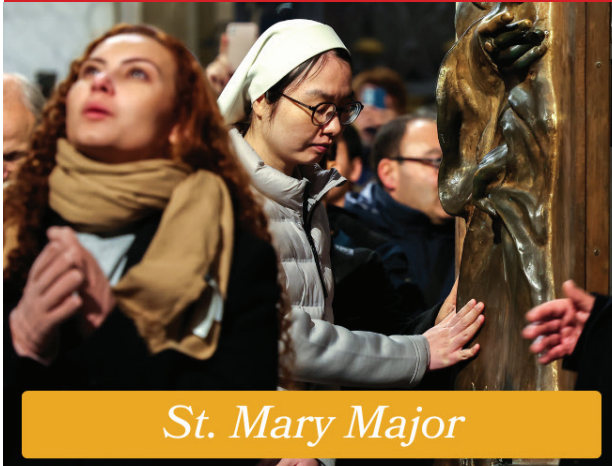


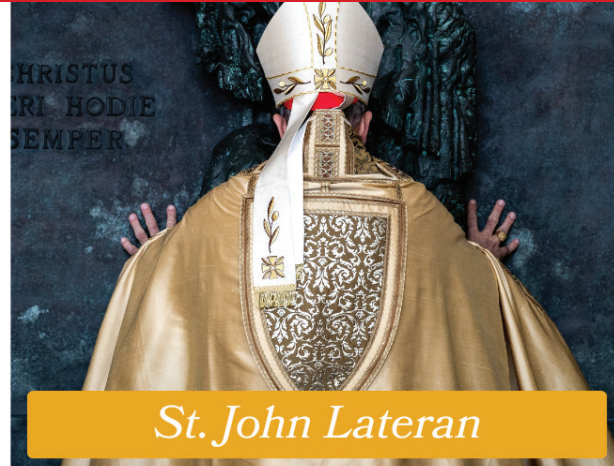
# The Catholic Light

DIocese of SCRANTON

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*St. Mary Major*



*St. John Lateran*



*Rebibbia Prison in Rome*

## HOLY DOORS WIDE OPEN



### 'Jubilee Year of Hope' officially begins

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – On Christmas Eve, Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, launching what he called a "Jubilee of Hope."

As the door opened, the bells of the basilica began to peal.

Opening the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica has been a fixture of the Catholic Church's celebration of jubilee years since the Holy Year 1450, the Vatican said.

Pope Francis chose "Pilgrims of Hope" as the theme for the Holy Year 2025 which will run through Jan. 6, 2026.

"The steps we now take are the steps of the whole church, a pilgrim in the world and a witness of peace," the pope told the assembled cardinals, bishops, ecumenical guests and lay faithful in the atrium of the basilica.

"Holding fast to Christ, the rock of our salvation, enlightened by his word and renewed by his grace," the pope continued, "may we cross the threshold of this holy temple and so enter into a season of mercy and forgiveness in which every man and woman may encounter and embrace the path of hope, which does not disappoint."

In the first two weeks after Pope Francis opened the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica, more than a half million

pilgrims had already crossed its threshold.

Between Dec. 24 and Jan. 7, the Vatican said 545,532 people from around the world had made the journey along the lengthy boulevard leading to St. Peter's Square and crossed the basilica's Holy Door.

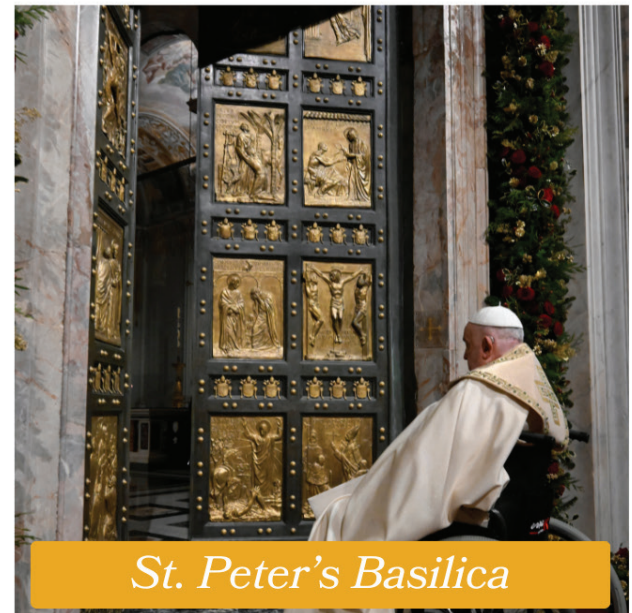
The city of Rome has estimated that more than 30 million people will travel to the city during the Jubilee.

In addition to opening the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica Dec. 24, Pope Francis also opened a Holy Door at Rome's Rebibbia prison Dec. 26, but assigned the archpriests of the city's other major basilicas to preside over the ceremonies of the other major pilgrimage sites.

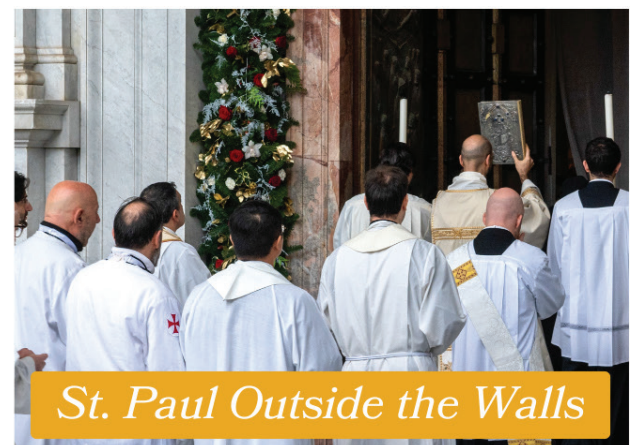
Cardinal Baldassare Reina, papal vicar for Rome and archpriest of Rome's Basilica of St. John Lateran, opened the Holy Door there Dec. 29.

Cardinal Rolandas Makrickas, coadjutor archpriest of the Basilica of St. Mary Major opened the Holy Door there Jan. 1, and U.S. Cardinal James M. Harvey, archpriest of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, presided over the opening of the Holy Door there Jan. 5.

*Coverage of Jubilee Year 2025 inside on Pages 2-4*



*St. Peter's Basilica*



*St. Paul Outside the Walls*



# The Catholic Light

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OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE  
DIOCESE OF SCRANTON



## DIOCESE OF SCRANTON MISSION STATEMENT

We, the Catholic community of the Diocese of Scranton, are called through Baptism to imitate the servant leadership of Jesus Christ. In union with Our Holy Father, the Pope, we proclaim the Gospel faithfully, celebrate the sacraments joyfully, and boldly promote life, justice and peace in northeastern and north central Pennsylvania.

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# Diocese of Scranton kicks off 2025 Holy Year with uplifting Mass led by Bishop Bambera

SCRANTON – The Diocese of Scranton joined other dioceses worldwide in celebrating the opening of the 2025 Holy Year on Dec. 29, 2024.

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, was the principal celebrant and homilist for a special Pontifical Mass to mark the Jubilee Year, which is themed “Pilgrims of Hope.”

Bishop Bambera began Mass at the back of the Cathedral, praying that God bless all who participate on the Holy Year pilgrim journey.

“May we enter into this year of grace filled with hope because of the love, mercy, and grace that God gives each of us,” Bishop Bambera said.

The prayer was followed by a Gospel reading from John 14, in which Jesus explained to His disciples His relationship to God the Father, and then a reading from the papal bull announcing the Jubilee Year.

A Jubilee – or Holy Year – is a special year in the life of the church currently celebrated every 25 years. The most recent ordinary Jubilee was in 2000, with Pope Francis calling for an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2015-2016.

Jubilee years have been held on regular intervals in the Catholic Church since 1300, but they trace their roots to the Jewish tradition of marking a Jubilee Year every 50 years.

During his homily, Bishop Bambera said that every person is invited to celebrate this Jubilee Year and experience Jesus’ healing touch and come to a renewed spirit of hope.

“This great Jubilee Year reminds us that for all that confronts us in life, it is our ability to hope that gives us the strength to persevere in the midst



The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, celebrated a special Mass on Dec. 29, 2024, to open the 2025 Holy Year at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton. The Mass began at the back of the Cathedral and featured a Gospel reading, as well as the blessing and sprinkling of Holy Water. (Photos/Mike Melisky)



Deacon Ed Shoener uses incense before proclaiming the Gospel at the Mass to open the 2025 Holy Year at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton Dec. 29, 2024.

“This great Jubilee Year reminds us that for all that confronts us in life, it is our ability to *hope* that gives us the strength to persevere in the midst of trials”

-Bishop Joseph C. Bambera



Faithful gather to celebrate the 12:15 p.m. Mass on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, which also served as the opening Mass for the 2025 Holy Year in the Diocese of Scranton.

of trials,” he said. “Hope founded on faith and nurtured by charity, more than anything else, enables us to press forward in life.”

Since the opening Mass for the Jubilee Year was celebrated on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, which is celebrated on the Sunday after Christmas Day, Bishop Bambera also reminded the faithful that they can find hope by looking at – and learning from – the Holy Family.

“Like families of every time and place, Mary and Joseph experienced hardship and pain – from Jesus’ unexpected conception – to the burden of life lived in an impoverished land – to being forced to flee to Egypt to protect their newborn – to losing Jesus amid the crowds during their Passover visit,” Bishop Bambera explained. “They faced their fears, disappointments and

uncertainty with a deep sense of trust in God and a selfless, sacrificial love that bound them together as a family and provided them with hope.”

Unlike the practice in the Year of Mercy, diocesan cathedrals around the world are not designating their own holy doors – but cathedrals like the one in Scranton will serve as places of pilgrimage for those who cannot travel to Rome.



# Pope opens Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, launching 'Jubilee Year of Hope'

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - In the quiet of Christmas Eve, Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica.

After the reading of a brief passage from the Gospel of John in which Jesus describes himself as "the door," Pope Francis briefly left the atrium of the basilica.

Three minutes later, the pope returned. He was pushed in his wheelchair up the ramp to the Holy Door. In silence, he raised himself from the chair to knock five times, and aides inside slowly opened the door, which had been framed in a garland of green pine branches, decorated with red roses and gold pinecones.

Pope Francis chose "Pilgrims of Hope" as the theme for the Holy Year 2025, which began Dec. 24 and will run through Jan. 6, 2026.

The rite of opening the decorated bronze door began inside the basilica with the reading in different languages of biblical passages prophesying the birth of the savior "who brings his kingdom of peace into our world," as the lector explained.

Then, to emphasize how the birth of Jesus "proclaims the dawn of hope in our world," the Gospel of St. Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus was proclaimed.

Introduced with a blare of trumpets, the choir sang, "Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord."

"The steps we now take are the steps of the whole church, a pilgrim in the world



**Pope Francis pushes open the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 24, 2024, inaugurating the Holy Year 2025. (CNS photo/Cristian Gennari, pool)**

and a witness of peace," the pope told the assembled cardinals, bishops, ecumenical guests and lay faithful in the atrium of the basilica.

"Holding fast to Christ, the rock of our salvation, enlightened by his word and renewed by his grace," the pope continued, "may we cross the threshold of this holy temple and so enter into a season of mercy and forgiveness in which every man and woman may encounter and embrace the path of hope, which does not disappoint."

Echoing the biblical jubilee themes of reconciliation and forgiveness, Pope Francis prayed that the Holy Spirit would soften hardened hearts so that "enemies may speak to each other again, adversaries

may join hands and people seek to meet together."

"Grant that the church may bear faithful witness to your love and may shine forth as a vital sign of the blessed hope of your kingdom," he prayed.

Normally the Holy Door, to the right of the basilica's center doors, remains sealed with bricks, a symbolic reminder of the barrier of sin between people and God. The 16 panels

on the bronze doors illustrate key moments in salvation history, including the fall of Adam and Eve, the annunciation of Jesus' birth, Christ presented as the shepherd rescuing a lost sheep, the crucifixion and the risen Jesus appearing to the disciples.

Ten children from 10 different countries, holding hands with their parents, crossed the threshold after the pope and the altar servers, but before the cardinals and bishops.

Then 54 people from 27 nations - including the United States and Canada, Australia, Tanzania and Togo, Venezuela and Vietnam - passed through. Many of them wore the traditional dress of their nations or ethnic groups.

Also among the first to cross the threshold were representatives of other Christian churches. The Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity said in an explanatory note, "Entering through the Holy Door expresses the willingness to follow and be guided by the only begotten Son of God."

Especially during the year that will see the celebration of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which solemnly defined the basics of Christian faith, the ritual "is a manifestation of the faith that all Christians share in Jesus, the Eternal Word made man," the note said.

However, it added, the ecumenical guests' participation "must not be interpreted as an attempt to associate them with elements of the jubilee, such as the jubilee indulgence, which are not in line with the practices of their respective communities."

In fact, the "selling" of indulgences helped spark the Protestant Reformation; the practice was later banned by the Council of Trent.

The Catholic Church believes that Christ and the saints have accumulated a treasure of merits, which other believers - who are prayerful and repentant - can draw upon to reduce or erase the punishment they are due because of sins they have committed. Making a pilgrimage, going to confession, receiving Communion and offering prayers to receive an indulgence is a key part of the Holy Year.

## Don't lose hope, pope says as he opens Holy Door at Rome prison

ROME (CNS) - Wearing red vestments for the feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, Pope Francis knocked on the door of the church in Rome's Rebibbia prison complex and walked over its threshold.

After reciting a formal prayer before opening the prison's Holy Door Dec. 26, the pope took the microphone back to explain that he had inaugurated the Holy Year 2025 by opening the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica.

"I wanted the second Holy Door to be the one here, at a prison," he said. "I wanted all of us, inside or out, to have an opportunity to throw open the doors of our hearts and understand that hope does not disappoint."

Members of the penitentiary police band played the official hymn of the Holy Year 2025 when the pope arrived, while about 300 people waited inside the church; they included just over 100 women and men serving time at Rebibbia, some of their family members, volunteers, prison staff, Rome Mayor Roberto Gualtieri and officials of the Italian justice department.

The prayers of the faithful included a petition for governments to focus on rehabilitating and assisting all people, especially those who have made mistakes.

Seated in his wheelchair in front of the church door, Pope Francis had prayed: "In the joy of Christmas, let us welcome the call of the Lord Jesus to follow him. He



**Pope Francis crosses the threshold of the Holy Door of the Church of Our Father at Rome's Rebibbia prison before presiding over a Mass with inmates, prison staff, and Italian government officials Dec. 26, 2024. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)**

is the door of life, the hope that does not disappoint, the good news that saves."

"May the opening of this Holy Door be for all of us a call to look to the future with hope," he said. "Let us open our hearts to the mercy of God so as to celebrate with the whole church his unending love."

The Vatican press office had distributed the text of the homily the pope prepared for the Mass, but the pope did not use it.

Instead, Pope Francis spoke directly to the inmates. He told them that all Christians need to remind themselves that "hope does not disappoint, it never disappoints. I need to think about this, too, because in life's difficult moments one thinks that everything is over, that nothing can be resolved. But hope never disappoints."



# Holy Door is symbol of God's arms open to all, cardinal says

ROME (CNS) - A Holy Door is an image of God, who awaits the return of his children with open arms, said the archpriest of Rome's Basilica of St. John Lateran.

