

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Retirement
collection for
Religious | Page 8

Christmas card
addresses for
priests | Page 10

The Diocese of Ogdensburg Volume 80 Number 31

NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

DECEMBER 10, 2025

Deacon Fitzgerald receives seminary honor

Deacon Tyler Fitzgerald, a seminarian for the Diocese of Ogdensburg, was awarded the Diakonia Award by St. Vincent's College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

"This award honors a fourth-year seminarian who exhibits outstanding academic performance, service to the Seminary community and creative outreach to others," the college said in a press release.

FULL STORY, PAGE 5

'HIT WITH THE SPIRIT'



PHOTO BY KEITH BENMAN

Confirmation candidate Isis White, of Our Lady of Grace parish, plays "Rock, Paper, Scissors Baseball" with NET missionary Ally Piasecky at the diocese's western region confirmation retreat at St. Mary's Church social hall, in Massena, on Nov. 22. Read the story on Page 4. Additional photos are on Page 16.

SPOTLIGHT ON SETON



PHOTO BY DESIREE KIRK

Seton Catholic students Ella and Lily Forrence serve at Holy Cross Parish's Harvest Dinner in early November. In this edition, we introduce "Spotlight on Seton," a new regular feature, around monthly, about happenings at the school, located in Plattsburgh.

FULL STORY, PAGE 6

Pope Leo to youth: Love is answer to evil

By Elias Turk

Catholic News Agency

Pope Leo XIV told thousands of young people in Lebanon on Monday that love, not retaliation, is the real force capable of transforming their country as it continues to grapple with the wounds of conflict and social instability. "The true opposition to evil is not evil, but love," he said, calling the nation's youth to rebuild their homeland through reconciliation, service, and a renewed rooting in faith.

The gathering took place in the square before the Maronite Patriarchate of Antioch, in Bkerké, where the pope was

welcomed by Patriarch Cardinal Béchara Boutros Raï. After greeting the crowd in a brief tour, Pope Leo opened his address with the Arabic words "assalamu alaykum," meaning "peace be with you," telling the young people that this greeting of the risen Christ "sustains the joy of our meeting."

Lebanon's young generation has endured some of the nation's hardest years. A devastating financial collapse, the 2020 Beirut port explosion, and the 2023-2024 border war between Hezbollah and Israel have left deep physical and social scars, contributing to widespread emigration and a sense of exhaustion among the coun-

try's youth.

The pope spoke directly to their anxieties, acknowledging that many feel they have inherited "a world torn apart by wars and disfigured by social injustice," yet insisted that hope lives within them. "You have time to dream, to plan, and to do good. You are the present, and the future is already taking shape in your hands."

Pointing to Lebanon's national symbol, he said the country "will flourish once again, beautiful and vigorous like the cedar," explaining that its strength lies in deep roots. In the same way, he told them, the foundation of renewal cannot rest only on ideas or agree-

ments. "The true principle of new life is the hope that comes from above. It is Christ himself. He, the Living One, is the foundation of our trust."

Peace, he continued, cannot grow out of factional interests. "It is only genuinely sincere when I do to others what I would like them to do to me. Forgiveness leads to justice, which is the foundation of peace."

Calling them to works of charity, he reminded them that nothing reveals God's presence more clearly than love. Renewal begins in daily choices, he said, such as welcoming "those near and far" and offering concrete help "to friends and refugees and enemies."

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CATHOLICPO Box 326
Ogdensburg, NY 13669
USPS 0039-3400**Bishop Terry****R. LaValley**

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Publish

45 issues

per year:

Weekly except

skipping every

other week be-

ginning July through August

and skipping one week in

December by the

Diocese of Ogdensburg.

622 Washington Street,

Ogdensburg, N.Y. 13669.

Editorial Office:

622 Washington Street,

Ogdensburg, N.Y. 13669.

Telephone:

(315) 608-7556

E-mail:news@northcountry
catholic.org**Entered at the****Post Office:**

Ogdensburg, NY

13669 and additional mailing

offices as

Periodical Postage.

Subscription:**For one year:**

In-Diocese Rate: \$27

Outside of Diocese Rate: \$30

Matters for publication

should be addressed to

PO Box 326

Ogdensburg, NY 13669

and should be received by

Wednesday prior to

publication. Paper is

printed each Friday;

dateline is Wednesday.

Member, Catholic

Press Association.

POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to

North Country Catholic,

PO Box 326

Ogdensburg, NY

13669-0326

Sorry, Father. I wasn't listening

I'll admit it: I was distracted through most of Mass.

It was the first Sunday of Advent, and I was attending a parish that wasn't my own. Shortly after I was seated, the pew in front of me filled with what I think was three generations of the same family. There were four little ones, and if I had to guess, I'd say they were all under age 5.

The oldest child, a young girl, was in mother-hen mode. She would frequently encourage the younger children to lower their volume. She sometimes did so at volumes

that were louder than what the littles were creating.

The second youngest was dropping every toy he touched. A rubbery green Hulk figure was dropped a handful of times. Twice, he dropped it behind the pew in which he was seated for me to pick up.



Darcy L. Fargo

The whole thing was hysterical. I don't think I went five minutes without laughing at

something. That probably just encouraged the little ones (my apologies to the parents).

The kids' parents and grandparents were awesome with these young

ones. They addressed behaviors with the little ones when necessary, but they also let them be kids. It was clear, though, that they were very worried about the kids bothering others. They kept looking at the people seated around them, presumably gauging reactions.

"It's funny how all the activity from the littles feels stressful when we're young enough that we have little children," I said to the parents after Mass. "It's not until we're older - when our kids aren't in pews being kids - that God gives us the patience and perspective to find it endearing and entertaining. I even miss these days of chasing a child in church."

