



America

NOVEMBER 2021

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

A PRO-LIFE DEMOCRAT, A DIVIDED NATION

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All Good Things...

Each morning, as I sit down behind this desk, I discover 13 sets of eyes upon me, the most recent (and in some ways least likely) Jesuit to occupy the office of editor in chief. One of my predecessors, when greeting visitors, would describe these portraits of **America's** former editors as a “rogues’ gallery”—his attempt to take some of the pomp out of what is, admittedly, a rather self-important display. When my immediate predecessor, Father Drew Christiansen, joined the group in 2012, the pictures were rearranged to make room for him, with a space set aside for the day when I in turn would vacate this office.

That day is now in sight. Last month, I informed the board of directors of America Media that I will step down as the president and editor in chief at the end of 2022, which will mark the 10th anniversary of my appointment as the 14th editor in chief. Rest assured, there is no story behind this story, only the abiding truth, as Scripture reminds us, that “for everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.”

That truth was well known to St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus. Long before there were strategic plans and schools of business, St. Ignatius taught that regular turnover in the leadership of an organization is a healthy occurrence. In fact, he enshrined that principle in the *Constitutions* of the Jesuit order, which still guide us today, by mandating regular turnover in most positions of governance. “There is but one right kind of ambition,” Ignatius wrote, “to love God, and as the reward of loving him, to love him more.”

By autumn 2022, moreover, we

will have met the goals that I set for us a decade ago. In 2012 we launched an ambitious, multiyear initiative to transform **America** into a media ministry that would meet the challenge of the digital revolution and allow it to lead the conversation about faith and culture in a new century. We announced a strategic plan to change **America** from a weekly print magazine with little digital presence into a multiplatform media ministry with vital, engaging content well beyond print. This is what you see today.

America grew steadily to achieve that vision. In 2012 we had 16 employees. Today we employ 44. Our online readership is more than 10 times what it was in 2012. We’ve redesigned and relaunched our print and digital editions, launched a video division, built a state-of-the-art headquarters, started a media fellowship for young professionals, rebooted the Catholic Book Club, produced award-winning podcasts and recruited a worldwide network of correspondents and contributing writers. And we have done all of this while maintaining the standard of excellence that is our hallmark, winning the Catholic Media Association magazine of the year award twice in eight years.

Thanks be to God. Thanks be to you.

As I have written here before, I believe that our founder, John Wynne, S.J., would be proud of us. When he founded **America** in 1909, he told its readers that because the press of events was so great, he dreamed of a day when **America** could publish daily. That day is here. We now publish/appear every day, multiple times a day, and even hourly when news is breaking. Our daily newsletter reach-

es more than 100,000 subscribers every weekday afternoon.

I apologize if that all sounds like bragging. Forgive me. No one would ever describe me as the humblest editor in chief. But I also recount all this because I want you to know that **America's** future is secure and the organization is ready for this transition in leadership. This ministry now has the resources to survive and thrive in the years ahead. You should also know that while I have consulted with the board of directors and with my Jesuit superiors, I have reached this decision on my own initiative.

I look forward to continuing to lead **America** for the next 14 months, working with the incredibly talented team who are the heart of this ministry. I always say that the best part of my job is going to work every day with the hardest-working, most faithful and smartest people in publishing. They are the ones who have truly made this all possible. But they could not have done it without you, the most loyal and generous readers a magazine could be blessed to have. Thank you.

I also look forward to working with my colleagues to recruit the 15th editor in chief, the person whose photo will one day follow mine in this rogues’ gallery above my desk. Most of all, I look forward to learning what God still has planned for his grateful yet unworthy servant.

Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

Matt Malone, S.J.
Twitter: @americaeditor.



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CNS photo/Christopher M. Riggs, Catholic Advance

Parishioners at St. John Nepomucene Church in Pilsen, Kan., welcome the remains of Father Emil J. Kapaun, Sept. 25. A candidate for sainthood, Father Kapaun died during the Korean War.

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Does just war theory still matter?

After the death of 13 U.S. service members and nearly 200 other people in the terrorist attack on the Kabul airport on Aug. 26, President Joe Biden made a speech in which he sent a direct message to the perpetrators: “To those who carried out this attack, as well as anyone who wishes America harm, know this: We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay. I will defend our interests and our people with every measure at my command.” In the following days, the United States executed two drone strikes: One on Aug. 27, which the U.S. military said killed two members of ISIS-K, and another on Aug. 29 that targeted what the military claimed was a vehicle containing explosives and an undetermined number of occupants.

On Sept. 1, Christopher Braun wrote an article for *America*, “Is violent revenge against terrorists moral? Just war theory says no.” The following responses were submitted shortly after the article was published, but before an investigation by The New York Times suggested that the Aug. 29 drone strike had killed civilians by mistake. On Sept. 17, the Pentagon acknowledged that it had indeed killed 10 civilians, including seven children, after initially suggesting that the strike was necessary to prevent another attack on U.S. forces.

Christian Braun asks, “Is violent revenge against terrorists moral?” He responds that Catholic social teaching does not support retribution. It does, however, support an active defense against terrorism.

Following the terrorist attacks on 9/11, St. John Paul II responded there is “a right to defend oneself against terrorism” (2000 World Day of Peace Message, No. 5). Violent retribution is impermissible, but defense against terrorism is not only a right but a duty of public authorities. I take the president’s words as a mistaken rhetorical choice that is not borne out by his careful policy.

For myself the more disturbing sentences in President Biden’s speech were: “We will not forgive. We will not forget.” While St. John Paul allowed for defense against terrorism, the burden of his argument was that forgiveness was essential to the just conclusion of war. “No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness” was the formula he left us. Pope Francis has insisted, too, that forgiveness and mercy are the heart of the Gospel life. On that point, the president’s rhetoric entirely missed the mark.

Drew Christiansen, S.J.

Former editor in chief of *America* and Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Human Development at Georgetown University

I understand the statements of the president sounded vengeful. However, he was angry and deeply felt the pain of the loss of those soldiers.

The president knew that another attack was imminent. He was reporting this constantly during the 36 hours preceding the drone strikes, and intelligence sources accurately

ly knew who to strike to prevent it. Therefore, the drone strikes were justifiable self defense to prevent another attack in which more U.S. soldiers and innocent civilians could have died.

Lydia Isabel Bobes

I agree that targeted killings for retribution or vengeance are wrong. And President Biden’s comments were wrong and I believe politically motivated in the heat of the moment.

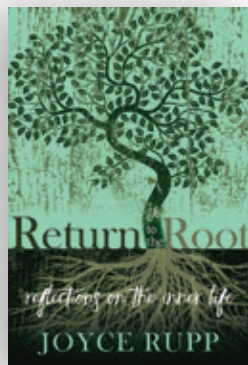
From what we know, it would appear that the destruction of the vehicle [Aug. 29] was a clear case of self-defense to prevent the slaughter of more innocents at the airport. Without knowledge of the [Aug. 27] bombing, it is unknown if the two killed posed an imminent threat. If so, it would fall in the self-defense category. Sometimes things can be very blurry. In this case, we don’t know.

Lloyd William

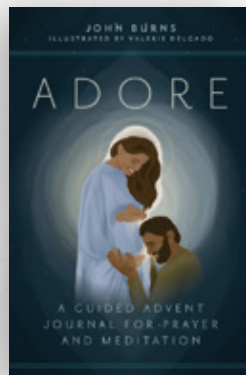
With regard to the drone attack which killed members of ISIS, I presumed that President Biden was working to save lives. If he had not reacted, can you guarantee that ISIS would not have mounted deadlier attacks on the airport? The Taliban had agreed to Aug. 31 as the deadline for American departure. The intervention of ISIS clearly escalated the risk to both Afghans and Americans. Are you saying it would have been better to file a complaint with the U.N.? Sometimes diplomacy works; but in an unwarranted attack, you have to act swiftly in a manner that says, there are deadly consequences for you if you cross this line.

Ethel Sutherland

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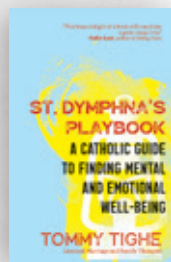
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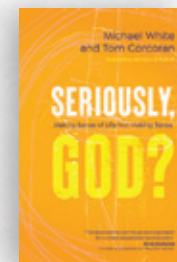
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Reverence for the Eucharist Transcends Politics

As the bishops of the United States gather this month for their first in-person meeting in more than a year, a topic of central focus will be the Eucharist. Whether expressed in terms of “eucharistic coherence” or of “eucharistic revival,” the discussion of how we conduct ourselves around the central sacrament of our faith will be the most prominent event at the biannual meeting and the topic of a document that may be published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The contents of that proposed document have been the source of much speculation and no small amount of concern among American Catholics, particularly because the election of a pro-choice Catholic, Joseph R. Biden Jr., as president added a new wrinkle to the ever-fraught issue of abortion politics in the United States. How should the bishops engage a Catholic president whose abortion policies contradict the teachings of the church? And to what degree should the attempts at engagement with Mr. Biden’s predecessor—who was far from simpatico with Catholic teaching on any number of important political issues—inform and influence that effort?

An important first step is for everyone—from bishops to reporters to priests to those in the pews—to recognize that the disagreements we have in the Catholic Church in the United States around the Eucharist are largely about discipline, not doctrine. One would be hard-pressed to find a prominent Catholic voice arguing that the church’s teachings on the Eucharist are wrong. Instead, most arguments about the sacrament are not about the essence of the church’s eucharistic theology, but a question of church

practice in light of those beliefs: Who can receive Communion and when?

No one has ever suggested that the participation of the U.S. bishops in the American political process is dependent upon the church changing its eucharistic teachings. State interference in Catholic life is not something to be feared here. In reality, most attempts to address the question of Catholic politicians in 2021 are coming from within the church itself.

Were one to consult any individual bishop about questions of eucharistic practice, he would first make it clear that the critical issue of abortion is not the only issue at hand. Huge percentages of Catholics have not received Communion for the better part of two years because of the Covid-19 pandemic, part of a eucharistic famine occurring around the world. It is exacerbated in those parts of the world seriously lacking priests—which are also the regions most hard-hit by Covid-19. As the Eucharist is central to Catholic life, this is a very serious matter.

Mass attendance in the United States—already in steep decline in the years before the Covid crisis—is at an all-time low. Further, a Pew Research Center survey in 2019 raised alarms with its conclusion that most self-described Catholics “personally believe that during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine used in Communion ‘are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.’” According to Pew, “just one-third of U.S. Catholics (31 percent) say they believe that ‘during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus.’”

America and others have pointed out that the terminology used in that survey falsely leads to the assumption that a substantial number of Amer-

ican Catholics are denying a central doctrine of the Catholic Church. But the obvious opacity around what Catholics perceive to be the church’s teaching on the Eucharist does make it clear that confusion reigns, and suggests that a proper understanding of the importance of the reception of this central sacrament—“the source and summit of the Christian life”—is becoming less central to the identity of many Catholics.

Indications from the lead-up to the bishops’ meeting suggest that the bishops as a whole have walked away from the notion that any document produced by the bishops’ conference should outline a national policy on when and where to deny Catholic politicians Communion. This is to the good. Not only would such a policy have little prescriptive authority on the local level (Catholic canon law is clear that an individual bishop holds authority over such matters in his own diocese), it would also reinforce the common perception that abortion policy is the sole topic of interest in the political life of the American bishops.

What will we see instead? Hopefully a plan that outlines how to reinforce the importance of the Eucharist in the life of every Catholic, politician or not. That begins with a recognition of the need for continued catechesis at every stage of life, so that we all have a better understanding of the importance of the Eucharist. Reverence for the sacrament itself, after all, can also lead to greater eucharistic coherence. The scrupulous Jansenism of previous ages caused many Catholics to avoid the sacrament. At the same time, the nature of the sacrament requires Catholics to approach Communion with reverence and after careful

examination of conscience. The way forward should validate the generous welcome that belongs to the nature of the Eucharist while also affirming that reception of the Eucharist must never be rote or cavalier.

Similarly, increased literacy about and devotion to the Eucharist can eliminate the unfortunate habit in Catholic circles—journalists included—of reducing one’s eucharistic practice to a “litmus test” for one’s Catholicity. We ask whether Mr. Biden is showing proper reverence for the sacrament when he presents himself for Communion, yet this is a question that every Catholic, priest and communicant, should ask.

Civil, charitable and open-minded commitment to dialogue will be necessary if we are to bring about a eucharistic revival. In that case, perhaps even pondering the questions asked in the previous paragraph is counterproductive. What if instead of focusing on who is worthy to give or receive the Eucharist, we focus on how important it is for us to receive it? The source and summit of our lives is not a performance but a personal encounter with the only Son of the Living God.

We would all do well to remember the words of Pope Benedict XV, spoken more than a century ago, at a time when the Catholic Church in both Europe and the United States was wracked by ideological divides. “As regards matters in which without harm to faith or discipline—in the absence of any authoritative intervention of the Apostolic See—there is room for divergent opinions, it is clearly the right of everyone to express and defend his own opinion,” the pope wrote.

“But in such discussions no expressions should be used which might constitute serious breaches of charity; let each one freely defend his own opinion, but let it be done with due moderation, so that no one should consider himself entitled to affix on those who merely do not agree with his ideas the stigma of disloyalty to faith or to discipline.”

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Christian parents: Keep your children far away from Instagram

The Christian mystic and philosopher Simone Weil wrote that “Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer.” Indeed, we can only love something insofar as we direct our pure, generous attention toward it—be that to God, to a neighbor or to ourselves. And in a world that so hungrily demands it, we should examine where we spend this finite resource. One such place rests in our very pockets.

Today, social media is a staple of our personal—and even spiritual—lives. Bible study groups on Facebook, inspirational Christian accounts on Instagram, evangelical dating sites and viral sermons on TikTok are modernizing our religious landscape. The more optimistic tout “digital discipleship” as the next best tool for spreading the Gospel.

But Christians should occasionally step back to evaluate new technology in terms of biblical guidance. Before adopting any cultural innovation, we must have the courage to ask: Is there, perhaps, a snake in this garden?

There *is* a snake, and it is particularly interested in our children. On March 18, Facebook announced plans to launch Instagram Youth, a version of the popular photo-sharing app designed specifically for 8- to-12-year-olds. Despite public outrage, Facebook has not reversed this decision, but on Sept. 27, three days before a congressional hearing on the effects of social media on children’s mental health, the company announced that it is “pausing” development of what is now called Instagram Kids.

Jesus teaches that “every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit” (Mt 7:17), so let us examine the fruits of this tree. Stud-

ies have linked the excessive use of social media, especially Instagram, to childhood depression, anxiety, suicide, eating disorders, cyberbullying, narcissism, attention disorders, obesity and vulnerability to sexual predators. According to a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*, Facebook’s own researchers have acknowledged Instagram’s harmful effects, admitting in a March 2020 presentation posted to an internal message board that “we make body image issues worse for one in three teen girls.”

But in their pursuit of profit, corporations like Facebook ignore these known harms to children and the warnings of countless psychologists, lawmakers and doctors in their eagerness to ensnare an ever-younger generation of consumers. With a twisted root, how can we expect anything other than rotten fruit?

Materialistic consumption oils the cogs of the Instagram machine. A recent study found that a startling 25 percent of all Instagram posts were advertisements, and that figure does not begin to include the abundance of corporate-funded “influencers” peddling exorbitant makeup routines, expensive clothing and superficially alluring lifestyles to children. While radio, television and print media have long been funded by advertising, social media algorithms increase their potency by cleverly manipulating emotions; these algorithms promote feelings of constant inadequacy and turn users into addicts through Pavlovian dopamine hits that can come from sending and receiving “likes.”

The real possibilities of digital discipleship should not prevent Christians from engaging in honest conversations about the harms of technology.

In fact, *digital discipleship* is something of an oxymoron: Jesus’ ministry was all about touch. When healing the sick, blind or broken, he made a point to reach out and gently acknowledge their messy humanity in the flesh. Jesus set an example of radical connection, action and vulnerability in loving acts of service. In contrast, social media’s tools for “connection” keep us at arm’s length from others, erecting walls against the complicated world of discipleship.

Thankfully, our situation is far from hopeless. Churches are in a unique position to initiate conversations about social media with their congregations; they can teach “tech temperance” as a spiritual practice by discouraging excessive screen time for children and promoting in-person community activities. It is important, however, to avoid falling into the trap of blaming parents for their children’s use of technology, as adults are also victims to the harms of social media and cannot reasonably guard children against all online content. Instead, we can all demand that corporations and policymakers change dangerous new social media norms.

More than anything, we must realize that children can live out their childhood in ways that are not soaked in technology. Christ calls them—and all of us—to spend our valuable attention on what really matters: love of God, love of neighbor and repairing our beautiful, messy world.

Lucy Kidwell is a senior at Indiana University and co-chair of the Interfaith Work Group at Fairplay’s Children’s Screen Time Action Network, a grassroots group advocating for technology ethics.

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Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless...

Will the next generation of Catholic donors follow the intentions of their founders?

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

When Richard and Angela Wolohan created the Wolohan Family Foundation in 1986, they sought to use their wealth, derived in part from the sale of a successful lumber company, to support organizations and charities that appealed to their shared Catholic faith. Nearly 25 years later, both the founders had passed away and their seven children assumed control of the foundation.

Michael Wolohan, the youngest of his siblings and the foundation's president, said his parents imbued the foundation with "a Catholic-informed perspective," which for the Wolohan siblings meant focusing on "the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, homes for the homeless." Ensuring that their parents' commitment to their Catholic faith continued through the Michigan-based foundation was key. With Michael and his siblings now north of age 65, they are preparing to hand control over to a new cohort of descendants who do not know the founders as intimately and who came of age in a radically different world.

This process can present challenges not just for the Wolohan family, but for other private Catholic family foundations throughout the country, which each year disburse tens of millions of dollars to Catholic ministries. Those ministries could face an uncertain financial future,

some analysts say, as religiosity decreases among younger Americans—including, perhaps, descendants of prominent Catholic philanthropic leaders.

While there are no definitive estimates of how much foundation money makes its way to Catholic-affiliated organizations each year, it likely runs into the billions. The Catholic Funding Guide is an online subscription-based search tool listing about 2,200 foundations that include Catholic ministries and organizations in their giving portfolios. These private foundations, church-based grantmakers, religious communities and international funders annually give more than \$14 billion in support.

"We know engaging the next generation is beneficial to everybody, and it strengthens our mission," said Maria Raskob. Ms. Raskob chairs the board of the Catholic philanthropic consortium Fadica (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities), which publishes the Catholic Funding Guide, and is herself a fourth-generation descendant of one of the nation's prominent Catholic philanthropic families. "Part of that engagement is passing on faith and values that began with the foundation and has been incorporated in everything that we do," she said.

John and Helena Raskob founded the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities in 1945. The foundation has

distributed more than \$200 million to Catholic organizations since its founding. Now the Delaware-based foundation operates with a membership model: Descendants of John and Helena can be as involved as much or as little in the grantmaking process as they desire. Making sure that younger members of the family want to participate—and that they understand the intent of the founders—is a key priority for the Raskob Foundation.

And that formation starts young.

“The next generation is exposed [to] and involved with the foundation at a really early age,” Ms. Raskob said. Some parents bring their children to service events organized by the foundation or even to annual meetings. Once descendants turn 18, they are able to participate in more formal ways as well, exposing them to the church’s vast social justice ministry. That can help forge strong bonds, she said, between family members and the institutional church, even if the individual descendant is not religious.

“What younger members, and any members, see is Catholic social teaching in action,” she said, learning how it “covers health care, social services, peace and justice, and environmental issues.”

“This is inspiring to witness, and all members are able to find aspects of the work that are appealing to them,” Ms. Raskob said.

But will it be enough to move them to continue to prioritize grants to Catholic entities? Declining religiosity in the United States is affecting all religious groups, including Catholics.

A report from the Pew Research Center in 2019 found that 65 percent of U.S. adults described themselves as Christian, down 12 percentage points over a decade. The share of the U.S. population describing themselves as Catholic was 23 percent in 2009 and fell to 20 percent in 2019.

When it comes to millennials specifically, 49 percent described themselves as Christian, while 40 percent said they were religiously unaffiliated. For members of so-called Gen Z, the picture is even more complicated, though trends suggest declining membership in churches will continue. These changing demographics can present challenges.