Cardinal Baldassare Reina, papal vicar for Rome and archpriest of the basilica, which is the Diocese of Rome's cathedral, opened the Holy Door there Dec. 29 as bishops around the world launched the Holy Year 2025 in their dioceses.

"It is not important how far we have strayed; it is not relevant what we have done, wasted or ruined," the cardinal said

in his homily at Mass after opening the door. "The moment we have decided to return we will never find a closed door, but only an embrace that welcomes and blesses."

Pope Francis opened the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica Dec. 24 and at Rome's Rebibbia prison Dec. 26 but assigned the archpriests of the city's other major basilicas to preside over the ceremonies of the other major pilgrimage sites.

In his homily Dec. 29, Cardinal Reina said that crossing the threshold of a Holy Door during the Jubilee Year is a sign that

one accepts God's call to return to him and to live as his son or daughter and as a brother or sister to others.

The open doors, he said, are "an invitation to respond to God's grace with an open heart, allowing ourselves to be reconciled by his embrace that restores our dignity and enables us to build relationships of authentic fraternity."



**Cardinal Baldassare Reina, papal vicar for Rome, opens the Holy Door of the Basilica of St. John Lateran during the ceremony marking the start of the Holy Year of 2025, held as part of Mass Dec. 29, 2024. (CNS photo/Cristian Gennari, pool)**

# Mary, not technology, is world's hope, cardinal says at Holy Door opening

ROME (CNS) - Opening the Holy Door of the oldest Marian shrine in the Western world, Cardinal Rolando Makrickas prayed that the world would entrust itself to Mary, "the door to heaven."

"Let us offer our prayer to the Father so that, like Mary, we may be pilgrims of hope who bring Christ into the world," said the cardinal, coadjutor archpriest of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome, before pushing open its bronze door Jan. 1.

As the bells rang out from the summit of Rome's Esquiline hill, Cardinal Makrickas became the first pilgrim to cross the door's threshold during the Holy Year 2025.

Among the pealing bells was one originally placed in the basilica's bell tower - the highest point in the center of Rome - which was used to announce the Catholic Church's first Jubilee in 1300 and had been housed in the Vatican Museums



**Cardinal Rolandas Makrickas, coadjutor archpriest of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome, opens the Holy Door of the basilica Jan. 1, 2025. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)**

since 1884; it was returned to St. Mary Major last year ahead of the Jubilee.

Celebrating Mass on the feast of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, Cardinal Makrickas reflected on the mystery of

Jesus' incarnation in Mary's womb, calling it the "fullness of time" as it united earthly time with eternity.

Today, the cardinal said, humanity often seeks to "perfect time" by saving or enriching it through technology, but "every effort results in its loss."

"One cannot, however, ever feel lost, wasted or tired from time spent with God," he said. "It will not be ideas or technology that give us comfort or hope, but the face of the Mother of God."

Cardinal Makrickas also spoke about the significance of the relics of Jesus' crib housed in the basilica, "the first, humble, poor home of Jesus," from which humanity began to mark time itself.

Each pilgrim entering the basilica

during the Jubilee and praying before the icon of the Marian icon "Salus Populi Romani" ("health of the Roman people") - which Pope Francis visits before and after each of his international trips - and the Holy Crib "will not be able to leave here without a deep and particular feeling, a feeling and certainty that the heavenly Mother is with him," the cardinal said.

"Each person will go from here with the assurance of being accompanied by the grace, the protection, the care and motherly tenderness of Mary," he said.

St. Mary Major is especially significant to Pope Francis. He has said that he often visited the basilica when traveling to Rome as a cardinal and, breaking with recent tradition, has said he will be buried there rather than in the Vatican after his death. Six popes are buried in the basilica, and the last pope interred there was Pope Clement IX in 1669.

# Grow in hope, share it with others, cardinal says as he opens Holy Door

ROME (CNS) - During the Holy Year 2025, Catholics are called not only to grow in the virtue of hope, but also to share it with others, said U.S. Cardinal James M. Harvey, archpriest of Rome's Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls.

Pope Francis' call to the whole church during the Jubilee Year is "both pressing and challenging. It is a call not to be satisfied just with having hope, but to radiate hope, to be sowers of hope," the cardinal said at Mass Jan. 5 after opening the basilica's Holy Door.

The golden bronze door, installed for

the Holy Year 2000, was the last of the Holy Doors at the papal basilicas of Rome to be opened for pilgrims.

In his homily at St. Paul Outside the Walls, Cardinal Harvey said hope "is certainly the most beautiful gift the church can give humanity, especially at this moment in history."

The opening of the Holy Door, particularly during the Christmas season, he said, "marks the salvific passage opened by Christ with his incarnation, death and resurrection, calling all members of the church to reconcile with God and with

their neighbor."

Cardinal Harvey told the congregation of close to 3,000 people that the words, "Spes Unica," meaning "our only hope," are written at the base of the cross on top of the basilica.

Quoting the Letter to the Romans of the Apostle Paul, whose tomb is under the basilica's main altar, Cardinal Harvey said his Holy Year prayer is: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."



**Visitors walk through the Holy Door of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome Jan. 5, 2025, after its ceremonial opening by U.S. Cardinal James M. Harvey, archpriest of the Basilica. The event marked the beginning of the Holy Year of 2025. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)**



## Jesus' birth brings 'meaning, purpose and peace,' Bishop Bambera says during Christmas Masses



The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, blesses the creche inside the Cathedral of Saint Peter at the beginning of Christmas Eve Mass. (Photo/Mike Melisky)

SCRANTON - Hundreds of people filled the pews of the Cathedral of Saint Peter on Christmas Eve to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord.

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, served as the principal celebrant and homilist for the 4 p.m. Mass - which kicked off the celebration of Christmas at the Cathedral. The Bishop also celebrated Midnight Mass at the Cathedral just a few hours later.

"In the birth of Jesus, we're given all the gifts that we need to find the blessings of life that truly matter: meaning, purpose and peace," Bishop Bambera said during his homily.

After entering the Cathedral with dimmed lighting, the Bishop blessed the large creche at the right side of the sanctuary. After the full lights illuminated the Cathedral, the Bishop explained that God's light continues to shine, despite the brokenness of our world.

"God's light does indeed shine far more brightly than we might realize," Bishop Bambera added. "We experience the warmth of his love when we're humble enough to admit our need for a Savior and, in turn, generous enough to follow the pattern of Jesus' life in the love and service

of our sisters and brothers."

Throughout the Christmas season, Bishop Bambera celebrated several other Masses at the Cathedral - including on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph on Dec. 29, and the Solemnity of the Epiphany on Jan. 5.

In celebrating Mass on the Epiphany, Bishop Bambera said the magi represent all the different types of individuals to whom the message of salvation is addressed, including "outsiders, seekers, latecomers, you and me!"

The Bishop said the story of the magi provides all faithful people with a very clear framework for how the scriptures should speak to our lives.

"Not unlike us, the magi were outsiders who wondered if they'd be welcomed in Bethlehem. They were seekers, not always certain about where they should look. And they were latecomers who were nonetheless given a place in the life and love of the newborn Christ," Bishop Bambera said. "Ultimately, the magi's journey offers a consoling and hope-filled opportunity for each of us to see our own journey of life and faith somewhere within their own, provided that we look carefully enough."

## Best gift a child can receive is faith, pope says on Feast of Baptism of the Lord



Pope Francis baptizes a baby during Mass in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican Jan. 12, 2025, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - When children are baptized, their parents and the church are giving them the greatest gift ever: the gift of faith, Pope Francis said before baptizing 21 infants in the Sistine Chapel.

"Let us ask the Lord that they grow in the faith, a true humanity (and) in the joy of family," he said in his brief homily at Mass on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord Jan. 12.

Like last year, Pope Francis led the baptismal prayers and poured the water over the heads of the infants and was assisted in anointing the babies by Cardinals Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, and Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the commission governing Vatican City State.

When an infant was accompanied by an older sibling, the pope would help the older child make the sign of the cross on the infant's forehead after he and the parents performed the ritual.

After the fathers lit their child's candle from the Paschal candle during the Mass, the pope told the parents to always keep the candle in their homes as a reminder of the day.

"And when there is some kind of

problem or difficulty, light the candle to ask the Lord for grace for your family," he said.

Surrounded by Michaelangelo's stunning frescoes in the chapel, the pope thanked the parents, who are Vatican employees, for bringing their children to be baptized. As he normally does at baptisms, the pope encouraged the parents to do what they had to to make sure the babies were comfortable.

"If they are hungry, nurse them, so they don't cry. If they are too hot, change their clothes," he said. What is important is that "they feel at ease because today they are in charge and we have to serve them with the sacrament, with prayers."

In his Angelus address later, he told the crowd gathered in the square that "today's feast makes us contemplate the face and the voice of God, which are manifested in Jesus' humanity."

He also asked Catholics who did not know or remember the date of their baptism to find out.

The date is important, he said, and it should be celebrated "as if it were a new birthday: that of our birth in the Spirit of God."



# Bishop blesses new, permanent location for Mother Teresa's Haven shelter

WILKES-BARRE

The new year has brought a new, permanent home for an emergency shelter that helps men experiencing homelessness in Luzerne County.

On Thursday, Jan. 2, 2025, the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, blessed the new location for Mother Teresa's Haven at 39 East Jackson Street in Wilkes-Barre.

Located directly above Saint Vincent de Paul Kitchen, the new home of the emergency shelter opened its doors one week earlier, on Dec. 27, 2024, after years of planning.

"We are thrilled to finally have a permanent home after all these years, absolutely thrilled," Harry Lyons, program director for Mother Teresa's Haven, said.

Mother Teresa's Haven has been a vital resource for men experiencing homelessness in the greater Wilkes-Barre area since the 1980s. For more than 25 years, the shelter was operated by VISION (Volunteers in Service in Our Neighborhoods), but Catholic Social Services of the Diocese of Scranton took over operations in 2013.

During its first several decades, the shelter rotated locations between several area churches, until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when the shelter found a temporary home in the basement of Saint Mary's Church of the Immaculate Conception on South Washington Street.

"This shelter has been in existence for decades, but it was nomadic up until about four years ago and when we think about the clients we serve, there is a certain dignity that they deserve to have," Bishop Bambera said during the dedication ceremony.

With the new location finally complete, Mother Teresa's Haven now has shower and laundry facilities available, will offer beds instead of cots, and will be housed



The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, uses holy water to bless the new, permanent location for Mother Teresa's Haven in Wilkes-Barre on Jan. 2, 2025. Mother Teresa's Haven is an emergency shelter for men that is operated by Catholic Social Services of the Diocese of Scranton. (Photos/Mike Melisky)



The new, permanent location for Mother Teresa's Haven is located at 39 East Jackson Street in Wilkes-Barre. The facility, which is open every night of the year at 7 p.m., is now located on the second floor of the building that houses Saint Vincent de Paul Kitchen.

**"Of all the things that we do as a local church, as a diocese, this one goes right to the heart of the Gospel message"**

-Bishop Joseph C. Bambera

in the same complex as the Saint Vincent de Paul Kitchen, food pantry, and clothing bank.

Joseph Mahoney, Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Social Services, says that will lead to a better coordination of services.

"We've got the kitchen, we've got the food pantry, we've got a clothing pantry, we're bringing all these services into one building and trying to make it easier for our clients," Mahoney explained.

Mother Teresa's Haven can house 20 men every night and the shelter will be open every night of

the year from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.

"Of all the things that we do as a local church, as a diocese, this one goes right to the heart of the Gospel message," Bishop Bambera added. "This is one small gesture on the part of the church, to lift up the dignity of the human person to take care of the lives that God has given to us."

During the 2024 calendar year, Mother Teresa's Haven provided more than 4,700 individual nights of emergency shelter to 311 men in the local community in its temporary location.

The new, permanent location would not have been possible without the support of both Luzerne County and the City of Wilkes-Barre, both of which provided significant funding for the \$334,000 project.

"Everything is designed in this complex here to help the homeless and it's done the right way," Wilkes-Barre mayor George C. Brown said.

During the dedication ceremony, Mayor Brown said over the last few years, his administration has contributed about \$309,000 to help those who are homeless.

"We don't want people sleeping out on the streets, we don't want them along the river or under bridges. We want them in a place that is a safe environment and you've done a wonderful job," Mayor Brown added, thanking those who helped bring

the shelter project to completion.

In addition to Mother Teresa's Haven in Wilkes-Barre, Catholic Social Services also operates two other emergency shelters: Saint Anthony's Haven in Scranton and Divine Providence Shelter in Hazleton.

## Report: Homelessness reaches new record high amid housing crunch

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - The United States saw an increase of about 18% in homelessness last year, a new record high, according to a federal report.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development released Dec. 27 its 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report: Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates, an annual report of the number of individuals in settings including shelters, temporary housing, and those who are unsheltered.

The report found more than 771,000 people were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2024, marking an 18% increase from

the previous year.

It is the highest number observed since the annual report began in 2007.

The report attributed the rise to a mix of factors including lack of affordable housing, a surge in migration, inflation, stagnant wages, "persisting effects of systemic racism" and natural disasters. The report also blamed the expiration of the extended child tax credit - which had reduced child poverty - as also exacerbating the homelessness crisis.

On its website, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops stated the bishops believe "decent, safe, and affordable housing is a human right."



# Historic Saint Mary's Church of the Immaculate Conception holds final Mass

WILKES-BARRE — A crowd of hundreds gathered Jan. 12, 2025, to celebrate the final Mass at the historic Saint Mary's Church of the Immaculate Conception on South Washington Street in Wilkes-Barre.

The church, which was founded in 1845, closed its doors for the final time at the conclusion of Mass, marking the final day of the first Catholic Church in Wilkes-Barre.

"It is a sad day, a very sad day," former parishioner Stacy Moore said.

Moore, who grew up in Wilkes-Barre, moved to Scranton in 1990, but decided to come back to attend the closing Mass.

"I was baptized here, was an altar server here, and was confirmed here," he explained.

As he walked through the doors of St. Mary's Church for the final time, Moore reflected on all the memories the church building held.

"I used to sit up on the balcony, the second pews on the balcony," he explained.

Father Joseph Verespy, Pastor, Saint Nicholas-Saint Mary Parish, was the principal celebrant and homilist for the closing Mass.

The long-time priest noted that "there is a lot of history" within the four walls of the church that needs to be celebrated. He said that over the last few weeks many people have approached him to share that the downtown church is where they received their sacraments, were married, or even their grandparents were married.

"This Holy place holds so many memories of encountering the Holy, right here," he said.

Father Verespy also pointed out that over the last 180 years, many things have changed.

"Things that we never imagined are part of everyday life," he stated.

What hasn't changed, Father Verespy noted, is that by virtue of our baptism, we are all called to be holy.

He also noted that a church is "more than bricks and mortar," adding, "we will continue to be God's people, church, whether it's here, down the street, or in Kirby Park."

Following the distribution of Holy Communion, the Closing Ritual had Father Verespy make several stops at significant points of the church to give thanks to God for all the blessings that have been found.



Faithful gathered for the final celebration of the Eucharist at Saint Mary's Church of the Immaculate Conception in Wilkes-Barre on Sunday, Jan. 12, 2025. (Photos/Eric Deabill)

At the Baptismal Pool, Father Verespy paused to remember all the baptisms celebrated over the many years at Saint Mary's Church.

"We thank you and we praise you for the life of faith given to all who have passed through the waters of new life at this pool," he prayed.