There are times when I still hit the proverbial panic button and have a little (or big) cry over something going wrong. But it takes far worse situations to get me there now than it did even just a few years ago, and I move from panicking to surrendering and adapting much faster than I did in my younger years.

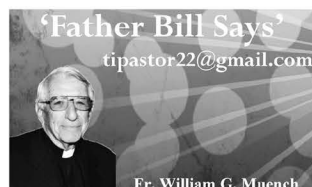
While part of me wishes we could all have the patience in all seasons of our lives, I think I appreciate God giving me the peaceful perspective of experience more because of the years I spent turning little deals into big deals.

And it turns being distracted through most of Mass into a really joyful time with our Lord and His people.

Be the light of Christ this Advent

Today, I am praying a prayer I make each year as we enter into Advent and begin to prepare for Christmas. I pray God will bring new life and a new Spirit to our Catholic Church. Advent is a season of longing. We again remember the thousands of years in which Israel longed for a Messiah. Today, many human hearts continue to carry that same longing - a longing for peace, for justice, for mercy and for healing. We again celebrate the coming of our Messiah, Jesus, to transform our Church and our world. May the Spirit of Jesus again come to bring the joy a new life and peace to our Church.

During Advent, we again read the messages of the Old Testament prophets who gave words to their longings then. During the liturgies of Advent, we read again the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah. They speak again to us "like lamps in the



night." They speak again to as they did to those people of old - who were tired, afraid, exiled, or discouraged. These prophets now speak to us insisting that God has not forgotten His people. Their message is meant for us who now listen. We are hoping again for a new transformation - a new Advent.

Isaiah wrote, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." Isaiah challenged ancient Israel to find that light that conquers darkness, the light that shows the way to live as Jesus taught us. Today, we again must fill the darkness with the light of Jesus so that we may find the Lord's way. Jesus comes to us again as our

Messiah and Savior.

In Advent, the light of God leads us through the darkness. May we bring the light of Jesus to others during this special time of Advent. Advent is a time for transformation or us - again - and for all those we encounter - a new life, a new Spirit.

Micah, the Old Testament prophet, taught that the Messiah would come from tiny Bethlehem. God works through the unexpected, the small, quiet ways. Jesus came to our world in a humble, hidden way. During Advent, we, the People of God, must be transformed. God reaches out to us in small, ordinary ways; we must recognize the presence of our Savior who reaches out to us in this world of ours filled with overwhelming love of the Lord, with Christ's Christmas love, as we pray in faith and hope. Our world must again become a place of love, peace, mer-

cy, forgiveness that Jesus brought to us. This is our challenge - to bring Jesus' love to all we meet along the way.

Advent again calls you and I - now - to be the light of the Lord. During Advent, we must be that light that shows the way, that light that enters the darkness that fills so much these days. May your Advent prayer bring Jesus and his love to light up this world, this place where we live.

Advent is a lesson in divine patience. God prepared His people slowly and lovingly, and now again he reaches out to us, bringing us all we need to make our time a time of love and peace. May God form our hearts and fill us with concern for all, all who are part of our families, of our parishes. May he fill us with love so that others may recognize in us God's love - a love that longs to make our world a better place every day.

FOLLOW ME

Is there room for God?

"While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." – Luke 2:6-7

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

At our Christmas Vigil Mass, we will hear St. Luke tell us that God was born in a manger because there was no room for Him in the inn. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior this year, the conditions of today's world beg us to reflect on the question: Is there room for God in my heart? Is there room in my heart for the scared migrant, the unborn

child, the terrified Ukrainian?

Today, it seems that the list is endless: those suffering from mental illness, the elderly, the addicted, the lonely, the imprisoned, indigenous peoples, the abused, the terror-stricken refugee. So many women, men and children are hurting. They are members of our families.

We enter this Advent Season, preparing for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, grateful for blessings received, but also keenly aware of our Christian duty to be the hands and tender heart of Christ to those who currently warrant scarce attention from us. Pope Leo XIV, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, reminds us

that "contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history. This Christmas, let us resolve, inspired by our own time spent with Jesus, to see His Face in our sisters and brothers who we too often neglect. We yearn to make room in our hearts for the hurting. Their human dignity demands it. Our Christian dignity impels us.

We pray that the beautiful acts of generosity that characterize the Christmas Season will be transformed from seasonal gestures of charity to lifelong acts of justice and mercy. Such personal transformation will give tangible evidence that we

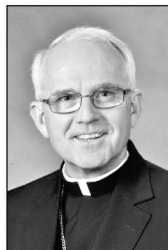
are Christ-led, Christ-fed, and Hope-filled. We can do great things in Christ Jesus, the Savior whose birth we celebrate with such joy and gratitude. Our God's unconditional love and boundless mercy became flesh and bones in the Person of Jesus Christ so that we might extend God's compassion and love.

May the Christ Child bring you and your loved ones the Gift of Love, the Blessing of Hope and the Promise of Peace. A blessed Christmas and joy-filled New Year!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Terry R. LaValley

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley
Bishop of Ogdensburg



Bishop Terry R. LaValley

Proposal takes Catholic school parents' rights

NYS Catholic Conference

The New York State Board of Regents is proposing to take away critically important rights from Catholic school parents of children with special needs while keeping these rights for public school families.

Specifically, the proposal would prohibit Catholic and other private school parents from seeking an "impartial hearing" when they have a concern with the implementation of special education services provided to their child by the local public school district.

Impartial Hearings have proven essential in ensuring that children get the special education services they

need.

Denying private school families this right while allowing it for public school parents creates a double standard which is clearly unfair and unacceptable.

