, and his insight offers a window onto the perpetual power of the crucifixion as a sociopolitical image: a man silenced in death by the machinations of empire. It also illustrates the distance between what the translator, Paul Larkin, calls in his afterword the "demagoguery" and "monomania" of Hallager's politics and the Christian vision of a social contract as drafted in the Beatitudes and ratified on the cross.

Pontoppidan was born in Denmark in 1857 to a family of Lutheran vicars, so it is no surprise that his work would

probe the relationship between the spiritual and material. He received the Nobel Prize in 1917, yet he remains less well known in the United States than Thomas Mann and other European writers who praised him during his lifetime.

The Rearguard is paired here with another novella in Larkin's translation, *The White Bear*, published by the thoughtfully curated New York Review Books Classics series. The two novellas work in conversation with each other. Both feature burly, uncouth protagonists who endure episodes of childhood trauma and develop a fiercely independent way of engaging with the world.

For Thorkild Müller of *The White Bear*, this trauma takes the form of the early death of his father and the condescending attitudes of his surviving family. "The perennial calm he displayed in the face of all his humiliations was more in the nature of an innate grimace, behind which he had hidden since childhood," Pontoppidan plangently writes. "A screen for the sorrow and shame of being born such a wretched and useless human being."

There is one way for Müller to improve his lot in the small provincial town where he is raised. By a government decree, theology students who commit to later serving as priests for "an unspecified period of time" in the Danish colony of Greenland can receive an annual stipend to fund their studies. It is a "charitable provision," but one that scares off many would-be applicants with its open-ended return date.

With options limited, Müller enrolls in the seminary program. He is a desultory student who "scarcely open[s] a book" and strays into the lecture hall but a handful of times. When he is brought before the faculty for his final examination, he attempts to sabotage the assessment—and with it the prospect of a mission to Greenland—by refusing to answer any of the questions. The government ministry intervenes, however, and forces the faculty to send him "to the most northerly priestly vocation that existed anywhere in the whole world."

The image of Müller silent before this tribunal recalls Christ's reticence before Pilate, a comparison that grows more pronounced as we proceed through the novella and watch him transform into a true pastor. The turning point comes after he endures his first winter in the northern reaches' "desolate crucible of stone." He tries to study texts on evangelization in the log cabin that serves as his rectory but finds the words don't land; he turns his attention to the outdoors, to the rocks and ice and fauna, and spends a summer in the mountains above the fjords with an Inuit elder, Ephraim, and his family.

Though we don't witness this episode, Pontoppidan narrates it after the fact. We learn how Müller "was a man born anew...a rejuvenated soul" upon his return from the



Pontoppidan has given us a sketch of the ‘inculturation’ of faith that Pope Francis repeatedly called for.

wilderness, where he has immersed himself in the rituals and subsistence practices of his circle of adopted kin. It is a relationship that changes him physically (“his eyes had come alive and his cheeks were flushed with color”) but also spiritually and emotionally.

Pontoppidan here has given us a sketch of the “inculturation” of faith that Pope Francis repeatedly called for, and that his successor, Pope Leo XIV, exemplified during his time in Peru. By accompanying his flock to the furthest reaches of their territory, the marginal lands of an already marginalized group, Müller wins not only respect but initiation into the community: “[O]nce these indigenous people fully realized the true cut of their new priest, it was not long before they regarded him as one of their own.” This “ministry of presence” inverts the typical path of evangelization: “Rather than converting and edifying heathens, they had converted him.”

The rest of the novella moves rather crisply. Müller marries Ephraim’s daughter, Seqineq, and enters a period of gratitude and happiness so encompassing that time seems suspended: “The days and weeks passed. Years vanished and he would not know exactly how many, if asked.” Yet beneath this, barely detectable even to himself, hums a longing for his homeland that takes Seqineq’s sudden death for him to act upon. He petitions the Danish government for return. The request is granted, and the priest, coarsened by years of Arctic living, resumes his role as a shepherd “with the smell of the sheep” in the parish of Søby and Sorvad:

Pastor Müller’s parishioners had come to love him dearly. For, once their initial fright had passed, they saw that, behind his outlandish appearance and startling way of being in the world, here was a man who understood them in a way that they were not usually understood by priests—a man who was clearly no stranger to any of the problems and feelings they themselves experienced, and to whom they could turn with their own travails—be they petty worries or great sorrows.

His popularity threatens the local clerical class, led by one conniving deacon with “a face that smacked of a flat, newly licked greasy plate” who covets Müller’s post as a steppingstone to the episcopate. When the priest introduces a new initiative that is a bit too progressive for his parishioners, the bishops move in to oust him, leading to a dramatic conclusion that gives Müller the final word.