At the ambo, the power of God's Word proclaimed in Scripture was honored.

"We thank you and we praise you for your Holy Word proclaimed here in faith and preached here in sincerity. May that Word always echo in our hearts," Father Verespy stated.

Before the statue of Saint Mary, parishioners thanked their ancestors and Mary, the Mother of God, by singing 'Immaculate Mary.'

Finally, at the altar, Father Verespy remembered all of the times the community has worshipped faithfully and been nourished with the Eucharist.

"Send us forth, O Faithful God, to be salt and light, to be a temple being built of living stones, a dwelling place for you, and a place of welcome for all your people," Father Verespy prayed.

Before exiting the church for the final time, each person was invited to come forward and bow before, genuflect, or kiss the altar. The opportunity brought many to tears, and parishioners consoled one another with hugs as they made their way out of the church building for the final time.

Once outside, the doors of the

church were locked one final time, and Father Verespy, followed by hundreds of parishioners, carried the Eucharist down the street to Saint Nicholas Church. Saint Nicholas Church will serve as the sole worship site for Saint Nicholas – Saint Mary Parish moving forward.

As the procession reached Saint Nicholas Church, bells tolled, and a group of Aztec dancers greeted the procession. Once inside Saint Nicholas Church, Benediction was celebrated with the faithful, followed by a reception at Saint Nicholas – Saint Mary School.

After several years of consultation and discussion, looking at various factors from declining Mass attendance, financial realities, and the maintenance costs associated with keeping two worship sites open, parish leaders last year made the difficult decision to close Saint Mary's Church.

Mary Elizabeth O'Connor, a former Saint Mary's parishioner who now lives in Allentown, made the trip back to Wilkes-Barre for the closing Mass.

"It was the parish of my soul and my sacraments were all there," she explained.

O'Connor remembered moving to the



During the Closing Ritual, Father Joseph Verespy prayed at Saint Mary's Baptismal pool, giving thanks for all of the baptisms celebrated over the years.

city in 1943, in the middle of World War II, and noted how important faith and having a spiritual life was at that time.

She also reflected on the important role the Sisters of Mercy played in her life and acknowledged the changing times that now have Saint Nicholas and Saint Mary churches working together.

"When I was at Saint Mary's (school), if you looked out the window and checked the time on the clock at Saint Nick's, we were told, that is not something you do in my class," O'Connor remembered with a laugh.

As the celebration came to a close inside Saint Nicholas Church – three words from Father Verespy resulted in applause from parishioners – wrapping up the entire day on a forward-looking note.

"We are home," he stated.



Following the Closing Ritual, Father Verespy, followed by hundreds of parishioners, carried the Eucharist down South Washington Street in Wilkes-Barre to Saint Nicholas Church.



# Ecumenical Prayer Service to be held Jan. 22 at Cathedral of Saint Peter

## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity to take place Jan. 18-25

SCRANTON – Faithful throughout the Diocese of Scranton will join with members of various Christian congregations of northeastern Pennsylvania for an Ecumenical Celebration of God’s Word on Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2025, at 12:10 p.m. in the Cathedral of Saint Peter.

All people of goodwill are invited to participate in the celebration highlighting the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which takes place from Jan. 18-25, 2025.

The observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity carries added significance this year, because 2025 marks the 1,700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in Turkey.

The council, which began meeting in May 325 AD, gave birth to the Nicene Creed, affirmed the full divinity of Christ, and set a formula for determining the date of Easter.

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will serve as leader of prayer for the traditional ecumenical prayer service at the Cathedral of Saint Peter. Bishop Bambera is once again serving as Chairman of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

Homilist for this year’s prayer service is Father Scott P. Sterowski, Diocesan Coordinator for Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations, who took over that role on Sept. 1, 2024. Father Sterowski also serves as Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish, Throop, and Holy Cross Parish, Olyphant.

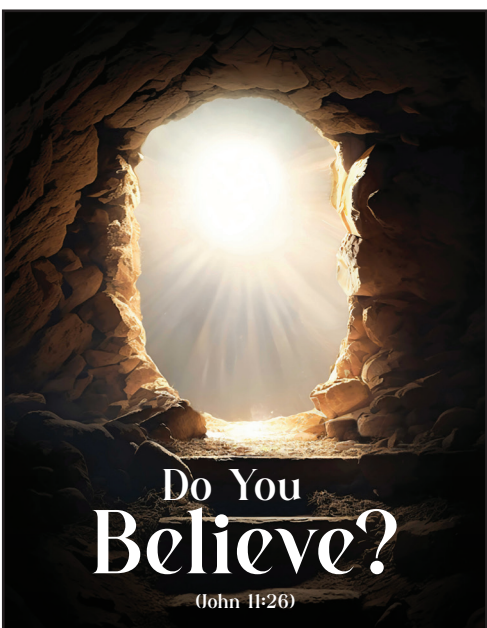
The Ecumenical prayer service will be broadcast live at 12:10 p.m. on CTV: Catholic Television of the Diocese of Scranton. It will also be made available on the Diocese of Scranton website, YouTube channel, and across all diocesan social media platforms.

The theme of the 2025 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is based on a text from the Gospel of John:

“Do you believe this?” (John 11:26). The theme takes its cue from the dialogue between Jesus and Martha when Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary in Bethany following the death of their brother Lazarus.

Using this year’s theme, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity provides a unique opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the common faith of Christians.

Prayers and reflections for the week have been prepared by the brothers and sisters of the monastic community of Bose in northern Italy. Using information jointly prepared and published by the Dicastery



for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, a d d i t i o n a l information on this importance of this year is highlighted below.

### THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

Convoked by the Emperor Constantine, the Council of Nicaea was attended,

according to tradition, by 318 Fathers, mostly from the East. The Church, having just emerged from hiding and persecution, was beginning to experience how difficult it was to share the same faith in the different cultural and political contexts of the time.

Agreement on the text of the Creed was a matter of defining the essential common foundations on which to build local communities that recognized each other as sister churches, each respecting the diversity of the other.

Disagreements had arisen among Christians in the previous decades, which sometimes degenerated into serious

conflicts. These disputes were on matters as diverse as: the nature of Christ in relation to the Father; the question of a single date to celebrate Easter and its relationship with the Jewish Passover; opposition to theological opinions considered heretical; and how to re-integrate believers who had abandoned the faith during the persecutions in earlier years.

### FROM 325 to 2025

Although the Council of Nicaea decreed how the date of Easter should be calculated, subsequent divergences of interpretation led to the feast frequently being marked on different dates in the East and West. Though we are still awaiting the day when we will have a common celebration of Easter annually, by coincidence, in this anniversary year of 2025, the great Easter feast will be celebrated on the same date by the Eastern and Western churches.

The meaning of the saving events which all Christians will celebrate on Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025, has not changed with the passage of seventeen centuries. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an opportunity for Christians to explore afresh this living heritage and re-appropriate it in ways that are in keeping with contemporary cultures, which are even more diverse today than those of the Christian world at the time of the Council of Nicaea.

## Pope says he hopes to visit Turkey later this year to mark Nicaea anniversary

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - Pope Francis said he truly hopes to celebrate the 1,700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in Turkey later this year.

“It is my hope that the commemoration of this highly significant event will inspire all believers in Christ the Lord to testify together to their faith and their desire for greater communion,” he told a delegation of Orthodox leaders during a meeting at the Vatican June 28, 2024.

The delegation representing the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate of

Constantinople was in Rome for the June 29 feast of Sts. Peter and Paul.

The pope thanked the group for Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew’s invitation to celebrate the anniversary “near the place where the council met. It is a trip that I truly wish to make.”

Pope Francis, likewise, invited the delegation and the faithful they represent to come to Rome for the Holy Year 2025. He asked them to accompany and support “with your prayers this year of grace, so that abundant spiritual fruits may not be

lacking. It would also be very nice to have you present.”

“Dialogue between our churches poses no risk to the integrity of the faith; rather, it is a necessity arising from our fidelity to the Lord and leading us to the whole truth through an exchange of gifts and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” he said.

He also encouraged the work of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, “which has embarked on the study of delicate historical and theological issues.”



**Pope Francis meets with Orthodox Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon during a private meeting with a delegation representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople at the Vatican on June 28, 2024. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)**



# 2025 March for Life speakers to include DeSantis, Bishop Thomas

WASHINGTON (OSV News)- Gov. Ron DeSantis, R-Fla., and Bishop Daniel E. Thomas of Toledo, Ohio, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities, will be among the speakers at the 52nd annual March for Life, which is scheduled for Jan. 24 on the Washington Monument grounds in Washington.

DeSantis, a Catholic who ran an unsuccessful bid for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, signed abortion restrictions in Florida during his tenure. Florida was one of just three states that had abortion-related ballot measures in 2024 where voters did not reject restrictions. Unlike the other nine states with such measures, the Sunshine State requires proposed amendments to its constitution to reach a threshold of 60% to pass.

President-elect Donald Trump and Vice President-elect JD Vance, who will begin their term just days before the March, were not among the speakers



**Pro-life demonstrators cheer during the 51st annual March for Life rally in Washington Jan. 19, 2024. The theme for the 2025 March, which will take place Jan. 24, will be "Every Life: Why We March." (OSV News photo/Leslie E. Kossoff)**

named Jan. 9. Trump addressed the March during his first term, as did then-Vice President Mike Pence. But Trump has since sought to distance himself from the issue, such as taking the campaign position that abortion should be left to the states to legislate after the U.S. Supreme

Court's 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision overturned prior precedent declaring abortion as a constitutional right. Trump's recent stance has disappointed pro-life activists who sought a commitment from him to support a federal 15-week ban.

Jeanne Mancini, president of March for Life Education and Defense Fund, and Jennie Bradley Lichter, the group's president-elect, issued statements thanking the speakers for their participation in the event, which they describe as the world's largest annual human rights demonstration.

"We are overjoyed to welcome these inspiring pro-life leaders at this year's 52nd March for Life," Mancini said. "For the past 52 years, the March for Life has powerfully witnessed to the tragedy of abortion, while calling for stronger protections for women and the unborn. This year's speakers will address the 2025 theme - 'Life: Why We March' which reminds us of the basic truth that every life has inherent human dignity from the start."

Bradley Lichter said she is "thrilled to be joining the March for Life at this pivotal moment, and I couldn't be more excited to share the stage this year with dedicated elected officials, pro-life leaders, and other great Americans

who will share their testimonies about why they fight for Life."

"There is nothing else like the March for Life, and this year's lineup is a reminder of the enduring strength of our movement," she added.

Other scheduled speakers include Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J.; professional surfer Bethany Hamilton; Lila Rose, president of Live Action; as well as Mancini and Bradley Lichter.

The group said it selected this year's theme, "Life: Why We March," to return "to our roots to acknowledge the humanity of each person, while also highlighting the need to protect and support both mother and child through the thousands of resources available to them."

"Our goal this year is to remind and reignite everyone - politicians, legislators, families, and women - in the truth that every life, unborn and born, has inherent dignity, meaning, and value, and as such is always worth fighting for," they said.

## Mass for Preservation of Life to be held at Saint Ann's Basilica Jan. 22

SCRANTON - A Mass for the Preservation of Peace and Justice will be celebrated on Wednesday, Jan. 22, at 6:30 p.m. in the lower church of Saint Ann's Basilica, 1233 St. Ann Street, Scranton, to prayerfully mark the anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decision, *Roe vs. Wade*.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have called for all dioceses in the United States to observe "a day of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life and of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion."

All area faithful are invited to attend the Mass, which

will conclude with a period of Eucharistic Adoration and the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

A lite social will follow.

The evening of prayer is

sponsored by the Scranton Section of the Eastern Lieutenancy of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem and will be led by the Reverend Thomas J. Petro, KCHS, Section Prior.

Sir Brian C. Hallock, KHS, serves as the Section Delegate. The knights and dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre who



are residing in the Diocese of Scranton are invited to vest in their regalia and assist at the Mass.

The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is a Public Association of faithful with a legal, canonical and public personality, having as its primary mission the support of the Christian presence in the Holy Land.





## Diocese of Scranton to hold Mass for Persons with Disabilities on Feb. 9

SCRANTON – In advance of National Disability Awareness Month in March, the Diocese of Scranton will hold its annual Mass for Persons with Disabilities on Sunday, Feb. 9, 2025, at 10 a.m. at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton.

All people, including those with special abilities, have gifts to contribute to the life of the Church. The Diocese of Scranton embraces and welcomes the talents of all individuals in building up the Kingdom of God.

The Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will serve as principal celebrant and homilist at this special Mass.

The Mass is open to everyone. It will be broadcast live on CTV: Catholic Television of the Diocese of Scranton. The Mass will also be livestream on the Diocese of Scranton website, YouTube channel and links will be provided on all Diocesan social media platforms.

A lite reception will be held following the Mass at the Diocesan Pastoral Center, 330 Wyoming Avenue, Scranton.

Partners in the annual Mass for Persons with Disabilities include Saint Joseph's Center in Scranton and the Order of the Alhambra. For more information, visit [dioceseofscranton.org](http://dioceseofscranton.org).

## Bishop Bambera to celebrate Mass for the World Day of the Sick Feb. 11

SCRANTON - The Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will celebrate Mass for the 33rd World Day of the Sick on Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2025, at 12:10 p.m. at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton.

The commemoration of the World Day of the Sick not only provides an opportunity to devote special attention to those who are ill, but is also a celebration of God's works of mercy, especially through those who work tirelessly in the healthcare field.

The World Day of the Sick Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Peter will feature the Liturgy of the Anointing. Any person who wishes to receive the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick will be invited to approach the bishop/priest with their hands open and palms facing up. The bishop/priest will anoint both the forehead and hands of the sick person.

Last year, Pope Francis reminded all faithful that the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is not just for those who are nearing the end of their life.

"Let us remember that the anointing of the sick is one of the 'sacraments of healing,' of 'restoration,' that heals the spirit," the pope said in a video message

released in July by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network.

For the month of July 2024, the pope dedicated his prayer intention to the pastoral care of the sick.


"The anointing of the sick is not a sacrament only for those who are at the point of death," the pope said, emphasizing "it is important that this is clear."

Having a priest or bishop give the sacrament does not necessarily mean saying "goodbye to life," he said. "Thinking this way means giving up every hope."

"When a person is very ill, it's advisable to give them the anointing of the sick. And when someone is elderly, it's good that they receive the anointing of the sick," Pope Francis said, underlining how there is no need to wait until a person experiencing a serious illness is at the point of death to receive the sacrament.

"Let us pray that the sacrament of the anointing of the sick grant the Lord's strength to those who receive it and to their loved ones, and that it may become for everyone an ever more visible sign of compassion and hope," he said.

CTV: Catholic Television of the Diocese of Scranton will provide a live broadcast of the Mass for those unable to attend.

Diocese of Scranton 

# Mass for Persons With Disabilities

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2025

10:00AM

CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER

315 WYOMING AVE. SCRANTON, PA 18502

CELEBRANT: BISHOP JOSEPH C. BAMBERA

All are welcome to join us as we honor the many gifts those with physical, developmental, or intellectual disabilities bring to the Church and the community.

**A lite reception will follow Mass in the Diocesan Pastoral Center.**

For more info, contact  
Shannon Kowalski at  
(570)207-2213

## World Day of the Sick Mass

Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2025

12:10 p.m.