We urge you to add your name to this petition which urges the NYS Board of Regents to withdraw their proposal.

To sign the petition, go to <https://www.nyscatholic.org/action-center> and click the banner "Stop Attack on Catholic School Families."

The petition states: "The Catholic school community is united in its opposition to the Regents' proposal to amend Part 200.5 eliminating due process

rights of private school families while maintaining these rights for public school families. This double standard is grossly unfair and simply unacceptable. Catholic school families already shoulder the dual burden of pay-

ing taxes to support public schools as well as tuition for Catholic school. Trying to obtain special education services for needy children only adds to this burden. The Regents proposal is a heart-breaking blow to Catholic

school families, and we urge its defeat."

While visiting the site, consider signing up for Catholic Action Network alerts to stay informed about legislative issues that affect our faith and our lives as Catholics.

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Confirmation candidates 'hit with the spirit'

By Keith Benman
Contributing Writer

Hundreds of young people from more than two dozen parishes around the diocese learned they are never alone in their Catholic Faith at four religious retreats in November.

Three of those retreats, in Plattsburgh, Massena and Adams, were for those receiving confirmation next year. Confirmation candidates heard 11 disciple-missionaries not much older than themselves recount their own stories of faith and conversion. The young missionaries' joyful witness took place during a six-hour retreat filled with fun, games, discussions, and then prayer and quiet reflection.

Isis White, a 7th grader from Our Lady of Grace parish, said playing games and talking in small groups with other confirmation candidates was the best part of the morning for her at the retreat at St. Mary's social hall, in Massena, on Saturday, Nov. 22.

"It's been great meeting new people," she said. "I was expecting like having the same people I knew here. ... I got to hear about some of the problems affect-

ing them. Here, they have someone to share them with."

The missionaries leading those small group discussions were from NET (National Evangelization Teams) Ministries. Their home parishes are in places as far away as Texas, California and the United Kingdom. They each do two-year stints traveling around the nation putting on religious retreats for young people.

"We're not teachers, we're witnesses," said NET team leader Anthony Frisina. "So we really share our own experience of how we came to believe in our Faith."

Frisina is a 20-year-old from St. Peter Cathedral parish, in Erie, Pennsylvania. Before Saturday's event started, he noted it was the 181st retreat he had conducted.

Two days before, he had been at Immaculate Heart Central School in Watertown doing a "Created and Claimed" school retreat for about 90 students.

"It was a really great retreat, he said. "They have a lot of foreign exchange students attending there, so to be able to talk to people from all over the world and share our faith with

High participation from parishes

Parishes participating this year in confirmation retreats put on in Massena and Adams by NET Ministries for parishes in the diocese's western region:

Massena retreat:

St. Peter's, Massena
St. Patrick, Brasher Falls
St. Andre Bessette, Malone
Our Lady of Grace, Morristown
St. Augustine'/St. Mary/St. Ann/
Holy Cros, Bangor/Brushton/St.
Regis Falls/Hopkinton

Adams retreat:

Our Lady of The Sacred Heart,
Watertown
Blessed Sacrament, Watertown
St. Cecilia's, Adams
St. Mary's, Clayton
All Saint, Chaumont
St. James, Carthage
St. Mary's, Copenhagen
Catholic Community of St.
Peter, St. Hedwig and St. Mary,
Lowville
Immaculate Conception and St.
Andrew's, Brownville
St. Paul's, Black River

Parishes participating this year in a confirmation retreat put on in Plattsburgh by NET Ministries for parishes in the diocese's eastern region.

Plattsburgh retreat:

Sacred Heart, Chazy
St. Patrick's, Chateaugay
St. Edmund's/St. Bernard's,
Ellenburg/Lyon Mountain
St. Mary's of the Fort, Fort
Covington
St. Agnes, Lake Placid
St. Ann's/Holy Angels, Mooers
Forks/Altona
St. Alexander's/St. Augustine/ St.
James, Morrisonville
The Catholic Community of
Moriah
Holy Cross Parish, Plattsburgh
Church of the Assumption/St.
Joseph's, Redford/Dannemora
St. Patrick's, Rouses Point
St. Bernard's, Saranac Lake
St. Mary's/Our Lady of Lourdes,
Ticonderoga/Schroon Lake
St. Alphonsus Holy Name of
Jesus Parish, Tupper Lake

that really sticks with them.

"I really liked Adoration because we had quiet time to pray," said Scott Ellis, of St. Alphonsus, in Tupper Lake.

That came as no surprise to Anita Soltero, diocesan faith formation director for the eastern region. She remembers seeing the young confirmation candidates at Adoration at a NET retreat for the first time some years ago.

"The kids really get hit with the spirit at that time," she said. "It was like they were all dead silent, staring up at the Eucharist. It was amazing."

Adoration gives the young people a great chance to reflect on all they've heard during the day, Soltero said.

Matthew Siskavich, of St. Bernard's, Ellenburg said hearing the testimony from the NET missionaries will help him persevere in his faith.

"I really liked the retreat because it gave me courage," Siskavich said.

It was the same mix of fun, games, prayer and testimony from NET missionaries on Friday, Nov. 21, at a confirmation candidates' retreat held at St. Cecilia's Church, in Adams. About 80 candidates attended there.

"The kids get to see there are young people out there who take their faith seriously and are happy and joyful about it," said Catherine Russell, diocesan western region faith formation director. "It's that 'I'm not alone' sense."

Photos of the retreat are on Page 16

them was really cool."

NET Ministries has come to the Ogdensburg diocese for a number of years now to put on retreats for confirmation candidates. As word about the retreats has spread, more and more parishes are opting to send their young people to the NET retreats. This

year, the eastern region had a record number participating in its confirmation retreat with 95 candidates from 14 parishes coming to Holy Cross Parish Center, on Sunday, Nov. 23.