Read in tandem with *The White Bear*, *The Rearguard’s* focus on class politics and the lyrical versus the didactic purposes of art stand out in even sharper relief. One could

imagine the two stories taking place at the same time on different continents, their main characters grappling with the advent of modernity in different ways.

In *The Rearguard*, this involves Hallager’s distrust of the past, his break from the “blind idolatry” of artistic beauty and belief in “the revenge of calm, cool reality” where society is rebuilt without obfuscating myths. His convictions might be the mirror image of that of a Christian. Yet in the novella’s final pages, when he finds himself adrift after his hoped-for revolutionary movement fails to come to pass, a neighbor makes an unintentionally perceptive observation: “A body would nearly think you had studied for the priesthood.”

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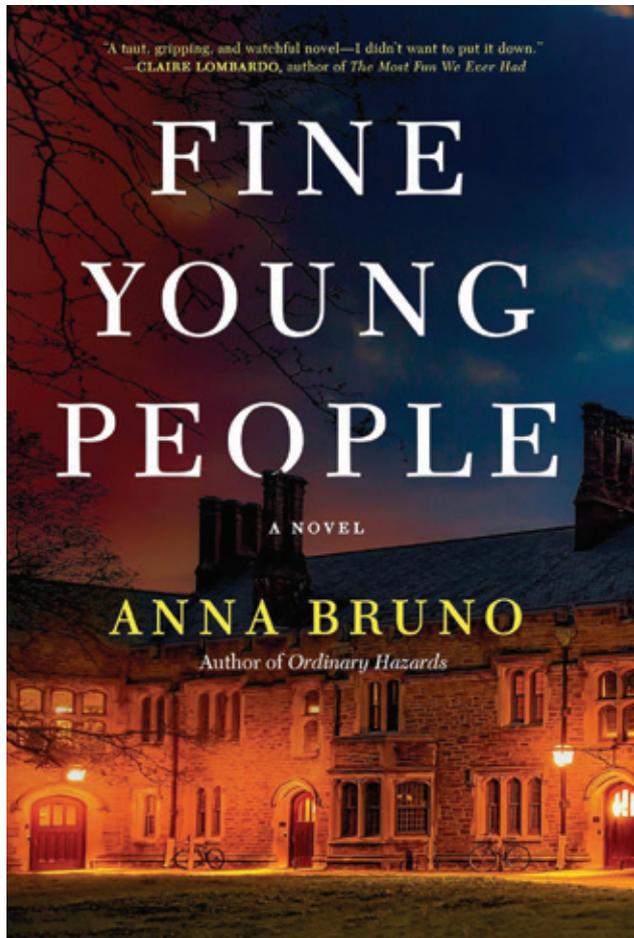
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MYSTERIES WITHIN MYSTERIES



Alongquin Books / 304p \$29

The best detective novels understand that solving a crime is never just about identifying a perpetrator. Rather, the investigation becomes a lens through which larger questions come into focus: questions about justice, community and the stories we tell ourselves about who we are.

Anna Bruno's *Fine Young People* operates as a whodunit on multiple levels simultaneously. Yes, there's a central mystery. When her classmate at St. Ignatius, an elite Jesuit high school in a Pittsburgh suburb, commits suicide after posting a cryptic message about Woolf Whiting, a star hockey player who died years earlier in a presumed suicide, two high school seniors, Frankie and her best friend, Shiv, decide to investigate Woolf's death for their community journalism class project. But Bruno has crafted something more ambitious: a novel that treats coming-of-age itself as a mystery to be solved, where the questions "Who did it?" and "Who am I?" become curiously intertwined.

What begins as a school assignment deepens when Frankie overhears a conversation between her mother, who teaches history at St. Ignatius, and Father Michael, the priest who teaches her philosophy class. Their guard-

ed discussion about Woolf draws Frankie further into the investigation. As she interviews those who knew Woolf—his sister, Maddie, now a high-powered lawyer in New York; his former girlfriend, Susanna, whom Woolf's mother believes knows more than she's revealed; and his best friend, Vince—Frankie discovers she's investigating both what happened to Woolf and the rot at the heart of her school. Ultimately, she learns to understand her own place within the mystery she's investigating.

The Jesuits, Frankie knows, have a way of thinking about unanswerable questions. Casuistry, they call it. You cannot apply broad principles to a question; you must understand it completely, in fine detail, and only then can you begin to draw comparisons. This commitment to wrestling with particularity rather than retreating to abstraction describes both detective work and the more difficult labor of understanding identity, family and institutional belonging. And Bruno doesn't let St. Ignatius High School off easy. Father Michael acknowledges what the school would prefer to ignore—that this beautiful, sacred place has, on multiple occasions, failed its fine young people.