Cathedral of Saint Peter





# Pope looks back on his life, urges people to look to future with hope

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - While calling himself an “old man” and saying he never expected to be pope this long, Pope Francis said he still has dreams for the future.

“We must not stumble upon tomorrow, we must build it, and we all have the responsibility to do so in a way that responds to the project of God, which is none other than the happiness of mankind, the centrality of mankind, without excluding anyone,” the 88-year-old pope wrote in his autobiography.

“Hope: The Autobiography” was written with the Italian editor Carlo Musso beginning in 2019. The book was released Jan. 14 in its original Italian and in 17 other languages in about 100 countries. Random House published the book in the United States, and Penguin Random House Canada released it in Canada.

The original plan, Musso said, was for the book to be released after Pope Francis’ death. But Mondadori, the Italian publisher coordinating the release, said the pope decided in August that it should be published at the beginning of the Holy Year 2025, which has hope as its central theme.

In several chapters of the book, Pope Francis directly addresses readers, including when he quotes St. John Paul II’s words during the Jubilee 2000: “Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ!”

“If one day you are overcome by fears and worries,” he told readers, “think of that episode in the Gospel of John, at the marriage at Cana (John 2:1–12), and say to yourselves: The best wine has yet to be served.”

“Be sure of it: The deepest, happiest, most beautiful reality for us, for those we love, has yet to come,” he continued. “Even if some statistic tells you the opposite, even if tiredness weakens your powers, never lose this hope that cannot be beaten.”

Much of the book contains familiar stories of Pope Francis’ past, his childhood and relationship with his grandmother

Rosa, his vocation and ministry as a Jesuit, his service as archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and his election as pope in 2013.

Pope Francis acknowledged that he has made mistakes during his pontificate, usually because of his impatience, but he defends some of his most controversial decisions, including expanding the possibilities for divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to return to the sacraments and, more recently, to authorize the blessing of same-sex or cohabiting couples.

He wrote about both of those decisions in the larger context of how the church should reach out to and welcome everyone.

“All are invited. Everyone,” he wrote. “And so: Everyone inside. Good and bad, young and old, healthy and sick. For this is the Lord’s plan.”

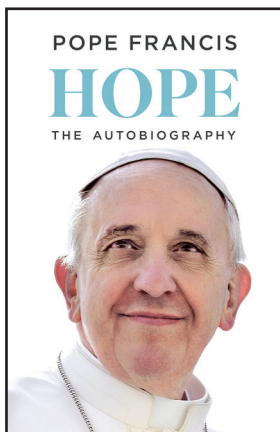
“It is our task as pastors to take others by the hand, to accompany them, to help them to discern, and not to exclude them,” the pope wrote. “And to pardon: to treat others with the same mercy that the Lord reserves for us.”

Pope Francis also discusses his health and asserts again that he has never thought of resigning, although like his predecessors he had prepared a letter early in his pontificate offering his resignation “in the event of impediment for medical reasons.”

“At the beginning of my papacy I had the feeling that it would be brief: no more than three or four years,” he wrote. “I never imagined that I would write four encyclicals, and all those letters, documents, apostolic exhortations, nor that I would have made all those journeys to more than sixty countries.”

But, he said, “the reality is, quite simply, that I am old.”

Pope Francis wrote that he will be pope as “long as God wishes,” and repeated his plan to be buried in Rome’s Basilica of St. Mary Major and not in St. Peter’s Basilica as most modern popes are.



## APPOINTMENTS

His Excellency, Bishop Joseph C. Bambera, announces the following appointments, effective January 8, 2025:

### SENIOR PRIEST

**Reverend Binesh Joseph Kanjirakattu**, from Parochial Vicar, Good Shepherd Parish Drums, and Immaculate Conception Parish, Freeland, to Senior Priest, St. Ann Parish, Shohola, St. John Neumann Parish, Hawley, and St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Milford.

**Reverend Kenneth M. Seegar**, from Sacramental Minister, Our Lady of the Eucharist Parish, Pittston, to Senior Priest, Good Shepherd Parish Drums, and Immaculate Conception Parish, Freeland.

### SACRAMENTAL MINISTER

**Reverend Joseph P. Elston, V.F.**, to Sacramental Minister, Our Lady of the Eucharist Parish, Pittston. Fr. Elston will remain Pastor, St. John the Evangelist Parish, Pittston, and St. Joseph Marelo Parish, Pittston.

**Reverend Jackson Pinhero, O.S.J.**, to Sacramental Minister, Our Lady of the Eucharist Parish, Pittston. Fr. Pinhero will remain Assistant Pastor, St. John the Evangelist Parish, Pittston, and St. Joseph Marelo Parish, Pittston.



## BISHOP BAMBERA’S SCHEDULE

**January 19** - Mass for the Feast of Altagracia  
Holy Family Academy, Hazleton, 12:10 p.m.

**January 22** - Ecumenical Celebration of God’s Word  
(Prayer Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity)  
Cathedral of Saint Peter, Scranton, 12:10 p.m.

**February 3-8** - Region III Bishops’ Retreat

**February 9** - Mass for Persons with Disabilities  
Cathedral of Saint Peter, Scranton, 10:00 a.m.

**February 11** - World Day of the Sick Mass  
Cathedral of Saint Peter, Scranton, 12:10 p.m.

**February 13** - School Mass for Our Lady of Peace School  
Saint Gregory Parish, Clarks Green, 9:00 a.m.

**February 19** - School Mass for La Salle Academy  
Queen of Angels Parish, Jessup, 9:00 a.m.

For the latest news and information across the Diocese, visit [dioceseofscranton.org](http://dioceseofscranton.org)



## Seminarian receives Ministry of Lector at Pontifical North American College in Rome

ROME - On Jan. 12, 2025, Diocese of Scranton seminarian Jacob P. Mutchler was one of 34 men who received the Ministry of Lector at the Pontifical North American College in Rome.

His Excellency John J. Kennedy, Secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, conferred the Ministry of Lector in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception.

Addressing the new lectors in his homily, Archbishop Kennedy encouraged them to proclaim the Word of God with faithfulness and joy. He went on to say, “by the faithfulness and commitment in your proclamation of the Word of God, the faithful will come to know how strongly you yourself believe in the word that you proclaim.”

As part of the rite, Archbishop Kennedy placed the Holy Scriptures in the hands of each candidate and said, “Take this book of holy Scripture and be faithful in handing on the word of

God, so that it may grow strong in the hearts of his people.”

The seminarians, currently in their first year of theological formation for the priesthood, will have three additional years of theological, spiritual, and pastoral formation

before being ordained to the priesthood in their home dioceses.

The Pontifical North American College serves as the American seminary in Rome.

Founded in 1859 by Blessed Pius IX, the College has formed over 5000 priests near the heart of the Church for service in dioceses



**His Excellency John J. Kennedy, Secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, confers the Ministry of Lector upon Diocese of Scranton seminarian Jacob P. Mutchler on Jan. 12, 2025, at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. (Photo credit: Pontifical North American College)**

around the United States, Canada, and Australia.

The College strengthens the bonds between Rome and local Churches worldwide, and it allows its students a first-hand encounter of the Church’s rich religious and cultural heritage.

## Diocese of Scranton accepts two new seminarians



SCRANTON - The Diocese of Scranton is proud to announce that two men have been accepted into the Program for Priestly Formation for the Diocese of Scranton by the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton.

Antonio Ingargiola of Saints Anthony & Rocco Parish in Dunmore (left photo) and Liam Barry of Epiphany Parish in Sayre (right photo) will now begin their formation programs. Please keep Antonio, Liam, and their families in your prayers, and please pray for all our seminarians and those discerning a vocation to the priesthood or religious life.

## Catholic Ministries Appeal approaching 85% of goal

At press time for this issue of *The Catholic Light*, approximately \$3.8 million (84%) of our \$4.5 million goal for this year’s Catholic Ministries Appeal has been raised.

That is about 8-percent ahead of last year in overall funds raised over the same period (September through December).

Comparing the 2024-25 Appeal to the 2023-24 Appeal, last January’s performance at this time was \$3.4 million or 76-percent of a \$4.5 million goal and we fell short in the final accounting on June 30 by about \$450,000 or 10-percent.

It’s worth noting that the Annual Appeal is recorded on a fiscal year (July – June).

Throughout the fall, we have been analyzing challenges and prioritizing development opportunities.

One that jumps out is room for improvement in our overall participation percentage.

Approximately 20-percent (or 1 in 5) households have made a commitment to this year’s Appeal. Imagine the possibilities for our local Church if we increased our participation to 2 in 5 households... imagine what participation from 4 in 5 households could do for our region!

Reported in just the past few weeks, a permanent home for Mother Teresa’s Haven Shelter was dedicated and opened in Wilkes-Barre, two more young men have formally entered the Diocesan seminarian program, and our kitchens and food pantries operated by Catholic Social Services continue to provide nutritious meals to those facing hunger and food insecurity.

These and the many other ministries funded by the Appeal are made possible through the generosity and compassion of each one of us, and there is much



**By: Joseph D. Strubeck  
Diocesan Secretary for  
Development**

more work to be done in this Jubilee Holy Year!

Pope Francis, in opening the Jubilee Year reminded us that “We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us” and your contribution to the Appeal is just one of the many opportunities to participate in offering hope to others.

To all who have made a commitment to this year’s Appeal – **thank you!**

Thank you for your generous support of the Catholic Ministries Appeal, and for answering Our Call to Serve and offering hope to those among us in need.

If you haven’t yet made a commitment – it’s not too late!

There are three easy ways to give to the Catholic Ministries Appeal. First, you can make an online gift at AnnualAppeal.org. Second, you can call our Development Office at (570) 207-2250. Lastly, you can mail a check, c/o Catholic Ministries Appeal to 300 Wyoming Avenue, Scranton, PA, 18503.

Please consider making a commitment to the current Appeal, if your circumstances allow; if you’ve never given to the Appeal in the past, I hope you’ll consider contributing this year.

No gift is too small, and every gift matters.