“It can be true for all types of family foundations thinking about the values and traditions from which those donors originally set up the missions of their foundations,” said David King, who heads the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving at Indiana University. “But I think it is particularly true for family foundations with religious sensibilities in their missions, whether that be Catholic family foundations or other types of Christian or Jewish foundations.”

Mr. King said that if a family foundation finds itself in a situation where next-generation foundation leaders seem detached from the religious faith of the founders, families should resist the temptation to throw up their hands and say, “We must continue to do the same thing we’ve always done.”

“My advice would be to give a lot of space to that next generation to really ‘live into’ the values of the donors and family that set up that foundation but to reimagine how that looks in today’s world,” he said. “Giving space for creativity and flexibility while remaining true to those initial values and religious sensibilities is important.”

According to a report on next-generation engagement published by Fadica, younger generations of would-be philanthropists, like their peers more broadly, are motivated by issues and causes more than by institutional loyalty. That could spell trouble for foundations that have historically supported Catholic institutions because of faith connections. But the report suggests that early exposure to on-the-ground ministries could serve as a way to strengthen ties between younger generations and the institutional church.

The report offered 10 ideas for Catholic family foundations aimed at shaping the next generation of philanthropic efforts, including encouraging strong mentorship, engaging a critical mass of young leadership and adopting a long-term commitment to maintaining the values that were important to previous generations.

“Learning together with younger family members about the Church’s diverse and global ministries, and the rich Catholic social tradition—a unique resource among faith traditions—can engage young people where they are,” the report states. “The Church’s campaigns to end global poverty, hunger, and human trafficking are vital causes being addressed through Church institutions.”

While previous generations may have been content to write checks to Catholic institutions in remote places, confident their money would help the church do good work, younger generations often need to see in order to believe.

“The growth of volunteerism, immersion trips, and service opportunities demonstrate that young people are responding to the opportunity to experience values in action, the Church’s ministries, and principles of effective philanthropy,” the report says.

“Amid the fast pace of change and ubiquitous technology that define young people’s reality, hands-on experiences offer a powerful way for them to connect and learn. These experiences can also bring Catholic values to life in

a meaningful way for the next generation,” it continues.

That is, family foundations should see forming the next generations not as simply another item on a to-do list, but as a potential resource for innovation and leadership.

Back in Michigan, Michael Wolohan and his family are intent on making sure the third generation is involved in the family’s philanthropy. That has meant relaying stories about the founders and inviting the next generation to assist with presentations at board meetings. But it also means empowering its younger members with the ability to connect with a culture of giving.

Keegan Wolohan, who is studying film and social entrepreneurship at the University of Notre Dame, said the foundation’s matching gift program, which incentivizes younger family members to seek out organizations that align with their values and interests, is most effective in helping instill his grandparents’ values in him and his siblings. He has supported a local food pantry and a campus organization that assists a school in Uganda.

“Whether it’s the environment or racial inequality, we all have different interests,” he said. “The matching program, more than anything else, allows younger individuals to get involved with the foundation and support something that we are passionate about.”

He said that while he is still unsure about his eventual career path, he plans to stay involved with his family’s philanthropic efforts. He credits the flexibility given to the next generation to find and support causes that speak to them.

“It gives us our own chance to do the research, find organizations, figure out what’s going on with things that we care about, and use our time and money to make an impact,” Keegan added. “That feeling of helping to impact the lives of others is something that once you do it once, once you do it twice, you just kind of have to keep going.”

Michael J. O’Loughlin, *national correspondent*.
Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.

Heightened need and growing economic confidence fuel boom in 2021 giving



When all the numbers are counted by the end of 2021, charitable giving will likely rise even higher than its surge in 2020, according to a recent survey from the philanthropic consulting firm DickersonBakker. During a webinar describing the results of the survey, DickersonBakker’s president, Derric Bakker, said the likely increase in charitable giving is being driven by two factors: increasing financial security and a “heightened sense of people’s needs in the philanthropic marketplace” because of the continuing Covid-19 crisis.

He added that during the final quarter of 2021, when substantial end-of-year donations are frequently made, fundraisers could expect a return to more traditional activities— one-on-one meetings with donors and galas and other large-scale events—after many had shifted to “no contact,” internet-based fundraising campaigns in 2020. One caveat: The survey was conducted in June and July, before the Delta variant propelled a surge in new Covid-19 cases over the late summer.

A 2021 boom?

90% of donors expect to give the same amount or more than they did in 2020 by year end 2021—59% said the same and 26% said “somewhat more.” Only 2% said they anticipated donating “significantly less.”

Return of traditional fundraising

70% of donors are willing to meet in person or attend small-scale fundraising and philanthropy events; 60% are willing to attend large fundraising events; 24% said they were “still reluctant” to attend large events.

Donor shift

One in three donors reported “shifting donations,” that is, funding new groups or altering amounts to regular recipients based on changing perception of need during the pandemic.

2020 Giving Snapshot

Americans donated **\$471.44 billion** to charity during 2020, 5.1% more than in 2019. Individuals donated **\$324 billion**—69% of all donations. Foundations donated **\$86 billion**—19% of all donations, a 17% increase from 2019. Corporations represented just 4 percent of all giving with just under **\$17 billion**, down more than 6 percent from 2019.

- **\$131 billion** of 2020’s donations went to “religion”—28% of all giving
- **\$71 billion** was directed to education—15% of giving
- **\$65.14 billion** went to Human Services—14% of giving
- **\$48 billion** was directed to community improvement, civil society and civil rights—10% of giving
- **\$42 billion**—9% of giving—was directed to health
- **\$26 billion**—5%—went to “international affairs”
- **\$19.5 billion**—4%—to arts, culture and the humanities
- **\$16 billion**—3%—to the environment and animal welfare

Sources: “Charitable Giving Strengthening in Post-Covid Recovery” survey from DickersonBakker; Giving USA.

GOODNEWS: A Franciscan sister fights for Indigenous rights in Brazil

Sister Laura Manso with Adriano Karipuna

A sister in Rondônia State in the Brazilian Amazon region, Laura Vicuña Pereira Manso, C.F., has devoted her life to the nation's urban poor and Indigenous people. In 2019 Pope Francis invited her to attend the Synod for the Pan-Amazon Region and to be a member of the recently established Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon Region.

During the preparatory work for the Amazon Synod, its organizers heard Amazonian community leaders say many times that the daily life of the local church is built and nurtured mostly by women like Sister Laura. In a region of vast distances, poor infrastructure and a relatively small number of priests, religious and laywomen are the mainstay of Catholic spirituality.

The daughter of migrants from northeast Brazil, Sister Laura experienced that reality from an early age. Her mother, a Catholic community leader, had close contact with the Franciscan Catechist Sisters. "I saw those nuns among the people, promoting actions to defend their rights, and that always attracted me. I wanted to be like them," she told **America**.

At 13 she joined the congregation. Shortly after she began to meet members of the Brazilian bishops' Indigenous Missionary Council (known by the Portuguese acronym C.I.M.I.). "They frequently came to our house after spending months in the forest among the Uru Eu Wau Wau, a people that had been recently contacted by the non-Indigenous society," she recalled.

The expansion of agribusiness in the Amazon in the 1970s, promoted by the military junta that ruled Brazil between 1964 and 1985, led to conflicts with Indigenous communities. Attacks against entire villages and the spread of diseases cost the lives of thousands of Indigenous people those years. The C.I.M.I. was a focus of the church's effort to protect Indigenous groups.

"The people from the nearby cities wanted to kill the Uru Eu Wau Wau," Sister Laura said. "The C.I.M.I. mission-

aries would tell us all about their work. I soon realized that I wanted to work with them. And I began to recognize my own history."

A descendant of the Indigenous Kariri people, she almost never heard her family talking about their ancestry. "The Indigenous from the Northeast were massacred over centuries," Sister Laura said. "Our family history was erased. My parents never mentioned it, due to the discrimination we always suffered."

Working for many years at missions in the Brazilian states of Mato Grosso and Amazonas, Sister Laura became active in the defense of Indigenous peoples' claims to their traditional lands. Incursions by illegal miners and loggers and by ranchers who want to expand their pastures are common. President Jair Bolsonaro has frequently declared his intention to open Indigenous lands to use by agribusiness and other economic interests. During his presidency, territorial violations have grown exponentially.

"Since 2017, I have been working with the Karipuna, who have been terribly threatened by invaders," Sister Laura said.

When she visits the Karipuna, Sister Laura often hears heavy machinery being run by invading loggers operating nearby, accelerating the deforestation of the territory. "At times, we have to hide in the woods in order to escape from them," she added.

Adriano Karipuna is one of the members of the community assisted by Sister Laura. He told **America** that the logging teams work day and night, devastating vast areas.

"Sister Laura began to help us years ago," he said. "She has denounced the illegality of the invasion to the [judicial authorities]. But [the land invaders] are not simple workers. There is big capital behind them; otherwise they would not have so much equipment."

"She is a warrior," Adriano said.

Eduardo Campos Lima contributes from São Paulo, Brazil.



Canadian church leaders apologize, research continues into unmarked graves of Indigenous children

Hundreds of unmarked graves of Indigenous children have been discovered across Canada at the sites of residential schools once operated by Catholic religious orders or dioceses. Many questions concerning the gravesites—like confirmed causes of death, exactly who is buried and why they were unmarked—remain unresolved.

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate operated the majority of the Catholic residential schools in Canada. Ken Thorson, O.M.I., the provincial superior of O.M.I. Lacombe Canada, explained in an email to **America** that contemporary Oblates now understand this part of their history as complicity in Canadian colonialism and “experience deep regret about Oblate involvement in residential schools, about implementing government policy to restrict or forbid Indigenous languages and culture.”

The Oblates offered an official apology in 1991. Canada’s bishops offered their own apology “unequivocally” on Sept. 23 of this year.

Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that in the 1930s and ’40s, the mortality rate for Indigenous children in residential schools was around five times the average for non-Indigenous children in Canada. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba, established by the commission, reports that there are now 4,118 student deaths. According to T.R.C. researchers, Indigenous children in residential

schools endured badly trained staff, racist prejudices, and physically unhealthy and abusive environments.

Sexual abuse was endemic at the schools. Many harbored longtime predators, most of whom have never been prosecuted. Reports of corporal punishment at the schools are harrowing. The abuse sometimes led to suicide among the Indigenous children. The commission’s historical narrative reports that dangerous conditions at the schools were exacerbated by chronic underfunding and a refusal on the part of the Canadian government to provide resources, leading to preventable deaths due to dilapidated living quarters, illness and malnutrition.

In about half the cases where the cause of death could be ascertained, “death was due to general lung disease, influenza, pneumonia and tuberculosis,” according to the National Centre. “Students also died of illnesses like appendicitis, diabetes, Bright’s disease, measles, meningitis, typhoid fever and whooping cough. They died due to severe trauma caused by accidents or drowned or died of exposure while running away. They were killed in fires, and [died] by suicide.”

Parents were often not informed when children became ill, fled or died at the schools. The deceased children were usually buried on school grounds or in local cemeteries, rather than returned to home communities, because of the cost, distance and lack of infrastructure, according to the National Centre.



CNS photo/Chris Helgren, Reuters

A young woman takes part in a rally in Toronto on June 6, 2021, after the remains of 215 children were found on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School in May.

Three causes have been found for the large number of unmarked graves of Indigenous children. Many graves were never marked during instances of high death rates, as during an epidemic; many grave markers, often wooden crosses, were destroyed by neglect of cemetery grounds or wildfires; and other grave markers were deliberately removed.

Over 40,000 documents have already been provided to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by the Oblates. Some records that had not been previously made available include the Codex Historicus, a daily record of events at mission sites. They are now being digitized for researchers.

“There may be information that is really pertinent to the history of communities and individuals [in the codices]; there may well be references to deaths of children, but I don’t know that,” Father Thorson said.

As the register of confirmed student deaths grows in light of more documentary evidence, other residential school sites are currently being surveyed. It is expected that more graves will be found before Pope Francis receives a delegation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders this December.

Dean Dettloff, *Toronto correspondent.*
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Pope Francis greets the faithful of the Diocese of Rome at the Vatican on Sept. 18.

Pope Francis: Trust the Holy Spirit as global synodal process begins

Pope Francis addressed roughly 1,000 representatives from the Diocese of Rome on Sept. 18 to speak about the upcoming global synod. “I have come here to encourage you to take this synodal process seriously and to tell you that the Holy Spirit needs you,” the pope said. “Listen to him. Listen to each other; do not leave anyone out.”

The two-year synodal process involves “a dynamism of mutual listening, conducted at all levels of the church, involving the whole people of God,” Pope Francis said, and will include the participation of more than 3,000 dioceses of the church worldwide.

It is scheduled to open at the Vatican on Oct. 9, and Pope Francis hopes to preside over its conclusion at the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome two years later, in October 2023. “Synodality expresses the nature of the church, its form, its style, its mission,” Francis said. “The Greek word *synod* means ‘walking together.’”

Francis noted that just as in the early church, in the church today “there can be a rigid way of considering things, that can mortify the patience of God...the God who looks far, the God who has no haste.” Departing from his text, he added, “Rigidity [in the church] is a sin against the patience of God.”

“If the parish is the house of all in the neighborhood, not an exclusive club, I recommend that you leave the doors and windows open; do not limit yourselves to those who frequent [the parish] or think like you,” the pope said. “Let everyone enter.... Let their questions be your questions; allow yourselves to walk together. The Spirit will lead you. Do not be afraid to enter into dialogue; it is the dialogue of salvation.”

Gerard O’Connell, *Vatican correspondent.*
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EDITORS' PICKS - PHILANTHROPY & GIVING



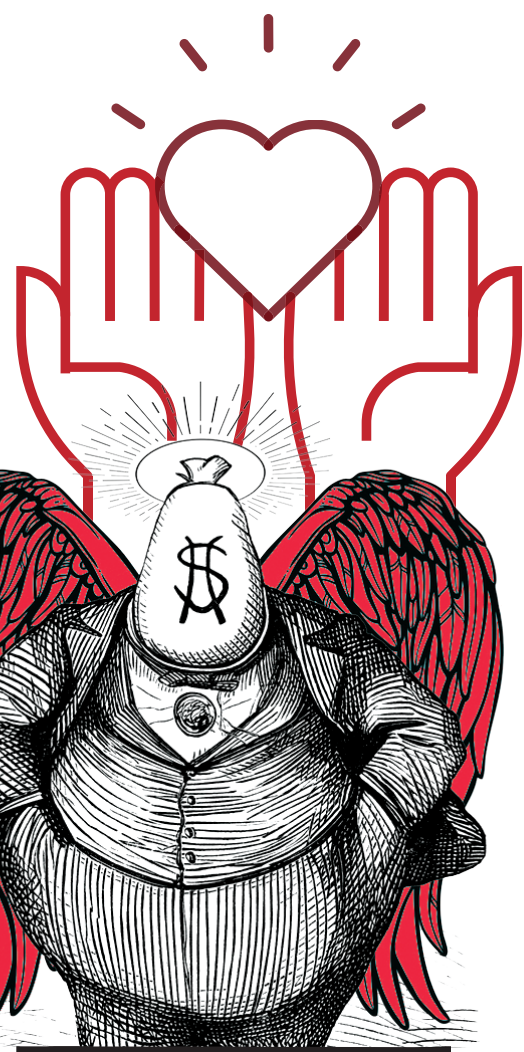
“Don’t wait until you’re dead. Giving while living is the most effective kind of philanthropy.” - Mary Beth Powers



“Father Greg Boyle’s Homeboy Industries transformed by \$20-million gift from billionaire philanthropist MacKenzie Scott” - **Alejandra Molina**



“Without the philanthropy of billionaires, the poor would suffer more and for longer” - **Joseph Dunn**



“Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and the Case Against Billionaire Philanthropy as We Know It” - **Nathan Schneider**

PLAGUE: UNTOLD STORIES OF AIDS AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: NEW BONUS EPISODE

In a bonus episode of the award-winning America Media podcast “Plague: Untold Stories of AIDS and the Catholic Church,” the host, Michael J. O’Loughlin, visits a Catholic Worker House in Syracuse, N.Y., to explore how Dorothy Day’s movement responded to the H.I.V. and AIDS crisis and captures the experiences of L.G.B.T. Catholic Workers during that challenging time.

Coinciding with the release of O’Loughlin’s new book, *Hidden Mercy: AIDS, Catholics, and Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear*, this episode takes listeners into a part of the Catholic Worker that is rarely discussed: how one of the church’s most welcoming and radically hospitable ministries struggled over the issue of homosexuality, even in the face of AIDS.

And yet, at the same time, Dorothy Day’s witness inspired L.G.B.T. Catholic Workers throughout the United

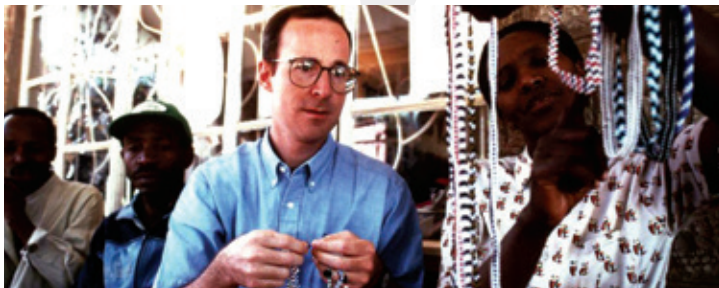
States to open houses of hospitality for people dying from AIDS, including the Friends of Dorothy Catholic Worker House in Syracuse.

Hear from gay Catholic Workers, journalists and authors, long-term H.I.V. survivors and individuals who worked alongside Dorothy Day speak about the complicated reality they faced.

This episode will challenge and inspire, prompting a thoughtful dialogue about Dorothy Day, the woman Pope Francis has hailed as one of the most important Americans, and the movement she helped to launch.

“*Untold Stories of AIDS and the Catholic Church*” is made possible by the generosity of Mark A. McDermott and Yuval David, whose gift honors and supports all L.G.B.T.Q.+ persons and allies past and present.

GIVING TUESDAY—PARTNERSHIP WITH MIKONO, A REFUGEE CRAFT SHOP



Join America Media and Mikono Refugee Craft Shop on **#GivingTuesday**, Nov. 30, and help to transform lives with your gift. With every dollar raised on this international day of giving, your donation will be split evenly with Mikono, a non-profit organization that markets refugee-made crafts and supports refugee-run businesses in East Africa.

In 1993, with the support of **America's** editor at large, James Martin, S.J., Mikono (Swahili for “hands”) was established as part of the income-generating program of Jesuit Refugee Service/East Africa. For nearly 30 years, Mikono has provided an outlet for the sale of beautiful crafts made by refugees and refugee groups living in the poor areas of Nairobi. Today, Mikono works with 75 suppliers living in or around Nairobi from over 10 different nationalities. Each of them brings unique skills learned either in their home countries or through livelihood training provided by JRS. So when you shop at Mikono, you help refugees support themselves and their families through dignified work.

Visit americamedia.org/givingtuesday2021 to make your contribution and learn more about Mikono.



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and previous episodes of “Plague: Untold Stories of AIDS and the Catholic Church” on your favorite podcast app or at americamagazine.org/podcasts.

NEW EPISODE AVAILABLE ON NOVEMBER 16.



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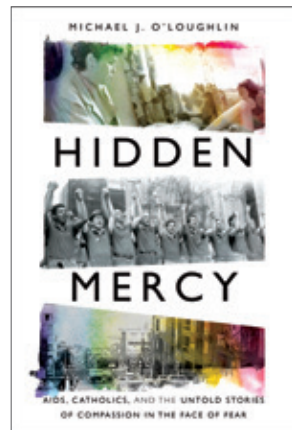


If you've called about a donation or **America's** pilgrimage program, you have talked to Michelle. She earned her bachelor of arts in history and classical studies from Villanova University, where she translated St. Patrick's *Confessions* from Latin. She earned her master of arts in world history from New York University. Before joining America Media in 2020, she worked in academic publishing acquiring monographs and edited collections, and developing media supplements for textbooks. In addition to her work in advancement at **America**, Michelle writes articles for the arts and culture section.



MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN'S NEW BOOK

Hidden Mercy: Aids, Catholics, and the Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear, available November 30 wherever books are sold.



CATHOLIC FIRST

By Daniel Lipinski

Confessions of a pro-life Democrat in a divided nation

One year after the most divisive elections in at least 50 years, there is little evidence that distrust and animosity laid bare by that bitter contest—and its horrific aftermath on Jan. 6—are going anywhere. Americans remain divided over longstanding culture war issues like abortion and climate change and more recent issues such as the best policy response to the ongoing pandemic.

