

The Catholic Light

DIOCESE OF SCRANTON

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Closing the Jubilee Year, Pope Leo XIV says

*God's mercy will
"never be shut"*

VATICAN CITY (OSV News) – After a jubilee year not seen for centuries – with one pope opening the Holy Door and another closing it – Pope Leo XIV ended the Jubilee Year of Hope at St. Peter's Basilica Jan. 6 telling the world to love and seek peace, protect what is holy, and flee from modern efficiency.

"Around us, a distorted economy tries to profit from everything. We see how the marketplace can turn human yearnings of seeking, traveling and beginning again into a mere business," he said.

"Let us ask ourselves: has the Jubilee taught us to flee from this type of efficiency that reduces everything to a product and human beings to consumers?" he asked. "After this year, will we be better able to recognize a pilgrim in the visitor, a seeker in the stranger, a neighbor in the foreigner and fellow travelers in those who are different?"

Before the Mass, the pope, cardinals and bishops present in Rome, gathered in the atrium of the basilica and gave thanks to God for the gifts received during the Holy Year. Dozens of the world's cardinals were in Rome to attend the pope's first extraordinary consistory Jan. 7-8, to pray, support and advise the pope on the life and mission of the church.

Pope Leo went to the threshold of the Holy Door and pulled each side shut. The door will be sealed until the next Holy Year, which is likely to be 2033, the 2000th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

While the last of the Holy Doors in the city was closing, "the gate" of God's mercy will never be shut, Pope Leo said before shutting the door. God "will always sustain the weary, raise up those who have fallen" and offer "good things" to those who place their trust in him.



Pope Leo XIV closes the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica Jan. 6, 2026, at the Vatican, marking the official end of the Jubilee Year. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

In his homily, Pope Leo compared the millions of men and women who came to Rome on pilgrimage to modern-day Magi, "who left palace and temple behind" in search of a new "king," which they found in the baby Jesus in a humble grotto in Bethlehem.

"Yes, the Magi still exist today. They are the people who sense the need to go out and search, accepting the risks associated with their journey, especially in a troubled world like ours that may be unpleasant and dangerous in many ways," he said.

However, Pope Leo cautioned, today's seekers must encounter in today's churches and sacred places the same humble source of life, hope and joy that the Magi encountered in Bethlehem.

"How important it is that those who pass through the doors of the church perceive therein that the Messiah has just been born, that a community gathers

in which hope springs forth and that a story of life is unfolding!" he said.

"Jesus encountered and allowed himself to be approached by all people," he said, because "the Lord wants his presence to grow among us as God-with-us."

"No one can sell this to us. The child whom the Magi adore is a priceless and immeasurable good," the pope said, criticizing "a distorted economy," which even tries to exploit and commodify the human desire for freedom and true fulfillment.

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Ash Wednesday is February 18

Bishop Bambera will once again hold Holy Hours throughout the Diocese during Lent.

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

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Vatican sees record number of visitors during Jubilee Year

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -

An estimated 33 million visitors and pilgrims came to the Vatican to celebrate the Jubilee Year, exceeding early forecasts, officials said at a news conference at the Vatican Jan. 5.

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization's section for new evangelization and chief organizer of the 2025 Holy Year, said the figure is based on estimates from a study by Roma Tre University, online registrations for the Holy Year, and the number of people who passed through the Holy Doors of Rome's major basilicas and attended papal events.

By the time the Holy Year ended Jan. 6, he said, at least 33 million people would have taken part, which breaks down to more than 90,000 people a day. The



Young Catholics celebrate ahead of the welcome Mass of the Jubilee of Youth in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican July 29, 2025. (OSV News photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters)

period with the most pilgrims in Rome was during the Jubilee of Young People from July 21 to Aug. 10, which registered more than 13 million people.

Early estimates had expected that the Jubilee Year would bring 30 million to 35 million visitors to the Vatican. The city saw about

22 million people come to Rome in 2024, Roberto Gualtieri, mayor of Rome, said during the news conference.

Based on data collected solely from registered pilgrims, visitors from the United States ranked second only to Italy, accounting for nearly 13 percent of the total number of registered visitors, Archbishop Fisichella said. Pilgrims from more than 185 countries participated in the Jubilee Year.

"It is inevitable that such a milestone also brings with it an assessment of this year,

which in many respects has been extraordinary. Begun under Pope Francis, the Jubilee concludes under Pope Leo XIV," the archbishop said in Italian. "The funeral and the new election were added to the entire Jubilee program, showing the whole world the ability to act with determination and confidence amid an exceptional series of events."

Archbishop Fisichella thanked Rome's officials for their hard work in supporting the inflow of visitors, and said that the increase also led to increased visitor rates across the city's tourist sites.

Vatican leaders have already begun planning the next Jubilee Year, which will take place in 2033 to commemorate the 2,000th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Pope Leo ends Holy Year with call to journey forward together

Continued from Page 1

God revealing himself to humanity as man is "a gift," Pope Leo said. "He reveals himself and lets himself be found."

"His ways are not our ways, and the violent do not succeed in controlling them, nor can the powers of the world block them," he said, recalling the great joy the Magi felt upon finding the Messiah and despite Herod's efforts to destroy what had been promised.

The fear and violence unleashed by King Herod "make us think of the many conflicts by which people resist and even damage the new things that God has in store for everyone," he said. "Loving and seeking peace means protecting what is holy and, consequently, that which is newly born like a small, vulnerable, fragile baby."

"God challenges the existing order," the pope said. "God is determined to rescue us from both

old and new forms of slavery. He involves young and old, poor and rich, men and women, saints and sinners in his works of mercy and in the wonders of his justice."

"Let us ask ourselves: is there life in our church? Is there space for something new to be born? Do we love and proclaim a God who sets us on a journey?" Pope Leo asked.

"Fear does indeed blind us. Conversely, the joy of the Gospel liberates us. It makes us prudent, yes, but also bold, attentive and creative; it beckons us along ways that are different from those already traveled," he said.

"It is wonderful to become pilgrims of hope," who journey together and are amazed by God's faithfulness, he said.

"If we do not reduce our churches to monuments, if our communities are homes, if we stand united and resist the flattery and seduction of those in power, then we will be the generation of a new dawn," he said. In



Pope Leo XIV kneels in prayer at the threshold of the Holy Door in St. Peter's Basilica before solemnly closing it Jan. 6, 2026, marking the end of the Jubilee Year. (CNS photo/Pool, Franco Origlia)

Jesus, "we will contemplate and serve an extraordinary humanity, transformed not by the delusions of the all-powerful, but by God

who became flesh out of love."

Outside on a cold, rainy winter morning, St. Peter's Square was filled with thousands of people watching the Mass on big screens and awaiting the pope to recite the Angelus at noon.

Hundreds of people dressed in traditional and festive costumes took part in an annual folkloric Epiphany procession along the main boulevard in front of the basilica. Marching bands and people in Renaissance costumes paraded up the street behind the Three Kings on horseback.

Before reciting the Angelus from the balcony of the basilica's loggia, the pope prayed that God's words "come to fulfillment in us, may strangers and enemies become brothers and sisters."

"In the place of inequality, may there be fairness, and may the industry of war be replaced by the craft of peace," he said. "As weavers of hope, let us journey together toward the future by another road."

Jubilee Year of Hope ends locally with call to compassion, love and mission

SCRANTON – The Diocese of Scranton formally concluded the Jubilee Year of Hope locally with a Closing Mass celebrated on Sunday, Dec. 28, 2025, at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton.

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, served as the principal celebrant and homilist for the liturgy, which was held on the Feast of the Holy Family. Several hundred people were in attendance for the Closing Mass.

The Jubilee Year, proclaimed by Pope Francis and celebrated by the universal Church every 25 years, officially began on Christmas Eve 2024 with the opening of the Holy Door at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. While Pope Leo XIV formally closed the Holy Year in Rome on the Solemnity of the Epiphany, Jan. 6, Bishop Bambera noted that local churches around the world were called the mark the Jubilee's conclusion with a Mass of Thanksgiving.

"In his papal bull proclaiming



the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis emphasized the theme of hope, a much-needed virtue in a time of uncertainty, war, and tribulation," Bishop Bambera said. "Everyone knows what it is to hope. In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring."

Bishop Bambera noted that the Jubilee Year unfolded in ways few could have anticipated, particularly following the death of Pope Francis on April 21, just one day after his final Easter Sunday blessing.

"Not surprisingly, given the death of the Holy Father, the motto of the Jubilee Year – Pilgrims of Hope – took on a different light," he said.



Parishioners fill the pews of the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton Dec. 28 for the Closing Mass of the Jubilee Year. (Photo/Mike Melisky)

Citing Archbishop Rino Fisichella, organizer of Jubilee 2025 events, the Bishop noted that "Christian hope is not a sentiment, but a promise," rooted in eternal life revealed through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the last year, the Diocese and its parishes across northeastern and north central Pennsylvania marked the occasion through both special events and everyday parish life.

While not a complete list, the Diocese celebrated

Masses honoring persons with disabilities, vocations, mothers, priest and religious jubilarians, and married couples. Additional celebrations included the Feast of Corpus Christi, a Hispanic Heritage Mass, a Respect Life Mass, and the ordination of two new priests and eight permanent deacons.

Two major Diocesan pilgrimages also marked the Jubilee Year. Nearly 100 faithful traveled to Rome in late August and early September, while more

than 600 pilgrims journeyed to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 1.

Because the local Closing Mass of the Jubilee Year coincided with the Feast of the Holy Family, Bishop Bambera acknowledged both the blessings and struggles present in family life.

"No family is immune from life with its opportunities and its challenges," he said, noting that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph themselves experienced hardship, poverty, displacement, and fear. Yet, he emphasized, they faced those realities "with a deep sense of trust in God and a selfless, sacrificial love that bound them together as a family and provided them with hope."

Calling the faithful to carry the Jubilee forward, Bishop Bambera urged them to embrace the virtues outlined by Saint Paul: "heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience," reminding them that "over all these put on love, this is, the bond of perfection."

Pilgrimage sites offered the faithful spiritual refreshment during Jubilee Year

EAST STROUDSBURG — It was a year ago when the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, named eight churches in the Scranton Diocese as pilgrimage sites for the Jubilee Holy Year 2025.

The pilgrimage sites included the Cathedral of Saint Peter, Scranton; Saint Ann Basilica, Scranton; Saint Augustine Church, Brackney; Saint Boniface Church, Williamsport; Saint Gabriel Church, Hazleton; Saint John the Evangelist Church, Honesdale; Saint Nicholas Church, Wilkes-Barre; and Saint Matthew Church, East Stroudsburg.

During the Jubilee Year, those parishes whose churches were honored by the designation prepared their places of worship to offer a deepening spiritual experience for area Catholics, as part of the

broader, global observance of the Holy Year, which takes in the Universal Church every 25 years.

"The Jubilee Year has been a blessing for our parish," Father Don Williams, pastor of Saint Matthew Parish in East Stroudsburg, said. "During the course of the year, we made it a point to speak about the Jubilee Year of Hope in our homilies.

Father Williams added that Saint Matthew's senior priest, Father Brian J.T. Clarke, prepared short Holy Year reflections offered before Masses and highlighted in the parish bulletin.

The Poconos pastor and his parish family played host to many visitors from parish communities throughout the Stroudsburg Deanery and various parts of Diocese. Due to its proximity to

the eastern Pennsylvania border, Saint Matthew Church also drew faithful pilgrims from New Jersey and New York.

"We had many people who came each week for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation," Father Williams recalled. "What a privilege to offer God's forgiveness and peace and a place of welcome and support to all those who came."

Looking back over the Jubilee Holy Year, Father Williams fondly reminisced about experiences that provided a "tremendous source of blessing."

One such occurrence came on the first Thursday of April when Saint Matthew's hosted a regional Lenten Holy Hour, presided over by Bishop Bambera.

"We decided that it should



Pilgrims from SS. Bernard & Stanislaus Parish in Plainfield, N.J., visited the Scranton Diocesan Holy Year pilgrimage site of Saint Matthew Church in East Stroudsburg during a recent Advent weekend.

be a bilingual prayer," the pastor explained, indicating that copies of a Spanish-translated version of Bishop Bambera's homily were provided for the congregation.

"The message was profound, spiritually touching the hearts and lives of all," Father Williams related. "I felt a special grace was given since we could see and

experience with our Bishop the universal nature of our Catholic Church, and also the diversity that is an additional blessing."

Near the end of the Holy Year — on an Advent weekend in December — Father Marcin Fuks, pastor of Saints Bernard & Stanislaus Parish in Plainfield, N.J.,

Continued on Page 15

Bishop proclaims message of hope and compassion at Christmas



At the beginning of the Vigil Mass of Christmas Dec. 24, 2025, Bishop Joseph C. Bambera blesses the crèche at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton. (Photo/Mike Melisky)

SCRANTON - A capacity crowd filled the Cathedral of Saint Peter on Christmas Eve as nearly 800 faithful gathered for the 4 p.m. Vigil Mass of Christmas, celebrated by the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton.

With every pew filled and worshippers standing in the back of the Cathedral, the joyful liturgy marked the beginning of Christmas celebrations at the Mother Church of the Diocese and was broadcast live on CTV: Catholic Television and livestream on Diocesan social media platforms.

Later that night, Bishop Bambera returned to the Cathedral to celebrate Midnight Mass, and on Christmas Day he carried the same message of hope, humility, and compassion to residents of the Gino Merli Veterans Center in Scranton, celebrating Mass with veterans and staff.

In his Christmas homily, Bishop Bambera reflected on the humility and hope found in the birth of Christ, sharing a personal story of witnessing kindness between two impoverished men on a cold winter day. He recalled witnessing one homeless man carefully ensure that his elderly friend had food before worrying about himself. That simple act, the Bishop explained, reveals the heart of the Christmas miracle.

“For whatever baggage those two men carried, the kindness displayed between

them gives us a glimpse of the goodness of God who reached into our broken lives on that first Christmas,” Bishop Bambera said, noting that God continues to offer “hope and a way forward amid the upheaval of our world.”