Bruno's novel embraces this casuistic method, refusing easy answers while insisting on the dignity of particular lives. As Frankie pursues her investigation, she discovers she must also reckon with her own identity, including her Catholicism, her family's working-class Pittsburgh roots and her relationship with her mother, who, like her, is a lesbian. All of these circumstances have been inherited rather than chosen by Frankie.

Catholic identity becomes the novel's testing ground for questions of inheritance and choice. Some identities aren't chosen so much as discovered, woven into us before we have language for them. Frankie has known she was Catholic longer than she's known she's a lesbian—but does that make her faith any less voluntary? Bruno resists easy answers. Yes, we all inherit something: country, family, race, religion. The question isn't whether to abandon these inheritances wholesale but whether we can claim a moral response to what we've been given. Rejection is one option. Fighting for what we've inherited is another.

Frankie chooses the harder path, wrestling with her Catholicism rather than walking away from it, demanding that the institution become worthy of the community it claims to serve.

The novel's genius lies in refusing to separate the detective plot from the identity work. Understanding who killed Woolf and understanding who Frankie is become the same project, a commitment to seeing clearly, to grappling with complicity rather than retreating into comfortable abstractions.

The paradox of inherited identity becomes most visi-



Bruno explores not only those who remain Catholic but also those who have left.

ble when her best friend, Shiv, who is not Catholic, participates in Catholic rituals without the burden of obligation. Frankie observes: “Shiv never complained about Mass. Shiv liked shaking hands when we offered the sign of peace. It was the Catholic kids who begrudged Mass. As part of our identity, holy obligation was harder to accept.” As an outsider, Shiv can engage freely with practices that feel oppressive to those for whom they constitute identity.

The novel’s portrait of Frankie’s mother crystallizes this vision of Catholic identity as rooted in people rather than doctrine. Recounting her job interview years earlier, she remembers the principal explaining why the Jesuit identity of St. Ignatius High School mattered: “Because the Jesuits have always understood that the quality of the education is not determined by the buildings, or even the agreed-upon curriculum. The people matter most.” Reaching out to shake the principal’s hand and saying, “Indeed” was “as good as signing a contract. So here I am, and here I will remain.”

Frankie sees her mother with clear eyes: “She’s too smart to teach high school, but places like St. Ignatius exist only because of people like her.” Yet Bruno doesn’t romanticize institutional life. When Frankie’s mom, Ms. Northrup, admits to a student, “I love my students, but I’ll never hold them, or dance with them in the kitchen, or watch them sleep,” it reveals the real cost to her to teach. Making peace with circumstances involves loss alongside whatever meaning is found.

Bruno explores not only those who remain Catholic but also those who have left. When Woolf’s sister Maddie kneels with the family dog the night Woolf dies, she tries to pray, “something she hadn’t done since she declared she was an atheist in junior high.” She wants to ask God, “Why?” and say Hail Marys “to feel something, even if it meant feeling the presence of something she didn’t believe in.” But she feels nothing—only absence. Bruno suggests that the mystery of faith isn’t resolved by either keeping or abandoning it; both choices leave unanswered questions and unfillable absences.

The mother-daughter relationship develops this theme further. Frankie explains: “We told each other as little as possible. We understood implicitly that part of our Catholic identity was breaking the rules and carrying on, because, well, life. At no point in time did we discuss changing the rules.” The Catholic framework becomes less about doctrine than a common language for navigating contradiction—for living with complexity rather than resolving it.

The novel’s academic setting provides both structural rigor and gentle satire. St. Ignatius becomes a character itself—an institution that shapes its students even as they question it. Bruno captures the peculiar intensity of Jesuit education, where teenagers are taught to interrogate power structures while embedded within one. The

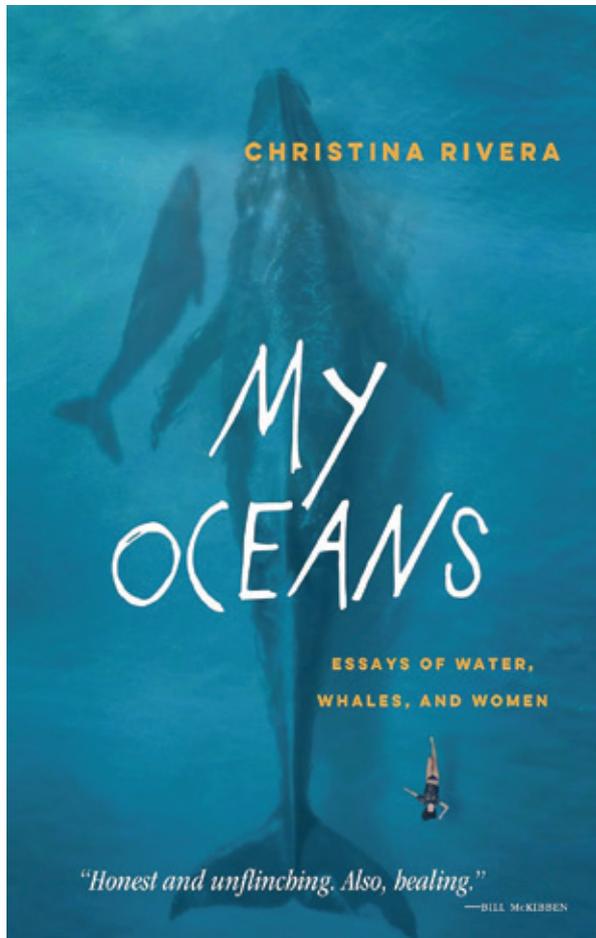
school’s motto, “*Nominatim non generatim*,” becomes both methodology and indictment. “Through the particular, not the abstract”—but what happens when the particular reveals institutional complicity?