But for an increasing number of Americans today, party affiliation is connected to more than policy preferences. It is a moralized social identity where members on each side view those on the other side with contempt. Americans are pushed by the culture to make a binary choice—Democrat or Republican—and then conform themselves to every belief of their party. This is not tribalism but sectarianism. It determines not only how we vote but where we live, who

we marry and how we worship.

Having served for 16 years in the U.S. House of Representatives as a pro-life Democrat who was deeply committed to bringing people together across the divide to serve the interests of my constituents and the country, I have an intimate understanding of the impact of sectarian partisanship. From the time I entered Congress in 2005, the widening policy gap between the parties made bridging differences to forge legislative compromises increasingly difficult, and the leftward move by many Democrats left me more ideologically isolated. But the rise of sectarian partisanship rendered Congress almost completely incapable of performing its constitutional duties. It also caused my figurative branding as a heretic within the ranks of the Democratic Party, which led to my loss in the 2020 Democratic primary.



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While Americans do not seem to agree on much, they do agree we are divided. In a poll conducted for The Wall Street Journal and NBC News in October 2018, 80 percent responded that the country was divided, including 85 percent of Democrats and 73 percent of Republicans. An even greater number—90 percent—said the division between Democrats and Republicans is “a serious problem.”

Why does this divide seem so dangerous to Americans? We have had these same two parties battling each other in election after election for about 160 years. But today, there has been a fundamental change in the nature of partisanship. It is now rooted in many people’s social identity. Research published in 2019 in The American Journal of Political Science showed that political identity is so powerful for some people that it can determine or change not only their

policy preferences but also their self-identified religion, class or sexual orientation.

The extreme policy divide between the parties on many issues makes policymaking very difficult, but *sectarian* division makes policymaking virtually impossible: The process—even on seemingly nonideological issues such as transportation policy—is viewed as a zero-sum, identity-based competition in which winning, not forging the best policies possible, is the primary goal. The ensuing congressional gridlock leaves a power vacuum filled by presidents who act beyond their constitutional power, as well as by activist courts and an unelected administrative state. Sectarian partisanship has also led to questions from both sides about the legitimacy of elections, lawmaking and the actions of elected officials. These have been used



U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, left, greets outgoing President Barack Obama before Mr. Trump is sworn in as the country's 45th president at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Jan. 21, 2016.

CNS photo/Rick Wilking, Reuters

as excuses for misuse and abuse of institutional power inside government and have inspired mob activities on the outside. If we do not find a way to restore the public square and reform government institutions so that people on both sides are willing to work with each other—through debate, argumentation and compromise—the republic created under our Constitution cannot survive.

A Life of Public Service

In November 2004, I was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Illinois' Third Congressional District, the seat vacated by my father, Congressman William O. Lipinski. The district included the southwest side of Chicago and southwestern suburbs close to the city boundary. In 2012, it moved a little farther southwest into some more outlying areas.

Forty years ago, the political ideology of “Chicago Democrats” ranged all the way from very liberal to fairly conservative. My district was known in the 1980s for being home to many “Reagan Democrats”: blue-collar voters who were pro-life, anti-communist and concerned about high taxes and crime. They called themselves Democrats but had no problem voting for a Republican. Many went to Catholic schools. When I was elected, the number of Reagan Democrats had dwindled, but it was still significant. And there was no question that Catholicism influenced their politics.

My life in politics was grounded in the conviction that

our personal relationship with God gives us our primary identity. We have many different identities: in our family, our job or profession, or as a member of a club, sports team or a political party. But as Jesus taught us, sometimes in stark ways (as when he told the man who wanted to follow him that he could not take the time to bury his father), God must always come first.

It is from this identity that the mission of any Christian should flow. What was my mission as a congressman that followed from my Catholic identity? It was to work for policies that served the common good, as explained in the deep and rich teachings of Christ and the church and understood through prayer and reason.

The Catholic Church offers many gifts that we too often take for granted. One of these is a rich tradition regarding the pursuit of the common good: Catholic social teaching. The U.S. bishops have highlighted seven themes of this teaching: life and dignity of the human person; call to family, community and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity; and care for God's creation.

We have guidelines for what it means to put Christ's teachings into action, and we cannot just pick and choose which teachings we like.

These themes do not directly tell us what policies to support or oppose. The one theme that has the clearest



line to public policy on some particular issues is the first: life and dignity of the human person. The U.S. bishops state that “human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.” They identify abortion and euthanasia as two direct threats to human life and dignity. That is why it is critical that Catholics support policies that oppose so-called abortion rights and euthanasia.

As I began my first term in Congress, I knew I was always going to oppose the position of a majority of Democrats when it came to abortion, and that I would have disagreements with many of my colleagues over issues like marriage and religious freedom. I knew it would be a bit of a challenge for me, but I did not believe it would be a major hurdle to getting re-elected or being an effective representative if I worked hard and took care of my constituents.

My record in Congress was strongly pro-life and strongly pro-union, as well as pro-environment and pro-defense. I was not in line with the Democratic Party on every issue, but I was initially considered to be just another blue-collar Democrat. I co-sponsored just about every pro-life bill introduced, and I voted for every one that got to the House floor. I eventually became the Democratic co-chair of the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus. I strongly and vocally defended the Religious Freedom Restoration Act on the House floor and other legislation to support religious liberty, including conscience protections for everyone, including the Little Sisters of the Poor and health care workers, in the face of Obamacare’s contraception mandate. I was the only Democrat to vote for a bill that created the Opportunity Scholarship Program in Washington, D.C., to provide scholarships for poor families to give them the choice to send their children to private schools.

But on many issues, I voted as you would expect a Democrat to vote. My vote aligned with the position favored by the A.F.L.-C.I.O. federation of unions more than 90 percent of the time. I voted 90 percent of the time with the League of Conservation Voters on environmental issues. And my grade from the National Rifle Association was an F.

This voting record vexed many people. I simply saw it as keeping true to my mission of pursuing policies that served the common good. A few times I had someone come up to me in my district and say, “I know, you vote Catholic.” Sometimes it was a criticism. Sometimes it was a compliment. But for some it seemed to have been a “Eureka!” moment, where they figured out the coherence behind what

THERE ARE CATHOLICS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE WHO SEEM TO PUT PARTY BEFORE FAITH.

the rest of the world saw as an incoherent voting pattern. Many people could not understand someone who did not fit neatly with either side.

Despite this, and despite having opponents in the Democratic primary every two years who attacked me for being pro-life and at times straying from the party line, I did not have too much trouble repeatedly winning re-election as a “Catholic congressman.”

The Rise of Sectarianism

Something began to change around 2009, soon after the election of Barack Obama as president. The congressional battle over the Affordable Care Act, popularly known as Obamacare, was pivotal in many ways. The Republican Tea Party movement began and quickly built grass-roots strength. Republican members of Congress who were seen as moderates or bipartisan began to be purged from the party in primary elections. A good friend of mine from South Carolina, Bob Inglis, lost his Republican primary because he said he believed climate change was real and that Congress should enact policy to counter it.

For me, the A.C.A. debate was the first time that I stepped forward on the national stage as a pro-life Democrat. I was part of a group of Democrats who held back our votes on the A.C.A., trying to get changes made that would prevent taxpayer funding of abortion. In the end, every Democrat who had supported the effort to get the abortion funding language changed wound up agreeing to vote for the bill in exchange for an executive order meant to restrict federal funding for abortions, which I believe was simply a fig leaf. I held out and voted no. In the 2010 and 2012 elec-



tions, a good number of pro-life Democrats lost, and the Democratic Party took an extreme turn on abortion.

With the election of Donald J. Trump in 2016, sectarianism ramped up in a major way on both sides, and my life as a Democratic congressman changed drastically. Associating someone with President Trump was the easiest and most powerful weapon anyone could use to cause that person to lose the support of Democratic voters. I had not changed my voting pattern significantly. But Democrats had moved further to the left, Republicans got behind Mr. Trump, and it was no longer acceptable to step out of line.

Over the years there were fewer and fewer pro-life Democrats in Congress, until we were down to only a couple in 2017. By that point, my pro-life position was an easy issue to use to link me to President Trump. NARAL, Planned Parenthood, Emily's List and other pro-abortion groups I never heard of, along with the Human Rights Campaign and the Chicago Teachers Union, poured more than \$3 million into the primary campaign against me to paint me as a DINO, a Democrat in Name Only. I was almost always labeled "conservative" and sometimes "one of the most conservative" Democrats in the House by the news media, despite voting with Democrats about 90 percent of the time.

Then, in December 2017, I was invited along with a

bipartisan group of House members and U.S. senators to the White House to watch a movie with President Trump. These were private events that everyone knew should be kept private, but Senator Joe Manchin, a Democrat who needed to show his constituents in West Virginia that he talked to the president, posted on social media a picture of himself shaking the president's hand. In the background of that photo, you can see me sharing a laugh with then-Speaker of the House Paul Ryan.

The photo quickly made the rounds on social media, with the comment that I was at the White House to celebrate the passage of the Republican tax bill—a bill I had voted against. The media picked up on the picture and characterized it as showing that I "had friends in the White House." Eventually, it showed up on a TV commercial to demonstrate that I was a "Trump guy."

After a very narrow (51 to 49 percent) victory in the Democratic primary that March, I knew that my seat would be at great risk in 2020, and that the same person would run against me again.

In the next year, sectarianism in the Democratic Party and the purging of those perceived as deviating from the strict party line only got worse. Politically speaking, I became a heretic in 2019, when the party took an even stronger stand for legal abortion. My pro-choice opponent



Representative Dan Lipinski, Democrat of Illinois, speaks during the annual March for Life rally in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 18, 2019.

was endorsed by a number of my Democratic colleagues in Congress, some local Democratic office holders and five Democratic presidential candidates. Locally, some Democrats who had endorsed me previously were obviously getting cold feet about supporting me. No one felt that they could get close to me for fear that they would be hurt politically by the association. And, of course, outside money kept pouring in to my opponent.

I did not back down from being outspoken in protecting life. I spoke at the March for Life in Washington, D.C., and in Chicago. In Congress, I was the lead Democratic co-sponsor of the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act and the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, and sought to bypass Speaker Nancy Pelosi to bring the Born-Alive Abortion Survivor Protection Act to the House floor.

When the votes were finally counted the day after the Democratic primary, a day before everything in Illinois shut down because of the pandemic, I suffered a narrow defeat.

Lessons Learned

My experiences have taught me that America will overcome sectarian partisanship only if enough people have the courage to choose to reject it in the public square. I believe Catholics are uniquely gifted to do this. But it will

happen only if Catholics have the courage to reject political orthodoxies and be Catholic first.

I understand that Catholics are not immune from the temptations of partisan sectarianism. There are Catholics on both sides of the aisle who seem to put party before faith. Nor am I saying that Catholics have to reject both of the major parties and all candidates from both parties. If you are going to get involved in politics, you usually need to choose one of the two major parties to be affiliated with. If you are voting, in most races you need to choose a candidate from one of these two parties.

I will never claim to have been perfect in everything I did as a Catholic member of Congress. But if I had not put my faith first and embraced its unique gifts, I cannot envision how I could have avoided fleeing to the political safety of sectarian partisanship and becoming part of the problem.

Because I knew what was at stake, I did not succumb to sectarianism. It was not easy. I was increasingly an outsider in my own party. I knew that I was sacrificing personal ambition, because my stance prevented me from rising in the Democratic Party. I eventually came to recognize that I was risking electoral defeat.

What inspired and enabled me to take this difficult path? God's grace and unique gifts that I, and every Catholic, receive from our faith. Those gifts include:



MY LIFE IN POLITICS WAS GROUNDED IN THE CONVICTION THAT OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD GIVES US OUR PRIMARY IDENTITY.

- A strong primary identity as a child of God, which provides a spiritual and social mission and lessens the susceptibility of turning to partisan sectarianism for a mission and an identity.

- A belief that the foundation of a moral vision for society is the inherent dignity of every individual; respect for that dignity must guide not only policy positions but interactions with others. This is the antithesis of sectarian behavior, which involves scrutinizing every person with an opposing view in order to find anything that can be used to make the case that that person deserves to be treated with disdain.

- Well-formed Catholic social teaching regarding the common good and social justice. This not only provides a guide to what it means to uphold the dignity of every individual when considering policy choices, it also provides an opening to finding common ground across the partisan divide—because Catholic social thought is partially embraced by each of the two parties.

Catholic Witness

The night of the election in 2020, when it looked almost certain that I would lose, I could not sleep. I thought all night about how my life for 16 years had revolved around my job as a member of Congress. It can be all-encompassing when you put your whole heart, mind and soul into it. All of a sudden, I knew that was all going to be gone. What would my life revolve around on a daily basis? What would my identity be?

But the next day, I remembered. It started as I was writing my concession speech. That morning, someone suggested to me that I needed to be prepared to answer this

question from the media: “Looking back, would you have done anything differently?” He said the reason they would ask this question, in three or four different ways, was to try to get me to say, “I should not have stuck with my pro-life stance.” I decided that I needed to answer it in my statement before it was asked, so I said the following instead:

I have always said that I would never give up being pro-life and standing up for babies in the womb. [My wife] Judy and I, and tens of millions of Catholics, hold and live this. But it is not just based on religious belief; it is based on science, which shows us that life begins at conception. Knowing this, I could never give up protecting the most vulnerable human beings in the world, simply to win an election. My faith teaches, and the Democratic Party preaches, that we should serve everyone, especially the most vulnerable. To stand in solidarity with the vulnerable is to become vulnerable. But there is no higher calling for anyone.

After that press conference—and with the help of the calls, texts and emails that flowed in from many Catholics afterwards—I felt more at peace than I ever imagined possible after a defeat. I had never worked harder on anything in my life than that campaign, and really for the three years leading up to the 2020 primary. I lost a job that was a great honor and privilege. But what I lost was nothing compared to what I have. I was tested by fire, and though I was not perfect through the whole ordeal, in the end I was—and am—Catholic first. I am hopeful, even though I did not succeed, that through my witness more Catholics will come to see that with faith and reason, wisdom from Scripture and tradition, unceasing prayer and God’s grace, we can defeat this culture of contempt and save the American republic.

Daniel Lipinski served eight terms as the U.S. Representative for Illinois’ Third Congressional District from 2005 to 2021. This article was adapted from a lecture delivered as part of the *Familiaris Consortio* Lecture Series at Father Gabriel Richard Catholic High School in Ann Arbor, Mich., on March 6, 2021.

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The Work of Unity

As the U.S. bishops' conference discerns a path forward, veterans cite legacy of work for the common good

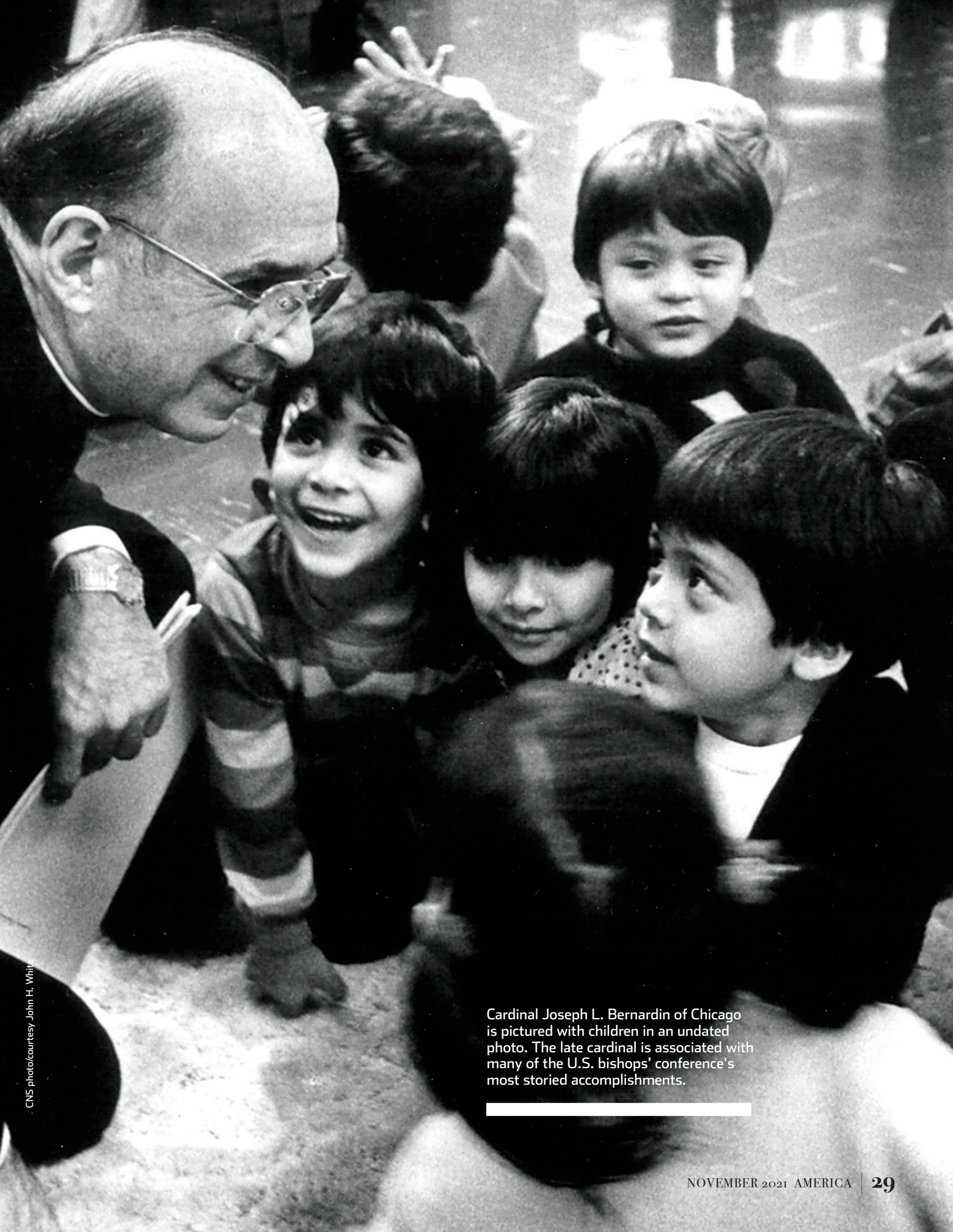
By Don Clemmer

As with most major events, the meetings of the Catholic bishops of the United States have not taken place in person since before the Covid-19 pandemic. But that has not kept the bishops from conducting the business of their semiannual general assemblies. Nor has it kept the meetings that have occurred—over Zoom—from becoming the object of heated focus and debate.

In June, the chairman of the doctrine committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., presented a proposal for his committee to draft a document on the Eucharist. Aimed at promoting a “eucharistic revival” among U.S. Catholics who have spent much of the pandemic away from the sacraments, the document originated as a recommendation of a conference task force set up in response to the election of Joe Biden, the second Catholic U.S. president and a supporter of legal abortion.

While Bishop Rhoades stressed that the document was not about any one person or group, the perception that the bishops were moving forward with a document that could be used to justify barring Mr. Biden and other Catholic politicians from Communion drew heavy pushback. The narrative that the bishops, amid a global pandemic, were now staking out and escalating an adversarial position with a new president over long-standing disagreements in policy was at odds with what had preceded it. The U.S.C.C.B. had adopted an engagement-driven approach to President Donald Trump, with cardinals even appearing in a White House photo op to celebrate an executive order on religious freedom, despite Mr. Trump’s bigoted rhetoric and harsh anti-immigrant policies. (Full disclosure: I served in the communications department of the U.S.C.C.B. from 2008 to 2016.)

“This last meeting was not quite, but approaching the Dallas meeting in terms of the no-



CNS photo/courtesy John H. White

Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago is pictured with children in an undated photo. The late cardinal is associated with many of the U.S. bishops' conference's most storied accomplishments.



The bishops' conference has suffered more than its share of wounds, many of them self-inflicted.

tority and the attention,” said Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, N.M. “We really need to listen to the people.”

The meeting mentioned by Archbishop Wester was the June 2002 general assembly, at which the bishops adopted the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,” commonly known as the Dallas Charter, in the wake of the clergy sex abuse crisis.