# Thank You to Everyone Who Has Supported the Catholic Ministries Appeal. We are currently at 84% of our Goal.

## Visit [AnnualAppeal.org](http://AnnualAppeal.org) or call (570) 207-2250 to make a gift!

### PARISH GOAL REPORT TO DATE (Jan. 11, 2025)

All Saints Parish - Plymouth.....	\$17,791.00 / \$31,286.00 (57%)	St. Ann Parish - Shohola.....	\$18,195.00 / \$19,945.00 (91%)
Annunciation Parish - Hazleton.....	\$19,195.00 / \$42,838.00 (45%)	St. Ann Parish - Williamsport.....	\$47,361.00 / \$48,050.00 (99%)
Ascension Parish - Forest City.....	\$18,745.00 / \$22,965.00 (82%)	St. Boniface Parish - Williamsport.....	\$51,496.00 / \$51,636.00 (99%)
Blessed Sacrament Parish - Throop.....	\$16,637.50 / \$19,093.00 (87%)	St. Brigid Parish - Friendsville.....	\$38,777.65 / \$23,474.00 (165%)
BVM Queen of Peace Parish - Hawley.....	\$48,567.00 / \$52,577.00 (92%)	St. Catherine of Siena Parish - Moscow.....	\$80,255.48 / \$62,284.00 (129%)
Christ the King Parish - Archbald.....	\$60,442.00 / \$79,534.00 (76%)	St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish - Swoyersville..	\$45,492.04 / \$55,801.00 (82%)
Corpus Christi Parish - West Pittston.....	\$54,705.00 / \$76,066.00 (72%)	St. Elizabeth Parish - Bear Creek.....	\$11,807.81 / \$17,694.00 (67%)
Divine Mercy Parish - Scranton.....	\$54,917.98 / \$46,472.00 (118%)	St. Eulalia Parish - Roaring Brook Township....	\$20,945.00 / \$54,380.00 (39%)
Epiphany Parish - Sayre.....	\$67,521.00 / \$53,497.00 (126%)	St. Faustina Kowalska Parish - Nanticoke.....	\$27,913.00 / \$56,918.00 (49%)
Exaltation of the Holy Cross Parish - Hanover Twp..	\$26,675.00 / \$23,844.00 (112%)	St. Frances X. Cabrini Parish - Carverton.....	\$19,320.51 / \$16,889.00 (114%)
Gate of Heaven Parish - Dallas.....	\$32,209.41 / \$38,351.00 (84%)	St. Gregory Parish - Clarks Green.....	\$89,669.00 / \$86,601.00 (104%)
Good Shepherd Parish - Drums.....	\$11,400.00 / \$32,364.00 (35%)	St. Ignatius Loyola Parish - Kingston.....	\$60,763.06 / \$78,424.00 (77%)
Holy Child Parish - Mansfield.....	\$21,145.00 / \$26,929.00 (79%)	St. John Bosco Parish - Conyngham.....	\$67,642.50 / \$60,677.00 (111%)
Holy Cross Parish - Olyphant.....	\$31,538.00 / \$43,621.00 (72%)	St. John Neumann Parish - Lords Valley.....	\$19,745.00 / \$21,487.00 (92%)
Holy Family Parish - Luzerne.....	\$34,730.00 / \$30,097.00 (115%)	St. John Parish - E. Stroudsburg.....	\$41,090.00 / \$52,044.00 (79%)
Holy Name of Jesus Parish - West Hazleton.....	\$7,135.00 / \$25,791.00 (28%)	St. John the Baptist Parish - Larksville.....	\$17,050.00 / \$33,560.00 (51%)
Holy Name of Mary Parish - Montrose.....	\$27,096.00 / \$19,324.00 (140%)	St. John the Evangelist Parish - Honesdale.....	\$61,435.00 / \$59,874.00 (103%)
Holy Rosary Parish - Hazleton.....	\$18,823.00 / \$25,047.00 (75%)	St. John the Evangelist Parish - Pittston.....	\$53,415.00 / \$53,607.00 (99%)
Holy Spirit Parish - Mocanaqua.....	\$16,475.00 / \$21,374.00 (77%)	St. John Vianney Parish - Montdale.....	\$29,898.00 / \$38,560.00 (78%)
Immaculate Conception Parish - Scranton.....	\$38,007.00 / \$49,769.00 (76%)	St. Joseph Marelo Parish - Pittston.....	\$29,338.00 / \$40,660.00 (72%)
Immaculate Conception Parish - Williamsport.....	\$17,015.00 / \$29,111.00 (58%)	St. Joseph Parish - Matamoras.....	\$33,712.00 / \$23,046.00 (146%)
Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish - Dushore.....	\$33,251.25 / \$35,273.00 (94%)	St. Joseph the Worker Parish - Williamsport....	\$72,763.00 / \$78,712.00 (92%)
Mary, Mother of God Parish - Scranton.....	\$47,802.00 / \$51,626.00 (93%)	St. Jude Parish - Mountain Top.....	\$88,564.00 / \$97,156.00 (91%)
Most Holy Trinity Parish - Cresco.....	\$35,705.00 / \$48,549.00 (74%)	St. Katharine Drexel Parish - Pleasant Mount..	\$18,815.00 / \$15,070.00 (125%)
Most Holy Trinity Parish - Susquehanna.....	\$32,358.20 / \$28,616.00 (113%)	St. Lawrence Parish - S. Williamsport.....	\$22,050.00 / \$22,478.00 (98%)
Most Precious Blood Parish - Hazleton.....	\$31,861.00 / \$36,585.00 (87%)	St. Leo Parish - Ashley.....	\$17,380.00 / \$38,760.00 (45%)
Nativity of Our Lord Parish - Duryea.....	\$43,821.00 / \$44,982.00 (97%)	St. Luke Parish - Jersey Shore.....	\$7,017.00 / \$20,244.00 (35%)
Nativity of the BVM Parish - Tunkhannock.....	\$29,325.00 / \$33,004.00 (89%)	St. Luke Parish - Stroudsburg.....	\$120,509.00 / \$92,320.00 (131%)
Our Lady Help of Christians Parish - Dorrance.....	\$20,620.00 / \$19,021.00 (108%)	St. Maria Goretti Parish - Laffin.....	\$27,640.00 / \$40,587.00 (68%)
Our Lady of Hope Parish - Wilkes-Barre.....	\$26,701.00 / \$36,122.00 (74%)	St. Mary of the Lake Parish - Lake Winola.....	\$5,435.00 / \$12,951.00 (42%)
Our Lady of Lourdes Parish - Montoursville.....	\$29,425.00 / \$41,857.00 (70%)	St. Mary Parish - Waymart.....	\$23,125.00 / \$16,306.00 (142%)
Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish - Dunmore.....	\$35,275.00 / \$58,784.00 (60%)	St. Matthew Parish - E. Stroudsburg.....	\$63,155.00 / \$68,474.00 (92%)
Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish - Lake Silkworth...	\$17,244.00 / \$24,387.00 (71%)	St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish - Pocono Pines....	\$19,746.00 / \$34,389.00 (57%)
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish - Wyalusing..	\$8,105.00 / \$18,963.00 (43%)	St. Michael Parish - Canton.....	\$14,070.00 / \$19,238.00 (73%)
Our Lady of the Abingtons Parish - Dalton.....	\$7,471.00 / \$12,849.00 (58%)	St. Michael Parish - Scranton.....	\$9,218.86 / \$23,868.00 (39%)
Our Lady of the Eucharist Parish - Pittston.....	\$10,425.00 / \$21,763.00 (48%)	St. Monica Parish - West Wyoming.....	\$24,202.00 / \$24,486.00 (99%)
Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception - Freeland..	\$13,658.00 / \$29,784.00 (46%)	St. Nicholas-St. Mary Parish - Wilkes-Barre....	\$80,111.34 / \$90,962.00 (88%)
Our Lady of the Rosary Parish - Carbondale.....	\$55,472.57 / \$78,343.00 (71%)	St. Patrick Parish - Milford.....	\$48,311.40 / \$20,273.00 (238%)
Our Lady of the Snows Parish - Clarks Summit....	\$63,101.02 / \$91,891.00 (69%)	St. Patrick Parish - Nicholson.....	\$6,984.98 / \$13,120.00 (53%)
Our Lady of Victory Parish - Harveys Lake.....	\$23,258.00 / \$35,213.00 (66%)	St. Patrick Parish - Scranton.....	\$23,681.00 / \$67,467.00 (35%)
Our Lady of Victory Parish - Tannersville.....	\$45,697.00 / \$52,332.00 (87%)	St. Patrick Parish - White Haven.....	\$6,555.00 / \$21,328.00 (31%)
Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish - Brodheadsville..	\$61,599.00 / \$69,328.00 (89%)	St. Paul Parish - Scranton.....	\$38,150.00 / \$55,312.00 (69%)
Prince of Peace Parish - Old Forge.....	\$13,555.00 / \$26,615.00 (51%)	St. Peter Parish - Wellsboro.....	\$27,503.00 / \$35,673.00 (77%)
Queen of Angels Parish - Jessup.....	\$12,185.00 / \$25,877.00 (47%)	St. Peter's Cathedral - Scranton.....	\$83,927.96 / \$51,364.00 (163%)
Queen of Heaven Parish - Hazleton.....	\$21,007.00 / \$32,404.00 (65%)	St. Rita Parish - Gouldsboro.....	\$8,940.00 / \$12,326.00 (73%)
Queen of the Apostles Parish - Avoca.....	\$18,348.59 / \$35,752.00 (51%)	St. Robert Bellarmine Parish - Wilkes-Barre....	\$28,560.00 / \$31,555.00 (91%)
Resurrection Parish - Muncy.....	\$25,040.00 / \$43,961.00 (57%)	St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish - Scranton.....	\$37,891.00 / \$62,962.00 (60%)
Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish - Dupont.....	\$18,250.00 / \$32,953.00 (55%)	St. Therese Parish - Shavertown.....	\$84,491.66 / \$72,531.00 (116%)
Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish - Peckville.....	\$63,459.98 / \$50,990.00 (124%)	St. Thomas More Parish - Lake Ariel.....	\$37,018.00 / \$50,146.00 (74%)
SS Anthony & Rocco Parish - Dunmore.....	\$31,424.00 / \$52,831.00 (59%)	St. Thomas the Apostle Parish - Elkland.....	\$8,400.00 / \$11,501.00 (73%)
SS Cyril & Methodius Parish - Hazleton.....	\$38,504.00 / \$46,735.00 (82%)	St. Vincent de Paul Parish - Milford.....	\$19,172.73 / \$36,520.00 (53%)
SS Peter & Paul Parish - Plains.....	\$52,151.00 / \$60,932.00 (86%)	Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Dickson City	\$60,546.98 / \$47,831.00 (127%)
SS Peter & Paul Parish - Towanda.....	\$60,803.00 / \$28,529.00 (213%)		
St. Andrew Parish - Wilkes-Barre.....	\$5,800.00 / \$19,046.00 (30%)		
St. Ann Basilica Parish - Scranton.....	\$34,809.00 / \$55,819.00 (62%)		
		<b>TOTAL TO DATE (as of Jan. 11, 2025)</b>	<b>\$3,787,094.96 / \$4,500,000 (84%)</b>



# “Our Faith. Our Students. Our Future.”

## Catholic School System releases Strategic Growth Plan

SCRANTON – After nearly two years of consultative work and thoughtful listening, the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System has released its Strategic Growth Plan entitled “Our Faith. Our Students. Our Future.”

On Jan. 8, 2025, all Catholic school families received a copy of the plan, which Diocesan leadership hopes will help to “strengthen and enrich the educational experience” of all Catholic school students.

The Strategic Growth Plan is broken down into seven key areas: Catholic Mission & Identity; Academic Excellence; Governance & Leadership; Enrollment Management; Development; Infrastructure; and Financial Stability. Each section contains high-level goals as well as action steps that can be taken to meet those goals.



**After approximately 21 months of work, the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System released its Strategic Growth Plan, “Our Faith. Our Students. Our Future.” on Jan. 8, 2025. (Photo/Eric Deabill)**

“Our Catholic School System has much to celebrate, with enrollment this year reaching its highest level in seven years, which is a testament to the dedication of our educators, administrators, staff, and supportive community,” the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, and Kristen Donohue, Diocesan Secretary of Catholic Education/ Superintendent, wrote in a

joint letter to families. “With a clear vision and collective commitment, we know that we can build on our successes and strategically navigate the path forward to ensure our Catholic School System continues to thrive and serve future generations.”

The Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System launched its Strategic Growth Planning Process on March 31, 2023. Over the last 21 months, a comprehensive study of community and parish demographics, school finances, enrollment history and patterns, and facility assessments all took place.

Nearly 1,500 Catholic school parents, teachers, priests and even parish religious education families took part in surveys to share their thoughts on the strength and areas for growth within Catholic schools.

“We are filled with hope

for what lies ahead,” Bishop Bambera and Donohue noted.

Some of the high-level goals included in the plan include increasing collaboration between Catholic schools and parishes to form disciples of Christ, establishing a Diocesan school board to support the mission and vision of the Bishop and the Catholic Schools Office, and developing a balanced operating budget to ensure long-term viability.

The Strategic Growth Plan now moves into the implementation phase. An Implementation Leadership Team will be established to provide oversight and direction to ensure that progress is made on the goals and action steps contained in the plan.

To read the “Our Faith. Our Students. Our Future.” Strategic Plan, visit [dioceseofscranton.org](http://dioceseofscranton.org).

## Goals of “Our Faith. Our Students. Our Future.” Strategic Growth Plan

- Increase and enhance collaboration among each Catholic school and nearby parishes to evangelize and catechize, forming disciples of Christ.
- Deepen the faith commitment of administrators, faculty, staff, and governing bodies through ongoing formation, allowing them to grow and serve as witnesses to their faith.
- Define, assess, and refine student support services to ensure data informs student learning at all levels.
- Develop a “master plan” to continue fully implementing STREAM throughout the curriculum and in the classrooms.
- Improve teacher recruitment and retention by increasing salary and benefits.
- Establish a Diocesan School Board that supports the mission and vision of the Bishop and Catholic Schools Office, focusing on Catholic school vitality and sustainability.
- Ensure every school has a comprehensive, multi-year strategic growth plan to inform decision-making.
- Develop/Implement a plan to identify potential Diocesan Catholic School Office personnel and local school administrators from within the diocese and support them in their first years.
- Increase student enrollment of all schools to ensure they operate at 85% or more of the identified enrollment capacity.
- Expand marketing/recruitment opportunities and strategies to serve families in areas of growing or changing demographics and confront/overcome challenges for those who desire a Catholic school education.
- Establish a diocesan advancement/development position(s) for Catholic schools to collaborate with the Diocesan Development Office and Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Scranton to strengthen local stewardship efforts.
- With the support of the new advancement/development personnel, increase development and fundraising to 8-10% of total annual operating revenue at each school.
- Engage in, and support, initiatives of the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Scranton in building future funding for Catholic school education.
- Prepare a master facility plan at each school site prioritizing short-, mid-, and long-term capital needs.
- Develop a balanced annual operating budget for the Diocesan Catholic School System by 2026-2027 to ensure long-term viability.
- Explore the potential and develop plans to undertake major campaigns as needed at the local school level.





# Blaise Alexander Family Dealerships donate \$150,000 to Saint John Neumann Regional Academy

WILLIAMSPORT – Blaise Alexander Family Dealerships recently announced its continued support of educational and religious programs at Saint John Neumann Regional Academy with a very generous donation of \$150,000 to the Diocese of Scranton Scholarship Foundation.

“The Saint John Neumann fundraising committee is extremely grateful to Blaise Alexander and of his family’s contribution and commitment to the families and students of Saint John Neumann,” Paul Rooney, Saint John Neumann Regional Academy Fundraising Chair, said.

The funding will go a long way to support student scholarships as part of Pennsylvania’s Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program.

“With this EITC donation, we are able to serve many local families who request or who deserve financial assistance or scholarships to our Academy at all levels. This support sets us apart from the other schools around,” principal Alisia McNamee shared.

The Blaise Alexander scholarship funding is earmarked for tuition scholarships for local students, from pre-K to grade 12, who wish to attend Saint John Neumann Regional Academy.

The academy has three locations locally. Its pre-K campus is located at Saint Lawrence Church in South Williamsport. The Saint John Neumann Regional Academy Elementary Campus location houses kindergarten through 5th grade at Saint Boniface Catholic Church, and the 6th through 12th grade classes and Catholic Community Center exist at the High School Campus, 901 Penn Street, Williamsport.

“At Saint John Neumann, we offer competitive courses. We offer Advanced Placement (AP) Courses, Dual Enrollment with multiple local colleges and universities, and unique learning opportunities via online course work for our students,” Dr. Chad Greevy, Curriculum Director, explained. “Additionally, we keep our class numbers smaller than any other school in the multi-county region to provide better one-on-one attention for our students. This individualized learning philosophy is one more way that sets us apart from those bigger guys around us.”

Anyone wishing to donate to Saint John Neumann Regional Academy can contact the Academy via phone at (570) 326-9953 or email [admissions@sjnra.org](mailto:admissions@sjnra.org).

Saint John Neumann is a Catholic, faith-centered community dedicated to



The Blaise Alexander Family Dealerships recently presented a \$150,000 check to the Diocese of Scranton to support educational and religious programs at Saint John Neumann Regional Academy. Attending the check presentation are, front row, from left: Aubrey Alexander, Blaise Alexander Family Dealerships; the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton; and Paul Rooney, Saint John Neumann Regional Academy Fundraising Chair. Second row, from left: Kristen Donohue, Diocesan Secretary of Catholic Education/Superintendent; Alisia McNamee, Saint John Neumann Regional Academy Principal; Joshua Lovell, 12th grade student; Kaidance Meixel, 12th grade student; Dr. Chad Greevy, Saint John Neumann Regional Academy Curriculum Director; Michele Long, Assistant Superintendent; and Malissa Heim, Saint John Neumann Regional Academy Director of Admissions and Marketing.

academic excellence, fostering personal leadership expressed in service to others. and spiritual growth, the promotion of “Come check us out, see what we can do for your family,” McNamee encouraged. a life of faith, and the development of

**SAVE THE DATE!** 1.27.25!

**DIOCESE OF SCRANTON CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

**LIVING THE S.T.R.E.A.M.**

SCIENCE  
TECHNOLOGY  
RELIGION  
ENGINEERING  
ART & MATHEMATICS  
SHOWCASE 2025

OUR FUTURE IS IN GOOD HANDS

IMAGINING A BETTER. MORE JUST WORLD!

**SPONSORS AND BENEFACTORS INVITED!**

To hear about unique support opportunities for this high-energy, high-exposure initiative, call Sandra Snyder at 570-591-5004 or email [ssnyder@dioceseofscranton.org](mailto:ssnyder@dioceseofscranton.org).

Join us on [dioceseofscranton.org](http://dioceseofscranton.org) for the launch of the first round of a first-of-its-kind student imagination exposition that will change the way you see the world!



Diocese of Scranton  
**CATHOLIC**  
 SCHOOL SYSTEM  
 FAITH • ACADEMICS • SERVICE

*The Diocese of Scranton is committed to educating our students in an environment that is academically excellent and facilitates the development of moral judgment and Christian decision-making. We are proud to share the following successes of our students in the classroom and in their service to others. Each day, our schools are fulfilling their mission of preparing today's youth and young adults to become tomorrow's faith-filled leaders.*



Eighth grade students at **Saint Nicholas/Saint Mary School in Wilkes-Barre** shared their talents while performing The Living Nativity just before their Christmas break.



Students and families of **Holy Rosary School in Duryea** partnered with Nativity of Our Lord Parish to make sure the less fortunate in the greater Pittston area have food to eat during the winter months.



Emily Strand, a third grade student at **Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg**, won the Keep Christ in Christmas poster contest sponsored by the local Knights of Columbus.



The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, celebrated Mass with the students, faculty, and community of **Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre**. In his homily, he reminded attendees that receiving the Eucharist is more than becoming one with Jesus, it is a responsibility to make us one with every person we encounter, whether we know them or not, whether we like them or not.



Local author Paulette DeBella visited with the students at **Saint Jude School in Mountain Top** and read them her book, "The Tiniest Angel's Gift."



What's better than decorating a cookie, eating tasty snacks, posing in a photo booth with Santa, taking a chance to win a raffle basket, and dancing the day away? Nothing, if you ask the students at **All Saints Academy in Scranton** who had the best time at the school's Christmas Carnival.



Students at **Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport** enjoy their new library furniture while Principal Alisia McNamee reads them a story.

Fourth grade Falcons at **Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green** created beautiful manger scenes to present to their families as Christmas gifts this blessed holiday season.