As much fun as the games and other activities provide, some young people say it's the more reflective part

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Deacon Fitzgerald honored by seminary

By Darcy Fargo
Editor

As he continues to prepare for ordination to the priesthood at St. Vincent's Seminary in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, Deacon Tyler Fitzgerald, a seminarian of the Diocese of Ogdensburg, was honored with a prestigious award for his service as a deacon.

On Nov. 20, at the St. Vincent Seminary's annual Convocation, part of its annual Founder's Day Celebration, Deacon Fitzgerald was presented the school's annual Diakonia Award by the Very Rev. Edward Mazich, O.S.B., S'98, SSL, STL, DPhil, the seminary's rector.

"This honor recognizes a seminarian whom both the student body and the faculty recommend as exhibiting outstanding academic performance, service to the Seminary community through contributing to student morale and spirit, leadership within the community, as well as creative outreach to others," the seminary said in a social media post. "The recipient of this award is nominated by the entire Seminary community and chosen by the faculty. The recipient must: be a member of the graduating class; have outstanding academic performance; show service to the community by contributing to student morale and spirit; show leadership; be (recommended) by the student body; demonstrate creative outreach; have one full year of study (full-time or part-time



Deacon Tyler Fitzgerald of the Diocese of Ogdensburg, New York, was presented with the Diakonia Award by the Very Rev. Edward Mazich, O.S.B., S'98, SSL, STL, DPhil, rector of Saint Vincent Seminary. This award honors a fourth-year seminarian who exhibits outstanding academic performance, service to the Seminary community and creative outreach to others.

in ordination and/or degree programs) completed at Saint Vincent Seminary."

"I knew of the award," said Deacon Fitzgerald. "My first year at St. Vincent's, the award went to a good friend of mine. He's now in Ottawa, and he joined our family for Thanksgiving. So, we had two recipients of the same award under the same roof."

Deacon Fitzgerald said he learned he was receiving the award only an hour before it was presented.

"I wasn't expecting

it," he said. "But it also wasn't a surprise."

Deacon Fitzgerald said he has held leadership roles in the seminary's Leadership Forum, and he has been part of an accreditation committee along with seminary students, faculty and administration. But he said he believes it's his presence and ministry with his fellow seminarians that made him stand out.

"One dimension of the award is 'creative outreach,'" Deacon Fitzgerald said. "In what was really a head nod to my time in

Clayton and the legacy of Father Art LaBaff, I would hold 'porch time' once a week. For a while, it was known as 'Thursdays on Third,' since I was on the third floor. After night prayer, it was a pretty well known fact in the house that my door was open, there was always snacks and drinks and music or a movie. There were never formal invitations, but anyone could just go to Fitz's room and hang out and talk. It was really a good opportunity to get to know a lot of the guys - their struggles, their stories, their vocation journeys."

Deacon Fitzgerald said the practice had such a great impact on him and others that he hopes to incorporate some version of it in his future ministry as a priest.

"Sometimes seminarians or priests get a reputation for being callous and distant," he said. "It always amazed me and touched my own heart how people would open up. We had a policy of not talking about high theology or classes. We talked about excitement about ordinations, family struggles, divorces, families that aren't supportive - anything.

I certainly plan to take that into my ministry - just being there as a normal priest who can talk to a variety of groups and share light-hearted moments over coffee and cake and really encounter people in their struggles and in their beautiful faith."

Deacon Fitzgerald said he was especially touched by the award considering he was nominated by his classmates.

"It touched my heart," he said. "I put a lot of effort into being in the community and opening my door to people. I love being there in creative ways for the men in this community. I'm honored they nominated me because I brought Christ to them. It means a lot to me. I've fallen in love with this diaconal ministry by trying crazy ways of serving. It's beautiful. I get to bring Christ to a tough crowd. The Lord is choosing to work through me and giving me that grace and that great blessing."

Now wrapping up his fall semester and preparing to come home for Christmas break, Deacon Fitzgerald enters his final semester of seminary studies before, God willing, he is ordained as a priest.

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The weeks before Christmas are perhaps the busiest time of the year. Along with all the regular chores, there are decorations to put up, food to prepare, events to attend and gifts to purchase and wrap.

Shopping for gifts in the North Country can be especially challenging. The selection of stores is often limited. The convenience of shopping online, the selection of goods, and the cost has forced many small, local merchants to close, stripping rural communities of the small businesses that formed the backbone of these population centers.

The natural world is not the only component of our environment. Towns and villages also form a part. Social creatures, humans have a need to interact with others. Saying hello to a neighbor is part of our social programming. So is going to the corner hardware store for the bracket, screw or tool needed to complete some task. So is an occasional trip to the clothing shop to purchase a piece of apparel that is required to replace a well-worn article now is destined for the rag bin.

Interacting with a store clerk who knows his or her profession as well as some local gossip is often a memorable experience. Shopping online is devoid of this interaction. While mega-size companies can offer cheaper prices, the amount of money made by the executives of these corporations is often obscene and frequently is spent to promote causes that benefit the rich at the expense of the poor.

Supporting local business may not be the most financially prudent way to purchase goods, but it certainly is the best for preserving an endangered aspect of the human environment. Consider shopping local during this season. It may not be easy to find what you want, or the cost may be just too high for your budget, but surrendering to online companies that damage our small-town environments may be unwise for a healthy, vibrant culture.