Quoting theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Bishop reminded the faithful that “God loves the lowly” and is “near to lowliness,” choosing to dwell among “the lost, the neglected, the excluded, the weak, and the broken.”

That nearness, Bishop Bambera emphasized, speaks directly to the fears and struggles many carry today.

“In Jesus’ birth, we no longer have reason to be afraid,” he said. “God has accepted us and God has loved us – as we are.”

The Bishop also encouraged the faithful to recognize God’s presence in ordinary moments of compassion and human connection.

“The joy of God’s goodness is contagious,” he said, quoting Pope Leo XIV. “We just need to be wise enough to know where to look and to accept that joy.”

With the Christmas season now concluded, Bishop Bambera’s message continues to resonate: the light of Christ shines brightest when it is humbly received and generously shared, reminding all that Emmanuel – God with us – has already come.

Baptism provides light in darkness, gateway to heaven, Pope Leo says



Pope Leo XIV baptizes one of 20 children in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican Jan. 11, 2026, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. (OSV News/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media)

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - Baptizing one’s children is as essential as providing them with food and clothing, Pope Leo XIV told parents.

“Just as they received life from you, their parents, now they receive the meaning to live it: faith,” he said, referring to the 20 infants about to receive the sacrament of baptism in the Sistine Chapel Jan. 11, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

“When we know that something is essential, we immediately seek it for those we love,” he said in his brief homily. “Who among us, in fact, would leave newborns without clothes or food, waiting for them to choose how to dress, and what to eat when they grow up?”

“If food and clothing are necessary for life, faith is more than necessary, because with God, life finds salvation,” he said in Italian.

Pope Leo led the baptismal prayers and poured the water over the heads of the infants of Vatican employees. He assisted some parents by cupping his hand under an infant’s head to provide support, and he tenderly offered his hand to babies whose arms flailed for something to grasp. He also gently wiped away some rivulets running down a few heads.

All of the gestures during the rite “are beautiful testimonies” of God’s limitless love, he said. “The water of the font is the washing in the Spirit, which purifies us

from all sin; the white garment is the new robe that God the Father gives us for the eternal feast of his Kingdom; the candle lit from the Paschal candle is the light of the risen Christ, which illuminates our path.”

“May baptism, which unites us in the one family of the Church, sanctify all your families at all times, giving strength and constancy to the affection that unites you,” he said.

The tradition of baptizing children of Vatican employees started in 1981 with St. John Paul II.

Afterward, Pope Leo again spoke about the importance and meaning of baptism before he led the recitation of the Angelus prayer with visitors gathered in St. Peter’s Square.

By baptizing the newborns, he said, they “have become our new brothers and sisters in the faith. How beautiful it is to celebrate the love of God - who calls us by name and frees us from evil - as one family!”

Baptism “accompanies us forever,” he said. “In moments of darkness, baptism is light; in life’s conflicts, it is reconciliation; at the hour of death, it is the gateway to heaven.”

Pope Leo also prayed for children born into difficult circumstances, saying, “May the grace of Baptism, which unites them to the Paschal Mystery of Christ, bear fruit in their lives and in the lives of their families.”

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

Week of Prayer of Christian Unity to be celebrated Jan. 18-25

SCRANTON – The Diocese of Scranton will once again mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with an Ecumenical Celebration of God’s Word, which will be held on Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026, at 12:10 p.m. at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton.

Christians of all denominations are warmly invited to attend this prayerful gathering, which reflects the Church’s ongoing commitment to unity among all followers of Jesus Christ.

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will serve as leader of prayer for the traditional ecumenical prayer service. Bishop Bambera is currently serving his final year as Chairman of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

The guest preacher for this year’s prayer service will be Rev. Dr. Nora Foust, Regional Conference Minister, Penn Central Conference, United Church of Christ.

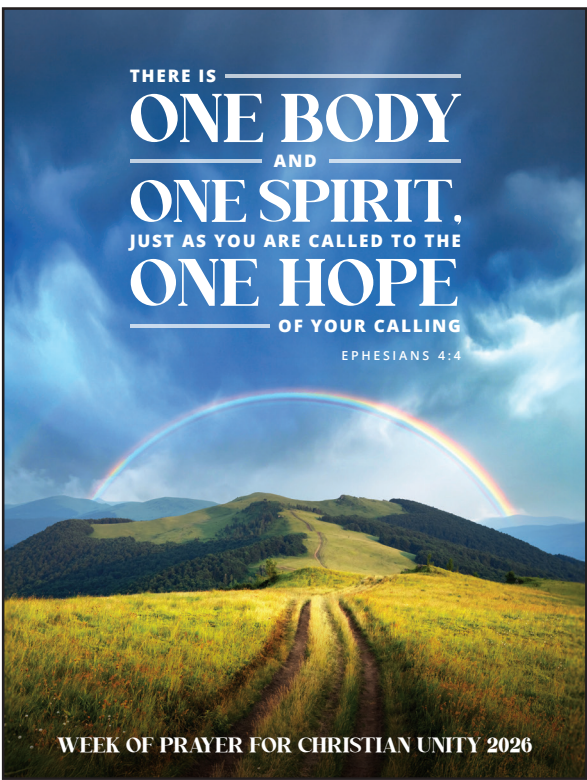
The Ecumenical Prayer Service will be broadcast live at 12:10 p.m. on CTV: Catholic Television of the Diocese of Scranton. It will also be made available on the Diocese of Scranton website, YouTube channel, and across all Diocesan social media platforms.

ABOUT THE WEEK OF PRAYER OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Observed worldwide each year from January 18-25, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity encourages Christians to pray together and to renew their dedication to working toward greater understanding, reconciliation, and communion.

The Catholic Church has participated fully in this global observance since the Second Vatican Council, and in 2025, commemorated the 61st anniversary of the Decree on Ecumenism, which formally brought the Church into the modern ecumenical movement.

The 2026 theme, chosen by Christians in Armenia and drawn from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, proclaims: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4).



The theme emphasizes unity as both a gift and a calling – one rooted in the Holy Spirit and expressed through conversion of heart, shared hope, and love lived in community.

UNITY OF BELIEVERS

Unity is a divine mandate at the core of our Christian identity and is more than simply an ideal. It represents the essence of the Church’s calling – a call to reflect the harmonious oneness of our life in Christ amidst our diversity.

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, God’s call to unity resonates from the earliest times. Starting with the Old Testament, Abram’s plea to Lot highlights the divine desire for peace and harmony among the faithful: “Let there be no strife between you and me and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred” (Genesis 13:8).

Abram’s call for harmony and mutual respect, despite their eventual parting of ways, emphasizes the importance of living peacefully.

This divine instruction continues in Leviticus 19:18, where God commands,

Ecumenical Celebration of God’s Word

Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026

12:10 p.m.

Cathedral of Saint Peter,
315 Wyoming Avenue,
Scranton, PA

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” Such commandments remind us that forgiveness and love

are vital for maintaining unity within the community of faith.

The Psalms also celebrate the beauty of unity among God’s people.

They declare, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1). This imagery underscores the significance of unity in God’s design for His people.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ elevates the concept of unity to a spiritual dimension, mirroring the profound relationship between Him and the Father. Unity among His followers is not merely the absence of conflict but a deep, spiritual bond reflecting the unity of the Holy Trinity.

Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21 calls for believers to be one as He and the Father are one, demonstrating that our unity is grounded in our relationship with Christ and our collective mission of sharing the Good News.

Ecumenism essential to the mission of the Church, Pope Leo XIV says in Turkey

ISTANBUL (CNS) - During his first papal trip abroad last year, Pope Leo XIV spent his time in Turkey reaffirming the Catholic Church’s commitment to the search for Christian unity.

The key symbol of that was the pope’s presence at the Divine Liturgy celebrated by Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople Nov. 30, the feast of St. Andrew, patron of the patriarchate.

For decades the popes and patriarchs have sent delegations to each other’s patronal feast celebrations - the Vatican’s celebration of the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul June 29 and the patriarchate’s celebration of St. Andrew’s feast Nov. 30.

St. Peter and St. Andrew were brothers and were the first of the 12 Apostles to be called by Jesus.

After the liturgy, the pope and patriarch went to a balcony where they jointly blessed the people gathered below.

At the liturgy Nov. 30 in the Patriarchal Cathedral of St. George, Pope Leo spoke about how for 60 years Catholics and Orthodox have followed “a path of reconciliation, peace and growing communion.”

The increasingly cordial relations have been “fostered through frequent contact, fraternal meetings and promising theological dialogue,” he said. “And today we are called even more to commit ourselves to the restoration of full communion.”

Pope Leo used his greeting at the Divine Liturgy to confirm that, “in continuity with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and my predecessors,” the pursuit of full communion among Christians “is one of the priorities of the Catholic Church. In particular, it is one of the priorities of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, whose specific role in the universal Church is to be at the service of all, building and safeguarding communion and unity.”

Bishop to celebrate Ash Wednesday Mass on Feb. 18 at Cathedral

SCRANTON – On Ash Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2026, the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will be principal celebrant and homilist for the 12:10 p.m. Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton.

Ash Wednesday marks the start of Lent, a 40-day season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving that ends at sundown on Holy Thursday. It is a period of preparation to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection at Easter.

During Lent, fasting and abstinence regulations are observed. Fasting and abstinence are church-imposed penitential practices that deny us food and drink during certain seasons and on certain days. These acts of self-denial dispose us to free ourselves from worldly distractions, to express our longing for Jesus, to somehow imitate His suffering.

Fasting is to be observed on Ash Wednesday (Feb. 18, 2026) and Good Friday (April 3, 2026) by all Catholics over 18 years of age to the beginning of their



Bishop Bambera places ashes on the forehead of parishioner Eileen Notarianni during a Mass for Ash Wednesday on March 5, 2025. This year, Ash Wednesday is on Feb. 18, 2026.

60th year. On days of fasting, one full meal is allowed. Two smaller meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to one's needs, but together should not equal another full meal, unless dispensed or excused.

Abstinence from meat is to be observed by all Catholics who are 14 years of age or older. Ash Wednesday, all of the Fridays of Lent, and Good Friday are days of abstinence.

A full listing of Ash Wednesday Masses for all 102 parishes in the Diocese of Scranton will be available soon on the Diocese of Scranton website at dioceseofscranton.org.

Bishop to continue holding Lenten Holy Hours across Diocese in 2026

SCRANTON – The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will once again travel throughout the Diocese of Scranton during Lent 2026 to lead Holy Hours in each of the Diocese's 12 deaneries, continuing a tradition that began several years ago.

The 2026 Lenten Holy Hours will begin on Thursday, Feb. 19 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Wyalusing, Bradford County, and continue through Tuesday, March 24, at SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Plains, Luzerne County.

Each Holy Hour will offer Catholics the opportunity to gather for prayer, reflection, and Eucharistic devotion during the Lenten season.

First launched several years ago as part of the National Eucharistic Revival, the Lenten Holy Hours with Bishop Bambera have drawn strong participation and elicited positive responses from parishioners. Many attendees return year after year, finding the evenings to be a moment of quiet encounter with Christ.

Each Holy Hour includes Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, time for silent prayer and adoration, a homily offered by Bishop Bambera, and sacred music that enhances the reverent atmosphere.

"It is such a special occasion to have the Bishop with us and to have him here

in our little town," Christine Aydelotte said after a 2024 Holy Hour at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Tunkhannock. "He helps to strengthen our bond with Jesus. He's an inspiration and a reminder that we all play a small part in our one Holy Catholic Apostolic Church."

Amid a busy and often chaotic season – leading up to Easter – many parishioners have found profound peace in spending quiet time in prayer before the Lord.

"If people put themselves fully into this experience and really sit with the Lord, He makes Himself known. I think everyone, when they fully enter into it, has their own personal revelation," Concetta Cooney said following a 2025 Holy Hour at Saint John the Evangelist Parish in Pittston.

A full schedule of dates and locations for the 2026 Holy Hours is located in the graphic on the following page of this edition of *The Catholic Light*. Every Holy Hour will take place at 7 p.m.

All are welcome to attend any of the Holy Hours, regardless of parish or deanery affiliation.

With the beginning of Lent now only a month away, Bishop Bambera invites the faithful to save the dates of these special Holy Hours and encourages them to attend at least one of the special evenings of prayer.

Three simple resolutions to help kick-start your prayer life in 2026

(OSV News) - For most of us, the new year means both celebrating what's ahead and learning from the year that's ending.

For Catholics, a new year offers us more than a fresh start. It can be an opportunity for conversion of heart - to take what we have experienced and resolve to grow more deeply as people of faith.

Losing weight and exercising are great, but how about exercising our spiritual muscles?

This is a moment to resolve to get our faith in shape - to live more prayerfully, more gratefully, more thoughtfully, more hopefully.

How can we do that? Here are a few ideas and suggestions to chart a new path for the coming 12 months.

Prayer and Gratitude

Hit the ground running - and start by hitting your knees. You can kickstart your daily prayer life by resolving to begin and end every day in prayer. Try starting this new year with a prayer comprised of two simple words: "Thank you." Find a moment or two to offer a quiet prayer of gratitude. Count your blessings. Find reason to hope. You'll be amazed at how it can change your perspective - and reset your day.



Adoration

"O come let us adore him." You don't have to sing those words just at Christmas or only on Sundays. Resolve to carve out some time during the week to drop by church and have a talk with Jesus. If your parish has adoration and Benediction, try to work that into your schedule. Simply sit in church and spend some spare time with God. You'll be glad you did.

Pray the Rosary

Grab those beads. Maybe they've been sitting in your dresser drawer unused. Maybe you only grab them as a last resort, when you have run out of words to pray and you're desperate for some divine intervention. Want to start a new habit for the new year? Resolve to pray the rosary - and not just when you need to ask God for a really big favor. Build this into your prayer life.

NEW YEAR
Resolutions



2026 Lenten Holy Hours with Bishop Bambara

February 19

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Wyalusing

February 24

Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, Brodheadsville

February 25

Saint Ann Parish, Williamsport

February 26

Divine Mercy Parish, Scranton

March 2

Saint Thomas More Parish, Lake Ariel

March 3

Saint Carlo Acutis Parish, Olyphant

March 5

Saint John Bosco Parish, Conyngham

March 12

Nativity of Our Lord Parish, Duryea

March 16

Saint Therese Parish, Shavertown

March 19

Saint John Vianney Parish, Montdale

March 23

Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, Peckville

March 24

SS. Peter & Paul Parish, Plains

All Holy Hours to
begin at 7 p.m.