Georgel Biah, Student Council Secretary at **Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg**, serves her fellow Spartans cookies as the Student Council offered Christmas treats during lunch.



Seniors from **Holy Cross High School in Dunmore**, along with their principal, Mr. Ben Tolerico, visited a variety of community offices, including the PA State Police Barracks in Dunmore, sharing gifts and Christmas cheer just before their winter vacation.



The Maker Club from **Epiphany School in Sayre** crafted hand-made Christmas ornaments, desk calendars, and cards for shut-ins of the Epiphany Church community as part of a three-month service project.



Eighth grade students from **Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton** had an opportunity to visit the Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine. They learned more about the skeletal system and careers that work directly with our bones and mobility. Workshops included hands-on activities introducing the skeletal system, understanding forensic science, and using X-ray images to learn about breaks and fractures.



The fourth & fifth grade boys' basketball team at **La Salle Academy in Jessup** spent time off the court spreading Christmas joy. They made cards and sent Christmas cookies to the priests at St. Mary's Villa. Santa was watching all their good works and made a surprise appearance at the end of one of their practices to thank them for keeping the true spirit of the holiday.



Students from **Saint Agnes School in Towanda** want everyone to notice that they blessed the school doors when they returned from Christmas break. The chalk inscription includes the letters "C," "M" and "B" representing the three Magi and the current year of 2025.



The kindergarten class at **Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore** presented The Living Nativity just before their Christmas break.

Students and their families from **Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter** supported the "Greater Pittston Area Shop with a Cop" during the holidays to support the program which helps families in need to receive toys for their children at Christmas.





# Catholic college students find spiritual inspiration, renewal at SEEK conference

EAST STROUDSBURG- The Diocese of Scranton was proudly represented at the Fellowship of Catholic University Students' (FOCUS) 2025 SEEK conference during the first days of the new year in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Father Don Williams, pastor of Saint Matthew Parish in East Stroudsburg and former vocations director for the Diocese of Scranton, along with four young adults, joined the approximately 17,000 college-age Catholic men and women who gathered in fellowship from Jan. 1-5 to dive deeper into their shared faith.

Saint Matthew Parish serves as the primary overseer and religious home base of "ESU Catholics," the Catholic campus ministry arm at nearby East Stroudsburg University.

Accompanying Father Williams to the SEEK25 gathering in the Rocky Mountains were three ESU students - Luke Connolly, Domenic Veneziano and Emily Simon - and area nursing major Nardin Mikhail.

Drawing its inspiration from John 1:38 - "What do you seek?" - the national SEEK conference offers an inspirational setting for young Catholic faithful to learn about their faith, to share in friendship, to be encouraged in their unique vocation - and to experience the love, hope and very real presence of Jesus Christ through His Church.

"SEEK was a phenomenal experience," Connolly said. "It helped reinvigorate my faith at a time when I really needed it."

Veneziano related, "SEEK was a great experience where I got to meet fellow Catholics from around the country, (attend) informative talks about topics ranging from faith to morality, and I got to visit a city I have never been in."

"SEEK was amazing and I



College students, from left, Emily Simon, Nardin Mikhail, Luke Connolly and Domenic Veneziano, began New Year's 2025 by joining Father Don Williams at the national SEEK conference for young adult Catholics, hosted by Salt Lake City during Jan. 1-5.

highly recommend going," he enthusiastically added.

Father Williams was among nearly 500 priests in attendance at the impressive Catholic youth event in Utah that, in addition to a first-ever regional conference held simultaneously in Washington, D.C., also featured the appearance of 46 U.S. bishops.

"The SEEK conference is a great opportunity for young Catholics to develop their commitment to their faith and their personal relationship with Jesus Christ," Father Williams remarked, after attending the annual faith gathering for the first time. "The idea is that the young people go forth to spread the message of the Gospel and pursue their commitment to a life of faith."

Father Williams explained the SEEK gathering included Mass each day, followed by dynamic keynote presentations and breakout sessions, whereby the young adult attendees could explore various areas and issues of their Catholic faith.

"There was just so much great energy," Father offered. "We hear so much negativity about our

youth today, and their resistance to religion."

"The Church is alive with young people. They are growing in their faith. They are proud Catholics," he added.

Father Williams shared that he was most impressed with the nightly Eucharistic Adoration devotions when the overwhelming throng of young Catholics gathered in silence to praise Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

"It was during this time of praise and worship of the Eucharistic Lord that some 4,000 faithful would go to Confessions," he said. "It was really such an unbelievable sight."

According to the East Stroudsburg pastor, the SEEK conference also featured morning sessions where the young men and women were separated into two massive groups to take part in talks affirming their unique gifts and offering the opportunity for individual discernment of their life vocations.

"The SEEK conference was a truly wonderful experience! I loved being able to attend Mass with thousands of other college students, and the talks from keynote

speakers were insightful and eye-opening," Simon expressed.

She continued, "I loved the talks from Father Mike Schmitz and Jackie Angel. Adoration was breath-taking both in the main conference room and the smaller chapel area. I had such a great time at this event. Even while waiting two hours in the Confession line, I was filled with joy and peace. I'm so grateful I was able to go this year, and I

hope that more students can join us at the next one!"

For Mikhail, it was her third SEEK conference.

"This was by far my favorite year, from the amazing speakers to meeting people my age in faith," she said. "Adoration was my favorite part of the conference - to see 17,000 people in front of the Eucharist! I really loved the unique activities such as line-dancing and the worship nights."

## High school students invited to participate in ISLI in March

Diocese of Scranton

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE HIGH SCHOOL RETREAT

March 21st-23rd, 2025

Holy Transfiguration Retreat Center  
Dalton, PA

REGISTRATION FEE:

First Time Participants - \$200

Trainees (2nd or 3rd time at ISLI) - \$215

includes meals, lodging, retreat materials and a t-shirt



Register today at [dioceseofscranton.org](http://dioceseofscranton.org)

SCRANTON - Registration Leadership Institute is a is now open for the next "International Student Leadership Institute" (ISLI) high school retreat that will be held in March.

The retreat will begin on Friday, March 21, and run through Sunday, March 23, at Holy Transfiguration Retreat Center in Dalton.

The International Student

Leadership Institute is a peer-facilitated faith-based leadership retreat designed by Fr. Thomas Chambers C.S.C. at the University of Notre Dame.

The ISLI retreat is designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to excel in both the leadership and membership roles of task oriented groups.



# Saint Ann Parish completes renovations thanks to parishioner support

WILLIAMSPORT - Saint Ann Parish has recently undergone a series of transformative renovations to enhance the functionality, accessibility, and beauty of its sacred spaces and campus.

The year-long effort included significant upgrades, from the sanctuary to the church's exterior, demonstrating the parish community's commitment to maintaining and improving their spiritual home.

These projects were carried out under the dedicated oversight of Father Shawn Simchock, Administrator *Pro Tem*, who began his leadership at Saint Ann Parish in September 2023.

One of the most noticeable updates is the repainting of the church sanctuary, restoring its vibrance and solemnity for worship. All exterior church doors were replaced, providing a renewed appearance and improved security for the building. The long-overdue replacement of

the handicap-accessible ramp has made the church more welcoming, addressing a critical need that had persisted for several years.

Outside, overgrown trees were removed, and the church's façade received a fresh look through power washing, restoring its inviting appearance.

To improve safety and visibility, lighting around the parish campus was enhanced, creating a brighter and more secure environment for parishioners and visitors alike.

These projects were made possible through the overwhelming generosity of parishioners and friends, who contributed through various fundraising efforts.

Unique events like *Rectory, Set, Cook!* and the church's involvement in Little League World Series concessions provided vital funding for the renovations.

In addition, private donations of materials and labor played

a crucial role in bringing these projects to fruition.

The success of these efforts speaks to the dedication and faith of the Saint Ann Church community. Each dollar raised and every hour volunteered was an act of stewardship and love for the parish.

Under the leadership of Father Simchock, the parish's renovation projects were executed with a clear vision and commitment to enhancing the church's mission of service and worship. His oversight and coordination ensured the successful completion of each project, reflecting his dedication to the spiritual and physical well-being of the parish.

The renovations are not quite complete, with a few more projects planned for the spring to further enhance the main church's aesthetic and functionality.

The leadership of Saint Ann Parish extends heartfelt

gratitude to all who contributed to these projects, whether through financial donations, time, or expertise. These improvements ensure that the church continues to serve as a welcoming place of worship and community for generations to come.

Through this collective effort, the Saint Ann Parish family has once again demonstrated the power of faith, fellowship, and shared purpose.

The result is not just a beautifully renovated church but a strengthened sense of unity and pride within the community.



The Saint Ann Parish community in Williamsport celebrated the completion of the work done to the front of the church, and the installation of a new handicap ramp with a special blessing on Nov. 3, 2024. (Photo/Becky Goonan)

## Mental Health courses and training available to community for free

CLARKS SUMMIT - The Clarks Summit Deanery Inter-parish Mental Health Ministry Team is inviting everyone in the entire diocese to participate in several upcoming events.

The first is a Sanctuary Course for Catholics, which is being offered via Zoom and at two Clarks Summit locations beginning this month.

The eight-week course is for anyone 18 years and older who wants to learn about the intersection of faith and mental health. It requires no previous training or expertise.

The small group course will explore the realities of mental health and illness and will spur faith-based conversations about these topics. The sessions

will include short films, presentations, discussion and prayer.

The next courses will be:

- Wednesday mornings at the Church of Saint Gregory, Clarks Green, from 10:30 a.m. to noon. These sessions will begin on Wednesday, Jan. 22, and conclude on March 12.

- Thursday evenings at Our Lady of the Snows Parish, Clarks Summit, from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. These sessions will begin on Thursday, Jan. 23, and conclude on March 13.

- Thursday, Jan. 23, 2025, 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. via Zoom.



The two courses will run in tandem so that if an individual has an occasional conflict, they could attend the week's other in-person session or participate via Zoom.

To register, visit [catholicmhm.org/csdeanery-mhm](http://catholicmhm.org/csdeanery-mhm) by Jan. 20.

The second event is free Youth Mental Health First Aid Training, which will take place on Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Saint

Gregory Parish.

Youth Mental Health First Aid aims to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring adults how to help an adolescent (age 12-18) who is experiencing a mental health or addictions challenge or is in crisis.

The course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.

Topics covered include anxiety, depression, substance use, disorders in which psychosis

may occur, disruptive behavior disorders (including AD/HD), and eating disorders.

This training is a combination of in-person instruction by a certified YMHFA instructor and two hours online preliminary work. The in-person day includes a light breakfast and lunch.

Although training and materials ordinarily cost over \$100, this course is free for participants; expenses are covered by a grant from the Social Justice Trust Fund of the Diocese of Scranton which is supported by the Catholic Ministries Appeal.

People who are interested in participating are asked to register by Jan. 22. For more information, email [mhmclarkssummit@gmail.com](mailto:mhmclarkssummit@gmail.com).



## Catholics rally to aid LA wildfire victims

LOS ANGELES (OSV News) As deadly wildfires ravage Los Angeles, Catholics are mobilizing to help those impacted.

Catholic Charities USA is now accepting donations to its Los Angeles Wildfire Relief initiative, which can be accessed through the agency's website at catholiccharitiesusa.org.

The organization is the official domestic relief agency of the Catholic Church in the U.S.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has also created a dedicated fund for parishes and schools affected by the fires, with donors asked to visit <https://lacatholics.org/california-fires>.

Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles has urged prayers for all those affected, saying, "My



**Flames rise from a structure as the Palisades Fire burns during a windstorm on the west side of Los Angeles Jan. 8, 2025. (OSV News photo/Ringo Chiu, Reuters)**

heart goes out to our neighbors who have lost their homes and livelihoods. Let's pray for them and let's pray for our firefighters and first responders."

Parishes in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles have opened their

doors to those displaced by the wildfires, which have so far killed at least 24 people and forced hundreds of thousands of people to evacuate.

Pope Francis has also assured the people of Los Angeles of his prayers.

"Entrusting the souls of the deceased to the loving mercy of almighty God, His Holiness sends heartfelt condolences to those who mourn their loss," said a telegram sent by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, to Archbishop Gomez.

It continued, "His Holiness Pope Francis assures you and the communities affected by this tragedy of his spiritual closeness."

## Parishes to hold special collection to assist wildfire victims

SCRANTON - As we witness the ongoing devastation caused by the wildfires that are ravaging parts of Los Angeles and surrounding areas, all parishes in the Diocese of Scranton are being asked to hold a special second collection to support our brothers and sisters who are in need of assistance.

Father Gerald W. Shantillo, Vicar General of the Diocese of Scranton, sent a message to all pastors on Jan. 14, asking them to take up the special collection. He noted that in the past, parishioners have been very generous with prayers, outreach, and donations in other disaster situations.

"The funds raised will be

donated directly to Catholic Charities USA - the official domestic relief agency of the Catholic Church in the United States. As usual, 100-percent of funds raised will go directly to local agencies in the affected areas who are offering emergency and long-term relief to those who have been displaced, or are suffering as a result of the wildfires," Father Shantillo wrote.

He continued, "As Catholics, we are called to show mercy and compassion in times of suffering. This is an opportunity for us to unite in prayer and action, offering not only our financial assistance, but also our thoughts and prayers for all those affected."

## Fire captain makes way through ruins of incinerated church to find tabernacle intact

LOS ANGELES (OSV News) - Four days after Corpus Christi Church was incinerated in the Palisades Fire, Capt. Bryan Nassour of the Los Angeles Fire Department picked his way over a 6-foot layer of rubble in the ashen bones of the sanctuary and recovered the tabernacle Jan. 11.

"I did it because the whole community has been decimated - it looks like a nuclear bomb has gone off and nothing is standing," Nassour told Angelus, the news outlet of the Los Angeles Archdiocese. Nassour is a member of St. Francis de Sales Church in Sherman Oaks, and his brother belongs to Corpus Christi.

"My brother lost his home. I have close friends who lost everything but the shirts on their backs, and they belong to that church too. So, if I could save just one thing, let it be this, so they have something to believe in," he said.

That Saturday morning

Nassour, whose station in Pacific Palisades is across the street from Corpus Christi, had been up all night battling other fires. As he sipped coffee at his desk and gazed at the ruined church, he decided to check for valuables. He wanted to protect them from looters and perhaps return something meaningful to the parish.

Scorched bricks, tiles and hunks of debris filled the nave so high that he had to crawl under the top of door frames that no longer had doors. The roof had collapsed, a burned steel frame teetered above the twisted remains of a chandelier. The pews had been consumed. Only the granite altar remained, with the solid brass tabernacle atop it and a cross above. The Blessed Sacrament was intact.

Nassour was astounded to find that the tabernacle weighed more than 300 lbs. His crew helped him get it into the station house.

"It was one of the most



**Msgr. Liam Kidney, left, and Msgr. Lloyd Torgerson are pictured at St. Monica Church with the tabernacle recovered Jan. 11, 2025, from Corpus Christi Church, where Msgr. Kidney is pastor. Some days after Corpus Christi was incinerated by the Palisades Fire, Capt. Bryan Nassour of the LA Fire Department crawled through the rubble and found the tabernacle intact. (OSV News photo/Victor Alemán, Angelus)**

uplifting things," he said. "Not everyone is religious, but they saw that and they're like, 'This is awesome.' We're doing something - at least one thing - that we can salvage for the community."