What makes *Fine Young People* particularly remarkable is Bruno’s refusal to treat self-discovery as shedding inherited identities in favor of authentic chosen ones. Instead, she presents identity as investigative work: gathering evidence, testing hypotheses, living with ambiguity. The crime plot becomes a scaffold for this deeper investigation, giving Frankie and Shiv a concrete mystery to solve while they’re simultaneously working on the hazier mystery of who they’re becoming.

Bruno’s prose is precise without being precious, capturing teenage voices without condescension. She understands that high school students are capable of sophisticated moral reasoning while still being fundamentally young—still figuring out who they are in relation to the worlds they’ve inherited. The novel trusts its readers in the same way it trusts Frankie, allowing complexity to emerge through accumulation rather than explanation. This restraint makes the emotional moments land harder. When they come, they feel earned.

Fine Young People succeeds because Anna Bruno understands that the deepest mysteries aren’t always solvable. Some questions—about faith, family and identity—don’t have answers so much as ways of being lived with. By structuring her novel as a detective story, Bruno gives her characters the satisfaction of solving one mystery while honoring that the biggest questions remain beautifully, frustratingly open. She’s written a whodunit that investigates what matters most: not just who committed the crime, but who we are—and how we learn to live with the complicated inheritance of being human.

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Curbstone Books / 272p \$24

“Last week, I dreamt I unfolded a map,” Christina Rivera writes in her collection *My Oceans: Essays of Water, Whales, and Women*. “I kept unfolding the map, to a long river-meandering length.” Reading the collection is a lot like this act of unfolding: We wander through waves of connections, an ebb and flow carrying us between climate change, the sixth extinction, motherhood, all kinds of oceans and personal challenges—including the writer’s desire to leave the Catholic Church she was raised in.

Last year marked the 10th anniversary of “Laudato Si’,” Pope Francis’ encyclical on climate change and the earth as our common home—and it was with this in mind that I read Rivera’s essays. As Catholics witness the miracle of Christ, Rivera witnesses the miracle of life. She dives deep into the sea, she interviews ship captains, she joins activists. She writes, “I once planted myself for half a year on an Ecuadorian coastline where I dragged around burlap sacks, machetes, empty jugs and shovels as my work on a reforestation team. My favorite of the little trees in the plant nursery was the ceiba.... I admired the ceiba for how she put a hand to the world in order to protect what was dormant inside her.”

The author’s adventures and meditations take us through a world of turtles and whales, coral and obscure species like the vaquita porpoise.

“Diving is all about witnessing,” she writes. Off the coast of Australia near the Great Barrier Reef, she reflects, “the thing about witnessing is the expanded scope of concern.” What swims by her mask does not leave her mind but is documented and becomes part of the larger story she wants to tell. She knows how threatened life is by the physical materials we use to construct our daily lives, such as plastics and chemicals and carbon fuels. Her own body is afflicted by toxins—“but moving my guilt from the altar of self-incrimination to the table of honest acknowledgement might be the better step forward.”

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” Francis posed this question in “Laudato Si’,” but it has a special urgency to Rivera, a mother of two who experienced multiple miscarriages. At one point in her adulthood, she is regularly awakened by nightmares about ecological disaster. Her nightmares feature “tidal waves and flooding houses and crumbling cliffs and emaciated climate refugees and fevered children—all on the set of a shriveling and quaking planet.” Only by participating in an eco-grief program does she arrive at some semblance of peace.

In another essay, what keeps her up at night is “not only the swirling trash-eye gyres of great garbage patches, but the decomposing albatross, the everlasting black octopus, the mini-candy wrappers, and the impending calendar of plasticized holidays in which we will ‘invest’ in single-use pleasures and then sweep the evidence into green plastic bins of stupid optimism.”