'Life is a Gift' is theme for 2026 March for Life on Jan. 23

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - The 2026 National March for Life theme will be "Life is a Gift" according to the March for Life Education and Defense Fund.

Jennie Bradley Lichter, who became president of the March for Life last year, noted the group chooses a theme each year for the annual pro-life march in Washington as "an opportunity to focus our attention on a key message or a timely element of the prolife mission."

"We're now at a critical moment in our country where the March for Life and what we stand for is more important than ever," Lichter told reporters at a recent launch event, adding, "This year, with this theme, we really want to speak to the heart."

"It is really a moment for boldness," she added.

Lichter cited the recent murder of Charlie Kirk, a conservative activist and Turning Point USA founder, arguing its aftermath shows that "young people are looking for opportunities to come together, to hear the truth spoken boldly and persuasively, to recover the fundamental goodness of family life, and to help to hear people speak into that, to be affirmed in their desire for children as something that's fundamentally good, and to hear

CTV/EWTN

MARCH FOR LIFE COVERAGE

THURSDAY, JAN. 22

5:00 P.M.: OPENING MASS OF THE NATIONAL PRAYER VIGIL


FRIDAY, JAN. 23

8:00 A.M.: CLOSING MASS OF THE NATIONAL PRAYER VIGIL

9:30 A.M.-3:00 P.M.: MARCH FOR LIFE COVERAGE

3:00 P.M.: LIFE FEST MASS

Cathedral of Saint Peter Mass to broadcast at 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. only



people witnessing to what's good and true and beautiful."

"That's my diagnosis of our moment," she said. "The March for Life offers all of these."

After his death, Kirk received praise from his allies in conservative politics for his willingness to debate and his advocacy for their cause. However, in discussions about his legacy, his critics also pointed to his controversial political rhetoric on subjects including race, persons experiencing same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria, and immigrants.

In response to a question about whether Kirk's death, amid other recent instances of political violence - which also include assassination attempts against President Donald Trump, but also the murders of Minnesota House of Representatives Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark Hortman - has changed the event's security planning, Lichter emphasized the group is committed to working with law enforcement to ensure the security of speakers and attendees.

"Our baseline is security upon security

upon security, to make the site secure," Lichter stressed.

"We will be - as we've done with our state marches - taking a close look at our existing security plan and working really closely with our law enforcement partners to ensure that every base is covered," she said. "But we have every confidence in the world, and the folks that we work with in law enforcement, who know this event very well, they're committed to it. They've worked with us for many years, and I think that will continue."

Organizers of the March for Life describe it as the nation's largest annual human rights demonstration.

The 53rd annual National March for Life is scheduled for Friday, Jan. 23, 2026. A pre-rally concert will feature the Christian band Sanctus Real, Lichter said, and the Friends of Club 21 Choir, which is comprised of individuals with Down syndrome, will lead the national anthem at the event.

Georgetown University Right to Life will carry the banner at the start of the March.

Lichter said the group is also launching a "Marchers' Stories Project" where they will seek video submissions from participants to document the group's history.

'9 Days for Life' Novena to begin Jan. 16 Abortion numbers in PA dropped in 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Catholics nationwide are invited to pray "9 Days for Life," an annual Respect Life novena starting Friday, Jan. 16, 2026.

In the Catholic Church, a 'novena' consists of prayers over nine successive days, and this particular novena is an opportunity for prayer and penance in observance of the annual Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children on January 22.

All are invited to sign up! Participants may access the novena or subscribe to receive the daily prayers by email or text message in English at 9daysforlife.com or in Spanish at respectlife.org/9-dias-por-la-vida.

The Diocese of Scranton will also feature the daily prayers on its website and Facebook page beginning on Jan. 16.

Sponsored by the Committee on Pro-Life Activities of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the novena began

in 2013 in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* - the Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal throughout the United States.

While the Supreme Court's 2022 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* returned the issue of abortion to the people's elected representatives at federal and state levels, continuing efforts are needed to protect children and their mothers from the tragedy of abortion.

This is the fourteenth year the novena is taking place. Since the novena began, it has reached hundreds of thousands of people in over one hundred countries spanning six continents.

The overarching intention of the novena is the end to abortion. Each daily prayer intention highlights a related topic and is accompanied by a reflection, educational information, and suggested daily actions.

HARRISBURG - Statistics released by the Pennsylvania Department of Health show 2,466 fewer abortions occurred in 2024 compared to 2023. In all, 32,946 abortions occurred in the Commonwealth in 2024.

"Every abortion is a tragedy, but the decline in abortions in Pennsylvania is good news for women and babies," said Maria Gallagher, executive director of the Pennsylvania Pro-Life Federation. "The dramatic drop demonstrates that more women in PA are getting the support they need to bring their babies into the world," Gallagher added.

"We are grateful to the many pregnancy resource centers in the Commonwealth, which offer comprehensive counseling and material aid to women in need. These vitally important centers charge nothing for their services, which are a life-saver for many women and their children," Gallagher added.

The age group having the most abortions are 25-29-year-olds, accounting for nearly 28 percent of the total. The vast majority of abortions - 93 percent - were performed in ten counties: Allegheny, Berks, Bucks, Dauphin, Delaware, Lehigh, Montgomery, Northampton, Philadelphia, and York.

INDUCED ABORTIONS IN 2024 BY COUNTY

Bradford	11
Lackawanna	434
Luzerne	825
Lycoming	111
Monroe	385
Pike	41
Sullivan	8
Susquehanna	15
Tioga	4
Wayne	39
Wyoming	20

Father Connell McHugh, pastor emeritus and Scripture scholar, dies at age 79

HAZLETON — The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, served as principal celebrant of a Pontifical Mass of Christian Burial for Father Connell A. McHugh, pastor emeritus of Good Shepherd Parish, Drums, on Jan. 10 at Holy Rosary Church in Hazleton.

Father McHugh, who was currently the sacramental minister at Holy Rosary Parish, Hazleton, died at the age of 79 on Jan. 4., after having faithfully served in priestly ministry for the Diocese of Scranton for 53 years.

Born Feb. 2, 1946, in Hazleton, son of the late Connell and Katherine Farley McHugh, Father McHugh received his early education in Saint Gabriel Parish schools, graduating from Saint Gabriel High School in 1964.

Father McHugh began his preparatory studies for the priesthood at Saint Charles Borromeo College, Catonsville, Md., which was staffed by the Sulpician Order. In 1966, he continued his theological training and formation at Saint Pius X Seminary in Dalton, where he

developed a love of biblical studies.

The young seminarian was greatly inspired by Scranton Diocesan priest Father Robert Barone, a native of Hazleton and former student of Father Raymond Brown, whom Father McHugh regarded as the greatest biblical scholar in the United States.

Father McHugh received his bachelor's degree in philosophy from Scranton University in 1969, after which he entered Our Lady of Angels Seminary in Selkirk, N.Y., near Albany.

Upon graduating with high honors, while earning master's degrees in divinity and theology from Our Lady of Angels, Father McHugh was ordained a priest for the Scranton Diocese on May 13, 1972, in the Cathedral of Saint Peter by the late Most Rev. J. Carroll McCormick, sixth Bishop of Scranton.

Following ordination, Father McHugh received a summer assignment at Saint Clare Parish, Scranton. While serving in subsequent appointments as assistant pastor at Saint Mary of



Father Connell A. McHugh

Mount Carmel Parish, Dunmore, and Nativity of Our Lord Parish, South Scranton, he also taught in both Diocesan junior and senior high schools in the Scranton area.

In 1975, Father McHugh was assigned as assistant pastor of Saint Francis Parish, West Hazleton, and as catechist at nearby Bishop Hafey High School, serving in both posts for nearly ten years. He was appointed pastor of Saint Patrick Parish, White Haven, in January 1985, in addition to being assigned Catholic chaplain of the White Haven Center.

From 1994 to 2007, Father

McHugh served as pastor of Saint Francis in West Hazleton, while returning to the faculty at Bishop Hafey High School during 2005-07. He later served briefly as a teacher at Holy Redeemer High School, Wilkes-Barre, and weekend celebrant at the parishes of Good Shepherd, Drums, and Saint John Bosco, Conyngham.

He subsequently was appointed as the Good Shepherd pastor in 2012, serving for more than eight years until retiring as pastor emeritus. In retirement, Father McHugh assumed the role of parish sacramental minister at Holy Rosary in Hazleton.

Himself an avid tennis player, known locally at clubs in Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, Father authored sports articles for many years for Panorama magazine and was widely recognized as an authority on vintage sports cards, especially baseball cards.

In addition to his parochial and academic duties, Father McHugh is well remembered for his decades of biblical presentations throughout the Diocese.

"Every Christian is a foot-washer, a person who serves others without thinking about himself" were the words Father Joseph Evanko used to begin the funeral homily for his longtime priest-friend, recalling his student days at Bishop Hafey High School in Hazleton when Father McHugh was his Christian Morality teacher.

He added, "This summary line was from a book we used that Father McHugh stressed, and it still resonates with me to this day. He tried to teach, live and witness a life as a 'foot-washer' in every sense."

"We are beneficiaries of Father McHugh's highly developed intellect of theology, philosophy and Scripture," Father Evanko expressed, while extolling the priest's immense knowledge and passion for music and sports.

"Father McHugh's daily pastoral presence has crossed over every parish in this 'neck of the woods,'" the homilist offered. "We would be hard pressed to name any parish, hospital or school (in the area) where he didn't have an impact."

Father John Turi, Scranton Diocesan priest for 70 years, dies at age 96

SCRANTON — The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, served as principal celebrant of a Pontifical Mass of Christian Burial for Father John F. Turi on Jan. 3 at Saint Patrick Church in West Scranton.

Father Turi died Dec. 28 at the Hospice of the Sacred Heart Inpatient Unit, having faithfully served the Diocese of Scranton in priestly ministry for 70 years.

Born April 20, 1929, in Scranton, son of the late Martin and Florence Walsh Turi, Father Turi received his early education at Saint Patrick Parish grade and high schools in Scranton.

He enrolled at Saint Bonaventure University in upstate New York, where he earned his bachelor's degree in philosophy in 1951. Following graduation, Father Turi entered Christ the King Seminary in Olean, N.Y., where he

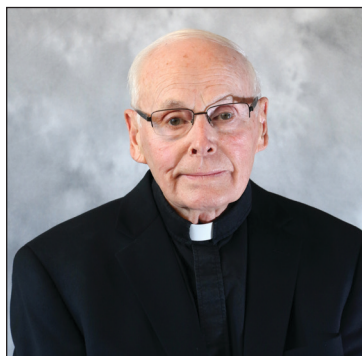
completed his preparatory studies for the priesthood and received his theology degree in 1955.

He later would obtain a Master of Science degree in education from Marywood College (now University) in 1983.

Father Turi was ordained a priest for the Scranton Diocese on June 4, 1955, in the Cathedral of Saint Peter by the late Most Rev. Jerome D. Hannan, fifth Bishop of Scranton.

Following ordination, he received his first assignment as assistant pastor of Saint Elizabeth Parish in Bear Creek, where he served until being appointed assistant pastor at Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, South Scranton.

In 1958, Father Turi was appointed chaplain of Mercy Hospital in Scranton, serving there for six years until he was assigned as assistant pastor of



Father John F. Turi

Saint Ann Parish, Tobyhanna. He subsequently returned to assume the chaplaincy duties at Scranton Mercy Hospital.

Father Turi received his first pastoral appointment in 1971, at Saint Joseph Parish in White Mills. After four years in the assignment, he was named pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Matamoras, where he remained until his retirement from active ministry as pastor

emeritus of Saint Joseph's on July 6, 2004.

In addition to his parochial duties, Father Turi also served as chaplain for Honesdale Council 363 of the Knights of Columbus.

Father Charles Cummings delivered the homily for the funeral of his dear friend and longtime fellow resident at the Villa Saint Joseph home for retired priests in Dunmore.

"I told one of the ladies who works at the Villa of John's death," Father Cummings began, "and her response was perfect: 'Good for him; he can rest in God's presence now.'"

"To me, that sums up the feeling we all have," the homilist added. "Often when we were gathered before dinner, he would say, 'I wanna go home.' He has been ready for a long time."

Recalling his friend's

wonderful and well-known sense of humor, Father Cummings quickly added, "But he was especially prayerful and serious about his call to the priesthood. He would come down in the morning and celebrate Mass in the chapel before breakfast, and he was faithful to his prayers."

"Today we say, 'Father John Turi has done great work' over 70 years as a priest of the Diocese of Scranton," Father Cummings commented, ultimately concluding, "Rest in peace in the presence of God...well done, good and faithful priest friend."

Father Turi is survived by several nieces and nephews. He was also preceded in death by a sister, Rose Marie Roche, and her husband, A.J.; and two brothers, Martin, and Sebastian, and his wife, Ann Marie.

Interment was conducted at Cathedral Cemetery in Scranton.

Legacy of faith endures as Saint Adalbert Church celebrates final Mass

NEWPORT TWP. — The pews of Saint Adalbert Church in Glen Lyon were filled one final time on Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026, as approximately 350 faithful gathered at 2 p.m. for a Closing Mass for the affectionately-known “Church on the Hill.”

The Mass was celebrated by the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, with Father James E. McGahagan, a native son of the community and longtime priest of the Diocese of Scranton, serving as homilist.

Throughout the liturgy, the voices of the Holy Spirit Parish choir echoed through the ornate interior built by hard-working Polish immigrants who sacrificed to establish a spiritual home for their community.

While the occasion was marked by sadness, the tone of the celebration consistently pointed toward gratitude, faith, and hope — themes echoed throughout the homily and remarks from Bishop Bambera.

“It is a bittersweet day — no doubt,” Bishop Bambera said following Communion. “But thank you for filling this church as it should be, to give honor and praise to God and thanksgiving for the blessing that this sacred space has been to so many of you.”