He made many calls before

he was able to reach Msgr. Liam Kidney of Corpus Christi to tell him that the tabernacle was safe and undamaged.

"He was in utter disbelief," Nassour said.

Nassour offered to search for other sacred objects and the priest told him where to find the chalices

and patens. Firefighters from Station 69 helped dig for the crushed cabinet. The chalices and patens had been severely damaged. But the firefighters recovered other sacred objects, including three unbroken containers of holy oil.

Brass withstands high heat, but Nassour suspects more was involved in the tabernacle's survival.

"Talk to any firefighter. In any religious building what usually survives is the cross and certain specific items that are highly religious, unless they've been specifically set on fire," he said.

Gabe Sanchez, a retired FBI special agent who does contract investigations for the Los Angeles Archdiocese, was sent to retrieve the tabernacle. Firefighters helped him wrestle it into his car. He drove it to St. Monica Church, where Msgr. Kidney celebrated Mass for survivors the next day.

At that Mass, the tabernacle stood on a table by the altar. Msgr. Kidney recounted Nassour calling him to ask, "I have found this big gold box. What would you like me to do with it?"

The Corpus Christi parishioners burst into applause.

Nassour was unable to attend because he was fighting fires.





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## Oblates of Saint Joseph to celebrate Feast of the Holy Spouses

LAFILN — The Congregation of the Oblates of Saint Joseph will host their annual Feast of the Holy Spouses on Sunday, Jan. 19, with a Eucharistic liturgy at 2 p.m. in the Chapel of Saint Joseph, Route 315, Lafiln.

Guest principal celebrant and homilist for this year's feast day Mass will be Saint Joseph Oblate Father Gustavo Lopez, who serves with the OSJ community in Bakersfield, Calif.

He will be assisted by Saint Joseph Oblate Father Matthew



Spencer, the Oblates USA provincial superior, and other local Oblate clergy.

The annual celebration of the

Holy Spouses honors the spousal role of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph as the parents of Jesus.

The special feast was approved by the Vatican in 1989 for the Oblate congregation to celebrate publicly.

All faithful are invited to the Holy Spouses celebration, which fulfills the Sunday Mass obligation and concludes with a social.

For more information, contact the Oblates office at (570) 654-7542.

## Children's Christmas Pageant in Milford



Students in the Children's Faith Formation Program at Saint Patrick Parish in Milford once again presented their Christmas Pageant on Christmas Eve in Saint Patrick Church. The colorful and moving presentation, featuring scriptural narrative and carols of the season, was followed by the celebration of Christmas Eve Mass by Father Joseph Manarchuck, pastor. Directed by Laurie Barcia of Milford, the Pageant featured costumes by Michelle Baron and musical accompaniment by the parish Music Ministry, under the direction of Rich Gherardi. Featured performers for the live Nativity presentation included Angelica and

Clare Barcia, narrators; and cast members Jillian Sell (Mary), Joseph Barcia (Joseph), Stephen Doyle, Colin Gaspar, Paul Barcia, Angelina Giovane, Charlotte Gregoire, Dominic Lake, Victoria Lake, Juliana Lentoni, Anya Nielsen, Joellen Nielsen, Audrianna O'Connell, Hailey O'Donnell, Charlotte Reynolds, Cora Reynolds, Camila Rizzo, Sofia Rizzo, Zachary Saccento, Jack Sell, Allison Sutton, Mya Terry, Jack Young and Matthew Zianio.



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**MISSION MESSAGE**

**Jubilee 2025: Pilgrims of Hope Called to Serve**

By **Shannon Kowalski**  
Diocesan Director,  
Pontifical Mission Societies



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By now, you have likely heard about the Jubilee Year declared by Pope Francis. This special year of prayer focused on the theme “Pilgrims of Hope” invites us to consider our spiritual journey, rekindle our relationship with God, and act upon our baptismal call to serve others — especially the poor and marginalized. It’s a reminder that our mission is to bring light to a world that often feels burdened by suffering and division.

What is a Jubilee? Typically celebrated every 25 years, Jubilees are extraordinary periods of grace marked by pilgrimages, prayer, and the opportunity to receive a plenary indulgence. One of the most meaningful symbols of the Jubilee is the Holy Door, which is opened in specific churches around the world. Walking through this door isn’t just a symbolic act; it’s

a way to physically and spiritually embrace Christ as the door to salvation. For those who step through, it’s a powerful moment of saying, “Yes, Lord, I’m ready for a new beginning in my faith.”

The theme “Pilgrims of Hope” couldn’t have come at a better time. The last five years have brought us many challenges — pandemics, social tensions, wars, and environmental crises. Amidst



all this, hope can feel hard to hold on to. But Pope Francis encourages us to embrace hope, not as a fleeting feeling but as a theological virtue that sustains us in the face of trials, suffering, and uncertainty. This Jubilee is an invitation to let hope shape our lives and our actions. After all, “hope does not disappoint.” (Romans 5:5)

In his message for the Jubilee,

Pope Francis emphasizes the vital role of prayer, pilgrimage, and acts of charity in making this year a time of grace. Pilgrimages, whether physical or spiritual, represent our journey toward God, while works of mercy bring faith to life through action. Over the next 12 months, I invite you to fully embrace this Jubilee year — consider going on a pilgrimage, whether to Rome or somewhere closer like Scranton. Reflect on your prayer life and seek ways to deepen your relationship with Christ and, above all, strive to be Christ’s hands and heart by serving those in need in your community.

Pope Francis calls on all believers to live out their baptismal call by becoming agents of hope and healing in a wounded world. He reminds us that true renewal doesn’t happen in isolation — it flourishes through acts of selflessness and solidarity with the most vulnerable. Serving others during the Jubilee not only transforms the lives of those we help but also deepens our own faith.

Jubilee 2025 isn’t just a Church event — it’s a personal invitation to each of us. It’s a chance to reflect, reconnect, and reignite our faith. As the Holy Doors open, let’s open the doors of our hearts. Let’s recommit to living our baptismal call by serving those in need and bringing light to those in darkness. By doing so, we become true “Pilgrims of Hope.” Jubilee 2025 is more than a celebration — it’s a mission, a journey, and an opportunity to put the Gospel into action.



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**Dunmore 'Giving Tree' aids St. Joseph's Center**



During the recent Advent season, the parish Holy Name Society at Saint Anthony of Padua Church, Dunmore, organized the annual "Christmas Giving Tree" to benefit the residents of Saint Joseph's Center in Scranton. Gifts were transported to the center after parishioners generously participated in the seasonal project.

## The 'reason for the season'

Continuing an annual tradition that began more than 20 years ago, Knights of Columbus Council 7622 in Jermyn once again served as the sponsor for a billboard in Lackawanna County celebrating the true meaning of Christmas. The billboard's time-honored message featuring the Nativity of Our Lord continues to be made possible through the generous contributions of area businesses and individuals. Pictured in front of the "Keep Christ in Christmas" billboard prominently displayed at the south entrance to the borough of Jermyn are, from left: Ron Ryczak, K of C Council financial secretary; Knight Charles Battenberg; Ted Prusinski, lector; Dan Pittack, trustee; Grand Knight Kevin Pittack; Deputy Grand Knight Mario Fitzgerald; Frank Ryczak, treasurer; and Kevin Ryczak, donor.

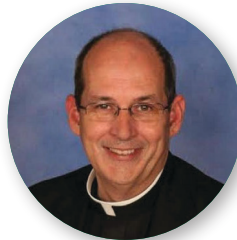
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## Project Andrew Prayer & Dinner held in Scranton Dec. 27

SCRANTON - On Friday, Dec. 27, 2024, seminarians from the Diocese of Scranton gathered with the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, and other young men for Evening Prayer for the Feast of Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist, followed by a reception at the Cathedral Rectory.

The Project Andrew event gives men who have been actively discerning a vocation to the priesthood or religious life the opportunity to have dinner with Bishop Bambera in a relaxed, “no pressure” atmosphere.

The men are welcome to have discussions and dialogue about the life of a priest.

Please join us in praying for all of our priests, seminarians and those discerning a call to the priesthood or religious life.



## Knights of Columbus honor Bishop Jeffrey J. Walsh



SCRANTON - On Saturday, Dec. 28, the Pennsylvania Central District of the Knights of Columbus witnessed a truly inspiring moment as the Most Reverend Jeffrey J. Walsh, Bishop of Gaylord, Mich., was the Honoree for the Exemplification Ceremony of 16 new Sir Knights exemplified into the Fourth Degree of the Knights of Columbus.

Led by Master Brian Hallock, this significant event marked the beginning of a new chapter in the lives of these men, who were officially welcomed into the proud ranks of Sir Knights in the Fourth Degree.

The day began at St. Ann’s Basilica in Scranton, where the Exemplification Ceremony filled the air with a sense of patriotism and love for our country.

As the candidates took their Fourth Degree, they committed to live and promote patriotism, and honor - values that the Knights of Columbus hold sacred.

The ceremony was elevated by the presence of State Deputy Gary Damich and State Chaplain, Father Pierre Bud Falkenhan, whose support and leadership added to the sense of unity and strength throughout the day.

The spirit of the day soared even higher as His Excellency, Bishop Walsh, celebrated the 4:00 p.m. Mass.

The celebration then culminated in a banquet at Arcaro & Genell in Old Forge, where brothers in Christ came together to reflect, share, and give thanks for the bonds forged that day.

## Catholics to express unity with Latin American Catholics with annual collection

SCRANTON - Many parishes in the Diocese of Scranton will hold the annual Collection for the Church in Latin America on Jan. 25-26, 2025.

Gifts will support the Church’s mission in countries affected by poverty, political instability and natural disasters.

The collection was founded in 1965 as a way for Catholics in the United States to express their unity and solidarity with Catholics in Central and South America and the islands of the Caribbean.

Inspired by the Second Vatican Council, it recognizes spiritual bonds

rooted in shared faith and history.

Last year the collection provided \$6.2 million for more than 250 ministries in places where the Church cannot support itself without outside assistance.

More than half the money supported pastoral needs, nearly 28% provided disaster relief and about 20% subsidized vocations and the formation of clergy and religious.

Recent gifts have helped to plant trees in Haiti, which has severe soil depletion, and even helped 18 young women in the Dominican Republic enter religious life.



## Jermyn Knights participate in 'Coats for Kids' Christmas projects



**JERMYN** — For the fifth consecutive year, Knights of Columbus Council 7622 of Jermyn participated in the “Coats for Kids” program for the Christmas season.

The Council purchased 24 winter coats that were provided for distribution by Catholic Social Services in Carbondale, along with a \$100 donation.

Shown in the left photo are, from left: Council Financial Secretary Ron Ryczak; Outside Guard Harry Newberry; Eileen Roman and Rich Ward, representing Carbondale CSS; Grand Knight Kevin Pittack; and Council Chaplain



Father Ryan Glenn.

The Knights’ Coats for Kids project also resulted in another two dozen infant-size coats being donated to the Agency for Community Empowerment (Head Start Jermyn/Montdale).

Principals of the infant coat distribution, shown in the accompanying photo are, from left: Ted Prusinski, lector; Deputy Grand Knight Mario Fitzgerald; Karen Bogdanski, Agency for Community Empowerment; Grand Knight Kevin Pittack; and Council Chaplain Father Ryan Glenn.

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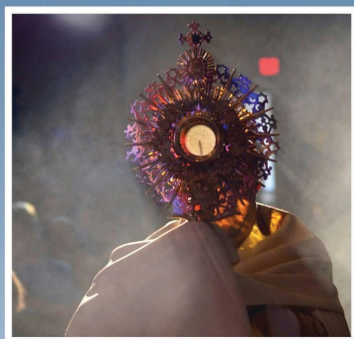
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## 'Eucharistic Miracles' poster panels available to diocesan parishes

Gloria Calabro, custodian of the "Eucharistic Miracles" display that has been traveling throughout the Scranton Diocese, announces the exhibit's nearly 100 posterboard capsules chronicling the Eucharistic miracle stories are available upon request to parishes and churches throughout 2025. For more information, contact Gloria at (570) 479-1175, or Gil at (570) 239-5357.



## Notice Regarding Reporting Sexual Abuse of a Minor

It is the policy of the Diocese of Scranton to report any allegation of sexual abuse of a minor to law enforcement. If you are a victim of sexual abuse committed by a priest, deacon, religious or lay employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Scranton, you are encouraged to immediately report the matter to law enforcement. If any priest, deacon, religious, lay employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Scranton has cause or reason to suspect that a minor has been subjected to any form of abuse, including child sexual abuse, the matter will be reported to law enforcement.

It is also the policy of the Diocese to adhere to all civil and state regulations. To this end, the Diocese is equally committed to adhering to the norms of the *Code of Canon Law* and to upholding the tenets of the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, which includes supporting victims of sexual abuse in their pursuit of emotional and spiritual well-being. As such, information regarding an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor should also be reported to the Victim Assistance Coordinator, Mary Beth Pacuska at (570) 862-7551.

## Aviso al Respecto de Reportar el Abuso Sexual de Un Menor de Edad

Es la norma de la Diócesis de Scranton reportar cualquier alegación de abuso sexual de un menor de edad a las autoridades. Si usted es una víctima de abuso sexual cometido por un sacerdote, diácono, religioso o empleado laico, o voluntario de la Diócesis de Scranton, usted está obligado a reportar el asunto inmediatamente a las autoridades de la ley.

Si algún sacerdote, diácono, religioso, empleado laico o voluntario de la Diócesis de Scranton tiene sospecha de que un menor de edad ha sido sujeto a cualquier forma de abuso, incluyendo abuso sexual de menor de edad, el asunto será reportado a las autoridades de la ley.

Es la norma de la Diócesis defender todas las regulaciones civiles y del estado. Al fin de que la Diócesis esté comprometida igualmente a defender las normas del Código de Derecho Canónico y defender los principios de la Carta Para la Protección de Niños y Jóvenes (Conferencia de los Obispos Católicos de los Estados Unidos), lo cual incluye apoyar a las víctimas de abuso sexual en pos del bienestar emocional y espiritual.

Por eso, información respecto a una alegación del asunto sexual de un menor de edad, debe ser reportada a la Coordinadora Diocesana de Asistencia para Las Víctimas, Mary Beth Pacuska, a (570) 862-7551.

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## Classifieds

## Classifieds

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# Catholic Happenings Around the Diocese

**Friday Eucharistic Adoration & Benediction** — JAN. 17, hosted by St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish at Our Lady of the Lake Church, 5112 Pocono Crest Road, Pocono Pines; Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament and benediction offered every Friday morning following the 9:15 a.m. Mass. All are invited to spend time in prayer & meditation with the Eucharistic Lord. St. Monica's Army hosts prayerful recitation of the Holy Rosary on the First Friday of each month at 6:30 p.m., followed by adoration.

**Weekly Eucharistic Adoration** — JAN. 17, hosted by St. Thomas More Parish in Lake Ariel; exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is held every Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the Chapel of St. Thomas More Church, 105 Gravity Road, Lake Ariel. Weekly adoration

of the Eucharistic Lord includes recitation of the Divine Mercy Chaplet during the 3 p.m. hour, evening prayers at 5:30 p.m., concluding with benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at 6 p.m. All faithful are welcome.

**Tuesday Eucharistic Adoration** — JAN. 21, hosted by St. Peter Parish in Wellsboro; weekly exposition & adoration of the Blessed Sacrament offered every Tuesday from 1 to 6 p.m. at the Church of St. Peter, 47 Central Ave., Wellsboro. All faithful are welcome to spend time in prayerful meditation and reflection in the presence of the Eucharistic Lord.