In “Laudato Si’,” Pope Francis wrote that to face climate change, we must also confront the purpose and meaning of our sojourn on this planet; such questions also speak to Rivera when she fields her children’s inquiries about what happens when we die. These are the most important questions, she writes.

Rivera’s writing about motherhood is tender and imbued with a strong sense of responsibility. She mentions a professional experience of “the first room I had ever walked into my life where the leadership was tone-set by a predominance of women” that leaves a mark on her, bringing to the surface her rejection of the Catholic Church because “men, only men, teach behind pulpits.” The idea of inheritance runs throughout this collection: She does not want this future for her daughter, neither the male-led church nor the extinction of so many unique species.

For Rivera, the church is simultaneously an institution that she credits as being the place she “learned how to speak publicly from behind the lectern at Mass” and

an “imperialist and sexist” institution. Rivera wants to make more “space for the laws of the spirit that supersede human law” and “make room for voices that know more about oppression.” She also craves rooms where women hold power. Perhaps, her work suggests, to truly tackle the rebirth of our planet, we need the experience of motherhood.

As we seek to recover the health of our planet, can we reform our church for women who, like Rivera, may want to see more women in our leadership, even as priests? While Rivera and Pope Francis shared a fundamental concern for the environment—and Francis was a leading voice on the subject—the two operated in vastly different social structures. Francis was the captivating leader of more than a billion Catholics, while Rivera seeks a way to be free from the organized church. Yet she also notes that people from different places can “still meet in the middle that holds life sacred.”

Rivera worries that even her own husband doesn’t believe the rate at which species are going extinct. “If I can find extinction denial in a grocery store parking lot and in my smart husband’s blank eyes at my own dinner table,” she asks, “where else is it rife?”

The earth and the species that dwell on it, including humans, are not abstractions in Rivera’s book. They are physical bodies that live and die and have their own histories with ancestors, whether it be coral or her children or those she miscarries. “Now I see,” she confesses, “that all I ever wanted to do was look for godliness wherever it could be found.”

Perhaps in reading Rivera alongside works like “Laudato Si’,” we can achieve the dialogue that Francis had in mind—and in doing so both honor his legacy and make Rivera’s experience of “accepting the interdependencies of nature as my religious nature” a reality.

Cynthia-Marie Marmo O’Brien is a writer and educator in New York. Her work has appeared in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Killing the Buddha*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and *The Rumpus*.



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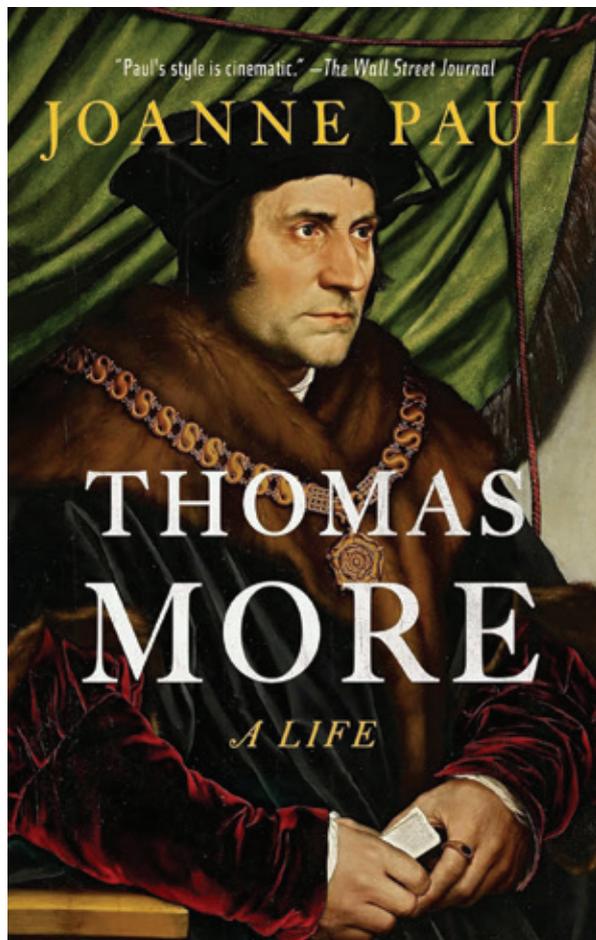
By Michael Waters

Late night in the guest room, between our hosts’
Bedroom & the nursery where their toddler
Calls & calls, we lie awake, struggling to trust
This new parenting, never taking the child
Into bed, not soothing her when she wails,
Allowing her to exhaust herself toward sleep.

That same cry rose across fields at Antietam,
Those wounded boys so far from home,
One voice triggering another, *mama!*
Like a series of muffled explosions
Echoing into the future where I hear
Tyre Nichols & all our dying citizens
Keening from the crib, their weak bleating
Unanswered though never-ending, our country
Awake or maybe sleeping, as we are not.