Bishop's Public Schedule

Dec. 11 – Noon – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral

Dec. 14 – 8 a.m. – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral

11 a.m. – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral

Dec. 15 – Noon – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral

Dec. 16 – Noon – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral

Dec. 17 – Noon – Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral

2:30 p.m. – Episcopal Council Meeting in the Spratt Conference Room followed by Dinner at Bishop's Residence

Protecting God's Children

The Diocese of Ogdensburg has scheduled Protecting God's Children training sessions. This required training addresses child abuse, the methods by which abusers commit abuse, and steps to prevent abuse from occurring and stop it from continuing. Pre-registration is encouraged at www.virtus.org. Upcoming sessions:

Dec. 12 – 9 a.m. – St. André Bessette Parish, Malone

Dec. 13 – Noon – Catholic Community of Brownville and Dexter (Brownville)

1 p.m. – St. Peter's Parish, Massena

To Report Abuse

If you have a complaint of suspected misconduct involving diocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers, contact Victim Assistance Coordinator, Terrianne Yanulavich, Ph.D., LMHC, 5050 Route 374, Merrill, NY 12955; terrianneyanulavich@yahoo.com; Phone: 518-569-0612; or Father Christopher Carrara, the Episcopal Vicar for Clergy; ccarrara@rcdony.org Phone: 315-393-2920 ext. 1340. **If you have a complaint** of suspected sexual abuse or related misconduct by the bishops, contact the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service at 800-276-1562 or www.ReportBishopAbuse.org

SPOTLIGHT ON SETON

Sharing faith, hope & love

Editor's note: The following is the first of an ongoing series highlighting Seton Catholic School in Plattsburgh.

Submitted by Seton Catholic

A BEACON OF FAITH, EXCELLENCE AND HOPE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Amid this holiday season and the whirlwind of meal planning, gift shopping and festive gatherings, Seton Catholic School in Plattsburgh reminds us of the true reason for the season: faith, hope and love. In a world that often feels hurried and uncertain, Catholic education stands as a steady light – forming not only minds but hearts.

WHY CATHOLIC EDUCATION MATTERS

Rest in Peace

This week marks the anniversary of the deaths of the following clergymen who served in the Diocese of Ogdensburg

Dec. 10 – Rev. James Hogan, 1882

Dec. 11 – Rev. George Montreuil, 1914; Rev. Edward Tetrault, 1952; Msgr. George Henry Brisson, P.A., 1969

Dec. 12 – Rev. Victor Dugas, 1843; Msgr. Albert J. Farrell, 1967; Rev. Julian P. O'Brien, 1988; Deacon Floyd J. Barton, 1999

Dec. 13 – Rev. Joseph Louis Levesque, 1939

Dec. 14 – Rev. P.M. O'Shea, O.S.A., 1942; Rev. Paul Beyette, 2016

Dec. 15 – Rev. Leon Pierre Co-chard, 1915; Deacon Joseph H. Gilbert II, 2010

Dec. 16 – Rev. J. F. McGowen, O.S.A., 1935; Rev. Frederick Cummings Horton, 1975

TODAY

Catholic schools offer more than academics; they provide a foundation rooted in faith, values and service. At Seton, students learn to see the world through the lens of compassion and integrity, preparing them to lead with purpose. In an era of digital distractions and shifting priorities, this holistic approach is essential. It nurtures character alongside knowledge, ensuring graduates are ready for life – not just tests.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Seton is proud to be a leader in education in the North Country. For example, when New York State announced a ban on cell phones in schools in May 2025, Seton had already implemented this policy for grades K-8 nearly a year earlier – affirming its commitment to focused learning environments. And the school's academic results speak volumes: Seton students achieve New York State standardized test proficiency 35% higher than the public-school average in the area.

Beyond academics, Seton shines in athletics and extracurriculars. Student athletes recently competed at the state level in cross country and swimming, and the varsity soccer team finished second in its class in Section VII. These achievements reflect not only talent, but the dedication and discipline fostered within the school's community.

FAITH IN ACTION

Seton's faith, values and service are lived daily. Over the past month, students have raised

funds for Meadowbrook residents and cancer patients, served at parish Harvest Dinners, and collected food for families in need during a time of growing food insecurity. These acts of service are not add-ons; they are integral to the character of the Seton community.

DOING MORE WITH LESS: UNLOCK A MATCHING GIFT

The annual cost of educating a student at Seton is roughly half that of public schools. Yet, Seton delivers a top-tier education enriched by faith formation and service, through the generosity of friends and alumni who believe in Seton's mission.

This year, an anonymous donor has pledged a \$20,000 matching gift to support tuition assistance through Seton's Adopt-A-Student program. Every dollar given this December will be doubled. Seton needs help to unlock this full match and ensure that the school continues to provide a faith-filled education for every family who desires it.

HOW TO GIVE

This Giving Season, please consider joining in sustaining Catholic education in the North Country. Visit setonknights.org/about/donate to make your tax-deductible gift today. Your generosity will go twice as far.

As St. Paul reminds us: "Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). This holiday season, let love guide your giving – and help Seton Catholic School continue its mission of faith, excellence, and hope.

Catholic Charities affiliates fear SNAP disruptions after Trump warning

By Tyler Arnold
Catholic News Agency

President Donald Trump's administration intends to cut off federal food assistance for 21 states amid a dispute over reporting data about recipients, which has caused concern for some local Catholic Charities affiliates whose areas may be affected.

In May, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins ordered states to share certain records with the federal government about people who receive food stamps through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). She said this was to ensure benefits only went to eligible people.

Although 29 states complied, 21 Democratic-led states refused to provide the information and sued the administration.

The lawsuit alleges that providing the information — which includes immigration status, income, and identifying information — would be a privacy violation.