The proposal to draft the document on the Eucharist also proved volatile among the bishops themselves, with some 60 of them voting no. The conflicts surrounding the document made national headlines in the secular press. The following month, a survey sponsored by **America** in partnership with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate found that the U.S.C.C.B. was the least trusted group in a list of nine in terms of offering guidance on faith and morals. (The survey was conducted prior to the bishops' meeting.) Only 35 percent of respondents who attend Mass weekly or more rated the group as “very trustworthy” in such matters. Women religious and parish priests were described as “very trustworthy” by 56 percent of the same demographic.

At their November general assembly, where the bishops will presumably vote on the next stage of the document on the Eucharist, they will also chart the next step on a path forward in their engagement with both the Biden administration and the culture at large. The meeting is likely to be closely followed by many Catholics, and the stakes appear to be high.

The bishops are heirs to a conference structure that has stood for over a century and amassed a significant track record in terms of Gospel-centered advocacy and action. The conference has also suffered more than its share of wounds, many of them self-inflicted. Now, in addition to policy questions, the bishops face questions about whether those structures still serve their purpose and the people of

God. The bishops must answer for themselves the question many Catholics are already considering: Do the bishops have the capacity to achieve the unity needed to leverage the witness of the conference toward the common good?

Spirited Foundations

To establish a way forward, it helps to look back first at the origins of the bishops' conference. While officially started in 1966 in response to the Second Vatican Council's call for the establishment of national bishops' conferences, the history of the bishops' conference and its accomplishments date back a century, to 1917 and the formation of the National Catholic War Council (later the National Catholic Welfare Conference). The formation of this council was spurred by the recognition among many bishops that they could be much more effective working cooperatively rather than singly in their dioceses. Operating in the devastating footprint of World War I and the 1918 influenza pandemic, one product of this embryonic effort of Catholic humanitarian relief was a document called the “Bishops' Program for Social Reconstruction” (1919).

Composed largely by Msgr. John A. Ryan, an influential Catholic social reformer and longtime staff member at the N.C.W.C., the bishops' plan offered a guide for overhauling the nation's social and economic policies that was based in part on Pope Leo XIII's social encyclical “*Rerum Novarum*.” Among the plan's defining features was a call for government intervention as an effective means for combating poverty, with proposals including pensions for senior citizens and unemployment insurance. It would eventually result in a sweeping reordering of American society when Msgr. Ryan reached out to the newly inaugurated President Franklin D. Roosevelt and offered the bishops' document as a blueprint for the New Deal.

In its postconciliar incarnation, the restructured and renamed National Conference of Catholic Bishops/U.S. Catholic Conference benefitted from the leadership of bishops like Cardinal John Dearden of Detroit (the new conference's first president), Archbishop John Roach of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco. “When he spoke at one of the plenary meetings, you could hear a pin drop,” said Archbishop Wester of his mentor Archbishop Quinn. “You didn't even have to be president to have that kind of influence.”

“They set the conference off to a very strong beginning through their leadership. I would contend that they were highly inspired by the council,” said Bishop Richard Pates, retired bishop of Des Moines, Iowa.

“When I came into the conference, we were still close

enough to Vatican II, so the prophetic words of ‘*Gaudium et Spes*,’ for example, were still ringing in our ears and touching our hearts,” said Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, retired bishop of Las Cruces, N.M., who was ordained a bishop in 1981. “The conference was deeply influenced then by the civil rights movement.”

Fruits of this early period included the bishops’ domestic antipoverty program, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, started in 1970, which supports grassroots community organizing and economic development efforts to address root causes of poverty, as well as two major pastoral letters: “The Challenge of Peace” (1983) and “Economic Justice for All” (1986), which challenged the arms race and the unbridled capitalism of the Reagan era.

“Those documents still stand, I believe, in terms of documents that really have a lasting influence,” said Bishop Pates. “Those were very, very exciting and really joyful times, because when you’re involved in helping the poor, involved in peacemaking, involved in a prophetic voice, you can’t help but rejoice,” said Bishop Ramirez. “We listened to a lot of voices...[and had] wonderful debates. We really listened with respect to one another.”

Prophet of Unity

As the bishops sought to respond to the signs of the times, their most storied efforts and accomplishments are still associated with Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, who served as the conference’s first general secretary (1968-72) and its third president (1974-77), and as archbishop of Chicago from 1982 until his death in 1996. Those who worked with Cardinal Bernardin cite his deep commitment to working toward unity among the bishops, a quality he wove into the fabric of the bishops’ conference.

Canon 447 of the Code of Canon Law, which addresses episcopal conferences, speaks of bishops who “jointly exercise certain pastoral functions” for the faithful of their territory “to promote the greater good.” Sharon Euart, R.S.M., a canon lawyer who served the conference as secretary for planning (1988-89) and as associate general secretary (1989-2001), notes, “The word ‘jointly’ is very important, [as is] the promotion of the greater good that the church can offer. I think those are two things that can sometimes get lost in the debate.”

Sister Euart and several bishops with whom I spoke recall Cardinal Bernardin and his conference staff working to engage in dialogue and incorporate the concerns of bishops like Cardinal John O’Connor of New York and Archbishop Philip Hannan of New Orleans, who had concerns about the peace pastoral. “Cardinal Bernardin was always

anxious to hear differences of opinion and to try to mold out of those differences an understanding of how to move forward,” said Bishop Gerald Kicanas, the retired bishop of Tucson, Ariz., and vice president of the U.S.C.C.B. from 2007 to 2010. Bishop Kicanas served as an auxiliary to Cardinal Bernardin in Chicago for the last two years of the cardinal’s life. “That’s what the conference is supposed to be, a place for dialogue and a place where working through those differences can take place.”

“He loved the church. He was an eminent churchman. He was a man who was very prophetic,” Bishop Ramirez recalls of Cardinal Bernardin. “To me, he’s one of the great prophets that came out of the bishops’ conference.”

The Bernardin model of engagement also shaped other efforts of the conference, including foreign policy and interfaith dialogue. “Our credibility rested on the fact that the church is on the ground,” said Stephen Colecchi. Prior to his retirement in 2018, Mr. Colecchi served as director of international justice and peace, the lead staff person to one of the committees served by the U.S.C.C.B.’s sprawling Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development. In that role, he accompanied the bishops both in their deliberations around global moral issues and in their engagement—often in person—with the church in countries across the Middle East, Latin America, Asia and Africa.

“There’s a lived experience of walking with the people who will be impacted by policies,” said Mr. Colecchi, who cited policies like the renewal of the PEPFAR AIDS program in Africa and the agreement on a new START treaty regulating nuclear arms between the United States and Russia as moments where the witness of the bishops made a difference. “We went to places where there was conflict, where there was poverty, where there was disease. That’s where the church was on the front lines.”

Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski of St. Louis, Mo., who chaired the bishops’ ecumenical and interreligious affairs committee from 2014 to 2017, similarly sees the good that the U.S.C.C.B.’s ethos and framework offer the world.

“Our ecumenical and interreligious work is a way of modeling how we can disagree with one another, but we can still work together—and civilly work together. And I think that’s a great model for the rest of society,” he said. “I would hope that for the church, we, clergy and laity alike, do not fall into that trap [of toxic polarized discourse], because it paralyzes the work of the kingdom.”

Cardinal Bernardin’s legacy of leadership has extended to his two immediate successors in Chicago: Cardinal Francis George, who served as conference president from 2007 to 2010, and Cardinal Blase Cupich, who embraces



Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington pictured in Rome on Sept. 27. Cardinal Gregory served as an auxiliary bishop to Cardinal Joseph Bernardin for a decade, and led the U.S. bishops' conference during the height of the sexual abuse crisis in the church.

CNS photo/Paul Haring

the Bernardin mantle of engaging the church's entire teaching on the dignity of human life, as opposed to singling out abortion. Bishop Pates sees Cardinal Cupich as "trying to call us to a relationship of unity at a deeper level with the Holy Father."

As the bishops prepared to debate the Eucharist proposal at the June meeting, a letter from Cardinal Luis Ladaria, S.J., prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, urged the bishops not to rush the process, to discuss widely among themselves and to dialogue with members of civil society and episcopal conferences of other countries before drafting a document.

Bishop Pates understood this move to be the Vatican's way of saying "think about the unintended consequences" and "see the ramifications beyond the local politics of the United States, because we are one church." This, he says, will require more than a majority vote from the bishops; it will require a deep, authentic unity forged among their members. "How do we get together and achieve a common mind in the unity of the Spirit? I think the process is probably as determinative as the issue itself."

Bishop Kicanas said he believes that the bishops must include voices from outside the conference. "Lay input is extremely important.... That's who we're trying to revive

the Eucharist with," he said. While Bishop Kicanas says the goal of reviving the Eucharist is admirable, "It's hard to see how the general public...is going to receive this [document] in any other way than 'Biden can't go to Communion.' I don't know if it's recoverable."

Mark Brumley, president of the board of Guadalupe Associates and chief executive officer for Ignatius Press, notes that objections that were once raised to the bishops' advocacy on peace and economic justice, such as "politicizing religion" and "politicizing the bishops' ministry" are now hurled against the document on the Eucharist, "even though that document isn't likely to focus on abortion." The value Mr. Brumley sees in such a document would be to "provide pastors and other leaders something as a basis for renewing the conversation and for focusing attention and mobilizing support. To a large extent, it depends on whether the statement/document is faithful, pertinent, clear and practical. And whether conferences, dioceses, parishes, and lay faithful are mobilized to get behind it."

Wounds on the Body

Throughout its years of existence, the U.S.C.C.B. has weathered blows from outside and within. One moment of crisis that had a significant negative impact on the

influence of the bishops' conference was the the crisis in 2002 over sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy, which brought to light how, for decades, the U.S. hierarchy failed to protect children and young people from sexual predators among the clergy and often returned abusive priests to ministry. Bishop Kicanas asserts that the abuse crisis compromised the moral voice of the bishops. "I don't think we can pretend that isn't the reality," he says.

But this experience also allowed the leadership gifts of others to shine, as the church hierarchy navigated the crisis. Now-Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington served as an auxiliary bishop to Cardinal Bernardin for a decade. The high regard in which he is held among his brother bishops can be traced to the early 2000s, when as bishop of Belleville, Ill., he was elected U.S.C.C.B. president and led the bishops through the creation of the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" at the meeting in Dallas in June 2002.

"He faced it directly.... It was a very progressive move. The church was in extraordinary, difficult times," said Bishop Pates. "It was imperative that we have someone at the time that was able to marshal the troops, set a direction.... That's going to sustain us for a long time."

In 2019, after a 14-year tenure in Atlanta, then-Archbishop Gregory was appointed by Pope Francis to lead the Archdiocese of Washington, a role with proximity to the conference. In his new role, Cardinal Gregory has taken positions in tension with the prevailing direction of the U.S.C.C.B. under its current president, Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles. One disagreement that became public appeared in a letter signed by Cardinal Gregory and 66 other bishops earlier in 2021, asking Archbishop Gomez to delay any document from the bishops on the reception of the Eucharist.

External criticisms of the conference have often taken the form of attacks from fellow Catholics who take issue with the bishops' postconciliar vision of their public witness. These have included criticism of the conference's longstanding policy positions—such as those in favor of health care reform and comprehensive immigration reform—as well as charges that the Catholic Campaign for Human Development funded groups that advocate for abortion and same-sex marriage. But Bishop Pates, for one, says, "There always will be sideshows trying to exercise influence, because they may consider themselves principal recipients of the Holy Spirit," says Bishop Pates. "It's part of human nature."

But suspicion or outright rejection of the Bernardin approach to the bishops' public witness has not been lim-

ited to lay Catholics. It was also reflected in the more doctrinaire style of bishops appointed by St. John Paul II in an effort to rein in what he saw as an out-of-control U.S. hierarchy.

Thomas Reese, S.J., author of a book on the conference, *A Flock of Shepherds* (1992), cites the failure of a third major pastoral letter, one on women, in the early 1990s as an inflection point for the conference.

"That was when Bernardin failed to hold the center for the first time," Father Reese said. The bonds of unity that allowed for "The Challenge of Peace" and "Economic Justice for All" appeared broken—or at least greatly weakened.

The Road to Today

The structural functions of the U.S.C.C.B. remain more or less constant, but each generation of bishops faces the challenge of claiming and taking ownership of them. A defining moment in that regard occurred in November 2010, when the bishops at the Baltimore plenary meeting broke from their longstanding tradition of electing the conference vice president as their new president. The conference elected then-archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, passing over a Cardinal Bernardin protégé, Bishop Kicanas.

"The bishops' conference is a product of the bishops themselves, plus the church environment that they're existing in, and who gets appointed bishops has a tremendous impact on what the bishops' conference ultimately does," said Father Reese. "The defeat of Kicanas showed that enough appointments had been made to change the body of the bishops' conference, so that the Bernardin people were simply pushed out of any leadership role or influence. That era was over."

The ensuing era saw the bishops intensify their efforts to prevent same-sex marriage from being enshrined in U.S. law, as well as increased opposition to other protections for members of the L.G.B.T.Q. community, as part of a new prioritization of religious freedom for the conference.

Archbishop Wester said that the conference has historically had a good capacity for self-correction, but that "in the last 5-10 years that's changed somewhat.... It's not quite as quick to move back to the center again in some respects." However, since Pope Francis' election in 2013, the conference has seen a number of appointees who share his emphases on mercy, care for creation and accompaniment of people on the peripheries of both society and the church.

"Now we see a new pope with a different agenda, but it takes a long time to change the makeup of the U.S. episcopacy," says Father Reese, noting that Francis has had eight



Cardinal Bernardin's legacy of leadership has extended to his two immediate successors in Chicago: Cardinal Francis George and Cardinal Blase Cupich.

years to name new bishops, while John Paul II and Benedict XVI had a combined 35. "It takes more than 10 years to turn around a bishops' conference."

During Francis' papacy, the conference has come under fire—sometimes by bishops themselves—for insufficiently incorporating initiatives of Pope Francis, including his Year of Mercy, his apostolic exhortation on family life in 2016, "Amoris Laetitia," and other efforts to emphasize the synodal process.

"There's always that tension in the church between the centrality and the synodality," said Archbishop Wester. But the irony is that the central authority—the pope—is now pushing the bishops to engage each other candidly amid their differences in a more collaborative fashion.

Collaborating in a public forum comes with additional challenges. The bishops' process is by definition deliberative and seeks consensus, which tends to result in careful statements that reflect a majority opinion among the bishops, which in turn can be overwhelmed or ignored in a culture that needs a quick (and possibly hot) take on every issue. A deliberately worded and carefully distributed public statement faces an uphill battle for attention in a 24-hour news cycle.

"It's difficult to understand the processes of the U.S.C.C.B. if we're just looking at sound bites," says Archbishop Rozanski, who made waves during the bishops' June meeting with a motion that every bishop who wanted to weigh in on discussion of the proposal be given the time to speak. Archbishop Rozanski resists oversimplifying the

dynamics of the U.S. hierarchy.

"Certainly, when you get that many bishops in a room, there is a diversity," he says, noting that even if the bishops are of one mind, "We don't share the same brain!" He adds, "When people say 'You bishops!' I kind of bristle, because I know it's not a reality."

But Father Reese is direct in drawing the contrast: "If we still had the bishops today that we had 30 years ago, we'd see them much more vocal on climate change, on racial justice, on those kinds of things."

There are many ideas on how the conference might move forward together. Bishop Kicanas sees a new era in which statements without engagement are not effective.

"As a conference, there's great need for humility," Bishop Kicanas said, "Were [Cardinal Bernardin] in the conference today, he would be making a concerted effort to try to encourage bishops to spend time talking together and trying to learn together how we can bring about a renewal and a revival of the faith.... That doesn't mean it's going to be magically successful. But it's a different way."

"We're not just a megaphone. We're also an earpiece. We have to listen to the People of God," Archbishop Wester said. "Let that guide much of what we do."

Bishop Ramirez cited the witness of the bishops on immigration along the U.S.-Mexico border as a sign of hope; the issue of justice for migrants, he noted, still enjoys strong support in the conference.

Bishop Pates sees unity as the key issue—with the pope, among the bishops and with the worldwide church, working with the successor of Peter to implement Vatican II.

"In my experience, that's where the manifestation of the Holy Spirit is most evident," he said. "I'm very hopeful."

Sister Euart's hope is rooted in the lived experience of the conference working for the common good, but she cautions that it's not something that happens automatically. "It's not the structure that's going to make it work," she says, but rather the intentional choice of the bishops to invest in the hard work of unity—of engagement, trust, setting aside agendas and rediscovering the ability to dialogue with one another and get the assistance they need to address issues adequately.

That unity existed during the Bernardin era; it may be possible for it to exist again in the future. "I think the conference can work," said Sister Euart. "I saw it work. I lived through it working and making a difference."

Don Clemmer is a writer, editor and communications specialist based in Indiana.



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Priest in Kenya Partners With Cross Catholic Outreach To Provide Poor With Safe Water



Fr. Fabian was appalled by the muddy water sources families were using, and he sought help from Cross Catholic Outreach to drill wells and install improved water systems. Working together, they hope to expand these efforts even more this year.

After more than 30 years in the priesthood, Father Fabian's passion for sharing God's mercy has only grown stronger. Originally from Ghana, he was first sent to Kenya by the Society of African Missionaries in 2002. It was there he discovered one of his life's greatest callings: bringing water to people who had none.

"That is one of my biggest dreams. Everyone should have access to clean and good water," Fr. Fabian said.

Over the course of six years, Fr. Fabian has collaborated with Cross Catholic Outreach to complete water system projects for 83,000 people in 27 villages throughout the Diocese of Lodwar. More recently, through the Good Samaritan Water Sanitation Services nonprofit he created to expand his mission, other water projects are being undertaken to benefit the poor in other Catholic dioceses. [See story on opposite page.]

"Fr. Fabian has asked Cross Catholic Outreach to join him in an ambitious plan to bring safe water to a 275-mile stretch of land shared by the Diocese of Machakos and Archdiocese of Mombasa," explained Jim Cavnar, president of Cross Catholic Outreach. "We have completed six water systems so far, blessing about 50,724 people in the region, and we hope to bring safe water to 10 additional

communities in the months ahead."

When Fr. Fabian first enters a new community to assess its situation, he begins by asking a simple question.

"You start by asking, 'What do you need?'" Fr. Fabian says. "Most of the time water is the first on their list."

According to Fr. Fabian, meeting a community's most critical need — water — is the perfect way to share the love of God. One benefit is the way Fr. Fabian works through local parishes, empowering priests to care for their communities by overseeing water projects and appointing village water committees. This strengthens the relationship between the people and their parish, and many experience a deeper understanding of the abundant life that is available to them in Christ.

Many immediate benefits become apparent once communities gain access to clean water. Improved health and restored faith are often two of the first blessings to reveal themselves.

"It saves the lives of most of these children. It also helps the spirituality of the people, giving them time to go to church," Fr. Fabian explained. "Priests call thanking you, saying, 'You can't imagine how many people are attending Mass!'"

There are other spiritual blessings that come from these projects too. According to Jim Cavnar, U.S. Catholics who help fund the work through Cross Catholic Outreach often share their enthusiasm for supporting mission work and say the experience gives them a greater appreciation for the impact of Catholic charity.

"Most American Catholics want to be more involved in helping the poor in developing countries, but they want to do something specific and meaningful like this," said Cavnar. "I'm sure they will rally to help Fr. Fabian with the work he has planned — and that they will be blessed by the experience if they do."

Readers interested in supporting Cross Catholic Outreach water programs and other outreaches to the poor can contribute through the ministry brochure inserted in this issue or send tax-deductible gifts to: Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC01837, PO Box 97168, Washington DC 20090-7168. The ministry has a special need for partners willing to make gifts on a monthly basis. Use the inserted brochure to become a Mission Partner or write "Monthly Mission Partner" on mailed checks to be contacted about setting up those arrangements.



U.S. Catholics Are Blessing the Poor in Kenya

BY ADDRESSING THEIR URGENT NEED FOR SAFE WATER

Gladys Mghoi is helping to raise her grandchildren in Mokine, a small village situated in the Archdiocese of Mombasa. Every morning, she wakes up at around 4 a.m. to start the long and arduous process of collecting water for the day.

"In Gladys' simple home, there is no tap to turn to get a supply of water. She lives in an impoverished village, and like most everyone else there, she must travel to a distant source to get the water her family needs," explained Jim Cavnar, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, a leading relief and development charity assisting Catholic missions in Africa. "It's tragic, but water scarcity is common in many parts of Kenya. People in remote areas tend to be desperately poor, and their villages have no infrastructure to supply water. To get what they need to survive, they face a lot of hardships."