Saint Adalbert Church, founded 137 years ago when Glen

Lyon was known as Morgantown, flourished for decades as a center of faith and community life.

Over time, however, demographic shifts, declining Mass attendance, rising costs, and mounting maintenance needs brought significant challenges. In recent years, average weekend Mass attendance at Saint Adalbert had declined to approximately 50 to 55 people, while an independent facilities assessment identified hundreds of thousands of dollars in necessary repairs that would be needed over the next decade.

After several years of discussion and prayer through the Diocese of Scranton’s *Vision 2030 Pastoral Planning Process*, the decision was made to close Saint Adalbert Church and suppress Holy Spirit Parish, which had been formed in 2010 and included Saint Adalbert, Saint Mary Church in Mocanaqua, and Saint Martha Church in Fairmount Springs.

Under reconfiguration, Saint Mary Church has now become a secondary worship site of Saint Faustina Kowalska Parish in Nanticoke, while Saint Martha Church has become a secondary worship site of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Hunlock Creek.

Acknowledging the pain of the moment, Bishop Bambera reminded the faithful that the Church’s identity is rooted not in buildings, but in its people.

“This is a difficult day. Make no mistake about it,” he said. “We have to say goodbye to a cherished



As part of the closing ritual at Saint Adalbert Church, Bishop Bambera offered prayers at several locations, including the confessional. (Photos/Eric Deabill)



A statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary is seen in the foreground as faithful participated in the Closing Mass of Saint Adalbert Church on Jan. 11, 2026.

part of so many of our lives. It is not a day that any parishioner, any priest, or any bishop would ever relish — but we take hope in our faith.”

Bishop Bambera spoke personally of change and sacrifice, recalling his own experiencing presiding at a closing Mass of a church several years ago where his great-grandparents were founding members.

“Change is never easy,” he said, “and the loss of a treasured house of worship is particularly painful for all who have experienced the consolation of our faith within the walls of this church.”

Yet, he noted, change has always been a part of the Church’s story.

“If my great-grandparents — and yours — were unwilling to change in response to the circumstances of their lives in Poland over a century ago, they would have never ventured to this land,” he said. “They taught us that despite the heartaches and losses they endured, life goes on. For them, the most important legacy to pass from one generation to the next is the faith that sustains us.”

Father McGahagan, who began his homily speaking Polish, powerfully recalled the sacrifices

of Saint Adalbert’s founders — many of them poorly paid coal miners — who built a magnificent church with little more than faith and determination.

“As we look around at the beauty of this church, we find it amazing to see what they were able to do when they had so little for themselves,” he said. “What a tribute to their faith, their generosity, and their desire to celebrate that faith.”

He reflected on memories tied to the parish — baptisms, weddings, funerals, Stations of the Cross, and crowded holy days — memories shared by nearly everyone gathered.

“All of you here have similar, emotionally charged memories,” Father McGahagan said. “Today, we have gathered in sadness with the realization that those days have passed.”

Still, he urged parishioners not to grieve without hope.

“At this moment, we must remember the words of Saint Paul when he wrote that he would not have us grieve like those who have no hope,” he said. “Because of our faith in Jesus, risen from the dead, we face this loss as we face the loss of loved ones, grieving — but not without hope. Brought low — but not crushed — drawing from Christ Jesus

himself the strength to go on and remain strong and faithful.”

Throughout the Mass, the message was clear: the Church lives on in the people who carry its faith forward.

“This church has been a spiritual beacon in our lives,” parishioner Heidi Jarecki said. “As time went on, our population diminished and so that led us to today. It’s very emotional for a lot of us. We are very humble and grateful that our church has been here all these years.”

“It was a tough decision to make but it was one that had to be made and now we have to move on,” parishioner Joseph Hillan added. “On Christmas Eve we had a nice crowd of 175 people. If we had those 175 people every week, we wouldn’t be in this situation that we are today.”

At the end of the Mass, all parishioners were invited to reverence the altar one final time and then leave the church. At 3:52 p.m., the doors were locked one final time, and the Blessed Sacrament was given a police escort to Saint Faustina Parish.

“May our memories today be filled with gratitude and hope,” Bishop Bambera said. “Gratitude for all that has been, and hope for all that will be, through the grace of God present in our lives.”



Pat Dule embraces Heidi Jarecki after reverencing the altar inside Saint Adalbert Church.

Mass for Persons with Disabilities to be held on Sunday, Feb. 8

SCRANTON – In advance of National Disability Awareness Month in March, the Diocese of Scranton will hold its annual Mass for Persons with Disabilities on Sunday, Feb. 8, 2026, at 12:15 p.m. at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton.


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

The Most Reverend Joseph C.

Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will serve as principal celebrant and homilist at this special Mass.

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

Partners in the annual Mass for Persons with Disabilities include Saint Joseph's Center in Scranton and the Order of the Alhambra.



MASS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Sunday, Feb. 8, 2026
12:15 p.m.
Cathedral of Saint Peter, Scranton

'The Compassion of the Samaritan': World Day of the Sick Mass set for Feb. 11

SCRANTON – The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, will be the principal celebrant for the Diocese of Scranton's annual Mass for the World Day of the Sick on Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026, at 12:10 p.m. at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton.

Celebrated each year on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, the World Day of the Sick invites the faithful to pray in a special way for those who are ill, the elderly, and all who suffer, while also honoring the compassionate service of caregivers, healthcare professionals, family members, and all who accompany the sick with love and dignity.

The World Day of the Sick Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Peter will feature the Liturgy of the Anointing. Any person who wishes to receive the Sacrament of

Anointing of the Sick will be invited to approach the bishop/priest with their hands open and palms facing up. The bishop/priest will anoint both the forehead and hands of the sick person, accompanied by prayer for healing, strength, and peace.

CTV: Catholic Television of the Diocese of Scranton will provide a live broadcast of the Mass for those unable to attend. The Mass will also be livestream on the Diocese of Scranton website, YouTube channel and links will be provided on all Diocesan social media platforms.

The World Day of the Sick was established in 1992 by Saint John Paul II as a moment of prayer, reflection, and spiritual closeness for the entire Church, calling attention to the face of Christ present in those who are sick and vulnerable.

For the 2026 celebration, Pope Leo XIV has chosen the theme: *"The compassion of the Samaritan: Loving by bearing the pain of the other."*

Explaining the pope's choice of the theme, the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development said the theme "highlights an aspect of love of neighbor: love needs concrete gestures of closeness, through which we enter into the suffering of others, those

who are ill, especially those who at the same time experience poverty, isolation and loneliness."


"Like the good Samaritan who bent down to help the injured man along the road, the Christian community is also called to stop and help those who suffer and be evangelical witnesses of closeness and service to the sick and most vulnerable," the dicastery said.

Please plan to join us on Feb. 11!

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE SICK MASS



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026
12:10 P.M.
CATHEDRAL OF SAINT PETER, SCRANTON
MASS WILL FEATURE THE LITURGY OF THE ANOINTING



BISHOP BAMBERA'S SCHEDULE

January 12-16 - Region III Bishops Retreat

January 18 - Visit & Mass at Saint Andrew Seminary
Seton Hall University

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

February 8 - Mass for Persons with Disabilities
Cathedral of Saint Peter, Scranton, 12:15 p.m.

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

February 18 - Ash Wednesday Mass
Cathedral of Saint Peter, Scranton, 12:10 p.m.

February 19 - Lenten Holy Hour for the Sayre Deanery
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Wyalusing, 7 p.m.

A CALLING IN COLOR



Austin Burke works on his painting of the Cathedral of Saint Peter in his Archbald home on Jan. 6, 2026. (Photo/Eric Deabill)

ARCHBALD — From the window of the room where Austin Burke paints, he can see the spire of Saint Thomas Aquinas Church in Archbald, his home parish and spiritual anchor.

The view is not lost on him as he spends many mornings carefully sketching, mixing colors, and patiently bringing to life some of the most sacred and iconic church buildings across the Diocese of Scranton — one brushstroke at a time.

For nearly the past year, Burke has been quietly undertaking a remarkable act of stewardship.

The retired community leader has committed himself to painting Catholic churches throughout the Diocese, donating every completed work to benefit the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Scranton.

More than a dozen churches have already been captured on canvas, representing communities from Dunmore, Stroudsburg, Williamsport, Wilkes-Barre to

Scranton, with more to come.

“I feel blessed. I really do,” Burke said. “God’s given me some talent, given me the health to go through with it, given me the community and the affirmation to say, ‘Austin, we like your stuff.’ I totally feel blessed and privileged to be able to do this.”

Burke, a native of Archbald, is well known across northeastern Pennsylvania for his decades of leadership in economic development. He served for 40 years with the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce and later as Pennsylvania’s Secretary of Community and Economic Development under Governor Ed Rendell.

But while business and civic leadership have defined his professional life, art has long lived quietly alongside it.

“I’ve always had an interest in art,” Burke said.

That interest took a more serious turn in 1997 during a family vacation in Florida, when Burke borrowed a set of



Above: Annunciation Church in Williamsport, the primary worship site of Saint Joseph the Worker Parish, as depicted in a painting by local artist Austin Burke.

Top Right: The painting of Saint Nicholas Church in Wilkes-Barre that will be auctioned off later this year.

Bottom Right: Austin Burke’s completed painting of Saint John the Evangelist Church in Honesdale.

watercolors and began painting clouds.

“When I came home, I continued,” he joked. “I started slow. I painted trees for the next month.”

After retiring in 2013, Burke audited art courses at Keystone College and immersed himself in color theory, perspective, and drawing.

“I ended up taking 15 art courses and that really upped my game,” he acknowledged.

Over time, his paintings of Scranton-area landmarks gained attention. But Burke found himself increasingly drawn to churches.

“I think the most iconic buildings that we have in Lackawanna County are all of our churches,” he said. “They are real treasures that we have.”

For Burke, churches represent far more than architecture.

“A church is where humanity encounters God,” he reflected. “Not only do you encounter God there, but you meet your

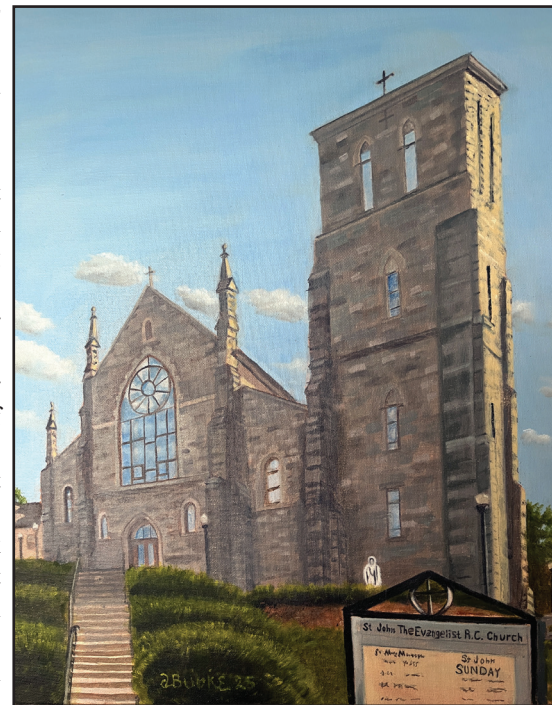
community there, and that is important.”

That insight eventually led to an idea: using his talent to help raise money for the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Scranton. Burke offered to paint local churches and the artwork could be put up for auction online.

Diocesan leaders embraced the idea — and encouraged him to expand beyond his home region.

“The Bishop said, ‘Would you mind doing a few more out in Williamsport, Muncy and Stroudsburg?’ Burke recalled. “I was honored.”

Each painting is a significant commitment.



Most are 16-by-20-inch oil paintings, with the Cathedral of Saint Peter a little larger. Burke and his wife, Marianne, travel to each location, carefully photographing the church under ideal lighting conditions.

“Morning light is different from evening light,” he explained.

Continued on Page 13

Parishes to hold collection for Church in Latin America Jan. 24-25

SCRANTON - On the weekend of Jan. 24 - 25, 2026, parishes in the Diocese of Scranton will take the annual Collection for the Church in Latin America, which supports ministries among the poor in Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

“This annual collection exemplifies the spiritual journey of Pope Leo XIV, who was born in Chicago but spent most of his ministry serving the poor in Peru,” said Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha, SDV, of the Diocese of Fall River, and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Subcommittee on the Church in Latin America, which oversees this annual collection and the grants it funds.

During the decade that then-Bishop Robert Prevost was Bishop of Chiclayo, his diocese received several grants from

the Collection for the Church in Latin America.

With this support, the diocese improved youth ministry in impoverished parishes, promoted care for the environment and educated thousands of parents, teachers and catechists in the prevention of child abuse.

“The Second Vatican Council, which ended a dozen years before Robert Prevost entered the Augustinian order, encouraged Catholics to reach out in love across all national borders, especially those between the wealthy global north and the developing global south,” said Bishop da Cunha, a Brazilian whose diocese includes Portuguese and Spanish-speaking Catholics. “Pope Leo XIV’s faith journey embodies the spirit of why the bishops of the United States created the Church in Latin America program six decades ago to

make an impact in Latin America.”

In 2024, gifts to the Collection for the Church in Latin America provided more than \$8 million for 344 projects. Some sample projects are:

- Evangelization, faith formation and pastoral care of teenagers in the Archdiocese of Caracas, Venezuela, whose parents have migrated to work in other countries.
- Prison ministry in the notorious Litoral Penitentiary in Guayaquil, Ecuador, with 10,000 severely overcrowded inmates and frequent lethal violence.
- Forming hundreds of Haitian lay leaders in marriage ministry so they can promote strong families in a society that is disintegrating from poverty and gang violence.
- A conference for 1,500 Colombians

to seek peace in a six-decade civil war through evangelization that emphasizes Jesus’s command to love our enemies.

• Preparing lay leaders in the Archdiocese of Havana, Cuba, to become evangelists in their communities, despite communist repression of the Catholic faith.

• An international gathering of 130 faith leaders in Mexico City to explore the continuing importance of the Vatican II document on Scripture, Dei Verbum.