**Our Lady of Perpetual Help Weekly Rosary** — JAN. 22, hosted at SS. Peter & Paul Church, 1309 West Locust St., West Scranton; weekly Rosary devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help offered

every Wednesday morning following the 9 a.m. Mass. All are welcome.

**Eucharistic Adoration for Vocations** — JAN. 29, sponsored by the Diocese of Scranton Office of Vocations; hosted at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, 429 Church St., Archbald. Evening of devotion begins at 6:30 p.m.; also includes guest speaker, live musical and fellowship social.

**Saint Brigid's Feast Day Mass** — FEB. 1, hosted by the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians; Mass celebrating the feast of St. Brigid will be offered at 4 p.m. in St. Patrick Church, 1403 Jackson St., West Scranton. All parishioners and friends are encouraged to attend. For more information, contact Maureen Wallace at (570) 558-5263.

*Continued on  
Page 28*

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## Catholic Happenings

**Night at the Races** — FEB. 1, sponsored by the Holy Cross High School Friends of the Crusaders; doors open at 5:30 p.m. at Holy Cross High School, 501 Drinker St., Dunmore. Admission cost: \$25 per person (adults 21 & older). For more information & reservations, call Krista at (570) 862-8478.

**Sign Language Interpreted Masses** — FEB. 2 & March 2, hosted by The University of Scranton; both signed Masses will be offered on Sunday at 11 a.m. on the university campus at Madonna Della Strada, 415 Monroe Ave., Scranton. All are welcome. For more information, contact Scranton University at (570) 941-7419 or campusministry@scranton.edu.

**Venerable Father Patrick Peyton Monthly Rosary** — FEB. 5, hosted by the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton; Rosary devotion is held on the first Wednesday of each month following the 12:10 p.m. Mass at the Cathedral. Recitation of Rosary prayers is offered for the special intention of furthering the cause for canonization of Venerable Father Patrick Peyton.

**58th Annual "German Nite" Dinner-Dance Social** — MARCH 1, sponsored by the Holy Name Society of St. Nicholas-St. Mary Parish in Wilkes-Barre; doors open at 6 p.m. in the St. Nicholas-St. Mary School Auditorium, 240 South Washington St., Wilkes-Barre. German-style buffet dinner served at 6:15 p.m., featuring pork

& sauerkraut, chicken francaise, bratwurst, mashed potatoes, halushki & green beans; beer and soda included. Dance music provided from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. by the German band Schnitzel. Cost: \$35 per person (adults 21 & older). Advance tickets only; for more information/tickets, call the parish office at (570) 823-7736.

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## Prayer Requests for Priests

*The Daily Prayer Request for Priests schedule is as follows:*

January 16, Monsignor John Jordan; January 17, Father Joseph Kakareka; January 18, Father Louis Kaminski; January 19, Saint Peter Priestly Fraternity Father Matthew Kane; January 20, Father Binesh Joseph Kanjirakattu; January 21, Father William Karle; January 22, Father Joseph Kearney; January 23, Jesuit Father Herbert Keller; January 24, Father Brian Kelly; January 25, Father E. Francis Kelly; January 26, Father John Kilpatrick; January 27, Monsignor Shane Kirby; January 28, Father Michael Kirwin; January 29, Father Michael Kloton; January 30, Holy Cross Father Charles Kociolek; January 31, Father Bert Kozen; February 1, Pope Francis; February 2, Bishop Joseph C. Bambera; February 3, Father Jonathan Kuhar; February 4, Father Jose Joseph Kuriappilly; February 5, Father Andrew Kurovsky; February 6, Father Joseph Kutch; February 7, Father Arun Lakra; February 8, Father John Lambert; February 9, Father William Langan; February 10, Father John Lapera; February 11, Saint Peter Priestly Fraternity Father William Lawrence; February 12, Passionist Father John Michael Lee; February 13, Jesuit Father John Levko; February 14, Father Michael Litcheck; February 15, Holy Cross Father Thomas Looney; February 16, Holy Cross Father Robert Lozinski; February 17, Father Edward Lyman; February 18, Monsignor Peter Madus; February 19, Father Joseph Manarchuck; February 20, Capuchin Franciscan Father Pio Mandato; February 21, Father Michael Marchetti; February 22, Jesuit Father Joseph Marina; February 23, Jesuit Father Leonard Martin; February 24, Bishop Emeritus Joseph F. Martino; February 25, Father Paschal Mbagwu.

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# Pope names Consolata Missionary as the first woman dicastery prefect

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis has appointed Consolata Missionary Sister Simona Brambilla to be the first woman to lead a Vatican dicastery, naming her prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

The 59-year-old Italian sister had served as secretary of the dicastery since October 2023.

The announcement of her appointment Jan. 6 also said Pope Francis named as pro-prefect of the dicastery Spanish Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, 64, the former rector general of the Salesians.

The Vatican press office did not reply to requests to explain why the cardinal was given the title pro-prefect or how his role would be different from that of a dicastery secretary.

Mercy Sister Sharon Euart, a canon lawyer and executive director of the Resource Center for Religious Institutes in Silver Spring, Maryland, told Catholic News Service, “The appointment



**Consolata Missionary Sister Simona Brambilla, secretary of the Dicastery for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, speaks during a news conference at the Vatican last March. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)**

of the pro-prefect recognizes that there may be situations that call for the exercise of (holy) orders such as liturgical functions with members of the dicastery and the Curia as well as individual situations involving the internal forum and the sacrament of reconciliation.”

“I do not think the appointment of the pro-prefect diminishes the role or authority of the prefect in carrying out the responsibilities” entrusted to the dicastery, she said in an email response to questions.

The dicastery, according to the apostolic constitution on the Roman Curia, is called “to promote, encourage and regulate the practice of the evangelical counsels, how they are lived out in the approved forms of consecrated life and all matters concerning the life and activity of Societies of Apostolic Life throughout the Latin Church.”

According to Vatican statistics, there are close to 600,000 professed women religious in the Catholic Church. The number of religious-order priests is about 128,500 and the number of religious brothers is close to 50,000.

When a vowed member of a religious order asks to leave or is asked by the community to leave, the decision must be approved by the dicastery.

It approves the establishment of new religious orders, approves the drafting or updating of the orders’ constitutions, oversees the merger or suppression of religious orders and the formation of unions of superiors general.

Sister Brambilla succeeds 77-year-old Brazilian Cardinal João Bráz de Aviz, who has led the dicastery since 2011.

Born in Monza, Italy, March 27, 1965, she entered the Consolata order in 1988.

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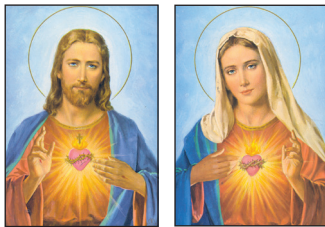
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## Blue Army Reparation Vigil

The next monthly First Friday Reparation Vigil, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary and sponsored by the Blue Army, will be held **Feb. 7** at Saint Joseph's Oblate Chapel, 1880 Highway 315, Laflin (Pittston).



Devotions begin Friday evening at 8 p.m. with recitation of the Rosary, during which time confessions are heard. Mass of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is celebrated at 8:55 p.m., followed by benediction and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and consecration to the Sacred Heart.

The vigil continues with the crowning of the Blue Army

Pilgrim Virgin Statue, the Blue Army Pledge, Fatima prayers and Marian hymns, followed by litany and consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The vigil concludes with scapular enrollment at 10:15 p.m.

Music for the First Friday devotion is provided by Marian Devotion Ministries, led by Ernie Pappa.

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## Cardinal McElroy chosen to succeed Cardinal Gregory as Washington's shepherd

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - Hours after Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego was announced Jan. 6 as the new archbishop of Washington, the prelate praised his new archdiocese as "truly sacramental in the rich diversity of its traditions and perspectives."

He also pledged to "show reverence for the grace of God which is already present in your midst and in the commitment to discipleship that underlies this local church."

"I come as your bishop seeking to know and understand this magnificent community of faith," Cardinal McElroy said. "As your pastor, an essential element of my mission is to encounter the hearts and the souls of the disciples who form our local church."

In a virtual news conference at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, Cardinal McElroy addressed his new flock via the Archdiocese of Washington's YouTube channel because a major snowstorm shut down the city.

"I want to give thanks to God for the grace-filled life of this local church and to Our Holy Father, Pope Francis who today makes me a member of that church," Cardinal McElroy said.

Early Jan. 6, Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory, Washington's archbishop since 2019, and named the San Diego prelate as his successor. As required by church law, Cardinal Gregory had submitted his resignation to the pope when he turned 75, which was two years ago, on Dec. 7, 2022.

Cardinal McElroy will be installed as Washington's eighth archbishop on March 11 at 2 p.m. at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

The new archbishop of Washington said he has embraced Pope Francis' emphasis on synodality and its call for the faithful to "build up a church centered in the Eucharist and devoted to the Word of God and the sacraments which sustain us."

"Synodality calls us to walk humbly as a church, acknowledging our faults and sinfulness, and seeking forgiveness," said Cardinal



Washington Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory and Cardinal Robert W. McElroy leave a Jan. 6, 2025, news conference at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington. (OSV News photo/Geoffrey Ros, Archdiocese of Washington)

McElroy, who is 70. "It seeks the participation of every disciple in the church's journey in this earthly pilgrimage, and is oriented toward the building of unity in society rooted in God's justice, which cares especially for the unborn, the poor, the marginalized and the dispossessed."

He said that in the Archdiocese of Washington, "for the past 85 years, the Catholic community has radiated the light of Christ throughout the District of Columbia and the surrounding five counties in Maryland."

The archdiocese is home to more than 671,000 Catholics in D.C. and Maryland's Montgomery, Prince George's, St. Mary's, Calvert and Charles counties.

At the Jan. 6 conference, Cardinal Gregory said, "As I reflect upon the past nearly six years in this wonderful local church of Washington, my heart is filled predominantly with joy and gratitude for the many blessings, always appreciated but rarely deserved that God has granted me."

Cardinal Gregory said that he plans to remain in Washington after his retirement and serve where needed.

### Who makes house calls?

As of October 2015, I will now meet clients either at their home, or at a location they choose and no longer require clients to meet at my office. I have decided that I would change the way I meet with people so it will be as easy and as convenient as possible for the client.

Based on my practice, which consists of estate planning and administration along with elder law, I find that clients are more comfortable discussing such matters in familiar surroundings. While I know this may seem unconventional to some, I believe I will be able to serve clients much better in this fashion.

If anyone is uncomfortable with home visits, I have a few locations where I can meet in an office setting. I look forward to meeting with my existing clients and especially meeting new clients that are looking for any assistance in estate or elder law matters.



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# National Marriage Week to be celebrated Feb. 7-14

SCRANTON - The theme for National Marriage Week 2025, which will be celebrated Feb. 7-14 will be "Marriage: Source of Hope, Spring of Renewal. Pursue a Lasting Love!"

This year's mission is aimed at speaking to everyone's core longing - to be loved - and to address how to help that love last.

National Marriage Week coincides with the week leading up to Valentine's Day, making it the perfect time to celebrate the joys and virtues that marriage brings into our lives.

Research consistently demonstrates that married couples experience greater health, financial stability, and personal happiness.

Brand new for this year, the 2025 campaign will feature eight consecutive nights of live virtual events featuring expert guests in moderated conversation with a NMW 2025 host to discuss this year's theme.



Each inspiring night will highlight a foundational element of a lasting relationship such as adjusting to new parenthood, creating a safe haven for conflict, and using laughter to help keep things in perspective.

Participants will hear from authors and thought leaders to include Bill & Pam Farrel well-known authors of "Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti;" Dr. Willard Harley, author of "His Needs,

Her Needs;" Dr. Ray Guarendi, a respected psychologist, author and speaker; as well as Robert Paul, VP of Marriage & Family Formation at Focus on the Family.

Participants will receive a follow-up packet with resources, challenges, and conversation starters inspired by the live events to help couples begin a journey of lasting love.

National Marriage Week

spokesperson, Arlene Pellicane, a renowned figure in the field and host of the highly regarded podcast, The Happy Home and her upcoming new book release, "Making Marriage Easier: How to Love (and Like) Your Spouse for Life," shared her hope for couples.

"Marriage vows are not designed to be an acknowledgement of present love. They are a promise of future love. Let's celebrate marriages in our nation and inspire the next generation about the value and enduring nature of marriage. Being married for more than 25 years has been one of the greatest joys of my life," she said.

The weeklong program provides a way for couples to hear from marriage experts in the privacy of their own homes on "hot topics" that can fuel future growth and conversation in their marriage relationship.

To participate and/or join National Marriage Week activities visit [MarriageWeek.org](http://MarriageWeek.org).

The website also includes a Couples Connection Plan and date ideas for couples, designed to help husbands and wives find deeper connection and meaning in their relationships.

National Marriage Week began in the United Kingdom in 1996 and expanded to the United States in 2002.

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# Jimmy Carter, first president to host a pope at the White House, remembered

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - Mourners including all five living U.S. presidents attended the late President Jimmy Carter's funeral Jan. 9 at the Washington National Cathedral, the first time they have all been in public together since 2018, and an increasingly rare occurrence in an era of bitter partisanship.

President Joe Biden, President-elect Donald Trump, and former presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, as well as living former vice presidents, members of Congress, U.S. Supreme Court justices and some foreign heads of state, joined the Carter family to remember the 39th president.

Carter, who died Dec. 29 at



**The casket of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter is carried during his state funeral service at Washington National Cathedral Jan. 9, 2025. (OSV News photo/Brendan McDermid, Reuters)**

the age of 100, served a single term in the White House from 1977-1981.

He was a devout Baptist, and speakers at the state funeral highlighted how faith played a key

role in his life, including teaching Sunday school and working with Habitat for Humanity in his retirement.

Carter was also the first U.S. president to host a pope at the White House. He hosted St. John Paul II at the White House on Oct. 6, 1979, while the latter was on his first papal trip to the United States.

Biden, who delivered a eulogy for Carter, called his life story that of a man "who was at once driven and devoted to making real the words of his Savior, the ideals of this nation," and "who never let the tides of politics divert him from his mission to serve and shape the world."

Carter, Biden said, also "established a model post-presidency by making a powerful

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difference as a private citizen in America."

As he often does in public remarks, Biden quoted from the Catholic hymn "On Eagle's Wings," composed by Father Jan Michael Joncas, a liturgical theologian and priest of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Steve Ford, son of former President Gerald Ford, said Carter and his father had agreed to eulogize each other, despite knowing one would die before the other. The younger Ford upheld his father's promise by reading a eulogy for Carter that Ford prepared before his 2006 death.

"It was because of our shared values that Jimmy and I respected each other as adversaries even

before we cherished one another as dear friends," Gerald Ford wrote. "For Jimmy Carter, honesty was not an aspirational goal. It was part of his very soul."

Carter's accomplishments as president included the Panama Canal treaties, and a treaty between Egypt and Israel known as the Camp David Accords, per his official White House Historical Association biography. But he lost his bid for a second term amid rising consumer costs and foreign policy setbacks, including the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

Carter was predeceased by his wife, former first lady Rosalynn Carter, who died Nov. 19, 2023, at 96.

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