In Gladys' case, quenching the thirst of her grandchildren means a walk of nearly 2 miles to a dry riverbed. There, villagers have dug a hole that allows water to seep up from the ground. It is a slow process, so Gladys and the others who come to the spot often have to wait in line more than an hour to fill their containers with muddy water from the pit.

The walk home with this "reward" is also a challenge because the jerrycan she uses can become very heavy when it is full.

Because of Gladys' age and health, her older grandchildren usually assist with this exhausting process. When they do, it disadvantages the family again. Water collection often takes so long the children either arrive late to class or miss school altogether.

According to Cavnar, solving the water scarcity problem is a priority for Cross Catholic Outreach because a lack of clean water has a negative impact in so many areas of a poor family's life.

"One of our biggest concerns is the poor quality of the water they currently collect," he said. "The muddy stuff is often tainted with bacteria, parasites and the chemical runoff from local farms."

Gladys is aware of this threat too, but since there is no alternative, she sees no other way to proceed.

"We collect water which is very, very dirty, and then it will become very difficult for us and very unhealthy for our consumption," Gladys admitted. "This water is very dirty. It is very murky. At the same time, because we have no option, we have to drink it the way it is."

As bleak as this situation may seem,



Gladys Mghoi and her grandchildren face tremendous challenges obtaining their daily water supply. They currently walk far to collect contaminated water — because they have no other option. With the help of the Church, this hardship can end.

Gladys and her neighbors have a reason to feel hopeful. A local priest has become aware of the village's hardships and is working to provide relief through a partnership with Cross Catholic Outreach. [See story on opposite page.] If this project is successful, the challenges she faces in collecting water may soon be over.

"Our goal now is to get the financial backing of U.S. Catholics to fund this special project," Cavnar said. "If they respond generously, and I believe they will, we can ensure Gladys and her grandchildren have safe water to drink for many years to come."

Addressing specific needs like this is what Cross Catholic Outreach was founded to accomplish. For nearly 20 years, the Catholic ministry has partnered with a local Catholic priest, religious sisters or missions to solve the problems of the poor.

"U.S. Catholics have been very interested in helping the poor using our approach because they like funding specific needs and supporting the local Catholic clergy," Cavnar said. "They want their donated dollars to have a profound and lasting impact, so water projects are the kind of outreach they like best. Providing safe water addresses many needs — from quenching thirst to restoring health to supporting educational goals. In this case, it will also bring long-awaited relief to precious people like Gladys."

The grandmother confirmed that fact as

she explained yet another reason she sees the proposed water project as a blessing.

"It is not very safe for me to collect water as an elderly person, but since there is no alternative, we have to risk our lives," Gladys explained. "Sometimes because of my weakness, I can fall down. Sometimes there are also wild animals [such as] hyenas in the area."

These risks will also be eliminated when the water project is completed.

"I can't imagine the joy Gladys will feel when that tap is installed and the clean water flows freely. But I do know one thing — she and the others in her community will praise God," Cavnar said. "And what a joy it will be for us too. There's nothing more gratifying than serving as instruments of God's mercy!"

HOW TO HELP

To fund Cross Catholic Outreach's effort to help the poor worldwide, use the postage-paid brochure inserted in this newspaper or mail your gift to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC01837, PO Box 97168, Washington DC 20090-7168. The brochure also includes instructions on becoming a Mission Partner and making a regular monthly donation to this cause.

If you identify an aid project, 100% of the donation will be restricted to be used for that specific project. However, if more is raised for the project than needed, funds will be redirected to other urgent needs in the ministry.

#METOO AND CLERGY SEX ABUSE

*What young women have taught
me about the abuse crisis*

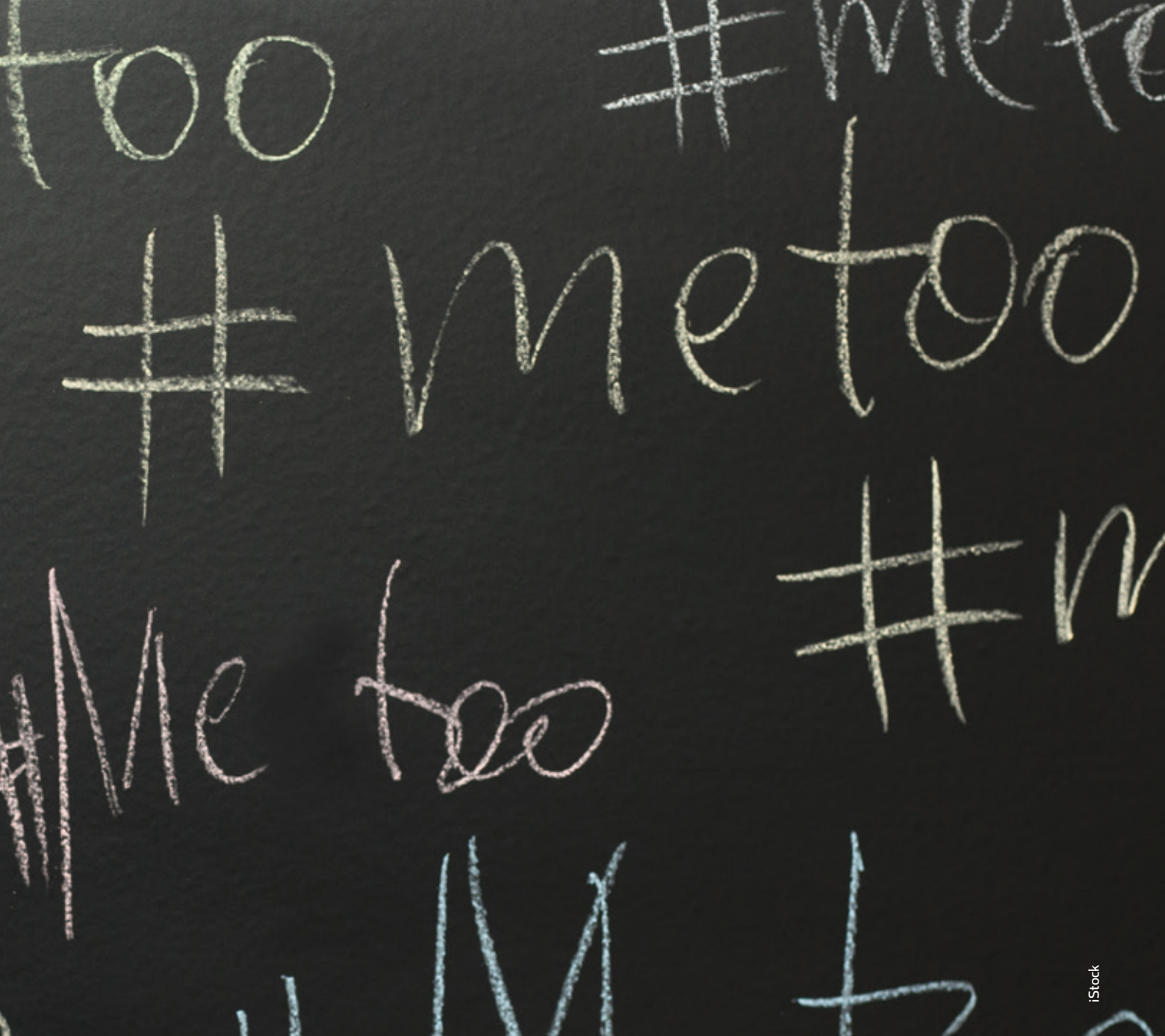
By Jessica Coblentz

Following the news about allegations of sexual abuse brought against then-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and the publication of a Pennsylvania grand jury report during the summer of 2018, I joined many Catholic theologians in considering how I would address still another surge of news about clergy sexual abuse in my college classroom. As a theology professor at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Ind., one of the nation's great Catholic women's colleges, I sensed that my undergraduate students deserved intellectual accompaniment as they confronted an issue that distinctly affected them. To speak with women about sexual abuse of any sort presents a unique situation, because women experience sexual assault of all kinds at

higher rates than men.

I also wanted to know what these young women would teach me—and the rest of the church—about living in a church marred by the scandal of sexual abuse by clergy. Now, two years later, I can say I have learned a great deal.

Each semester, I begin our three-week study of sexual abuse by members of the clergy by asking students what, if anything, they already know about the abuse scandal in the U.S. church. Most report little more than a general awareness that long ago some Catholic priests sexually abused children. Several students have belonged to parishes where accused priests were removed from ministry. Some have family members who are victim-survivors of clergy abuse.



iStock

Those who know about cover-up of abuse most often cite the Oscar-winning film “Spotlight” as their source of information, which leads some to presume that the problem of cover-up was local to Boston.

After taking in the sheer magnitude of sexual abuse by clergy throughout the United States and the world, and then learning about the broadscale dereliction by church leaders who covered up and enabled further abuse, my students are predictably outraged. However, their responses bear some distinctive features I had not anticipated, and these have been revealing.

One example surfaces when we discuss Episode 10 of “Deliver Us,” the podcast series on clerical sexual abuse

produced by **America** that serves as a key resource for the course. (Full disclosure: I am interviewed in episode 12 of the series.) In the podcast Maggi Van Dorn, **America**’s audio producer (and my dear friend), interviews the Rev. Boniface Ramsey, who reported suspicions about Cardinal McCarrick’s abuse of seminarians no fewer than five times before he was officially disciplined. When Ms. Van Dorn asks about his recollection that many people were aware of this unscrupulous behavior, Father Ramsey explains that though he reported this misconduct, “It never occurred to me that there was a cover-up or anything like that. I just accepted that everybody knew and nobody did anything. I didn’t necessarily attach a moral weight to that.... It was su-



This generation of women has embraced its responsibility to reflect on sexual power and right relationships.

premiely immoral, but I didn't know that. There was no category to put McCarrick's behavior in." Father Ramsey's acknowledgment of his naïveté often trips up students: They cannot fathom his loss for words. What was so difficult about recognizing and naming this harassment and abuse?

Conversations about this episode and the intricacies of abuse cover-up reflect my students' familiarity with the technicalities of consent. Though I—their millennial professor—am a mere 15 years older than my Gen Z students, we grew up in markedly different climates when it comes to the ethics of bodily self-determination. The highly publicized #MeToo movement framed my students' formative teenage years. Our campus, like other college campuses in the United States, offers extensive programming about prevention of sexual assault. As a result, these young women discuss the parameters of just and equal sexual relationships without pretense—perhaps all the more because of our single-gender classroom. They bring remarkable, unapologetic moral clarity to these conversations as well.

That these young women struggle to imagine a recent past that lacked their vocabulary for sexual violence and sophisticated discourse about consent might, to some, be a sign of their youthful naïveté. For me, it is a marker of the opposite: This generation of women has embraced its responsibility to reflect on sexual power and right relationships far more than I had embraced the same at their age, and they are right to see it as a strange moral failure that so many of us were content not to for so long. Because of what this generation takes for granted as normal, they possess a clear-eyed sense of how we have collectively failed victims of sexual violence.

My students' familiarity with the realities of sexual

violence probably informs another common response to our study of clergy sexual abuse. In nearly every course I have taught on this topic, there comes a point when an exasperated student raises her hand to inquire, "Why, after 12 years of Catholic schooling, is this the first time I'm really learning about the scope of clergy abuse and cover-up? Why didn't anyone tell me?" Always, these words are met with nods of agreement from around the room. Some students go on to explain that while they cannot remember a church without extensive rituals of child protection, there was little disclosure of why these procedures were put into place. There was also no talk of the long tolerance and broadscale cover-up of abuse by church leaders.

This tracks with the findings of a recent study done by **America** and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, which reports that just a third of adult Catholics said their parish community helped them process the clergy abuse crisis. Only 29 percent of the survey group had heard a homily on the topic, while a mere 26 percent belonged to a parish that hosted a listening group in response to the crisis.

Though all Catholics recognize, first, the scandal of sexual abuse by members of the clergy itself, and second, the widespread cover-up of that abuse as it unfolded, these young women are additionally scandalized by the relative silence about these matters in the everyday life of the church. I think of this as a "third scandal" that this generation confronts. Many perceive the absence of frank talk about this massive institutional sin as a cautionary sign that cover-up continues. They also see it as a mark of indifference.

To these students—who have seen firsthand in the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements how frank talk about injustice set into motion collective action and new possibilities for transformation—the church's inability to consistently name its sins at the local level and invite all Catholics into the work of transparency, repentance and reform is evidence that this institution is unwilling to take even the first step toward being saved from its sins.

Nevertheless, many of these young women—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—want to be a part of the transformation of the church. This has been another unexpected finding for me, for I have been aware that introducing students to the horrors of abuse by clergy could inspire disaffiliation. This is rarely their reaction to our studies, however, and I have wondered whether this, too, is a consequence of their generational distinctiveness.

I recently heard Donna Freitas, a survivor of abuse by

a member of the clergy, comment that today's "young women have been raised in an unsafe world." Though certainly there have always been individuals for whom safety was never taken for granted, Ms. Freitas is right that the ubiquity of #MeToo along with sexual assault awareness and prevention efforts have made clear to an entire group of young women that the institutions of the present protect no one from the possibility of grave harm. This is a devastating truth. But I have seen young women—rather than surrendering in despair—come together in hope of creating a better world for themselves and others. They have done it on our campuses and in the streets, and I hear their desire to aid in bringing about change in the church. Why? Perhaps because they have all been raised in an unsafe world, these young women do not have the "luxury of despair," as the feminist Kate Manne has called it. Their survival and future depend on the transformation of institutions that have disappointed and even hurt them.

Perhaps if we work to accompany them in the hard truths of sexual abuse by clerics and its cover-up and invite them to join us in the ongoing work of ecclesial transformation, this next generation of women will teach us what they already know about trying to change an unsafe world. Perhaps they will teach us how to cooperate with the Spirit to transform what has been for many years this unsafe church.

*Jessica Coblentz is an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies and Theology at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Ind., and the author of *Dust in the Blood: A Theology of Life with Depression* (Liturgical Press).*

Michelangelo's Late Drawings

By Kathryn Simmonds

Nearly blind, it's all behind him now.
Four scaffolded years risking a fall
like Adam's and the wrath of Julius
who struck him once for being slow.
Gone, the strength for travertine, all the figures
he could loosen have been freed,
and he's burned his studies, hundreds of them,
let them go, those young men twisting
in their mighty attitudes, bodies floating heavenwards
in specks of white. So much done, and yet he works
all night sometimes, light pooling
from the candle in his makeshift crown,
a stick of graphite as he fills what's left of time,
Love crucified, dying and living in the line.

Kathryn Simmonds's recent poems have appeared in Poetry Ireland Review, The New Statesman and The Montreal International Poetry Prize Anthology 2020.

Photo by Anukrati Omar/ Unsplash



The First Lesson I Learned in Retirement

***I am replaceable
(in a good way)***

By Valerie Schultz

Retirement is a more loaded proposition than I realized when I first decided to do it. In our society, we are overly defined by our jobs: Ask any stay-at-home mother about the ego-deflating reaction she gets when she answers the question, “What do you do?” If you aren’t out making money and proving your productivity, you are an unidentifiable blur. One pitfall of retirement is that when we are done doing, we might feel done being.

On the other hand, some of us put off retiring because we fear we are irreplaceable. We can’t leave now! We are

essential! Who will do all the things we do? Who will keep this place running? We may feel trapped by our perceived necessity to our workplace. We may feel we owe it to our co-workers to keep the ship afloat. Consequently, we may wait too long to retire.

One of the lessons I have learned in retirement, however, is this: We are all replaceable.

I mean this in a good way, not in a faceless-cog-in-a-machine way. Being irreplaceable is not the same as being unique. We are, of course, created by God as unique souls, fearfully and wonderfully made and all that, intimately known and loved by God as our individual selves. But we are totally replaceable in the marketplace. Professional life for everyone else goes on.

There is freedom in this realization.

I thought of this as I watched the absolutely unique American gymnast Simone Biles withdraw from Olympic competition in Tokyo for the sake of her mental health. One would have thought that Ms. Biles was surely irreplaceable in terms of our team's shot at gold medals and glory. But her withdrawal, which was the right and healthy choice for her personally, made room for another American gymnast, Suni Lee, to take her place in the spotlight.

And Ms. Lee won gold in the women's individual all-around final. Several other American gymnasts got the chance to compete in events for which they had not previously qualified. They got to "rise to the occasion," as my literary heroine Anne of Green Gables always said. "Simone Biles Can't Be Replaced," ran a CBS sports headline. But guess what? We can all be replaced. Without Simone Biles, the U.S. team won the silver medal. And perhaps America got a lesson in the unexpected grace of knowing one's limits and of being replaceable.

A tweet from Simone Biles herself makes the point best: "The outpouring [of] love and support I've received has made me realize I'm more than my accomplishments and gymnastics, which I never truly believed before."

She is much more. As are we all. Believe it.

The classic warning story—that no one on their deathbed ever expressed the wish that they'd spent more time at the office—is applicable to the folly of falling into the chasm of Irreplaceable Syndrome. Feeling irreplaceable in what we do for a paycheck may actually prevent us from awakening other gifts, other talents, other missions, other callings. It may blind us to our obligations to the people we love. It may make us ill, mentally, physically or spiritually.

When we realize we are replaceable, we give ourselves

permission to move on. We can close that work chapter with a clear conscience. We can take a different job. We can quit our day job and follow an enduring dream. We can learn a new skill. We can retire. We can rediscover things we used to love, used to do before we became so irreplaceable.

I once imagined I was irreplaceable. My solution was to find the perfect replacement so that I could go elsewhere with peace of mind. I left that job in what I thought were good hands. My replacement had worked alongside me and knew how everything should run. I was confident that every program I had started would continue without a hitch. "I hope I don't mess up," my replacement wrote in a farewell card from the whole staff, which should have given me pause.

Within a short time, I heard that my hand-picked replacement had been let go for having broken a bunch of workplace rules and perhaps a law. But the lesson for me was not that I was irreplaceable. It was that I had failed in my choice of replacement. I could only hope with all my heart that the departure of my replacement led to an opening for an unknown person with young blood and fantastic ideas to take over and *rule* that job.

Having finally retired, I understand that retirement is not as easy as going to work one day and then simply not going the next. You may feel disloyal for leaving your position. You may second guess the whole retirement deal. You may worry you'll commit the sin of irrelevance the next time someone asks you, "What do you do?" You may question your financial decisions. You may miss your co-workers. You may feel paralyzed by the weird amount of time on your hands. You may feel at loose ends without the structure of your job. You may crave the satisfaction of a job well done and the praise you get for it. You may even feel nostalgic for the work situations that drove you crazy. I experienced all of these things.

But I have also found that there's more to life than work, that I am replaceable in my job but urgently needed in other roles and relationships in my life. And that I still have plenty of work to do to flesh out and fulfill the unique person God created me to be.

Valerie Schultz is a freelance writer, a columnist for *The Bakersfield Californian* and the author of *Overdue: A Dewey Decimal System of Grace*. She and her husband, Randy, have four children and two grandchildren.



Searching for Relief

What living with chronic pain taught me about suffering

By Keara Hanlon

I live with chronic pain, and often it seems that no one really understands what this means. This is evidenced by the amount of well-intentioned but unsolicited advice and commentary I receive about my condition. I ask God to grant me patience with the next person who asks, “But have you ever tried hot yoga?” after I mention that nothing works for the pain.

For the most part, well-meaning people try to reassure me that my situation is all part of God’s plan, that some important lesson will be learned from this in time, or that at the very least, I will come out of my struggle a stronger person. I nod along and quietly wonder if it is possible that I am really so uniquely stupid that God’s teaching for me

had to come in the form of such a particularly painful and extreme pedagogy.

I know they don’t mean it that way, I really do. But sometimes that is how I feel. And if there ever really was a lesson, I’ve learned it: I took the blessing of good health for granted before. Now what?

Chronic pain is defined as pain that is ongoing, often lasting for longer than six months. By the time I had a diagnosis for my chronic pain, a name for the monster that had robbed me of my dreams of continuing marching band in college, I had been experiencing it for four years. I got the news in a chilly and fluorescent-lit hospital room in Boston. I remember sitting atop the exam table, sniffing anx-

iously under two layers of masks and feeling small despite my 5'9" frame, as my feet dangled above the white tile.