Rollins said in a Cabinet meeting on Dec. 2 that “as of next week, we have begun and will begin to stop moving federal funds into those states until they comply and they ... allow us to partner with them to root out this fraud and protect the American taxpayer.”

She said an initial overview of the data from states that complied showed SNAP benefits given to 186,000 people using Social Security numbers for someone who is not alive and about a half of a million people receiving SNAP benefits more than once.

The Department of Agriculture has not released that data.

If funding is halted, this would be the second disruption for SNAP benefits in just two months. In November, SNAP payments were delayed for nearly two weeks until lawmakers negotiated an end to the government shutdown.

For many of the states that will be impacted. Catholic Charities is

the largest provider of food assistance after SNAP, and some affiliate leaders fear that the disruption will cause problems.

Rose Bak, chief operating officer of Catholic Charities of Oregon, told CNA the nonprofit keeps stockpiles for emergencies, but “we’ve gone through most of our supplies” amid the November disruption and an increase in people’s needs caused by the high cost of groceries.

She said their food pantry partners have told her “they’ve never been this low on stock” as well.

“Our phones were ringing off the hook,” Bak said. “Our mailboxes were flooded with emails.”

When asked how another disruption would compare to the problems in November, she said: “I think it will definitely be worse.”

“People are scared,” Bak said. “They’re worried about how they’re going to feed their families.”

Ashley Valis, chief operating officer of Catholic Charities of Baltimore, similarly told CNA that another disruption “would place immense strain on families already struggling as well as on organizations like ours, which are experiencing growing demand for food and emergency assistance.”

“Food insecurity forces children, parents, and older adults to make impossible trade-offs between rent, groceries, and medication,” she said.

James Malloy, CEO and president of Catholic Charities DC, told CNA: “We work to be responsive to the needs of the community as they fluctuate,” and added: “SNAP cuts will certainly increase that need.”

“These benefits are critical for veterans, children, and many low-income workers who have multiple jobs to cover basic expenses,” he said.

Catholic Charities USA launched a national fundraising effort in late October, just before SNAP benefits were delayed the first time.

Catholic Charities USA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

CATHOLIC WORLD AT A GLANCE

Vatican commission rejects female diaconate

The Vatican published on Dec. 4 the summary of the work carried out by the commissions studying the possibility of admitting women to the diaconate, presented to Pope Leo XIV by Cardinal Giuseppe Petrocchi. Petrocchi, the president of the Study Commission on the Female Diaconate created by Pope Francis, stated that — with seven votes in favor and one against — the possibility of admitting women to the diaconate as a degree of the sacrament of holy orders is ruled out. However, he emphasized that for the moment it is not possible “to formulate a definitive judgment, as in the case of priestly ordination.”

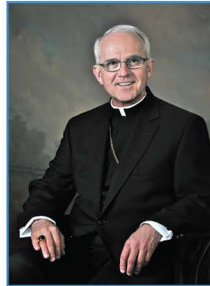
EU imposes ‘homosexual marriage’ recognition on states

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has ruled that all member states are obliged to recognize so-called “homosexual marriages” legally contracted in another country, even when this type of union is not valid under their own legal system. Although the CJEU clarified that the regulation of these types of unions remains the responsibility of each state, it requires all European Union countries to recognize the “fundamental rights” entailed by these unions, such as the right to private and family life and freedom of residence. The ruling, issued Nov. 25, concerns the case of a Polish same-sex couple who “married” in Germany in 2018. Upon returning to Poland, the authorities refused to record the union in the civil registry. The European Court of Justice has deemed this refusal contrary to EU law, meaning that all member states are now obligated to recognize the rights stemming from such a union. Almost half of the European Union countries have not legalized same-sex marriage. This is the case in Poland, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Romania.

US bishops award over \$7 million for mission dioceses

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) allocated more than \$7.8 million to strengthen American mission dioceses, which are dioceses that cannot sustain themselves without additional funds. The USCCB Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions announced the grants on Dec. 1, which will provide 69 dioceses and eparchies with funds for the 2025-2026 budget year, according to a news release. The subcommittee reviewed the grant requests in the fall. Per the news release, the funds were generated through collections from parishioners during the Catholic Home Missions appeal, which is taken up annually throughout the country. Many mission dioceses are in regions with small Catholic populations and in rural areas that are affected by economic hardship, the bishops said in the announcement. “When parishioners contribute to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal, they bring faith, hope, and love where it is most needed, regardless the amount of their gift,” Bishop Chad Zielinski of New Ulm, Minnesota, subcommittee chair, said in a statement.

Retirement Collection for Religious



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Each December, we are invited to reflect on the quiet heroes of our Church, religious sisters, brothers, and priests who have spent their lives in service to God's people. The Retirement Fund for Religious collection, scheduled for December 13th and 14th, gives us a chance to honor their legacy and support their needs.

These women and men have labored in classrooms, hospitals, missions, and parishes, often receiving little financial compensation. Their reward was never material; it was found in the joy of serving Christ and His Church. Today, many of them face the realities of aging, with rising healthcare costs and limited retirement resources.

In our own Diocese, we have been blessed by the presence of religious communities whose members have shaped our faith through decades of ministry. Their impact is woven into the fabric of our parishes, schools, and outreach programs. Though many now live quietly in retirement, their prayers continue to sustain the Church.

This collection is more than a financial appeal; it is a heartfelt expression of gratitude. It is a way for us to say, "You are not forgotten. Your sacrifices matter. We care." Your generosity helps ensure that these faithful servants receive the dignity and care they deserve, while also supporting younger members who carry forward their mission.

We live in a time when the witness of consecrated religious is more important than ever. Their lives remind us that holiness is found in daily acts of love, in steadfast commitment, and in joyful service. By supporting this appeal, we not only meet a practical need, we affirm the value of a vocation that continues to enrich the Church.