“All of these projects represent the types of initiatives that inspired Father Prevost to go to Peru as a missionary,” Bishop da Cunha said. “In supporting the Collection for the Church in Latin America, we are able to honor Pope Leo XIV and, above all, serve the Lord who calls us to love our neighbors.”

Sacred spaces captured on canvas to support Catholic Foundation

Continued from Page 12

In his home studio, the process begins with days of sketching.

“If you don’t get the sketch right, you don’t know what you’re going to paint,” he said.

In total, Burke estimates that each painting takes about 200 hours from start to finish.

“These churches, they have great stained glass, stonework and buttresses,” he said. “Those lines often pull the whole painting together.”

Painting, for Burke, is a daily discipline.

“I like to paint most mornings,” he said, noting author Stephen King’s advice to work every day. “I would bet you that I paint four or five days a week for several hours.”

Some churches present unique challenges. He joked about the countless stones at Saint Catherine of Siena Church in Moscow but also acknowledged the joy that comes when a painting finally reveals a building’s true beauty – as what happened with Annunciation Church (Saint Joseph the Worker Parish) in Williamsport.

“All of a sudden – bang – you can see what a beautiful church this is,” he said, reflecting on the color he used for the columns near the church’s stained-glass windows. “That was one of the delights.”

For Burke, the greatest reward comes when others see the finished work.

“When you get it right, you bring joy to people that see it – and that brings joy to me,” he said.

Displayed in early January at a leadership donor reception for the Catholic Ministries Appeal, the paintings sparked pride among parishioners from across the Diocese.

Burke hopes his paintings also help people recognize the breadth and diversity of the Church of Scranton.

“I’d like to see people recognize how huge this diocese is,” he said, “and the variations (of churches) depending on where immigrants come from.”

As the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Scranton prepares for an auction of Burke’s paintings after Easter 2026, his effort already stands



Above: Saint Catherine of Siena Church in Moscow as depicted by local artist Austin Burke.

Right: The painting of Saint John the Evangelist Parish in Pittston that will be up for auction later this year.



About the Online Art Auction

A select number of churches painted by local artist Austin Burke will be part of an online auction that opens in April 2026. Information on how to participate will be forthcoming.

For early access to an opening bid for the auction, please contact Mark DiPippa, Executive Director of the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Scranton at (570) 207-2212 or MDiPippa@catholicfoundationscranton.org.

Viva Villanova! PA Catholic university's link to Pope Leo gives Dickson City professor inside track to meet school's most famous alum

DICKSON CITY — As 2025 came to a close, the Prefecture of the Papal Household in Rome estimated that nearly three million pilgrims and visitors attended audiences, liturgies or meetings at the Vatican with Pope Leo XIV from the time of his election in May through December.

Among those millions, no layperson from the Diocese of Scranton had a more personal visit with the new Pontiff than Frank Klassner, Ph.D., of Dickson City.

The longtime professor in the Department of Computing Sciences at Villanova University, outside of Philadelphia, was among a group of nearly 20 students and faculty from Villanova who had a private audience last fall with Pope Leo — the first priest from the Order of Saint Augustine elevated to the papacy — who earned his mathematics degree from the Augustinian-run university in 1977.

The meeting proved historic as it was the Holy Father's first meeting with former Villanova classmates since his election as Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church last year.

Celebrating the university's most famous alumnus' ascent to the papacy and their shared values of education and faith, the gathering was a momentous occasion of reflection and connection for the Villanova community.

Dr. Klassner, the Dickson City native and lifelong member of the borough's Catholic Parish of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was a key participant in the academic and personal exchanges with Pope Leo during the privileged visit.

"(Villanova) has had an internship program since 2003 that sends computer science and communication majors to work for a semester in technical offices at the Vatican," Dr. Klassner explained, noting that the papal meeting was arranged through the office of the university's president.

The audience consisted of computer science and communications faculty, as well as 11 students serving as interns at the Vatican Museum, Vatican Telecommunications Office, and the Dicastery of Communication.

Having earned his undergraduate degrees in computer science and electrical engineering from The University of Scranton, Dr. Klassner received his doctorate in computer science — with a specialization in artificial intelligence (AI) — from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst in 1996.

Additionally, the local Villanova professor has played an integral role in the unique academic relationship with the Holy See, which has had him travel to Rome several times a year since 2008.

"Meeting His Holiness was the

most moving experience in the 17 years I have worked in the Villanova-Vatican Internship Program, and it will inspire me for the rest of my life," Dr. Klassner noted.

He indicated the personal gathering with the Holy Father focused on the technical realities of today, particularly in the field of AI, and Pope Leo's mathematical backgrounds was highlighted as especially helpful in understanding these challenges.

Dr. Klassner joins his Villanova colleagues in the belief that it is quite appropriate — if not prophetic — that His Holiness chose the papal name of Leo, in homage to his predecessor Pope Leo XIII.

"Today, Pope Leo XIV leads the Catholic Church in a world that, each day is coming to grips with the pervasive effects of artificial intelligence," Dr. Klassner remarked, noting that during his reign as Supreme Pontiff from the late 19th century until his death in 1903, Leo XIII grappled with the immense challenges of the Industrial Revolution.

However, the papal audience wasn't all business, according to the local professor.

"After greeting each of us, the Pope expressed his gratitude for the work the students and faculty from his alma mater were doing," Dr. Klassner shared. "He also led us in reciting the Our Father and gave us his personal blessing."

The singular honor for the visiting Villanovans also presented another opportunity, which Dr. Klassner thanks his pastor, Monsignor Patrick Pratico, for. Due to his time spent in Rome acquiring advanced degrees in Canon Law, Monsignor Pratico was able to put his parishioner in touch with the official papal tailor shop in town to obtain a zucchetto (the papal skull cap) that was perfectly sized for Pope Leo.

"I presented the Pope with the zucchetto (specially embroidered with Villanova's



Above: Dr. Frank Klassner of Dickson City, professor of computing sciences at Villanova University, presents a custom-made 'Villanova zucchetto' to Pope Leo XIV, a 1977 graduate of the Philadelphia area Catholic Augustinian university. Below: Frank displays the zucchetto and a Boy Scout neckerchief signed by the Holy Father at the Troop 21 Scout home at Saint Mary's Visitation Church in Dickson City.



iconic blue 'V' logo), which he wore briefly and then returned as a souvenir," he related.

Saint Mary's Visitation Church in Dickson City would also play another part in the historic meeting with the Holy Father.

A product of the former parish elementary school, Dr. Klassner was also active in Saint Mary's Boy Scout troop. He eventually attained the rank of Eagle Scout and now serves as a troop leader.

"I also asked Pope Leo to sign a neckerchief from the parish's Boy Scout Troop 21, in recognition of the impact the parish and troop had on my training and research," Dr. Klassner noted.

Recalling how his scouting experience and student days at the parish school taught him to always be open to serve the Church, he can't help but to wonder if he now has the only Boy Scout neckerchief ever signed by a Pope.



Dickson City Scout leader Dr. Frank Klassner and members of Boy Scout Troop 21 pose with the glass display case containing a zucchetto worn by Pope Leo and the Scout neckerchief His Holiness signed for the Troop during Klassner's recent papal audience.

Rectory, Set, Cook! will return for its fifth season next month

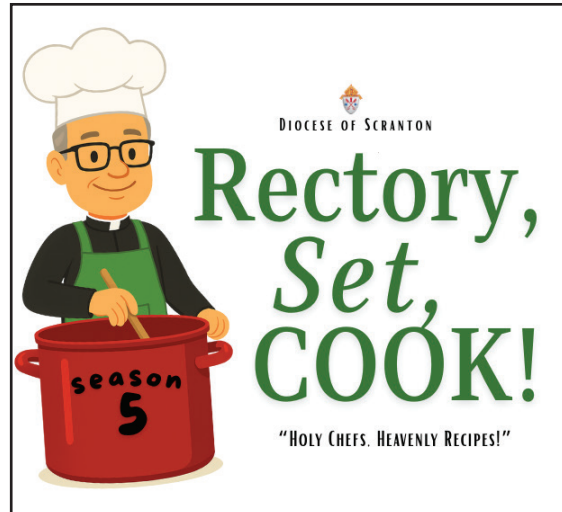
SCRANTON – One of the Diocese of Scranton's most popular and creative fundraisers is returning for a milestone season, as Rectory, Set, Cook! will launch its fifth annual competition next month – with the hopes of surpassing \$1 million raised since its inception.

The 2026 Rectory, Set, Cook! campaign will officially kick off on Tuesday, Feb. 17, and continue through 4:00 p.m. on Friday, March 27, inviting everyone across northeastern and north central Pennsylvania to support priests-turned-“pastor chefs” as they cook – and compete – for a good cause.

Half of all funds raised through Rectory, Set, Cook! benefit Catholic Social Services of the Diocese of Scranton, specifically supporting hunger and homelessness initiatives, while the remaining half goes directly to the participating priest's parish.

The new season will begin with a Launch Party on Tuesday, Feb. 17, from 6-8:30 p.m. at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Scranton. The 21-and-over event will feature food from local restaurants, musical entertainment from some of the pastor chefs, and a collaborative beer brewed by Breaker Brewing Company in partnership with Father Brian Van Fossen. Admission is \$20 at the door.

Now in its fifth year, Rectory, Set, Cook! has grown into a signature fundraiser for Catholic Social Services, combining friendly competition, humor, and generosity. Priests from across the Diocese film short cooking videos – sometimes solo, sometimes alongside parishioners, friends, or fellow clergy – encouraging donations and votes through an online platform.



For Father Michael Boris, assistant pastor at Saint Ignatius Loyola Parish in Kingston and Holy Family Parish in Luzerne, the competition is about much more than cooking.

“I really do think it’s important that we support Catholic Social Services,” Father Boris said. “As a priest, I have an obligation to do what I can to promote those services.”

Entering his third year in the competition, Father Boris this year is cooking Pan-Seared Chicken with Lemon Riccotta Pasta alongside several parishioners.

“Every time I do it, I’m impressed with how the people I work with come together,” he added. “I think it helps them appreciate what we do as priests – and I get to learn new skills.”

Monsignor Jack Bendik, who has participated in Rectory, Set, Cook! every year since its launch, said his continued involvement reflects an enduring commitment to service.

“I want to show that even though we’re retired, we still have a commitment to the

JOIN US FOR THIS YEAR’S LAUNCH PARTY!

TUESDAY, FEB. 17

6:00-8:30 P.M.

DIOCESAN PASTORAL CENTER, SCRANTON

**ADMISSION: \$20 AT THE DOOR
21-AND-OVER EVENT**

Some of the dishes our pastor-chefs are making this year....



Polenta Parmigiana with Porcini Mushrooms



Pan-Seared Chicken with Lemon Ricotta Pasta

Diocesan mission – especially to the poor,” Monsignor Bendik said. “Everything we receive is given to the poor.”

Monsignor Bendik will be joined by Father Phil Sladicka in this year’s video for the Villa Saint Joseph. The pair will share several simple, crowd-pleasing recipes, including a zucchini quiche that became a parish favorite in Avoca.

“Every time I had Bible study or a Sunday morning gathering, this was so easy to make that I would feed it to everybody and they loved it,” he said. “They kept coming back.”

Since its inaugural year in 2022, Rectory, Set, Cook! has steadily grown,

raising \$171,747 in its first year, followed by \$197,412 in 2023, \$218,001 in 2024, and a record-breaking \$227,162 in 2025.

Proceeds have supported food pantries, kitchens, emergency shelters, and housing initiatives across the Diocese, helping Catholic Social Services respond to increasing needs in local communities.

For more information on Rectory, Set, Cook!, visit the Diocese of Scranton’s website or follow Diocesan social media channels.

It is also not too late for priests to participate in this year’s effort. For more information, contact Shannon Kowalski at Skowalski@dioceseofscranton.org.

Holy Year pilgrimage churches throughout Diocese welcomed worshippers from near & far

Continued from Page 3

contacted the East Stroudsburg parish to arrange for a busload of youth and adults to visit the pilgrimage site while they were on retreat in the Pocono Mountains.

“What a beautiful experience to see the pilgrims process from their bus in prayer and devotion passing through the doors of our church,” Father Williams shared.

Father Kevin Miller, pastor of the newly created Parish of Saint Pius of Pietrelcina in

Hazleton, served as the spiritual shepherd for the Jubilee Year pilgrimage site of Saint Gabriel Church.

He recalled that one group of women from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia were regularly attending the Saturday morning Mass at Saint Gabriel’s.

“I remember two women who were coming to daily Mass during the summer told me their goal was to visit all of the jubilee pilgrimage sites in the Diocese during the year,” Father Miller said.

The Hazleton pastor also related that a pilgrim group of approximately 20 young men from a traditionalist Catholic organization - dressed in sport coats and ties - arrived for a daily Mass as part of their own pilgrimage.

“It was a great blessing for our parish and those in attendance to see so many young people worshipping at Mass in our church,” Father remarked.

Nearly a year ago - in February - Saint Gabriel Church was blessed to host the relics

of the parish’s new patron, Saint Padre Pio, attracting numerous pilgrims from around the Scranton Diocese and the nearby Diocese of Allentown to visit the worship site for communal veneration and prayerful intercession.

“Only the Lord knows how many souls received the grace of hope during the course of the Jubilee Year,” Father Miller mused. “This was a great blessing to our parish, in the challenging times of parish consolidation, to be a place of mercy, love and hope.”

National Marriage Week to be celebrated Feb. 7-14

SCRANTON - The Diocese of Scranton will observe National Marriage Week from Feb. 7-14, 2026, with a special emphasis on Sunday, Feb. 8, which is when World Marriage Day will be celebrated this year.

This special week is an opportunity to focus on building a culture of life and love that begins with supporting and promoting marriage and the family.

This year's theme is: "Man and Woman He Created Them: Together with Purpose."

It is more important than ever to spread the word and hope about the value of the institution of marriage.

Marriage is the bedrock of our society. When that crumbles, our homes and families crumble, our children then struggle, and our communities deal with the ripple effect.



Throughout National Marriage Week, the Diocese of Scranton will share special content on its Diocesan social media channels.

National Marriage Week, launched in 2010, is part of an international event seeking to strengthen marriage in our communities.