I wished more than anything that my mom could have been there to sit with me, to hold my hand as she did when I was young, but instead I was alone. No extra visitors were allowed to enter the hospital because of Covid-19. When the doctor confirmed my diagnosis—thoracic outlet syndrome—I was too numb to fully absorb the gravity of the moment, which at this point had been years in the making.

Having chronic pain, especially as a young person, can often feel lonely and isolating. At doctors' appointments I pass through waiting rooms filled with patients old enough to be my grandparents, a reminder that people my age are not meant to be in a place like this. Receptionists look confused to see me until I give my name and they find me on their schedule. I've learned to try to see the humor in it. I once quipped to a nurse who commented on my youth that "I've always been told I'm mature for my age."

When it all started four years ago, I was at my first-year orientation at Boston College. It was July, and it was hot. The day started off well enough. I felt like I was standing on the precipice of my future. Caught up in the new friends I was making and the promise of exciting

college traditions I would get to share in, I tried to ignore the fact that my shoulder was beginning to hurt as the day went on. My backpack was just heavy, I thought.

That was the last day I woke up pain-free. In a few weeks, when pins and needles surged through the fingers in my left hand, I knew that this was more than soreness from a heavy backpack. I was frustrated, assuming that I had injured myself right before college. By the end of freshman year I had to finally accept that this was not just an injury.

I started buying lidocaine patches from the CVS in Cleveland Circle just to get through the day. As I shuttled from appointment to appointment—in three different states and over several years, as I transitioned from college in Boston to summers at home in Texas and then moved to Chicago—the documents delineating my medical history piled up but left me no closer to resolution or relief. Last fall in Boston, I got my answer. I'm still searching for the relief.

I prefer not to assign meaning to my suffering or at-

tempt to glean wisdom from my pain, but I have decided to look for a silver lining. It is hard to find one when at the end of a long day my back aches and I feel much older than 22. It is easier to feel angry and alone, and to ask, "Why me?" But when the fog of self-pity clears, there is this realization: I am not actually alone. Quite the opposite.

Suffering is endemic to the human condition. It strikes me as profound that as a baby is born and takes their first breath, it is not a laugh or a smile but a cry that tells us they are alive. It is as if to say, "Congratulations, kid. Life is tough. And this is only the beginning."

Pain is both relative and relatable. We feel it in different ways and to varying degrees, but everyone knows suffering. And if I must suffer, then at least I am in good company. In fact, I could not be less alone.

Even those who do not experience chronic illnesses are familiar with the suffering of humanity. In the last 17 months alone, the world has grieved the losses from Covid-19, the destruction of an earthquake in Haiti and a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. And of course, amid each of these shared crises, there are the more acute and personal sufferings of "normal" life, the loneliness, hurt and heartbreak with which everyone is acquainted to some degree. Everyone has burdens they are carrying.

For a long time I didn't tell anyone what I was going through. But as others chose to be vulnerable with me about their own experiences of pain, loss and suffering, I too began to open up. What at first was scary and strangely personal became a tremendous relief. Suffering is a double burden when it is secret, when you are paranoid someone will notice the thing you hate about yourself or your circumstances. But it can offer us a bridge when we are willing to reach out to others, because it is one of the few things that permeates every human experience. We may not be able to take away someone's pain, and sometimes it is not our place to try, but we might alleviate their loneliness by admitting we have suffered too.

Suffering bonds us in brokenness with our brothers and sisters in humanity. Furthermore, it brings us into communion with Christ in the Eucharist through his ultimate sacrifice of suffering death on the cross. Jesus could never have been fully human without this intimate knowledge of earthly suffering. Even in our tiny and sometimes seemingly inconsequential lives, we have this in common with Jesus. And perhaps, more than anyone, he truly understands.

Keara Hanlon is a Joseph A. O'Hare fellow at America and a graduate of Boston College.



CNS photo/Kevin Lamarque, Reuters

THE GOOD SAMARITANS OF TWITTER

How strangers came together to welcome Afghan refugees to their new home

By Shannon Last

As images of desperate Afghan refugees flooded the news recently, I felt overwhelmed by my own inadequacy. The director of Catholic Charities' migrant and refugee services in my home diocese of Arlington posted a wish list on Amazon of concrete needs that was daunting in its variety and expense: furniture, kitchenware, bedding, electronics. I shipped some flatware and sheets for their staff to distribute and immediately felt worse. What does a few hundred dollars do for tens of thousands of displaced people?

I suspected others felt equally helpless and wanted to do something more meaningful for our new neighbors. Then I remembered some advice my grandmother once

gave me. And I logged on to Twitter.

...

My granny, Mary Byrnes, had a treasury of wisdom so simple I've been unpacking it for decades. My favorite was this: "Spread your arms a little wider."

She would say it joyfully as we sardined together for family photos. She would say it archly when we were not being as forbearing as we ought. She would say it prayerfully, reminding us to be open to God's plan.

One afternoon she explained that the piles of yarn all over her sofa were for something her women's club was making for people in need. "They need potholders?" I asked dubiously, glancing at a bright stack of cotton

Afghan refugees aboard a bus taking them to a refugee processing center upon their arrival at Dulles International Airport in Dulles, Va., on Aug. 25.

squares. “Each of us knits a bunch of squares,” she clarified, “and then Jean stitches them all together into an afghan.”

Granny patiently taught my 10-year-old fingers how to knit. She sensed my frustration as all my contributions came out as trapezoids. She said gently, “It doesn’t need to be perfect to keep someone warm.”

•••

On Twitter, I shared the Amazon wish list and asked if anyone would like to pool resources to purchase bigger-ticket items. By that evening, people from all over had sent me nearly \$7,700.

It bought nine cribs, seven twin beds, four full beds and two queen beds, plus mattresses, sheets, pillows, blankets and comforters for all of them. There was enough for four dining sets, dishes, bath towels, diapers, personal products and school supply kits. I tearfully updated my Twitter feed and fell asleep with a thankful heart.

I awoke to discover the total had jumped to \$11,321. I stood in my kitchen smashing the “submit order” button like Oprah giving away cars: more cribs and beds and sheets, more fluffy towels and floor lamps, more sweet soaps and soft blankets.

I meditate often on the hours leading up to the Nativity, the moment where light and love itself entered a place devoid of all such comforts. The Holy Family had only what they could carry. As time drew short, the guardians of God could not even find an inn. Not for the first time would his parents suffer the knowledge that they could not not alter his fate.

Mary did the only thing she could do: “She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.” In that moment, Christ needed nothing more than what she was able to offer. It was enough.

Walter Ciszek, S.J., explores this same idea in his spiritual memoir, *He Leadeth Me*. In his struggle to understand and carry out God’s will, Ciszek realized how much energy can be wasted on the abstract mission of discernment.

“God does not expect a man single-handedly to change the world or overthrow all evil or cure all ill,” Father Ciszek reminds us. “God’s will was not hidden somewhere ‘out there’ in the situations in which I found myself; the situations themselves *were* his will for me.”

Doing God’s will doesn’t require dramatics, heroism or even self-reflection. It means recognizing the needs in the people and situations God puts before us every hour of the day: changing the next diaper, preparing the next meal, meeting the next deadline.

Or, today, responding to a post on social media. That’s “not real life,” we say, and pass by, like the priest and Levite

in Luke 10.

The Samaritans on Twitter were moved with compassion by this unfathomable tragedy and offered concrete help. They Venmo’d their coins into the void with the instruction, “Please put this toward whatever is urgently needed.” Most of them told me they wished they could do more. “It doesn’t need to be perfect to keep someone warm,” I heard my granny say.

God only asks that we help handle the “too big to handle” one act of love at a time, trusting it will add up. More than 100 real people recently sent real money to buy real home goods that went to real refugees who really arrived at Dulles Airport. We welcomed the stranger by providing comfortable beds and soft pillows on which to lay their anxious heads and crisp sheets and cozy blankets to receive their weary bodies.

Mary’s first gift to her Savior was to meet his first, most immediate need. It was her first gift to me, too, mediated through another faithful Mary, two millennia later.

Shannon Last is a writer and editor in Virginia.

Nativity MISSION CENTER



Photo courtesy Nativity/Miguel Coalition

‘The Transformative Experience of My Life’

By J.D. Long-García

How a Nativity student grew up to lead the national coalition

In no small way, the absence of girls at Nativity Mission Center in lower Manhattan dampened Daniel Pérez’s interest in enrolling. On top of that, he would have to stay at school until later in the day—4 or 5 p.m. At the Catholic school he had been attending since kindergarten, he was released at 2:30 p.m. And yes, unlike at Nativity, there were girls there.

That’s not to mention the seven weeks of summer camp students attended to teach them independence and to keep them out of trouble over the break. Mr. Pérez, a New Yorker by birth, had no interest in leaving the city for the wilderness—and certainly not for that much time.

Still, his friends who began attending Nativity as sixth graders wouldn’t stop talking about it. So his parents enrolled him in what was then called the Brother Lawrence program, a special process for new applicants. Every Saturday, from October through April, applicants would go to Nativity for a couple hours for math lessons, to read books as a group and to socialize. The program gave both pro-

spective students and teachers the chance to evaluate each other. Mr. Pérez was invited to camp that summer and enrolled in the school as a seventh grader shortly thereafter.

“Looking back at it, I would say it’s the transformative experience of my life,” Mr. Pérez told **America** of spending seventh and eighth grade at Nativity. “The Nativity model provides students and families a second home, and in some cases, a first home.”

The Jesuit-run middle school, which serves immigrant and generationally impoverished communities, would open at 7:15 a.m. and have breakfast available. Students were in class from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m., with study hall going until 4:30 p.m. Students could also return at 6 p.m. to study at the school for a couple of more hours, as needed.

For many of the students, the camp was the first time they had been hiking and where they learned how to swim. “It was the first time being away from our families for that long, doing our own laundry and making our own beds,” Mr. Pérez said. “There were a lot of learning experiences

Nativity Mission Center, pictured here in the 1970s, was founded by the Jesuits in 1971 in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The center is now part of a coalition of 49 schools across the United States that follow its model for educating underserved children.

that, as a student, you're like 'Oh, why do we have to do this?' But as an adult, you realize how impactful they were for your growth."

Mr. Pérez went on to Xavier High School in New York. As a sophomore, he became the receptionist at Nativity, a position the school offers to alumni so they can stay involved in the community. That is part of the graduate support program, through which the school helps students navigate high school and college applications and offers financial support.

Mr. Pérez then went to the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. He became a big brother when a Nativity school opened in the area, and he invited his Holy Cross friends to participate.

"It was exciting to see a new school started in Worcester and in the city that I was in, but also it is a bit daunting to kind of start the tradition of a Nativity school, primarily because there is no history there," Mr. Pérez said, explaining that Nativity had already operated in New York for decades before he enrolled.

When he was at Nativity in New York, alumni would come back to his school, play basketball with the students and share their experiences of high school and college. But Worcester students could not count on alumni yet. It was difficult to implement a study hall, uniforms and an extended day.

"I would hear the students complain here and there," he said. "But it was a great experience because you could see the program working. The first couple of months, the students had a hard time interacting. But they became more comfortable and confident in the system."

The program in Worcester has continued for the last 15 years and is flourishing, Mr. Pérez said.

"It just speaks to the beauty of the model itself of the small classroom, small school," he said. The small setting creates a community that is like a second family, he said, and the school becomes like a second home.

After his bachelor's degree, Mr. Pérez received his master's from Fordham University. He served as teacher, counselor and then principal of Nativity Mission School in New York, which celebrated its 50th anniversary this September. He then became the principal of St. Aloysius School in Harlem until it closed, and then served as assistant principal for academics of LaSalle Academy.

Mr. Pérez, 37, is now the executive director of the NativityMiguel Coalition, a national network of faith-based schools that follow the Nativity model for helping children prepare for rigorous high school curricula. The coalition of 49 schools brings together Nativity and San Miguel

Schools, which were founded by the Christian Brothers. Episcopal schools and centers run by religious sisters are also part of the network. Jack Podsiadlo, S.J., who spent decades serving at the Nativity Mission Center in New York, was a key figure in establishing the network.

Typically, students at these schools qualify for the federal reduced lunch program. Students often come from immigrant families or from generationally impoverished communities, Mr. Pérez said, noting that 46 percent of students are Latino and 40 percent are black. His parents, Gildardo and Carmen, immigrated to New York from Mexico in the 1970s.

"I was fortunate to have parents who regarded education as a top priority," said Mr. Pérez, the second of three children in his family. "And you probably would hear this a lot in many of our Nativity schools."

In addition to academics, Mr. Pérez said the schools develop students' character. "It is a time where they develop and get a sense of who they are and what they're capable of," he said. "And I'll speak from experience: It was a time for me to, like, really be myself. I never felt as if I had to conform to a certain way. Yes, I had to conform to the uniform and to, you know, the going down the stairs quietly or sitting in rows. But, you know, the teachers and the faculty and someone like Father Jack [Podsiadlo] were never asking us to be something we were not."

That, according to Mr. Pérez, helps explain why the model is successful. "Our schools are successful because we're a community. It is beyond just academic proficiency and growth," he said, noting that Father Podsiadlo spoke Spanish and Masses at his school were bilingual.

"The small size allows for much more interpersonal relationships with families, and you're with them for sometimes four years, maybe even five," Mr. Pérez said. "What we do highlights, celebrates and uplifts the communities in which we find ourselves serving. It is much more about who you are as an individual and who your family is and what they want."

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

JESUIT SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

Jesuit School Spotlight is a monthly feature focusing on Jesuit middle and secondary schools from around the country. It is underwritten in part by Jesuit high schools of the USA East Province of the Society of Jesus.





Glennon Doyle, Your Family Is Not an Island By Anna Keating



Greg Wahl-Stephens/AP Images for WME Live ventures, LLC

Glennon Doyle, seated next to her wife, Abby Wambach, has a knack for tapping into the zeitgeist of progressive, female suburbia.

When Glennon Doyle speaks, women listen. Doyle is part memoirist, part life coach. And she has a knack for tapping into the zeitgeist of progressive, white, female suburbia. Doyle's most recent memoir, *Untamed*, is about falling in love with the professional soccer star Abby Wambach, ending her unhappy marriage to Craig Melton and building a new life as a blended family.

It's a good story and has been a New York Times bestseller for over 77 consecutive weeks. Doyle's ideas matter; many people take them as gos-

pel. She describes her Instagram followers as a "church," while throwing shade at actual churches: "Religion is for people who don't want to go to hell. Spirituality is for people who've already been there."

I am a fan of Doyle's old-school feminism. She is at her best when encouraging women to model loving their lives instead of teaching their children by example that being a mother is about being miserable. Women do need to be reminded that it is okay to build a life that is very different from the life that their parents or their culture might have imagined for them.

But some of Doyle's other ideas, like the notion that your nuclear or chosen family is an "island," are symptomatic of a New Puritanism that is dividing our country. New Puritans on the left and the right are creating echo chambers by encouraging their adherents to end friendships, cut off family members and cancel their neighbors on social media for wrong-think, or even ambivalence.

In the chapter "Islands," Doyle writes that her mother, who lives in another state, was having a hard time accepting her decision to divorce her husband and marry Wambach. Doyle spends a great deal of emotional energy trying to get her mom to understand what Doyle knew in her bones: That this was the best, truest and most life-giving decision for herself and her family. Doyle doesn't say that her mother was abusive or homophobic, but that she was worrying and calling her worry love.

In one of the book's "aha mo-

ments," which Doyle describes as "the moment I became an adult," she explains to her mom over the phone that she can't come visit her grandchildren until she can come without any hang-ups. Doyle says, "When you are ready to come to our island with nothing but wild acceptance and joy and celebration for our true beautiful family we'll lower the drawbridge for you. But not one second sooner."

As she has done in all her other books, Doyle once again has her finger on the pulse of a certain kind of Americana. Indeed, more parents are estranged from their adult children than ever before. Joshua Coleman writes in *The Atlantic*: "Deciding which people to keep in or out of one's life has become an important strategy to achieve happiness. While there's nothing especially modern about family conflict or a desire to feel insulated from it, conceptualizing the estrangement of a family member as an expression of personal growth as it is commonly done today is almost certainly new."

Contemporary Western culture hates unchosen bonds. The dependence of children on their parents, and aging parents on their adult children, is a problem for us. It attacks the myth of the self-made woman and limits her freedom to choose herself. So being an island taps into a powerful fantasy.

I admit: Putting one's individual needs over the needs of the collective is appealing to me. Sharing DNA with someone does not mean you have anything in common with them. Relationships with people who have known you your whole life but don't always understand you are difficult. It is hard to acknowledge that you weren't parented perfectly, that your parents weren't parented perfectly and that your own children have not been parented per-



We need more villages and fewer islands, especially now.

factly. But to know this is forgiveness.

As Sebastian Junger writes in his book *Tribe*, people in affluent societies like our own are eight times more likely to experience depression, anxiety and other serious mental illnesses. He theorizes that this is because in affluent societies we have “perfected the art of making people not feel necessary.” Elderly people in particular often feel irrelevant and cast aside, most seeing their adult children less than once a year.

In the not-so-distant past, our ancestors lived in societies in which they were almost never alone. Parents raised their children with other adults around. They weren’t alone with their kids all day, scrolling Instagram for some sense of connection. In a tribe, in a village, in a real extended family, everyone took part or it didn’t work.

Today, the self as an island is largely a class-specific idea. A large extended family network is still valued by many working-class and immigrant communities. When you are poor and your car breaks down, guess who helps you fix it? When you need childcare after hours, guess who watches your kids? Working-class people and many people of color still understand that there are practical and emotional benefits to living close to sisters, aunts,

cousins and friends who are like family, even when that means putting up with their foibles.

As Catholics, we have a similar worldview. For us, the basic unit of society is the family (and by extension our local church), not the individual. In households we learn how to dialogue with difficult people—homophobic uncles are still part of our family, even as we hope they will learn the error of their ways. The Catholic view of family is a school for holiness.

Doyle’s concept of her family as an island, on the other hand, is a gospel for rich, able-bodied people who can afford to hire help. It is a gospel for suburbia. It is a gospel for big homes with giant yards and neighbors who don’t really know one another because they don’t really need to know one another. But for most of human history, people made it through hard times by knowing and caring for one another, and we’re still wired to feel happier when we do.

There are spiritual benefits, too. Knowing your enemies humanizes them to you and you to them. Our country is polarized by political tribalism and the childish belief that everyone who disagrees with you is not only morally wrong but not worth talking to. We are hyper-divided—not just in

our families but at work, at school and even in our neighborhoods.

I live in the same mostly affluent, mostly white neighborhood that I grew up in. When I was a kid, yard signs came out at election time and then they went in the trash. Today people keep yard signs up and huge flags on their trucks year round, often with hostile “political” messages on them. Face-to-face relationships with people who are very different from us are an antidote to this division. Family is sitting together around a table. It is encounter.

We need more villages and fewer islands, especially now. Part of why parenting during the pandemic has been so exhausting is because we weren’t meant to raise our children all alone. So it seems worth noting that the notion of family that Doyle is describing in *Untamed*, a couple alone with their kids, is relatively new. It is a concept embraced primarily by people who define their success by their ability to *never have to ask anyone for help*—unless you count the army of paid helpers, the people who cook their meals, dry clean their clothes, mow their lawns and throw the ball with their kids.

Of course, Doyle and anyone else navigating adulthood and divorce and coming out to parents has my empathy. It is incredibly hard, and everyone’s situation is unique. Sometimes a family member is abusive or has an untreated mental illness or addiction, and ending a relationship is the best choice. But most people need forgiveness. Most people change not by being ostracized but by being embraced. And change is slow.

It is possible to set a firm boundary without cutting someone off,

though doing so is made extra hard if our own parents have modeled estrangement. But it is possible to break the cycle and to teach your own children that you can love someone who is deeply flawed. As Richard Rohr, O.F.M., writes, “If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it.”

We need more aging parents who are willing to do their own emotional work and to apologize when they screw up and overstep their bounds. And we need more adult children who can say both, “It is painful that there are parts of my life that are beautiful and good and true that my relatives will never understand” and, “It’s wonderful how good my family is to my children.” What would the world look like if we modeled for our children that family is family no matter what—that at our table, sinners are welcome?

Instead, some of purity culture’s biggest critics are often the quickest to develop new purity tests.