Please consider making a generous gift during this year's collection. Let us continue to pray for our consecrated religious and for an increase in vocations. Know that they are praying for us.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

Terry R. LaValley
 Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley
 Bishop of Ogdensburg

Special Collection in your parish the weekend of Dec. 13th & 14th

Religious communities are financially responsible for the support and care of all members. Income, earnings, and expenses are managed separately from the parish and diocesan structures of the Catholic Church.

- By 2027, religious over age 70 are projected to outnumber those under age 70 by more than three to one. This demographic shift reflects a growing imbalance between retired and wage-earning members.
- The funding shortage is compounded by rising healthcare costs and decreased income. As more religious reach retirement age and leave compensated ministry, income will further decline while care needs increase.
- There are approximately 20,571 religious past age 70 living in the United States.
- In 2023, the average annual cost for their care was about \$59,700 per person, with skilled nursing care averaging \$90,700.
- During the early and mid-twentieth centuries, the Catholic Church in the United States experienced a surge in vocations to religious life, peaking in the mid-1960s. Care for elderly members was provided largely by younger ones. Over time, however, the number of vocations decreased while lifespans increased. The result is far fewer younger members available to support the retirement and eldercare needs of senior members.
- Currently, 71 percent of the religious communities providing data to the NRRO have a median age of 70 or older.

COMFORTING • NURTURING • TEACHING • NURSING • SHARING • LOVING • CARING

***“Let us put the Lord back
in the center and press
forward with joy”.
(Pope Francis)***

Orders Serving in the Diocese

- Daughters of Charity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
- Dominican Sisters of Hope
- Missionaries of the Sacred Heart
- Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood
- Sisters of Charity of St. Louis
- Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod
- Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Church
- Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
- Sisters of St. Joseph



**Please give to those who have
given and are giving a lifetime.**

***We are grateful
for all the
support you have
given us
throughout
the years.***

***Religious of
the Diocese of Ogdensburg***

You can express your gratitude for all the religious have done and will continue to do by giving to your parishes annual collection.

Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Make your tax-deductible check payable to your parish. Write Retirement Fund for Religious on the memo line and give it to your parish collection.



Share Christmas greetings with priests of our diocese

Bishop Terry R. LaValley
Diocese of Ogdensburg
PO Box 369
Ogdensburg, NY 13669

Rev. Philip T. Allen
St. Mary's and St. Paul's
Parish
PO Box 332
Indian Lake, NY 12842

Rev. Andrew J. Amyot
PO Box 637
Norfolk, NY 13667

Rev. Medenel Angrand
St. Mary's Church
22 Father Jogues Place
Ticonderoga, NY 12883

Msgr. Robert H. Aucoin
324 Pratt Street
Watertown, NY 13601

Rev. Scott A. Belina
St. Mary's Church
68 Court Street
Canton, NY 13617

Rev. Corneille Boyeye MSC
Missionaries of the
Sacred Heart
668 Thompson Street
Watertown, NY 13601

Rev. Timothy G. Canaan
669 W. Oakland Park Blvd
Unit B117
Wilton Manors, FL 33311

Rev. Leagon J. Carlin
St. Mary's Cathedral
415 Hamilton Street
Ogdensburg, NY 13669

Rev. Christopher C. Carrara
Our Lady of Grace Parish
PO Box 216
Morristown, NY 13664

Rev. Tojo Chacko HGN
St. Edmund's Church
5526 State Route 11
Ellenburg Center, NY 12934

Rev. Daniel L. Chapin
St. Martin's Church
PO Box 431
Port Leyden, NY 13433

Rev. Martin E. Cline
St. Bernard's Church
27 St. Bernard Street
Saranac Lake, NY 12983

Rev. Douglas G. Comstock
The Catholic Community of
Alexandria
17 Rock Street
Alexandria Bay, NY 13607

Rev. Matthew S. Conger
St. Andre Bessette Parish
PO Box 547
Malone, NY 12953

Rev. Theodore A. Crosby
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PO Box 224
West Chazy, NY 12992

**Rev. Pedro Edgardo N.
de la Rosa**
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24 Town Hall Road
Mooers Forks, NY 12959

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PO Box 13
Watertown, NY 13601

Rev. Robert L. Decker
PO Box 13
Watertown, NY 13601

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Rev. Richard D. Demers
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Mitchell, IN 47446

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Blessed Sacrament Parish
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Rosiere and Chaumont
PO Box 288
Cape Vincent, NY 13618

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Peru, NY 12972

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Rev. Alfred H. Fish
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Plattsburgh, NY 12901

Rev. Francis J. Flynn
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St. Mary's Church
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Waddington, NY 13694

Rev. Joseph W. Giroux
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Port Henry, NY 12974

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Morrisonville, NY 12962

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St. Peter's Parish
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Massena, NY 13662

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and Dexter
PO Box 99
Brownville, NY 13615

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Rochester, NY 14445

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78 Clinton Street
Redford, NY 12978

**Rev. Jose Kanijankunnel
John HGN**
Holy Cross Parish
7 Margaret Street
Plattsburgh, NY 12901

Rev. Joseph Kanimea MSC
Missionaries of the
Sacred Heart
668 Thompson Street
Watertown, NY 13601