Michael Waters is the author of *Pagan Sky: New & Selected Poems 2000-2025* and *The Bicycle and the Soul: Prose on Poetry*, and co-editor of *Border Lines: Poems of Migration*.

Stock/Saara Kuusjarvi



Pegasus Books / 604p \$40

Thomas More's choice to give up his life rather than go against his conscience is a primary reason why he is recognized as such a heroic figure by Catholics and others. In 2000, he was proclaimed the patron saint of statesmen and politicians by St. Pope John Paul II. He was also someone whose life and thought embraced the mores of his age: speaking out against tyrants but also sanctioning the execution of heretics.

Joanne Paul, an honorary associate professor in intellectual history at the University of Sussex, wrote her powerful and considerable biography *Thomas More* because she finds More's life relevant to today's world. But the book also addresses another question: Was More a saintly martyr or a vicious murderer?

More lived a prominent and distinguished life that included professional and personal relationships with numerous notable historical figures. His own roles in English public life were many: lawyer, undersheriff of London, judge, writer (e.g., his famous *Utopia*), foreign diplomat, secretary and advisor to the king, House of Commons speaker, lord chancellor and, ultimately, martyr and saint.

In those roles, More played a part in the lives and

events of King Henry VIII, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, France's King Francis I, Desiderius Erasmus, Martin Luther, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Bishop John Fisher, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, all of whom are covered in the book.

In the book's first half, Paul comprehensively chronicles More's early life from his birth in 1478 through his formative years up to 1518. The author describes More's father, studies, marriage and his role as an English historian. Paul describes the young More as someone who combined "devotion to God and dedication to scholarship with marriage and a public career."

The biography's highlights occur in the second half, which covers Henry VIII's marriages, the Protestant Reformation and Henry's developing views of his supremacy, the role of the pope, and the relationship between church and state. In 1509, Henry was crowned as king and married Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Spain's King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella; she had been married before to the English king's now-deceased brother. A controversy arose over the validity of Catherine's first marriage under church law. At the time, the pope gave a dispensation allowing Henry and Catherine to marry despite any consanguinity issue.

In 1526, however, Henry fell in love with Anne Boleyn, a member of Catherine's entourage, and decided to divorce Catherine and marry her. At that time, one of the king's most prominent advisors was Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, who had become a cardinal in 1514 and the lord chancellor in 1515. Cardinal Wolsey was charged with the task of getting Henry's marriage to Catherine annulled.

Henry ultimately became disappointed with Cardinal Wolsey's failure to obtain an annulment, and in 1529, charged him with *praemunire* (the crime of asserting or maintaining papal jurisdiction in England). More replaced the cardinal as lord chancellor. When Henry asked him for his view on what Henry referred to as his "great matter" (that is, his divorce and annulment), More responded to the king that he had not yet decided on the issue. The new lord chancellor was surely worried about how this would adversely affect his role in Henry's life—and thus, his continued earthly existence.

At the same time, the influence of Protestant voices in Europe was rising. Henry was alarmed about the threats Martin Luther's views could have on England and the Catholic Church. The king's book *Defense of the Seven Sacraments* was written to counter Luther's views; shortly after, Henry was declared by the pope to be a *fidei defensor*—"defender of the faith." The title would take on particular irony later in the king's reign, considering his later statements on his supremacy as the head of the Church of



England over the pope.

More eventually resigned as lord chancellor in 1532, though he cited personal health reasons rather than political motivations. Soon after, Parliament approved England's infamous Acts of Succession and Supremacy, which required oaths of loyalty and obedience to the crown. Because the crime of treason in England at the time required an actual deed, simply speaking or writing against the king was not sufficient for a conviction. But not taking the Oaths of Succession or Supremacy was a "misprision of treason," or the concealment of treason, so the penalty was imprisonment and the forfeiture of one's property, not beheading.

Henry VIII was eager for More to support him on his quest for religious supremacy above the pope and his divorce and annulment. To emphasize his goal, Parliament finally passed the Treasons Act in 1534, which redefined treason to include any malicious speech or writing against the king, his marriage or his supremacy.

More was then required to swear that Henry's marriage to Catherine was invalid and that no English subject should recognize any foreign authority, including the pope. More refused. Shortly after, he was accused of high treason and imprisoned in the Tower of London for more than a year. At his trial, only one person provided testimony, Richard Rich. Nevertheless, More was found guilty and was beheaded on July 6, 1535.

Along with the details of More's heroic stand against the king, the author is candid in describing some of More's decisions that most people today would find unconscionable. Most importantly, More, in his work *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, clearly supported the church's policy of turning religious heretics over to the state—which enforced beheading or burning to death as the penalty. More argued that just as a prince is justified in killing invaders of one's country, so the church and the state can punish heretics with death because they seek to destroy one's soul.