Prayer for Married Couples

O God, who in creating the human race willed that man and wife should be one,

keep, we pray, in a bond of inseparable love those who are united in the covenant of Marriage,

so that, as you make their love fruitful, they may become, by your grace, witnesses to charity itself.

Through Christ our Lord
Amen.

NATIONAL MARRIAGE WEEK

Swing Dance

Feb 7th *Featuring LIVE!* **SWING FEVER DANCE BAND** *Full Big Band 17-Piece & Vocalists*

With
DANCE INSTRUCTION FROM PHILIP SPINKA & JILL WETZEL

*MUST BE 18+ TO ATTEND

Saturday, Feb 7th, 2026 * **Diocesan Pastoral Center**

\$20 in Advance * **330 Wyoming Ave, Scranton** * **To Purchase your Tickets:**
\$25 at the Door * **Visit dioceseofscranton.org**
\$10 - ADVANCE TABLE RESERVATION OPTION * **4:00PM - 8:00PM** * **or call**
8 Seats/Table * **SWING DANCE INSTRUCTION 4-5PM** * **(570) 207-2213 ext 1133**
OPEN DANCE FROM 5-8PM * **OUR CALL TO SERVE**
BRING YOUR OWN FOOD & DRINK! * **CATHOLIC MINISTRIES APPEAL**

DIocese of SCRANTON

Diocese to host National Marriage Week 'Swing Dance' on Feb. 7

SCRANTON - In celebration of the vocation of marriage and National Marriage Week (Feb. 7-14), the Diocese of Scranton is hosting a Swing Dance on Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026, at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Scranton.

The Swing Dance, which will take place in the Pastoral Center Auditorium, will feature the Swing Fever Dance Band from Limekiln, Pa., a 17-piece traditional Big Band, and swing dance instruction from local instructors, Philip Spinka and Jill Wetzel.

The Swing Fever Dance Band is a non-profit corporation whose purpose is to perform and encourage the enjoyment of big band music.

Swinging since 1983, the Swing Fever Dance Band has been recreating the big band sound of the 1930s and 1940s and performing music selections that span over five decades.

In addition to performing throughout Pennsylvania, in 1992, the band performed in England and Wales. They were also invited to return in 1994 to participate in the United Kingdom's official commemoration of the 50th anniversary of D-Day.

The Swing Fever Dance Band has several CDs, which include great selections like *Take the A-Train*, *Eager Beaver*, *Moonlight in Vermont*, and *The Shadow of Your Smile*.

Please mark your calendars now for this special event in Scranton.

All people over the age of 18 are welcome to join us from 4 - 5 p.m. for the dance instruction from our local instructors and then enjoy open dance from 5 - 8 p.m.

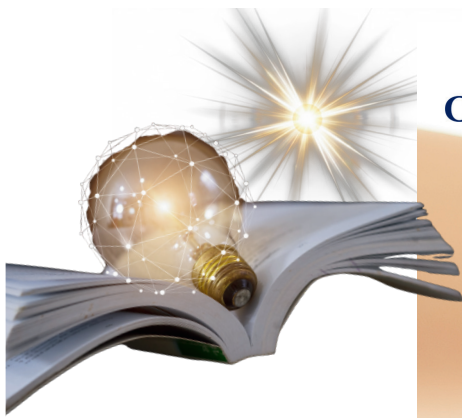
Tickets to attend will be \$20 per person in advance, and \$25 at the door.

Guests also have the option of reserving a table for their families and friends in advance for \$10 for tables of 8 guests.

For more information or to purchase tickets now, visit dioceseofscranton.org.

All who are attending are welcome to bring their own food and drinks to enjoy at the dance.

If you have any questions, you may call Bridget Maille, Program Coordinator, Family Life, in the Diocesan Office for Parish Life, at (570) 207-2213 ext 1133 or email: familylife@dioceseofscranton.org.



**DIOCESE
OF SCRANTON
CATHOLIC
SCHOOLS**



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

**SCIENCE
TECHNOLOGY
RELIGION
ENGINEERING
ART &
MATHEMATICS**



The kickoff of the second annual **"Living The S.T.R.E.A.M."** virtual competition for Diocese of Scranton middle-schoolers is quickly approaching, and our students need your support! Hundreds of sixth- through eighth-graders in our Catholic schools will showcase their best ideas for improving the world through a **S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering, **A**rt, or **M**athematics concept presented in a three- to five-minute video. All projects are required to have **Religion** as an overarching theme and clearly demonstrate how our Roman Catholic faith inspired the idea.

**Please join us on
www.dioceseofscranton.org from Feb.
2-10 and vote for your favorite BIG
IDEAS FOR A BETTER WORLD!**



CAN YOU HELP? WE NEED PRIZE SPONSORS!

This year's Awards Ceremony will give students the chance to win educational technology prizes for their schools. **If you can donate a prize, scan the QR code at left to view our Amazon wish list and send a prize directly to the Catholic Schools office or call Sandra Snyder at 570-591-5004 (or email ssnyder@dioceseofscranton.org) to find out how to help offline.** All prize donors will be recognized as **Incentives Sponsors** at the awards ceremony.



IMPORTANT DATES CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK SPECIAL EVENT!

Thursday, Jan. 29, 6:30-8 p.m.: Pre-launch mixer & inspiration session with our competitors and our Catholic schools alumni who are future doctors now studying at The Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine in Scranton.

Monday, Feb. 2: Website opens for voting!

Tuesday, Feb. 10: Voting ends at 3 p.m. **People's Choice** winners based on total dollars raised as of this timestamp.

Wednesday, Feb. 11: Awards ceremony from 6-8 p.m. at the Diocesan Pastoral Center. Scholarships & technology prizes awarded to top-vote getters in both the **People's Choice** and **Judges' Choice** categories.



"There are 28 teams registered from GSA. ... As soon as they started producing a video, the spark ignited.

Overall, their favorite task is making the video. It's like I have 28 tiny independent production studios working out of my classroom.

I am excited to see what the students come up with. There are always some unique ideas, and their concepts focus on what's important to them. None of them match my own ideas, which is refreshing.

As an adult it's fascinating to spectate, and I do learn a tremendous amount from the students. I would wholeheartedly endorse this endeavor to all other adults. Even if it was just for fun."

**-JESSE HOPPE,
FACULTY ADVISOR,
GOOD SHEPHERD ACADEMY,
KINGSTON**

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



The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, celebrated Mass for the community at **Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton** on Jan. 8, 2026. Reflecting on why the Christmas season lasts a couple weeks beyond December 25, the Bishop told the students that this gives us more time to think about the gift of Jesus. He also encouraged them to become saints like recently canonized Carlo Acutis and shared the words of St. Teresa of Calcutta, "You don't have to do great things, just small things with great love."



Mrs. Harbach's kindergarten class from **Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport** visited the Meadows Nursing Home to spread some Christmas cheer by performing carols for the residents.



Mrs. Jessica Zugel's students sang Christmas carols, in Latin, throughout the halls of **Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg**.



Eighth grade students at **Saint Nicholas/Saint Mary School in Wilkes-Barre** shared the Living Nativity with the rest of the school at the December 18 Mass.



The eighth grade class at **All Saints Academy in Scranton** share the true meaning of Christmas with their presentation of The Nativity Story.



The students and faculty at **Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston** recently celebrated their Christmas Liturgy with Father Andrew HvozdoVIC, Pastor of Gate of Heaven Parish, Dallas, and Our Lady of Victory Parish, Harveys Lake. Pictured with Father HvozdoVIC are Gavin Kravulski, Emily Ratchford, Max Budzilek, and Sophia Jones who portrayed the Nativity Scene.



TJ Grego, Colton Kowalski and Bert Marcalus, seventh grade students at **Saint Jude School in Mountain Top**, proudly show off their creation as part of the school's STREAM Gingerbread House Challenge.



Mrs. GERALYN Durham from **Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg** smiles with some students as they enjoy the school's annual "Cookies and Milk with Santa" celebration.



On the Feast of the Epiphany, students and teachers at **Saint Agnes School in Towanda** gather to bless the doors of their school and classrooms and to pray for God's blessings on all in 2026.



Middle school students from **Saint John Neumann Jr./Sr. High School in Williamsport** wrote Christmas letters for homebound neighbors in the Williamsport area to help spread Christmas cheer.



Luna Esty, JJ Rupprecht, and JJ Galvin, students at **Holy Rosary School in Duryea**, participated in the Diocesan Band's Winter Concert.



Mr. Tolerico and the Christmas crew at **Holy Cross High School in Dunmore** were in the local area spreading cheer and thanking those who serve the HCHS community. Students Kevin Vincent, Katie Apolinario, Claire Polishan, and Alessandra Lynn had a chance to visit Alec Shattin, HC Class of 2016, and the Dunmore Fire Department.



The first grade at **Epiphany School in Sayre** celebrated Christmas in the Convent with Sister Anne Quigley, IHM.



The Viking Council from **La Salle Academy in Jessup** decorated a tree at the trolley museum to display their school heritage and a variety of Christmas traditions from around the world—it was so fantastic, it won first place!



The second Agape Retreat recently concluded for half of the Class of 2026 from **Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre**. The soon-to-be graduates are left with a challenge, which is to go forth to love and dignify all they encounter, and this call to action is already being demonstrated by this remarkable group of students.



What cuties! Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students at **Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore** danced and sang for family and friends at the school's annual Christmas concert.



In the days before his big trip around the world, Santa and Mrs. Claus stopped by **Holy Family Academy in Hazleton** to express their gratitude to the cafeteria team for the great service and dedication they provide to the HFA students and faculty.

Host-for-a-Day campaign supports mission to serve people in need

Campaign celebration event is April 29; RSVPs required by April 15

SCRANTON - As many people continue to experience food insecurity, Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen in Scranton has begun the 48th annual Host-for-a-Day campaign to support its mission of feeding and clothing individuals and families in need.

For a donation of \$100 or more, an individual, family, business, community organization or faith-based group can help to fund a day's meal. Major sponsorship levels are also available starting at \$500.

In effect, each contributor becomes a "host" for a day. Contributors may then select a date on which they or someone they designate or memorialize will be recognized as helping to

provide that meal.

Financial contributions to the Kitchen also help to fund other programs such as a Client-Choice Food Pantry and Free Clothing Store and weekly meals at parish locations and high-rise housing buildings in Carbondale and Olyphant, and also weekly meals at parish sites in Roaring Brook Township and Archbald.

In addition, the Kitchen is also now providing meals for Saint Anthony's Haven shelter for the homeless.

The Kitchen's Free Clothing Mobile Trailer visits various locations to bring clothing items to those in need who might not be able to come to the Scranton property.



Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen has launched its 2026 Host-for-a-Day campaign. Pictured from left are: Kitchen Executive Director Rob Williams, Advisory Board President Donna Barbetti, and Advisory Board member and Campaign Chair Michael J. Cummings.

Also, the Kitchen participates in the "Code Blue" initiative with

the City of Scranton and Catholic Social Services of the Diocese of Scranton. When the temperature gets below 20 degrees, the Kitchen provides hot soup to those experiencing homelessness who are being welcomed at Weston Field.

Rob Williams, Kitchen Executive Director, noted that the Kitchen has been serving historic numbers of meals.

In 2025, the Kitchen provided more than 125,000 meals, far surpassing the approximately 95,000 meals in 2024 and 75,000 meals in 2023.

In recent months, the Client Choice Food Pantry and Free Clothing operation have also experienced higher visits by families in need.

"For a variety of reasons, we are seeing more people than ever coming to us for help," he said. "There is nothing more basic than the need to eat, and we are

privileged to be in a position to address this need for our brothers and sisters."

Michael J. Cummings, a member of the Kitchen's Advisory Board, is chairing the 2026 Host-for-a-Day campaign and leading the effort with his fellow board members.

"The Host-for-a-Day campaign is essential to the operation of the Kitchen," he said. "The generosity of so many individuals and organizations within our community enables us to continue the mission."

Recent contributors to the campaign are receiving an appeal directly from the Kitchen through the mail or will be contacted by members of the Kitchen's Advisory Board.

Host-for-a-Day gifts can also be made by calling the Kitchen at (570) 342-5556, or sending a check to Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen, 500 Penn Avenue, Scranton, PA 18509.

Donations can also be made online at: www.stfranciskitchen.org or facebook.com/stfranciskitchen or text SFAK to 26989.

The culmination of the campaign will be celebrated at Fiorelli's in Peckville on Wednesday, April 29, beginning at 6 p.m.

Each contributor and a guest is invited to attend. RSVPs are required by April 15 to confirm attendance and an accurate meal count.

Those who would like to sponsor the reception are asked to call the Kitchen at (570) 342-5556.

YOU Can Feed and Clothe People In Need!

More than 250 men, women and children rely on Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen each day for hot, nutritious meals, food for their households and clothing for all seasons.

You can support this mission through the annual Host-for-a-Day campaign. For a donation of \$100 or more, an individual, a family, a business, a community organization

or faith-based group can help sponsor a day's meal at the Kitchen and be recognized as a "host" of that meal. Major sponsorship levels are also available beginning at \$500.

Recent contributors to the Host-for-a-Day campaign are receiving an appeal directly from the Kitchen through the mail or will be contacted by a member of the Advisory Board. Donations can also be made by:



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Thank You For Your Support!

The culmination of the campaign will be celebrated at Fiorelli's in Peckville on Wednesday, April 29, at 6 p.m. RSVPs are required by April 15. Those who would like to sponsor the reception are asked to call the Kitchen at 570-342-5556.



Sign up for the FREE Catholic Light Weekly E-Newsletter

Click on the MEDIA tab on the Diocese of Scranton website (dioceseofscranton.org)

SEEK 2026 conference summoned youth to draw close to Christ

(OSV News) - Thousands of youth and young adults across the nation were assured of God's love - and encouraged to respond to his call in their lives - during an annual gathering spanning three cities, with Pope Leo XIV delivering a special recorded message to participants.

"Be open to what the Lord has in store for you," the pope said in a video address to those attending the SEEK 2026 conference.

This year's conference took place Jan. 1-5 at three event locations - Columbus, Ohio; Denver; and Fort Worth, Texas - drawing an estimated 26,000 participants in total for talks and workshops on encountering Jesus Christ. The schedule included daily Mass, Eucharistic adoration, the sacrament of reconciliation and fellowship.