John Donne famously wrote: “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that life is short and fragile and that most of us still need someone to call when we’re sick or in crisis or feel like we can’t carry on. For most of human history, that has meant relying on people we didn’t choose, but who also didn’t choose us.

Anna Keating is the co-author of *The Catholic Catalogue: A Field Guide to the Daily Acts That Make Up a Catholic Life* (Penguin Random House). She co-owns and lives above Keating Woodworks, a handmade furniture studio in Colorado. Her essays appear in *The Hedgehog Review*, *Notre Dame Magazine* and elsewhere.

Meditations on an Apple

By Bryce Taylor

Candle body, stem wick,
always hinting at flame.

If not for my eyes there is
no red, only red’s potential.
Thus no apple shape or size
at all.

Whether you’re pie or cider
some of you will be human
and some in the sewer.

Your name was a freighted net
catching all kinds of fruit
till the others left
and you were left.

What is it with us wanting you
in particular to have been
forbidden?

Something will eat you rotten
if I don’t ripe.

A million trees led up to one
little you, in whom perhaps there
hide a hundred million more
or none.

Bryce Taylor’s fiction and poetry have appeared in *Image*, *Literary Orphans*, *Dappled Things*, *Macrina Magazine* and *Lydwine Journal*.



Data-Crunching for Parents

Emily Oster encourages parents to have a "mission statement" for their families.

The Brown University economist Emily Oster, author of the best-selling *Expecting Better* (2013) and *Cribsheet* (2019), is back with a third book on how to apply the principles of economics to parenting.

In *The Family Firm*, Oster wades through the data on questions relevant to many parents of school-age kids: extracurriculars, camp, sleep and so on. But the book is less about the data itself and more about how to frame decisions on these topics and others in the most effective, logical and efficient way using what Oster calls the "four F's"—frame the question, fact-find, final decision and follow up. Oster encourages parents to have a "mission statement" for their families, just like they would for any firm where they do paid work, and then apply the four F's to a given decision through the lens of that over-

arching ambition. Throughout the book, Oster uses both examples from her own life with two children and hypothetical scenarios to demonstrate the practicability and virtues of this decision-making process.

Implicit in Oster's guidance is the understanding that family life requires the same explicit articulation of purpose and goals as any professional endeavor. The fact that many view parenting as sacred work does not render that work any less subject to the imperatives of, say, cost-benefit analysis than any other kind of work. You cannot add one more product line to your business's repertoire without a foundational knowledge of the product's production costs and its likely sale value, as well as your firm's long-term mission and its short-term priorities. Neither can you add one extracurricular activity to your fami-

ly's weeks without a clear sense of the commitment required (and its likely duration and trajectory), as well as the specific mission and goals unique to your own "family firm."

In me Oster has an enthusiastic cheerleader and a willing (if still sometimes wanting) disciple. My dad is a social scientist, too, and I am a good student. So long before I became a parent or even heard of Oster, I was striving to focus on data filtered through the lens of my values and separated from the impetus of my emotions to make decisions about family life and about everything else.

So I find Oster's broad guidance on parenting useful in many ways. Economically based parental decision-making? Check! Been there, been doing that. As I wrote in an earlier piece on *Cribsheet* ("The End of Parenting" 11/25/19), Oster's guid-

The Family Firm
A Data-Driven Guide to Better Decision Making
in the Early School Years
By Emily Oster
Penguin Press
320p \$28

ance on early parenting hot topics like breastfeeding, screen time and sleep training gave me a succinct counterweight to any lingering, irrational guilt over making what had in fact been the optimal decisions for my family. Hooray for the data—and forget about the sacred cows.

Yet, for me, Oster's guidance in *The Family Firm* is more humbling than validating. Compared with the cool, comprehensive deliberation Oster describes taking place in her household, my own discernment often seems irreducibly conflicted, and in ways that Oster's decision-making framework cannot always solve.

I am a controlling person. I am the kind of mom that puts hard caps on the number of Christmas presents my kids receive and schedules everything in advance. Yet if my son wanted to try out for his elementary school's musical, it would not cross my mind to say anything other than "good luck," and worry about any frustrating but temporary wrenches to my preferred family schedule afterward.

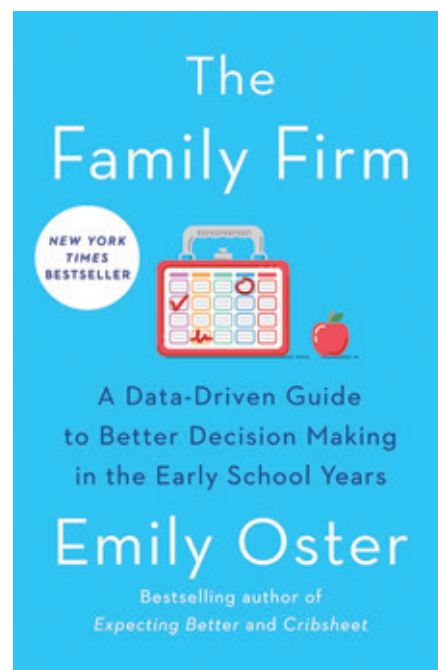
Oster approached the same situation quite differently. She ran a decision about her daughter's participation in the school production of "Frozen" through the "four F's" the way I would have run a decision about something much more persistently time-consuming, less seasonal and less communally oriented—like travel basketball or youth orchestra. Her daughter did not try out for the play; it would have conflicted for a time with one of Oster's priorities: family dinner, nightly at six o'clock.

This anecdote leaves me impressed, troubled and jealous.

I am impressed by Oster's consistent adherence to her family mission and priorities, as well as by her confidence in her method. And I am challenged to be more intentional about drawing firmer and more frequent boundaries around my family's priorities, rather than reflexively saying yes to things, or sliding into commitments that do not serve our broader family mission.

Simultaneously, though, I am troubled by the implicit presumption in this anecdote and throughout the book that most parents have options when it comes to things like extracurriculars. It is true that most of Oster's readers likely do have multiple and competing opportunities—but, of course, many people do not. For those without the kinds of privileges that Oster's family and mine enjoy, choosing among extracurricular options might not be a consideration, because access to even one worthwhile, affordable activity is the more pressing concern.

Finally, I am jealous because part of me craves the kind of total independence that Oster demonstrates in this story—the kind of control I had when I dumped the breast pump and broke out the formula. There is a simple antidote to my jealousy, of course: If I want to prioritize a few weeks of nuclear family dinner over something like the school play, I can. Just as I can prioritize my baby's nap time over a family party; my 4-year-old's healthy eating over a meal with his grandmother; or my 6-year-old's "to-



tal responsibility" for getting himself ready for school sans scaffolding (the way Oster suggests transferring tasks) over the rest of us being on time.

But it turns out that for my husband and me, that kind of total autonomy is incompatible with the way in which we are choosing to live out our family mission. That is, we are constrained by the professional, geographic and educational decisions we have already made, and the spirit in which we have made them.

We have chosen, over and over, not to be a nuclear family firm.

I could picture choosing differently and pursuing our broader family mission in a less conventional, more iconoclastic way. Like homeschooling my kids. Or moving far away from family and friends. Or instead of taking multigenerational, family-focused trips to the Jersey shore and Ohio, taking nuclear family excursions to distant ski resorts. There are great reasons why many people make these choices, of course, and I could imagine circumstances under which I might make any or all of them myself.



Hooray for the data—and forget about the sacred cows.

But what I cannot imagine is having chosen to be part of a school community or part of an extended family and then choosing to defer to our toddler's bedtime or our family dinner hour over a given (temporary, bounded, communally central) event. Because those very disruptions to our nuclear family priorities are at the heart of our macro-level mission: to teach our young sons that our nuclear family, though the center of our world, is not the center of the world. Rather, it is a sacred means to the holy end of walking with and serving others.

To accomplish this mission feels daunting, even unlikely in a world where “parenting alone” is the emerging norm. And despite my quibbles with the book's limitations and my frustration with the ways in which it reveals my own, *The Family Firm* is a resource worth having on that journey.

Elizabeth Grace Matthew works in online education at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Pa.

Tales Ancient and New

Sigmund Freud is supposed to have said that there is no such thing as an accident. We behave in certain ways—often toxic or destructive ways—whose origins we are only

dimly aware of. We are, ultimately, inscrutable to ourselves. That is at least one of the reasons why people like Mariana, the psychotherapist protagonist of Alex Michaelides's *The Maidens*, stays employed.

Of course, as one character points out, a psychotherapist is, etymologically speaking, a “healer of souls,” and it is Mariana's soul that is in need of repair first of all. Her impossibly perfect partner, Sebastian, has drowned off the coast of Naxos, and he and his death occupy almost all of her thoughts. Despite her best efforts, she cannot bring herself to discard his possessions. In the middle of her own grief and crisis, she also has others to think about: her clients, including the highly volatile Henry, and her orphaned niece, Zoe.

Other tragedies await Mariana. The body of Tara, a friend of Zoe's at the University of Cambridge, is found slashed to ribbons in the woods. And so Mariana must return, with some trepidation, to the place where she and Sebastian met and fell hopelessly in love.

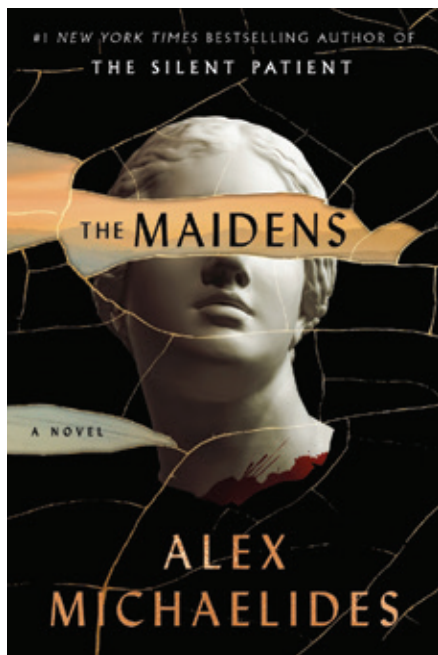
What follows is a taut and diligently plotted detective story. Mariana, whose intuitions are predictably dismissed by the inspector handling the case, decides to remain in Cambridge and get to the bottom of things herself. Sebastian is painfully present to her in Cambridge, and at times he appears in the guise of a guardian an-

gel, pressing Mariana on and giving her strength. (At one point, Mariana comes upon a statue of an angel and thinks it looks like Sebastian, which is really not to give the reader any credit at all.)

The murder, Mariana learns, is bound up with Greek tragedy and myth. And so it is fitting that at the center of the mystery around Tara's untimely demise is Professor Edward Fosca, a dazzling American expatriate and classics professor. He is the kind of teacher whose lectures students line up to watch. Fosca has a loyal student clique of “maidens,” an exclusive study group whose parties, we are told (in low, conspiratorial tones), are pretty wild.

The Maidens unapologetically takes the tone of a thriller. Readers should not expect sumptuous and dreamlike evocations of an old university town fondly remembered, as in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. Michaelides knows his genre (and his protagonist; he was himself trained as a psychotherapist), deftly controlling the flow of information and teasing us at times with snippets of story written on a typewriter by the ostensible villain.

Occasional citations from Tenneyson, Aristotle (the author may have had the *Poetics* in mind at times while he was writing) and others intensify the book's carefully built sense of tension. Hardly a word is



The Maidens

By Alex Michaelides

Celadon Books

352p \$27.99

wasted, let alone a chapter. And there is a smattering of memorable set-piece moments; a scene in which Mariana runs a group therapy session stands out in particular.

Coincidences and clues accumulate in the plot like brushstrokes of paint on a canvas, coming together at a satisfying pace to form an image. But—and this is apt—one has the distinct impression that no one can truly be trusted, including the protagonist, who is naturally more aware than most of our inexhaustible capacity to hide inconvenient truths from ourselves. Michaelides has our heroine Mariana encounter both overtly sinister types and people who seem sinister by dint of not being sinister at all. Some of these characters do come across as obvious, shifty, red-herring types. But there is a real paranoia that

colors *The Maidens* and mirrors Mariana's mental landscape as she makes her way through Cambridge, asking question after question.

The novel has its flaws. Take the charismatic Professor Fosca, Mariana's primary suspect. He is aching-ly handsome, charming, literate; he likes classical music. And, of course, he likes his meat *rare*. There are other well-worn tropes of commercial horror fiction. If Martin Amis is right in saying that good literature avoids cliché—well, you catch my drift. The inevitable twist, it has to be said, is entirely predictable, and from pretty early on. Michaelides also has that slightly trying habit of ending chapters with a single ominous sentence. But (I'm ashamed to say) it succeeds in making the reader feel compelled—even *obliged*—to read on. Clichéd or not, Michaelides knows how storytelling works.

The plot's superficial similarities to Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* are so obvious that it would be dull to devote much time to them here, though it is perhaps worth acknowledging that they are only superficial; in fact, the two books have very little of real significance in common. The author who most comes to mind while reading *The Maidens* is Dan Brown, a writer often dismissed as a mere entertainer, as if there were something wrong with entertainment. But Michaelides imbues this story with an almost palpable atmosphere of uncertainty, the discomfiting sense that one is not being told the *whole* story.

The Maidens is entertaining as well as readable in a single sitting, which is the best way to enjoy a book of this kind. Take it all in all and on its own terms, and it will prove a very

welcome addition to the genre: a well-wrought, satisfying, psychological detective tale begging on every page to be adapted for the screen—something that is indeed already in the works.

Harry Readhead is a writer and editor from London. He writes about politics and literature for publications like *The Guardian*, *The New Statesman* and *The Times Literary Supplement*.

Finding Redemption

“What you most fear is where you must go,” an ancient sage or a Jordan B. Peterson or an Instagram caption may tell you. For writers, the phrase is a little different: What you most fear is what you must write. I will not pretend to trace knowledge of another being's inner universe, but with *Black Sunday*, Tola Rotimi Abraham has done this—whether the fear is hers, yours or mine.

Black Sunday wrenches open a plantain-yellow fortune cookie, and the fortune inside is one you maybe wish you hadn't paid for, one some part of you might even wish you could unread, even though deep down somewhere you know it to be true and are glad for the reckoning. The fortune: Sometimes things don't turn out okay for some people. Sometimes they just don't.

Is this a fist threatening God's goodness? Is this a rejection of the reality of grace and redemption? We would like to escape our shadow side by becoming Christ, but it is as much a part of us as the skin that holds us together.

Tola Rotimi Abraham is from Lagos, Nigeria. She writes this, her debut novel, with one foot placed in the inti-



This book feels like a challenge—how will you redeem all of this? 🔴

mate and communal confines of Lagos and the other inside her characters' heads. Her writing is wed to the real dust on working kids' shoes, the real sexual awakening and sexual trauma and abuse that happens behind closed doors and in the dirt, the limping faith in an incomplete God.

Abraham, an Iowa Writers' Workshop graduate, makes the reader forget there is a creator behind it all. *Black Sunday* is a story made of stories, a thousand thought patterns and sensory memories laid between the separate but entwined psychic universes of four siblings: Bibike, Ariyike, Andrew and Peter. The four alternate through first-person chapters alive with their unique and vivid points of view, telling the story of a Nigerian family in Lagos that splinters when the mother leaves, then the father. Four children are left to be raised by their grandmother, Yoruba proverbs and an unrelenting shadow-world that is often housed under the roof of church and monstrosity.

You are in 9-year-old Peter's body when an old nail's tetanus raises the prospect that he will lose his arm. You are taught that some people let their chickens loose in the woods, and that some people want back what they have abandoned. Others don't. You become entranced by a lizard in

the backyard. You call the police and a family member ends up dead. Family is the thing that first breaks you. A Yoruba proverb intertwines with the moment, usually a moment that is cracking a hairline fracture in the spirit. There are loved ones who do not choose to love. There are people who die sad and afraid.

Near the end of the book, Arikoyike narrates, "It is a common mistake, to hear a story about tragedy and disbelieve it because the telling is off. We think to ourselves, how does the storyteller know this? We are asking the wrong question. The right question is, why is the storyteller telling me this story?"

Why is Tola Rotimi Abraham telling us *this* soul-crushing, breath-stealing story?

I was reminded in reading it of the moment in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* when Ivan tells Alyosha of life: "It is not worth one little tear of even that one tormented child who beat her chest with her little fist and prayed 'dear God' in a stinking outhouse with her unredeemed tears! Not worth it, because her tears remain unredeemed. They must be redeemed, otherwise there can be no harmony. But how, how will you redeem them? Is it possible?"

Is it possible?

I am 23 years old. What we all



Black Sunday

By Tola Rotimi Abraham

Catapult

288p \$26

know this means without having to say as much is that I am yet a child, but I cannot, for survival and morality's sake, *go on* as a child—and yet I have not been a child for quite some time. All of this is true. I have been alive long enough to know that most of us grow up in different ways "far too fast," and that none of us will "grow up" entirely because of one six-letter word: *trauma*. Without giving you the complete diary-of-a-still-tiny-girl, I am coming what feels like nose-to-nose with my own shadow.

Reading *Black Sunday* at this time has been, for me, like an exercise in the truth—as good stories are—of my own potential to veer toward my darkness; and I am curious what the book will do to a person who has been alive for a little longer, or to a person who

has been alive a long while. Because for me, it digs into bits of myself that terrify. Having read it now as I come of age, I think about revisiting it in another 10 years, and then in another 10, another 10, another 10, depending on how things go, because good God—what can we and life become?

That being said, *Black Sunday* is also an exercise in compassion. One can trace scars of trauma across every moment in the characters' inner worlds and encounters with the reality of broken and devastating human relationships. I read and I hold the sorrow in my body and let it nestle next to my own traumas to keep them company, to lend some love to the terrors that my fellow neighbors and I, each of us, know so well. I can let the grandmother of the story hold me and see me through.

This book feels like a challenge—how, how will you redeem all of *this*? People become something vicious. People are the survivors of jagged cruelty. In certainty of their own good faith, precious people do each other in.

Will you find the redemption?

Erika Rasmussen is a writer, poet, editor and video producer. Her poetry has been published in the *Santa Clara Review*, *Beyond Words*, *Sleet* and two anthologies, titled *What We Talk About When We Talk About It*.

A Life in Letters

James Merrill was one of the most naturally gifted American poets of the 20th century. While other contemporaries had a skimpier output (e.g., Elizabeth Bishop) or went through “phases” that made for an inconsistent oeuvre (e.g., Robert Lowell), Merrill’s poetry flowed prolifically and with an unwavering shimmer and excellence. Leaf through the 900 pages of his *Collected Poems* and any given line your eye falls upon will evince his mastery of imagery, language and musicality. And beyond all its virtuosity and shine, his writing style always had a canny, wry and often mensch-like grasp of human nature that is on magisterial display in the recently published collection of his letters, *A Whole World*.

The editors of the collection—Langdon Hammer, author of a fine Merrill biography, and Stephen Yenser, a well-known editor of Merrill’s works who was close enough to the poet to have been referred to by Merrill as “my only disciple”—show a combination of scrupulous scholarship and inner-circle access. This makes for editorial annotations to the letters that are acute, comprehensive and so audience-intuitive that readers never feel lost, as we are congenially guided through the novel-like accumulation of places, incidents and personalities that comprise, as the title aptly describes it, “a whole world.”

And what a world it was.

Long before being extolled as a literary wunderkind by age 21, Merrill seemed blessed by the gods. Not only was he “to the manor born,” as we used to say of folks with his sort of WASP pedigree, the manor was owned by

Charles Merrill, magnate of the eponymous financial behemoth Merrill Lynch. So son James grew up awash in the mixed blessing of money and privilege. On the down side of the mix, the job description of “scion to an early- to mid-century American fortune” didn’t include the qualifications “poet” and “gay.” So Merrill’s early days were the predictable crucible he later fleshed out in his bildungsroman-style memoir of growing up, *A Different Person*. On the plus side, as Merrill himself was the first to admit, at no time in his life did he lack the financial freedom to do whatever he wanted, wherever he wanted to do it.

Merrill’s innate talent, genteel personality and elegant good looks, combined with his high aesthetic standards for the meter, form and imagery of his poetry, made him a much-admired alternative to the hippie mangle, confessional psychosis and contempt for “form” of his contemporaries. All of this gave Merrill something of a “poet’s poet” reputation and a kind of “golden boy” public persona.

But as Robert Frost cautioned all of us: “Nothing gold can stay.”