The disjuncture between that view and almost all modern ideas of the relationship between church and state will cause most readers to grapple with the time-limited views of saints and heroes of the past like More. On the one hand, he acted in ways that we abhor today; at the same time, many still see him as a luminary to be emulated for putting one's conscience above the actions of those in power.

In the book's preface, Paul argues that "Thomas More did almost nothing to change the course of English history." But the author's view should be evaluated from a global perspective. More is among one of the most famous figures in English history, and the Catholic Church canonized him in 1935. His influence in the centuries since his martyrdom has also been significant in Great Britain's religious history. For example, St. Cardinal John Henry Newman, whom

Paul candidly describes some of More's decisions that people today would find unconscionable.

Pope Leo XIV recently declared a doctor of the Catholic church, is sometimes linked to More because of his decision while an Anglican bishop to follow his conscience and become a Catholic.

Paul concludes her text with an answer to a question she posed at the beginning: Who was Thomas More? She writes that "Thomas More could comfort himself with the assurance that he had lived his life—and given his life—in service of those things he held most dear." We need such examples today from those who are entrusted with the public's common good. Five hundred years after his death, we can take from More's bravery and integrity much that we need to learn in our own time.

Michael A. Vaccari is an attorney and an adjunct professor of law at Fordham University School of Law. He is the author of numerous book reviews on law and public policy.

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A JESUIT MINISTRY

Christ the Light Shatters the Darkness

John's Gospel recounts the Easter narratives that extend across the four Sundays of April. These are stories of discovery, openness and hearts burning within the disciples as they gradually encounter the risen Lord. We hear that Mary Magdala, Peter and an unnamed disciple first discovered the empty tomb. Then a gathering of the disciples recognizes Jesus' presence among them in the breaking of the bread. Later, Thomas's eyes are opened to faith when he finally sees and touches Jesus' hands and side. Lastly, two disciples on the road to Emmaus encounter Jesus as a stranger who opens the meaning of the Scriptures to them.

The first readings on these Sundays from Acts describe the growth and character of the new Christian communities, based upon the witness of these disciples. We hear about how these new groups fashioned their communal life on the

teachings of Jesus. They share their resources with one another. They gather for prayers and the breaking of the bread. Further, they offer forgiveness of sins and baptism to all who believe in Jesus.

As all these stories testify to the resurrection, they also become an invitation to the newly baptized to participate in this witness to the risen Lord. These accounts of Jesus' appearances summon us all to live lives of hope, even if our world cultivates despair. The light of Christ continues to be present to us always, shattering the darkness and enkindling our hearts to love as he loved. In the Gospel for the final Sunday of April, Jesus himself delivers a discourse guaranteeing his ongoing attention and care for us, as well as offering us assurance as to why he came. "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

EASTER SUNDAY (A), APRIL 5, 2026

A light shines in the darkness

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (A), April 12, 2026

Faith as "evidence of things not seen"

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER (A), April 19, 2026

Shattered hopes now restored

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (A), April 26, 2026

Life in abundance



Gina Hens-Piazza is the Joseph S. Alemany professor of biblical studies at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, in Berkeley, Calif.



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1909 SOCIETY



Finding the People of God

Lessons learned as a Catholic journalist in Rome

By Cindy Wooden



Being a Vatican correspondent for more than three decades meant being in the presence of popes, presidents, future saints and thousands of people who would be what Pope Francis called “the saints next door.”

I was based in Rome for 36 years, covering three papacies with three different modes of operating. Broadly, St. John Paul II tried to gather Catholics together after the well-intentioned trial and error that followed the Second Vatican Council; Pope Benedict XVI used his skills as a teacher—not just as a scholar—to instruct Catholics on the basics of the Christian faith and of Christian living in the modern world; and Pope Francis sent them out, reminding them of their primary mission to share the Gospel in deed and word. In each case, some Catholics felt left out, and some felt pushed out.

The early days of Leo XIV’s pontificate seem to be a calm, deliberate continuation of the direction set by Francis in several key areas, including a commitment to a synodal outreach to those who felt alienated from the church and an insistence on the missionary gifts and responsibilities of all Catholics. He also seems to be reaffirming Pope Francis’ recognition of the teaching authority of national bishops’ conferences and relying on them to speak first and most clearly about challenges to Gospel living in their nations, as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is doing on immigration issues.

In preparing to return to the United States after decades abroad, I sort-ed through years of accumulated press

passes, photos and press clippings. But some memories do not need those visual reminders.

I will never forget the look of pain on Pope Francis’ face in 2016 when I mentioned during an in-flight press conference the massacre of 49 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Fla. I asked him if he thought the church should apologize for contributing to the marginalization of members of the L.G.B.T.Q. community.