Among the numerous conference speakers were Father Mike Schmitz, Matt Fradd, Chris Stefanick, Sister of Life Mary Grace and Sister Josephine Garrett, a sister of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

In his Jan. 4 keynote address, Curtis Martin - founder of conference sponsor FOCUS, an international Catholic missionary outreach which serves at more

than 200 college campuses in the U.S., Mexico and Europe, as well as at some 20 parishes - told attendees that God "wants to dance with" them.

Martin (who is set to retire as CEO of FOCUS, while remaining on its board) stressed the transformative power of God's love, which enables those infused with it to in turn become missionary disciples, able to "go love the world."

SEEK 2026 centered on the theme "To the Heights," a favorite exhortation of the recently canonized St. Pier Giorgio Frassati, an avid mountaineer and patron of young adults.

Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of Columbus reflected in his homily at the SEEK 2026 opening Mass in that city Jan. 1 that the conference's timing and its 2026 theme harmonized well.

"The mighty God descended from the starry heaven and became a child so that we might go up to heaven, 'toward the heights,' as Pier Giorgio Frassati might say," Bishop Fernandes said.

In his pre-recorded video message to the SEEK attendees, which was posted along with a transcript to the Vatican website, Pope Leo also appeared to echo

St. Frassati's sentiment, urging SEEK attendees to reflect on the call of the first two disciples of Jesus as detailed in John 1:35-51.

The pope said that St. Andrew and the other disciple - initially followers of St. John the Baptist - pursued Jesus, whose first recorded words in John's Gospel were a question posed to

the two: "What do you seek?"

Jesus "directs this same question to each one of you," said the pope, adding, "The answer is found in a person. The Lord Jesus alone brings us true peace and joy, and fulfills every one of our deepest desires."

Discerning one's God-given vocation was a core element of

SEEK 2026, with Sister Catherine Rotterman of the Felician Sisters of North America, who was on hand at the Fort Worth gathering, saying the conference enables young adults to see themselves as part of a "much bigger Church."

"SEEK helps them dream of where God might be leading them," Sister Catherine said.



Father Brian J.T. Clarke, Senior Priest, Saint Matthew Parish in East Stroudsburg, accompanied several university students from the Poconos to this year's SEEK 2026 conference in Columbus, Ohio.

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New chapter in life of the St. Lucy Province of the Religious Teachers Filippini

MORRISTOWN, N.J. - The St. Lucy Province of the Religious Teachers Filippini held their Provincial Chapter of Elections at Villa Walsh in Morristown, N.J., from Oct. 11-13, 2025.

The Sisters currently serve at Saints Anthony and Rocco Parish in Dunmore, and the St. Lucy

Province covers the entire United States.

The Sister delegates elected a new Provincial Superior and four Provincial Councillors to assist her during the six-year term that began immediately and continues until October 2031.

After spending a significant

amount of time in prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament in Eucharistic Adoration, the Sister delegates elected Sister Marianne McCann, M.P.F. as Provincial Superior.

At the time of her election, Sister Marianne McCann had been serving as Provincial Councillor from 2019 to 2025.

She was also the Superior of the local convent at St. John Vianney Parish in Colonia, N.J. Previously, she served for many years as Principal of Paul VI High School in Haddonfield, N.J.

The four Provincial Councillors elected were Sister Laura Bezila, M.P.F., who served as Provincial Councillor from 2019 to 2025, and who teaches Theology part-time at Villa Walsh Academy in Morristown.

Elected next was Sister Alice Ivanyo, M.P.F. who serves as Parish Catechetical Leader at the Parish of Our Lady of Victories in Sayreville, N.J. Sister Alice also ministered as Provincial Councillor from 2007 to 2013.

The election of Sister Lesley Draper, M.P.F., Principal of Villa Victoria Academy in Ewing, N.J., followed.

The final Provincial



The newly-elected administration of the St. Lucy Province of the Religious Teachers Filippini are, from left: Sister Elaine Bebyn, MPF, Provincial Councillor; Sister Alice Ivanyo, MPF, Provincial Councillor; Sister Marianne McCann, MPF, Provincial Superior; Sister Laura Bezila, MPF, Provincial Councillor; and Sister Lesley Draper, MPF, Provincial Councillor.

Councillor elected was Sister Elaine Bebyn, M.P.F., who ministers as Principal at Villa Walsh Academy in Morristown.

During the celebratory meal following the election, Sister Marianne McCann addressed the Sisters with a message of gratitude for the honor of the Sisters' trust, and she welcomed the Sisters to upcoming scheduled events in the life of the Province.

Sister Marianne further asked for their prayerful support at this time of transition of administrations.

There was a palpable sense of excitement in the dining room as the Sisters began a new chapter in the life the Religious Teachers Filippini in the United States.

For more information on the Religious Teachers Filippini, visit filippiniusa.org.



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Children celebrate Christmas



Children from SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Towanda, Bradford County, pose for a photograph with their pastor, Father Jose Kuriappilly, after Christmas Eve Mass on Dec. 24, 2025.

President Trump meets with U.S. Bishops' President at White House

WASHINGTON (OSV News) - President Donald Trump met with Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Jan. 12, a spokesperson for the USCCB confirmed.

The private meeting, which was listed on the official White House schedule for Trump, was closed to press. The White House did not specify the topic of the meeting.

In a statement provided to OSV News, a USCCB

spokesperson said, "Archbishop Coakley had the opportunity for introductory meetings with President Trump, Vice President Vance, and other Administration officials, in which they discussed areas of mutual concern, as well as areas for further dialogue."

"Archbishop Coakley is grateful for the engagement and looks forward to ongoing discussions," the statement said.

Although it was not immediately clear what the topic of the meeting was, it comes as the U.S. bishops have alternately

praised and criticized some Trump administration policies, objecting to some of his actions on topics including immigration and the death penalty, but commending others, such as those on gender policy.

Archbishop Coakley was elected president of the USCCB in November at the bishops' fall plenary assembly. At the same meeting, the bishops also approved a "special pastoral message" Nov. 12 - their first since 2013 when they objected to the Obama administration's

contraceptive mandate - of people" and also prayed voicing "our concern here for immigrants." The bishops' rhetoric and violence, whether special message opposed "the directed at immigrants or at law indiscriminate mass deportation enforcement."

Human Trafficking and Sporting Events Webinar Jan. 22

HARRISBURG - In partnership with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the New Jersey Catholic Conference, the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference, and the SOAP Project, we invite you to a 90-minute webinar dedicated to exploring the intersection of human trafficking and major sporting events.

The webinar will take place on Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026, from 6:30-8:00 p.m. via Zoom.

January marks National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, a time when we come together to raise awareness about the grave injustice of human trafficking.

This year, the focus is on major sporting events, which unfortunately can create conditions where trafficking risks increase.

With the Super Bowl scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 8 in San Jose, California, this discussion is both timely and urgent.

Opening Prayer and Reflection led by His Excellency Oscar Cantú, Bishop of San Jose, California, who will offer a reflection on the Church's role in combating human trafficking.

To sign up for the webinar, you can go to the Diocese of Scranton website (dioceseofscranton.org) and click on the MEDIA and then DIOCESAN NEWS tab for a link.

You can also register directly at: <https://usccb.zoom.us/j/8456789012>

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The beginning of a new year often stirs something hopeful within us. We make New Year's resolutions because, at our core, we desire change. We want to become better versions of ourselves and leave behind habits or mindsets that no longer serve us.

The Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord seems to arrive at just the right moment, when so many of us are already thinking about doing things differently. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Magi encounter Christ and then return home "by another way." Their physical detour reflects an inner shift after meeting Jesus. They couldn't go back the same way they came because something within them has changed.

I recently came across a video reflection from Bishop Ronald

Hicks, Archbishop-designate of New York, that stuck with me. Bishop Hicks reflected on the Epiphany through the lens of his own experiences living as a missionary in El Salvador. He spoke about how immersion in another culture, especially with people who live with fewer material comforts, has a way of changing you.

Life slows down. Relationships take priority. Faith becomes less about convenience and more about trust. After experiences like that, he says, it becomes impossible to return home unchanged. He reminds us that an authentic encounter with Christ *always* reorients our lives.

Bishop Hicks' reflection resonated so deeply with me because it reminded me of a transformation I experienced while on mission in Guatemala. The country suffered through a 36-year-long civil war that left scars still visible today. Many people suffered from extreme poverty and inadequate education long after the war ended. But faith was not an accessory to the daily life of the people of San Lucas Tolimán; it was the foundation. Through all this, the Catholic Church was the epicenter of the community, offering dignity to its people through education, healthcare, and vocational programs.

There was an acceptance of hardship that did not breed bitterness, but resilience and hope. The people I encountered lived with a sense that God was not a distant presence, but a constant companion. That witness stays with you long after you leave, and

it challenged my own assumptions about comfort, dependence, and what it truly means to live the Gospel.

When I returned home, I found myself more aware of the global Church, more conscious of injustice, and more attentive to the ways my daily actions reflected solidarity. The experience did not give me a checklist of resolutions; it gave me a new way of seeing and living.

This is where Epiphany and our New Year's instinct for change intersect. While resolutions often focus on self-improvement, Epiphany calls us to deeper conversion. It asks us how an encounter with Christ — often revealed through other people and cultures — should redirect our lives.

Bishop Hicks' reflection reminds us that missionary experiences are not meant to be memories we tuck away. They are meant to reorder our priorities. They challenge us to slow down, to value people over productivity, and to trust God more deeply. These are lessons learned profoundly in communities that rely on Him daily.

Most of us will never follow a star across the desert, and many will never travel on an international mission trip. Yet we are all offered moments of encounter that call us onto a different path. As we move forward in this new year, may we allow those encounters to shape us. And may we, like the Magi, have the courage to walk home another way, becoming the missionary people our world so desperately needs.

MISSION MESSAGE

Going Home Another Way: The Call to be Missionary

By Shannon Kowalski
Diocesan Director,
of Pontifical Mission Societies



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Church leaders must listen to abuse victims, those who suffer, pope tells cardinals

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - Every level of Church leadership must strengthen and improve its ability to listen to everyone, especially to victims of sexual abuse and those who suffer, Pope Leo XIV said.

The problem of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church “is truly a wound in the life of the Church in many places,” and “we cannot close our eyes or our hearts” to the crisis and its victims, he said at the conclusion of an extraordinary meeting with the world’s cardinals at the Vatican.

“I encourage you to share this with your bishops: often the pain of the victims has been made worse by the fact that they were not welcomed and listened to,” he said Jan. 8. The Vatican published the remarks Jan. 10.

“The abuse itself causes a deep wound that may last a lifetime, but often the scandal in the Church is because the door was closed and the victims were not welcomed and accompanied by authentic pastors,” he said.

And so, he said, “listening is profoundly important” in this and all areas. “Formation in listening,



Pope Leo XIV holds a consistory with cardinals from around the world at the Vatican Jan. 7, 2025. (OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media)

formation in a spirituality of listening” is needed in seminaries, “but also for bishops” and all levels of church leadership, including laypeople working for the Church.

The pope’s remarks came at the conclusion of an extraordinary consistory Jan. 7-8.

The overarching aim of their encounter was to grow in communion and discern together “what the Lord is asking of us for the good of his people.”

After convening the international group of cardinals in Rome, the pope decided to

make the gathering an annual event, however, with an additional meeting later this year, it will be a kind of synodal journey for Pope Leo and members of his College of Cardinals.

It marked an approach that vastly expanded on what Pope Francis established after his election in 2013. Wishing for a more decentralized and listening Church, the late pope created a nine-member Council of Cardinals to help and advise him on several critical matters facing the Church, particularly the reform of the Roman Curia, by meeting at least quarterly in Rome.

Pope Leo decided he would be inviting all the world’s cardinals to Rome every year for a few days, Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, told

reporters at a news conference after the consistory ended Jan. 8.

College members will meet with the pope again for at least three days sometime in June, possibly around the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, June 29, and then the gathering will be held over three to four days once a year in the following years.


The College of Cardinals is made up of 245 cardinals from all over the world. About 170 of them - about 69% - made it to Rome after the pope’s invitation Dec. 12 that they come together again for the first time since the conclave that elected him May 8.

Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe, a Dominican theologian, offered

a reflection Jan. 7 to help the cardinals understand their role not just as advisers to the pope, but as much-needed companions along life’s way.

Jesus does not want Peter or any of the disciples to go into the storm alone, he said. “This is our first obedience, to be in the barque of Peter, with his successor, as he faces the storms of our times.”





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Pope Leo XIV to visit Spain this summer

VATICAN CITY (OSV News) - With the jubilee year now officially ended, the pope's travel schedule is also expected to ramp up, with one trip especially dear to the pontiff just confirmed: a June visit to Madrid, Barcelona and the Canary Islands.

Cardinal José Cobo of Madrid confirmed that the delegation of Spanish bishops had a meeting in the Secretariat of State in the morning of Jan. 9,

just after the consistory, to discuss a papal trip to Spain with "a first draft" of the plan "prepared for the Holy Father to review."

"This came directly from the pope ... this was his personal initiative," Cardinal Cobo said of the idea behind the trip.

"Spain has long been in need and has continually requested a papal visit. So I think that the opening of this door now is a cause for hope and joy for everyone, both

for the civil authorities and, of course, for the Church in Spain," Cardinal Cobo said.

The first apostolic trip to Turkey and Lebanon was inherited by Pope Leo from Pope Francis' calendar.

Pope Francis was invited to Spain several times but never went, leaving the traditionally Catholic country - struggling with dropping Church attendance - without a papal visit for 14 years.

Notice Regarding Reporting Sexual Abuse of a Minor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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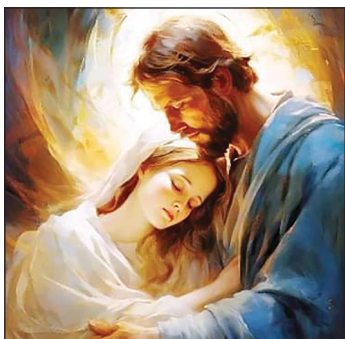
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Oblates of Saint Joseph to celebrate Feast of the Holy Spouses

LAF LIN — The Congregation of the Oblates of Saint Joseph will host their annual Feast of the Holy Spouses on Sunday, Jan. 25, with a Eucharistic liturgy at 3 p.m. in the Chapel of Saint Joseph, Route 315, Laflin.