By the time he died in 1995 of a heart attack—hastened by a long struggle with AIDS—much of Merrill’s world, including his decades-long partnership with the writer and artist David Jackson, had lost its luster. What never waned or weakened was his God-given writing talent, examples of which fill this book of his letters.

But first, a trigger warning. Merrill’s sexual tastes tended toward the male hookers who hung around street corners in a far dodgier area of Athens, Greece, than the upscale neighborhood where Merrill kept a flat for



Long before being extolled as a literary wunderkind by age 21, Merrill seemed blessed by the gods.

years. A number of letters recount doomed-from-the-start dalliances with the sort of diamond-in-the-rough-trade types Merrill favored and with whom he swapped his dream of an idealized love object for a Greek call boy's interest in a rich American writer who could get him a visa. Given that our day and age is one in which even the dead are scrutinized for "cancelable" offences, this trifecta of sex, colonialism and privilege will no doubt cause Merrill's reputation to take some hits, especially from those neo-virtuous gatekeepers of literary "wokeness" about whom one could apply the humorist Oscar Levant's crack about Doris Day: "I knew her *before* she was a virgin."

But I trust that, in the main, the takeaway from *A Whole World* will be its many passages of brilliant writing and the exciting entrée it gives us to the way a truly great poet thinks, feels and, above all, sees. To wit—this is Merrill musing on a certain slant of light he saw in Europe:

Wherever I looked, something quite painfully beautiful was to be seen: glass in an ash-heap, a little ring of painted boats outside a sea-wall, a tombstone topped with a stone turban, a pigeon—nothing that

is remarkable in itself; until I suddenly realized what it was: the light of Europe, which exists nowhere else, that high, sad, eloquent painter's light, mightn't it even be responsible for the materialism of Western culture, for shedding such a magic over things?

Here is the observational sensitivity of one who said, "Vermeer makes you believe in a heaven for things," coupled with a poet's gift for capturing heavenly things in vivid images. For example, the Istanbul sultan's threadbare silks, which Merrill describes as "hung with great pale tenth-rate emeralds like sucked candies." Merrill was not only a poet, but also a multilingual polymath, vastly well-read, eclectic in his tastes and stiletto-sharp in his critical acumen.

And what a treat all of this is for readers of these letters!

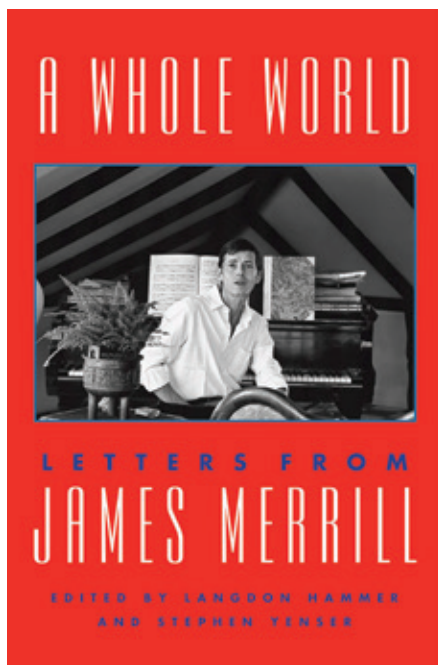
One minute he is discussing the nuances of *Anna Karenina*, which he is reading in French instead of Constance Garnett's redoubtable English translation. The next minute he is weighing in, brilliantly, on the work of a contemporary, like this observation about the work of Norman Mailer: "It's how Henry James would write if he lived in this decade—long flexible

floats of rhetoric decked out with *all* that is in the parade." Only a mind as deft as Merrill's could spot the inner Henry James of Norman Mailer (and vice versa).

"Boris Gudonov is dying to the saddest sounds, made keener and sadder I suspect by the fourth drink at my side." So begins one letter, many of which start with a similar opera-lover's and booze-sipper's tableau. For all his talent and learning, Merrill is never an intimidating companion for readers of these letters. And his unremitting brilliance is not so much impressive as it is deeply moving—allowing us to fathom, firsthand, the daily devotion of an individual about whom one can truly say: He lived for art.

Best of all, as the letters carry us through all the requisite high points of his life and career, we are treated along the way to sweet surprises of humanity, grace and warmth. He includes in his letter about the hubbub surrounding his winning the Pulitzer Prize the mention of a local youngster whose congratulatory note to Merrill said, "I write poetry too, but the scouts take a lot of my time."

Such sweetly common touches abound in *A Whole World*. And there's a reason for them. For all of Merrill's world travels and international notoriety, he seemed always in search of a



A Whole World

Letters From James Merrill

By James Merrill (ed. by Langdon Hammer and Stephen Yenser)

Knopf
736p \$45

simple *home*: a refuge, a place where he could learn the art of belonging, a neighborhood in which he could stroll as one of the happy locals.

And he found it.

“Stonington, I must say, is bliss,” he writes of the southeastern Connecticut waterfront town, first settled in 1649, where Merrill purchased 107 Water Street, a ramshackle commercial building on the corner of the town’s most bustling pedestrian area. Above the storefronts that he rented out (for a song) to merchants and pals, Merrill refurbished an eccentric warren of upper apartments, the top floor of which became his beloved garret apartment.

“The Merrill House,” as it became known, is now a thriving writers’ re-

treat where young poets come to stay and work in the place where Merrill lived happiest, entertained generously and wrote at his best. Because it was the backdrop for so many of the letters in *A Whole World*, and since Stonington is only a two-hour drive from where I live in Kent, Conn., I arranged a visit with a few of the devotees who run the place—and do so with none of the museum preciousness or “Please don’t sit there” finger-wagging that has given me a lifelong fear of docents.

Writers who come to work at the Merrill House stay in an adjacent apartment but are given a key and the full run of Merrill’s book-crammed, knickknack-bestrewn apartment. There are still shopping receipts of Merrill’s stuffed in the drawers (that guests are encouraged to open), and a to-do list of his from the ’90s, written in fading Magic Marker, on a memo board in the kitchen. All of it gives one the feel that Merrill has just stepped out to buy more wine and will be back any minute.

Being in this place, of course, brought the letters to life, but it also made me marvel at how Merrill was able to bring this place to life through the sheer alchemy of his letter writing and his singular gift for capturing life in words. And it was moving to stand in the very place where he passed so many hours of writing and honing his craft.

Tucked up against a window that faces the water is the chaise-style couch where Merrill always worked. Now young poets craft their poems on the same chaise, at the same window, where—as his illness and intimations of mortality progressed—James Merrill gazed out at the Stonington rooftops toward the water beyond, and

into the abyss of his diminishing days. Still writing letters to friends, still sipping cocktails as his turntable played... what? Puccini? “Tosca”? The aria “Vissi d’arte”? “I gave my singing to the stars in heaven, / Which then smiled more beautifully in my hour of sorrow.”

Above all, it was here that James Merrill kept writing poetry, to the last. As guests lingered at his circular dining-room table, he’d adjourn to lounge on this window-side chaise and, in longhand on unlined paper, pen final gems like his poem “Days of 1994,” with its softly elegiac closing lines:

*The fading trumpet of a car,
The knowing glance from star
to star,
The laughter of old friends.*

His end was sad, but his life was not. Perhaps because James Merrill always knew the lovely secret this monumental new collection of his letters amply proves: that something gold *can* stay. Golden writing.

Ron Marasco is professor emeritus of theater arts at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, and the author of numerous books.

Models of Generosity

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), NOV. 7, 2021

READINGS: 1 KGS 17:10-16; PS 146; HEB 9:24-28; MK 12:38-44

The readings over the past weeks have highlighted characteristics of discipleship, emphasizing humility, wisdom and service. Today we encounter another important quality: generosity. The first reading and the Gospel present two women as models for how to live charitably, selflessly showing kindness to others.

The first reading from 1 Kings describes the prophet Elijah's interaction with a woman who is a widow. Earlier in the narrative, God provides food and water to Elijah during a drought, as ravens are described bringing the prophet bread and meat. Today's reading is another example of divine care, and it is mediated through a woman who shares with Elijah. When the prophet asks her for water, she provides it, but when he requests bread, she says that she has nothing

available and very few ingredients. He presses her again, stating that she should not be afraid because the jar of meal and jug of oil that she will use for the bread will not be emptied. Indeed, this blessing comes true, as the text says she and her son ate for many days.

A similar example is found in the Gospel reading from Mark. Jesus and the disciples witness people donating to the temple treasury. Many rich people gave large amounts of money. A poor woman who is widowed offered two small coins worth only a few cents. Jesus proclaims that the woman is making a more substantial donation than others who gave larger amounts, since she has given all that she has.

The woman's generosity is juxtaposed to the behavior of the scribes. In the longer Lectionary reading, which should be preferred, Jesus denounces the actions of scribes who oppress vulnerable populations and "devour the houses of widows" yet recite long prayers. Jesus denounces their faux religiosity, pointing out that a show of devotion cannot make up for their financial exploitation of people in need. Jesus' strong critique of people misusing power is notable and should remind us of the need to correct corrupt financial systems rather than benefit from them at the expense of the vulnerable.

Widows were often among the poor, with limited resources and opportunities. The biblical tradition affirms the need to care for widows, building in laws to protect them and often depicting a special divine care for women who have lost their husbands. The two women in today's readings are financially disadvantaged and are surviving in a system that can at times

A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. (Mk 12:42)

Praying With Scripture

What can you do to help people in need?

How can the women in today's reading inspire your life?

Do you use your power and influence in ways that support the common good?

be oppressive towards them, as is highlighted in the reference to widows losing their homes.

Many women in the Bible are presented as minor, nameless characters around whom stories happen. Today's readings bring women to the foreground for us to see, praise and emulate. They embody the spirit of generosity and care for others, even as they were in need of assistance.

The readings should inspire us to think and act. They should encourage us to assist those in need and approach giving of time and resources with a spirit of openness. The widow who encounters Elijah does not refuse to give him food; rather, she shares her time and resources with him. Likewise, the widow at the temple treasury gives her money despite living in poverty. While Jesus strongly criticizes those who exploit the poor, he speaks even more strongly in praise for the woman who "from her poverty, has contributed all she had." Jesus does not just treat her as someone to be cared for, but celebrates her generosity in caring for others.

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The Season Ahead

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), NOV. 14, 2021

READINGS: DN 12:1-3; PS 16; HEB 10:11-18; MK 13:24-32

Today's Gospel gives us insights into how the evangelists crafted their narratives about Jesus. The short reading from Mark reveals his style and vision for how his audience should understand Jesus. The themes of power, timeliness and anticipation are prominent, which we should expect to hear as we approach the feast of Christ the King, the season of Advent and the celebration of the birth of Christ.

As Jesus neared the end of his ministry, he stressed his forthcoming suffering, death and resurrection to his followers. Today's Gospel is located just before the events surrounding Jesus' last supper with the disciples and his arrest. Jesus says that the Son of Man is coming in the clouds with power and glory. This image draws on Daniel 7, which is proclaimed in the first reading next Sunday.

The prophet Daniel describes a vision of "one like a son of man" or "one like a human being" on the clouds. This person has power and everlasting dominion, and Mark frequently identifies Jesus as the Son of Man to affirm his authority and kingship.

The second part of the Gospel refers to an earlier event in Mark in which Jesus curses a fig tree. After his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus was hungry and looked for figs on a tree. Finding none, he proclaims, "May no one ever eat of your fruit again" (Mk 11:14). The next day, Jesus and his disciples pass by the fig tree, which had withered away, revealing the efficacy of Jesus' curse. Jesus makes this a teachable moment by reminding the disciples of their power when acting and praying in his name.

Mark has Jesus recall the fig tree story to stress the importance of timeliness, seasons and productivity. Jesus cursed the fig tree because it failed to produce fruit. On the other hand, the growth of a fig tree can indicate that summer is near. Both realities remind the disciples that they must be active in ministry, continuing to grow the community even after Jesus' death. Recalling the fig tree incident also reminds the disciples of the power and authority they are given by Jesus. Moreover, the emphasis on seasons reminds the disciples to be ready for

'And then they will see "the Son of Man coming in the clouds" with great power and glory.' (Mk 13:26)

Praying With Scripture

What can you do to have a positive impact on the world?

How do you pray?

How are you preparing for the Advent season?

the new season ahead.

In his final days, Jesus builds on the Hebrew Scriptures and on his teachings throughout his ministry to prepare his followers for what is to come. Mark builds up his Gospel to heighten the anticipation for Jesus' crucifixion, death and resurrection. As we near the end of the liturgical year and ready ourselves for Advent, we should assess how active and engaged in the world we have been this year and reflect on ways to be prepared for the new year.

Kingship

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE (B), NOV. 21, 2021

READINGS: DN 7:13-14; PS 93; RV 1:5-8; JN 18:33-37

The last Sunday of the liturgical year is the feast of Christ the King. Today's readings provide diverse scriptural images of divine power, authority and majesty.

Psalms 93 is today's responsorial psalm, and it offers a clear image of divine kingship: "The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty." The references to a throne, decree and kingdom help to

envision a royal God who reigns over creation. Based on this content, Psalm 93 is often analyzed as a royal or enthronement psalm.

The first reading from Daniel depicts the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. This image was alluded to in the Gospel of Mark proclaimed last Sunday. Today's second reading from Revelation also

includes a divine figure who rides on the clouds. Daniel emphasizes the everlasting dominion of the Son of Man, and Revelation highlights everlasting divine power. These texts show ways that people tried to comprehend and express God's immense strength and authority. The kingship model was understandable and relatable to ancient communities.

By emphasizing God's everlasting kingdom, these texts position people as part of the kingdom, working to follow God's laws and promote the kingdom to others.

While royal imagery is prominent in Scripture, it is not without problems. The Gospel from John reveals the opportunity for the kingship language to be misunderstood and mocked. When Pilate questions Jesus before his crucifixion, he asks if Jesus is king of the Jews, and when he is not satisfied with Jesus' responses, he asks again, "Then you are a king?" Jesus reiterates that the kingdom that he proclaims is of heaven, but Pilate, intentionally or unintentionally, fails to understand Jesus' message. Moreover, the potential threat of another king or kingdom likely contributed to Jesus'

persecution and crucifixion.

Comparing the relationship of humans to God to that of subjects to a ruler can be problematic. While kingship can evoke strength, longevity and authority, it can also evoke abuses of power, servitude or slavery. Obviously, this feast is a reminder of God's glory and God's relationship with all of creation, but we should recognize that certain images have the ability to be misused and might not be the best representation of God. They reflect the imagination of ancient communities, and we inherit them today. Nonetheless, we can still use them with caution while recognizing their potential pitfalls, engaging with them as part of the richness of the variety of overlapping images for God in Scripture.

As we end the liturgical year, the

'My kingdom does not belong to this world.'
(Jn 18:36)

Praying With Scripture

What are benefits and pitfalls for comparing God to a king?

What can you do to promote the kingdom of heaven on earth?

What would you like to change or improve during the next liturgical year?

feast of Christ the King is an opportunity to think about ways that we promote God's kingdom in the world. As we prepare to begin Advent and celebrate Christ's birth, we should reflect on what we have been doing to live out Christ's command to love God and one another.

A Time for Growth

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C), NOV. 28, 2021
READINGS: JER 33:14-16; PS 25; 1 THESS 3:12-4:2; LK 21:25-36

A new liturgical year is upon us. As we begin Advent, we begin Cycle C of the Lectionary readings, in which Luke is regularly proclaimed on Sundays. The season of Advent takes its name from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning arrival or coming. The season is a time of reflection and preparation for the arrival of Christ, and it marks the start of a new year. Our readings build on themes in the last two Sunday readings, and they invite us to plan how to use Advent as a time for spiritual growth.

In the second reading from 1 Thessalonians, we hear about the importance of loving one another, an

exhortation prominent in both the Old and New Testaments. In today's reading, we receive more insight into why this should be done: to be blameless in holiness. Paul emphasizes that how we treat one another reflects, informs and impacts our relationship with God. Put another way, in order to show love and devotion to God, we must show love to one another.

What does this look like in reality? How can we "increase and abound in love" this Advent season and throughout the year? Many people spend Advent preparing to celebrate Christmas by buying gifts, decorating and preparing for gather-

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. (1 Thes 3:12)

Praying With Scripture

What can you do to increase love in your community?

How will you increase your spiritual practices during the Advent season?

What do you hope to accomplish during this liturgical year?

ings with family and friends. These enjoyable activities can help to build

anticipation for Christmas. In addition, and perhaps even more central to Advent, this season provides an opportunity to be more prayerful and reflective about how we spiritually prepare to draw nearer to God. The second reading reminds us that spiritual preparation for Christmas can and should involve outward engagement with one's community. While making Christmas preparations, it would be in the spirit of the season to increase one's service to people most in need.

In the Gospel, we hear again the image of the Son of Man in the clouds. This image is repeated at this

point in the Lectionary, as it has been over the last two Sundays, to connect the coming of Christ at Christmas with the vision described in Daniel. In addition, as is typical for Advent readings, the Gospel focuses on anticipation and preparation. The reading contains very ominous language of fright, wariness, anxiety and vigilance. By starting Advent in this way, the Lectionary heightens the intensity of the season, stressing that we must prepare ourselves for Christ's arrival.

The Gospel also warns us against things that can make us less alert and less focused on Christ's arrival, such

as drunkenness and anxieties of daily life. During Advent, which is often filled with much festivity and activity, we are reminded not to be overly consumed with these things that can distract from our primary focus of the season. We should use the new liturgical season to review our actions and priorities and work to sustain and strengthen our relationship with God and one another.

Jaime L. Waters teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.



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An Opportunity in Texas

We can provide alternatives to abortion

By Kristen Day



With the passage of its “heartbeat” law, Texas has a fine opportunity to show that our society can provide women with support, compassion and alternatives to abortion. We must elevate the way we treat pregnant women and preborn life.

Social media has been aflame with angry screeds about bodily autonomy, arguing that the law assaults women’s rights and harms minority communities. We should not get caught up in the rhetoric; we should look at the reality. According to the Texas Department of Health and Human Services, 53,949 abortions were performed in Texas in 2020. A majority of women affected by abortion are poor and almost three-fourths of Texans seeking abortions are women of color.

Texas abortion providers have already indicated that they are abiding by the law, no longer performing abortions once a heartbeat is detected. This means there are pregnant women in need of immediate support. Abortion providers, abortion supporters, pregnancy care clinics and pro-life activists must work together to address those needs.

While Texas already has a vast network of pregnancy support centers, a more robust infrastructure is needed. There is a host of legislation that could complement the state’s heartbeat law and provide women who might normally choose or be coerced into abortions with resources

and support throughout their parenting lives. Besides strengthening programs to connect expecting mothers with various local resources, the state should require adequate accommodations in the workplace for pregnant women, expand access to paid leave and expand access to perinatal hospice for women whose preborn children receive a terminal diagnosis.

An unlikely partner in the effort to provide abortion alternatives could be what is now the largest abortion provider in the United States. According to its annual report, Planned Parenthood performed 354,871 abortions nationwide during the 2020 fiscal year but provided only 8,626 prenatal services. In other words, Planned Parenthood’s support of pregnant women is overwhelmed by its termination of pregnancies.

But Texas facilities whose revenue streams have relied on the violation of preborn human rights can reform their business model. I challenge Planned Parenthood of Texas to transition its clinics from providing abortion to providing life-affirming care for both mothers and preborn children.

Planned Parenthood has been critical of crisis pregnancy centers, calling them “fake” and claiming the centers are trying to “shame people out of choosing abortion.” In fact, most pregnancy centers provide clothing, diapers, parenting classes and other meaningful support. An increasing number now have medical staff offer-

ing prenatal and postnatal health care. If Planned Parenthood does not trust crisis pregnancy centers, the abortion Goliath should beat the centers at their own game. Planned Parenthood should provide women with real medical care, not the Band-Aid of abortion.

Texas’ heartbeat law gives abortion providers the chance to show that they genuinely care about women. Should Planned Parenthood and others in Texas close their doors, it may create an impression that abortion, not protecting women, is their primary goal.

The law also provides supporters of the ban an opportunity to show that we care about the children outside the womb as much as we care about the child inside the womb by passing legislation like paid maternity leave and other measures to support new mothers.

Neither side should walk away from women in need simply because abortion will not be an option in Texas once a heartbeat is detected.

The civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer summed it up best: “I think these children have a right to live. And I think that these mothers have a right to support them in a decent way. We are dealing with human beings.”

Kristen Day is the executive director of Democrats for Life of America.

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