“The church must say it is sorry for not having behaved as it should many times, many times,” the pope replied. “We Christians must say we are sorry.”

On that flight back to Rome from Armenia, Pope Francis took his famous phrase from 2013—“Who am I to judge?”—and changed it to the plural, asking “Who are we to judge?” about a gay person “who has good will and is seeking God.”

There were lighter moments on papal trips as well, like the massive pillow fight that broke out in the press section of the plane on Francis’ trip to Mexico in 2016, during a nighttime trip from Morelia back to Mexico City after a workday that began at 5 a.m. And Pope Benedict publicly wished me a happy birthday on a very long papal flight in 2008. My birthday lasted 36 hours that year as we left World Youth Day in Sydney, flew more than 20 hours and landed in Rome at 11 p.m.

I also accompanied Pope John Paul II on his last foreign trip—an overnight visit to the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in France in 2004. He already was severely affected by

Parkinson’s disease and clearly shared the physical weakness of thousands of his fellow pilgrims.

But covering “the church” for Catholic News Service, which I did from mid-1989 until Dec. 31, 2025, was about much more than who was on the Seat of Peter. While each pope said and did things that inspired me or puzzled me or challenged me or disappointed me, so did other Catholics.

I have had countless opportunities to speak with Catholics who saved for years for a chance to see St. Peter’s Basilica and to wave at the pope from afar at a general audience. I have met amazing religious sisters who feed the hungry, clothe the naked and welcome the stranger, even when their governments say those strangers are “illegal.” I have prayed with Catholics from Beijing and visited a Catholic school in remote Gujarat, India, where the kids were fascinated by my pasty white skin.

Being a Vatican-based journalist for these years has taught me repeatedly that the church really is the people of God. Yes, there are denominations, structures, organizations, rules, traditions, leaders, rites and rituals—and personal preferences in each of those categories. But hyper-focusing on just one aspect gives you tunnel vision. What you need is peripheral vision to see most of what God is doing and to recognize the people God is working through.

Cindy Wooden retired on Jan. 1 as the editor in chief of Catholic News Service in Rome.

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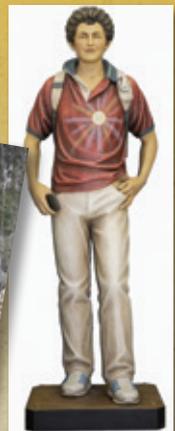
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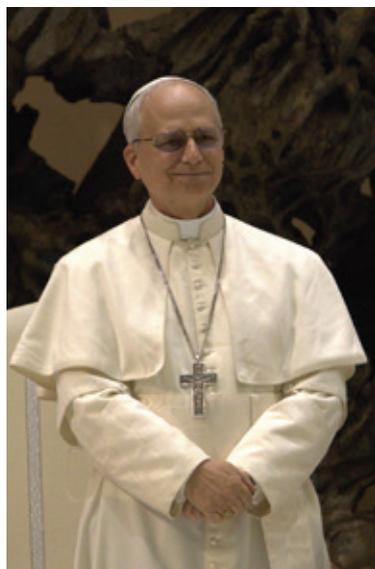
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March 25th, 2026 marks 101 years since the birth of acclaimed author, Flannery O'Connor. Though she only published two novels and two collections of short fiction in her life, O'Connor continues to compel and inspire scholars of literature, devotees of the short story, theologians, visual artists, and a cast of others. O'Connor has been identified and grouped in a number of ways, but she always seems to transcend simple reductions. Join us for a day of unorthodox, mixed media celebration of an artist who put her storytelling first—an artist who both embraced discomfort and who understood her own fallibility in "hot pursuit of the real" and her quest for God.



Pope Leo XIV,
photo by Edgar Beltrán

CARDINAL BERNARDIN DIALOGUES

Habemus Papam: Three Journalists Weigh In on Pope Leo's First Year

April 15, 2026, 7–8:30pm

Loyola University Chicago, Lake Shore Campus

In less than 12 months since his election to the Chair of St. Peter, Pope Leo has continued Vatican reforms, personally reached out to the faithful in need of support, and inspired the Catholic faithful—both committed and lapsed. His influence has been felt outside of the Catholic Church through his ecumenical and interreligious dialogues, as well as his public ministry to the marginalized in Rome. To mark the one-year anniversary of Pope Leo's election, The Hank Center will host a conversation focused on the first year of the Pope Leo's reign: What has he accomplished? Where do we go from here? What remains to be done? Journalists **Colleen Dulle (America)**, **Michael Sean Winters (National Catholic Reporter)**, and **Gretchen Crowe (Our Sunday Visitor)** will offer their take on Pope Leo's first year. **Dominic Preziosi (Commonweal)** will moderate.



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