Guest principal celebrant and homilist for this year's feast day Mass will be Father Timothy Kennedy, a married priest in the Byzantine Catholic rite, who serves as pastor of Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church in



Jessup and celebrates liturgy in both the Latin & Byzantine rites.

The annual celebration of the

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

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

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

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

King's to host program on 'The Organ & Catholic Liturgy'

WILKES-BARRE — King's College will host a free public program on "The Organ and Catholic Liturgy" on Monday Feb. 9, at 7 p.m. at the George & Giovita Maffei Family Commons, 29 West North St., Wilkes-Barre.

Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Northeast Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, the presentation will feature a guest lecture by Holy Cross Father Michael Wurtz, assistant professor of theology at King's, who serves

as secretary for the Society of Catholic Liturgy.



Father Michael Wurtz, CSC

A light reception will follow.

Father Wurtz, who received his bachelor's and Master of Divinity degrees from the University of Notre Dame,

was ordained a priest for the Congregation of the Holy Cross in 2004.

After assisting in the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy and serving on the theology faculty, he began his doctoral work in liturgical studies at the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant' Anselmo in Rome.

Father Wurtz regularly ministers sacramentally at Saint Thomas More Parish, Scranton, of the Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter.

For more information, contact John Vaida, dean, at (570) 650-6459.



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March 22nd
-  **Christ the King, Archbald - 6:30pm**
January 28th
February 25th
March 25th
-  **St. Maria Goretti, Laflin - 7pm**
February 5th
March 5th
May 7th

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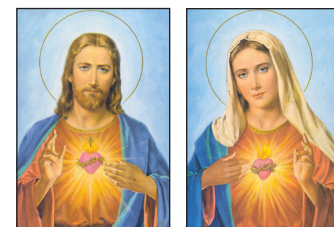
Continuing an annual tradition that began more than 20 years ago, Knights of Columbus Council 7622 in Jermyrn once again served as the sponsor for a billboard in Lackawanna County celebrating the true meaning of Christmas. The billboard's time-honored message featuring the Nativity of Our Lord continues to be made possible through the generous contributions of the following area businesses and individuals: Christ the King Parish, Archbald; Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, Peckville; Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, Carbondale; Saint Mary Parish, Waymart; Community Bank, N.A.; Harrison Funeral Home; T & R Service Station; Rapoch Semian Funeral Home, Inc.; Johnson's Fixit Shoppe; Joseph W. Arcadipane, D.M.D.; Calabro Floor Coverings, Inc.; Yeselavage Rugs; Bernardi-Wilson Insurance, Inc.; Convenient Food Mart; Battenberg Furniture; Mark Bednash Enterprises; Robert Decker Funeral Home; Kevin and Margaret Ryczak; Victoria and Paul Eastlake; and Mario and Dorothy Fitzgerald. Pictured in front of the "Keep Christ in Christmas" billboard prominently displayed at the south entrance to the borough of Jermyrn are, from left: Knights and contributors Victor Domenech, Victoria and Paul Eastlake, Harry Newberry, Charles Battenberg, Tony Sparato, Mark Bednash, Father Ryan Glenn, Frank Ryczak, Kevin Ryczak, Kevin Pittack, George Palickar and Mario Fitzgerald.

Blue Army Reparation Vigil

The next monthly First Friday Reparation Vigil, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary and sponsored by the Blue Army, will be held **Feb. 6** at Saint Joseph's Oblate Chapel, 1880 Highway 315, Laflin (Pittston).

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

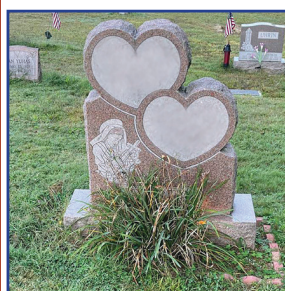
The vigil continues with the crowning of the Blue Army



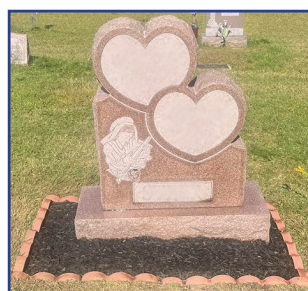
Pilgrim Virgin Statue, the Blue Army Pledge, Fatima prayers and Marian hymns, followed by litany and consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The vigil concludes with scapular enrollment at 10:15 p.m.

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

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Catholic Happenings Around the Diocese of Scranton

Monthly Meeting of the Lay Carmelites — JAN. 17, hosted by Our Lady of the Mountains Lay Carmelite Community on the third Saturday of each month; gatherings are held from 9 to 11 a.m. at the Oblates of St. Joseph Seminary/Chapel, 1880 Highway 315, Laflin. For more information, contact Chris at (570) 239-8094.

“Nazareth Group” Days for High School Girls — JAN. 17, hosted by the Capuchin Sisters of Nazareth in Tunkhannock and Williamsport; Saturday programs are presented by the Nazareth Group. Open to all girls in grades 9-12; the experience is offered from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Capuchin Sisters’ two convent locations: Mother of God Convent, 215 Wellwood Drive, Tunkhannock; and Mother of the Eucharist Convent, 6100 Jacks Hollow Road, Williamsport. Day’s program fosters faith, friendship, and increased love of Jesus through prayer and inspirational talks. Reservations are required. For Tunkhannock, contact Sister Angela of the Capuchin Sisters at (570) 836-2737; for Williamsport, contact Sister Clare at (570) 745-3334.

St. Joseph Fraternity of Third Order Secular Franciscans — JAN. 18, Lay Franciscan Canonical Order meets on the third Sunday of each month; meetings hosted from 2 to 4

p.m. at the Oblates of St. Joseph Seminary/Chapel, 1880 Highway 315, Laflin. All interested men, women and visitors are welcome. For more information, contact Michele at (570) 807-7996.

Weekly Church Soup Sale — JAN. 18 & 21, sponsored by SS. Peter & Paul Church, 1309 West Locust St., West Scranton; sale of various homemade soups held each week following the church’s Sunday morning Mass at 11 a.m. and Wednesday morning Mass at 9 a.m. Mass. For more information, call the St. Ann Basilica Parish office at (570) 342-5166.

LGBTQ Spiritual Support Group Gathering — JAN. 31, sponsored by Mary, Mother of God Parish in Scranton; support group meeting for the spiritual needs of LGBTQ community begins at 1 p.m. in the former Holy Rosary School, 312 William St., North Scranton. Group provides support & fellowship, including information on speakers and other community resources. All are welcome to attend; refreshments provided. For more information, call (570) 342-4881.

Parish Pasta & Sausage Dinner — FEB. 1, sponsored by St. Maria Goretti Parish in Laflin; held from noon to 3 p.m. in the parish hall, 42 Laflin Road. Eat-in and takeout service available; containers provided. Dinner

also includes salad, beverage, dessert, bread & butter. Cost: \$15 per person; children ages five and younger admitted free of charge (eat-in only). For more information, call the parish office (570) 655-8956.

February Lottery Cash Raffle — FEB. 1-28, sponsored by the Holy Name Society of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Pittston; lottery cash raffle tickets for the month of February cost \$10 each. Winners determined by exact match of the PA Lottery nightly (7 p.m.) drawing of the Pick 3 number. Winning payouts: Monday-Friday, \$50; Saturday, \$75; and Sunday, \$100. Bonus prizes: Valentine’s Day (Feb. 14) and Presidents’ Day (Feb. 16), \$150 each. To purchase tickets, call the parish office at (570) 654-0053.

Venerable Father Patrick Peyton Monthly Rosary — FEB. 4, hosted by the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton; Rosary devotion is held on the first Wednesday of each month following the 12:10 p.m. Mass at the Cathedral. Recitation of Rosary prayers is offered for the special intention of furthering the cause for

canonization of Venerable Father Patrick Peyton.

Secular Discalced Carmelites Meeting — FEB. 8, monthly meeting of the Holy Annunciation Secular Community of Discalced Carmelites (OCDS); the community gathers on the

Continued on Page 30



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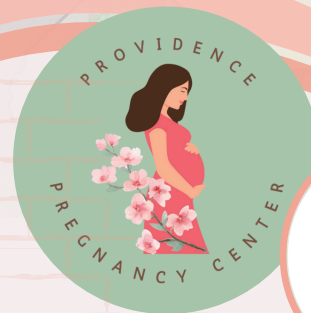
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Apostleship of Prayer

Papal Intention for January 2026

For Prayer with the Word of God —

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Alhamar hosts Marian Rosary devotion



Order of Alhambra, local caravan Alhambra No. 4, recently hosted a Marian devotion Rosary prayer service in Christ the King Chapel at King's College, officiated by Father James McGahagan, Alhambra chaplain. Music ministry featured Geraldine Molitoris performing her original song dedicated to the Blessed Mother, "Love Like You (Oh, Mary)." Grand Commander Donna Magni announced the special intentions for the recitation of the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, led by Alhambra members John Brzycki, Marilyn Krall, Sharon Yale, Michael Young and Father McGahagan.

Catholic Happenings

Continued from Page 29

second Sunday of the month, from noon to 4 p.m., at the Oblates of St. Joseph Seminary in Laffin. New members are most welcome. For more information and inquiries, contact Gina Romanchek at (570) 956-9272.

Valentine's Day Night at the Races — FEB. 14, sponsored by the Holy Name and Altar & Rosary societies of St. John the

Evangelist Parish in Pittston; held in the Monsignor Bendik Pastoral Center. Doors open at 6 p.m.; races start at 7 p.m. Admission cost: \$10, includes food, refreshments and complimentary race horse. Owners of winning horses receive \$50 cash prize. Race sponsorships cost \$50. For more information or to donate to the basket raffle, call the parish office at (570) 654-0053. Horse and race sponsorships requested by Feb. 8.

Who makes house calls?

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

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

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



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Apostleship of Prayer

Papal Intention for February 2026

For Children with Incurable Diseases —

Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.

Saint Francis Kitchen benefits from UNICO

The UNICO Foundation recently presented a check in the amount of \$1,000 to support Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen in Scranton. The funds were granted from the Torraco Food Bank/Shelter Fund, established by member Ralph Torraco, to assist those in need of food and housing. In accord with the UNICO motto, "Service Above Self," the endowment was established to provide underprivileged families in the community with safe haven and food on their tables. Shown during the check presentation are, from left: Mike Rescigno, chair of the Torraco Fund; Chris DiMattio, UNICO Foundation chair; and Rob Williams, executive director of Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen.



IN MEMORIAM

Immaculate Heart
of Mary Sister
Christina Aldarelli

Entered Life:
December 23, 1936

Entered Eternal Life:
January 8, 2026



Prayer Requests for Priests

The Daily Prayer Request for Priests schedule is as follows:

January 15, Holy Cross Father Michael Wurtz; January 16, Father Paul Yeboah; January 17, Father Michael Zipay; January 18, Father Joseph Adonizio; January 19, Saint Peter Priestly Fraternity Father Zachary Akers; January 20, Father Patrick Albert; January 21, Father John Albosta; January 22, Father James Alco; January 23, Father Andrew Amankwaa; January 24, Father Michael Amo Gyau; January 25, Father William Asinari; January 26, Father Thomas Augustine; January 27, Monsignor Thomas Banick; January 28, Father David Bechtel; January 29, Father Richard Beck; January 30, Monsignor John Bendik; January 31, Monsignor John Bergamo; February 1, Pope Leo XIV; February 2, Bishop Joseph C. Bambera; February 3, Father Eric Bergman; February 4, Father Rafael Ofarril Bermúdez Gonzalez; February 5, Father Jacek Bialkowski; February 6, Monsignor David Bohr; February 7, Father Michael Boris; February 8, Father Stephen Bosomafi; February 9, Father John Boyle; February 10, Father Stephen Brenyah; February 11, Father Michael Bryant; February 12, Passionist Father Richard Burke; February 13, Jesuit Father Timothy Cadigan; February 14, Father David Cappelloni; February 15, Passionist Father Robert Carbonneau; February 16, Father Sean Carpenter; February 17, Father Edward Casey; February 18, Father John Chmil; February 19, Father Richard Cirba; February 20, Father Brian J.T. Clarke; February 21, Father Brian J.W. Clarke; February 22, Father Charles Connor; February 23, Jesuit Father Vincent Conti; February 24, Father William Corcoran; February 25, Father William Culnane.

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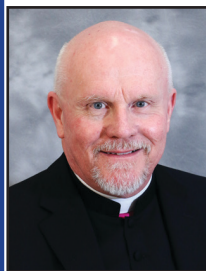


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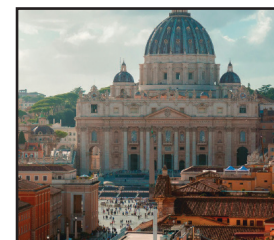
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National Eucharistic Pilgrimage is back in 2026 - with a patriotic twist

FORT WAYNE, Ind. (OSV News) - The 2026 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage will travel the East Coast from St. Augustine, Florida, to Portland, Maine, ending in Philadelphia, organizers announced Jan. 8.

The pilgrimage - the third of its kind - will begin in May on Memorial Day weekend and end July 5.

This year's pilgrimage celebrates America's 250th anniversary with the theme "One Nation Under God" and its route, which incorporates key sites in the history of the country and its Catholics.

Organizers described the pilgrimage as "a nationwide call to renewal, unity and mission rooted in the Eucharist."

The pilgrimage will

pass through the dioceses of Savannah, Georgia; Charleston, South Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; Arlington, Virginia; Washington, Baltimore; Wilmington, Delaware; Camden, New Jersey; Paterson, New Jersey; Springfield, Massachusetts; Manchester, New Hampshire; Portland, Maine; Boston; Fall River, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; and Philadelphia.

The pilgrimage will end in Philadelphia with events planned July 4-5, Independence Day weekend, to commemorate the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in the Pennsylvania State House, now the city's Independence Hall, on July 4, 1776.

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