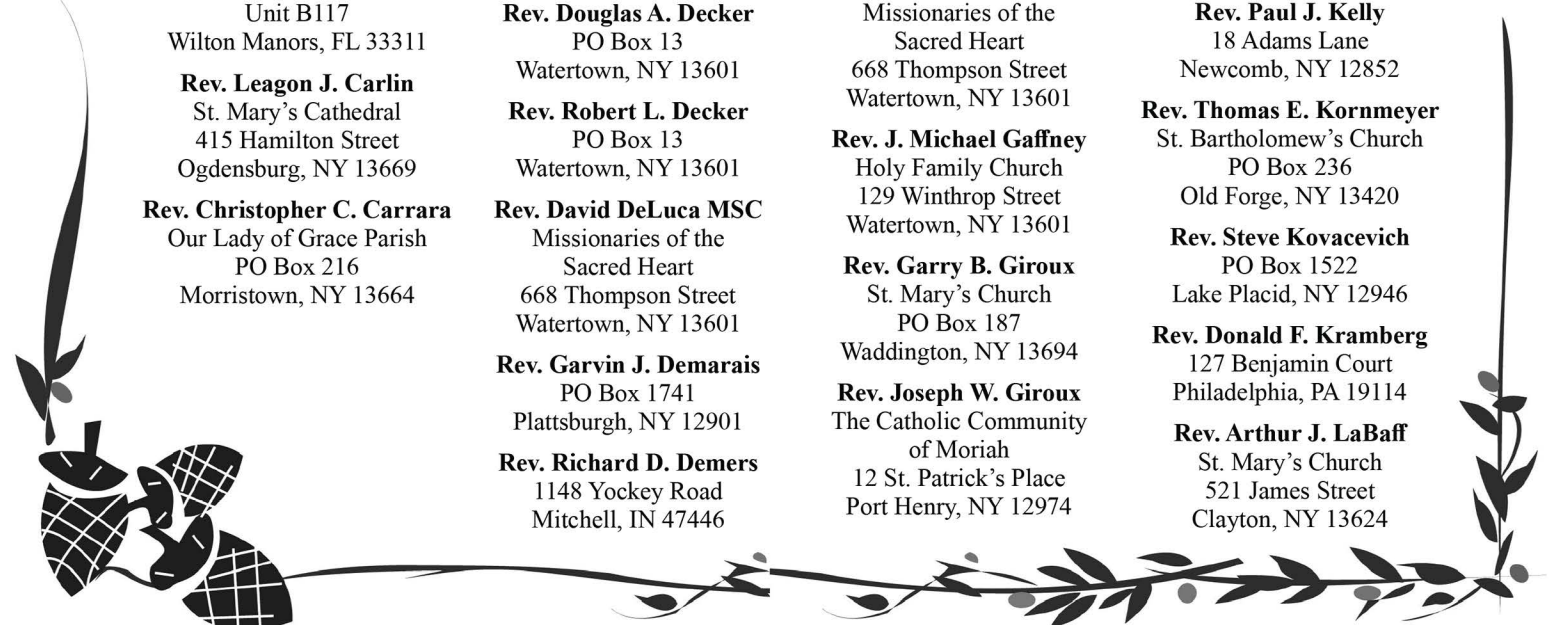
Rev. Paul J. Kelly
18 Adams Lane
Newcomb, NY 12852

Rev. Thomas E. Kornmeyer
St. Bartholomew's Church
PO Box 236
Old Forge, NY 13420

Rev. Steve Kovacevich
PO Box 1522
Lake Placid, NY 12946

Rev. Donald F. Kramberg
127 Benjamin Court
Philadelphia, PA 19114

Rev. Arthur J. LaBaff
St. Mary's Church
521 James Street
Clayton, NY 13624



Share Christmas greetings with priests of our diocese

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P.O. Box 38
North Bangor, NY 12966

Rev. Kris C. Lauzon
St. Augustine's Church
2472 State Route 11
North Bangor, NY 12966

Rev. Christopher J. Looby
The Roman Catholic
Community of St. Alexander
and St. Joseph
PO Box 159
Morrisonville, NY 12962

Rev. John J. Looby
PO Box 159
Morrisonville, NY 12962

Rev. Shane M. Lynch
The Roman Catholic
Community of Brownville
and Dexter
PO Box 99
Brownville, NY 13615

Rev. Donald J. Manfred
St. Stephen's Church
PO Box 38
Croghan, NY 13327

Rev. Lawrence E. Marullo
PO Box 428
Constableville, NY 13325

Rev. Michael H. Marzan
St. Mary's Cathedral
415 Hamilton Street
Ogdensburg, NY 13669

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c/o CJ Farrara
46 Constable Street
Malone, NY 12953

Rev. Kevin D. McEwan
Holy Cross Parish
7 Margaret Street
Plattsburgh, NY 12901

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St. Andrew's Church
2 Park Avenue
Norwood, NY 13668

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St. Mary's Cathedral
125 Ford Avenue
Ogdensburg, NY 13669

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Holy Family Church Rectory
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1046 Oswegatchie Trail Road
Star Lake, NY 13690

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6813 Porcher Drive Unit 2
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CC of St. Peter and and St.
Mary and St. Hedwig
5457 Shady Avenue
Lowville, NY 13367

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Trout River
PO Box 129
Constable, NY 12926

Rev. Jerome Pastores
Kateri Hall
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Hogansburg, NY 13655

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18 Flow Drive
Potsdam, NY 13676

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St. Joseph
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Morrisonville, NY 12962

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Plattsburgh, NY 12903

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St. Peter's Parish
PO Box 329
Massena, NY 13662

Rev. Nicolas J. Revilla
St. Patrick's Church
PO Box 217
Rouses Point, NY 12979

Rev. Clement Rimonds HGN
CC of Holy Name and
St. Matthew
PO Box 719
Au Sable Forks, NY 12912

Rev. Donald A. Robinson VF
20063 County Route 181
LaFargeville, NY 13656

Rev. Stephen T. Rocker
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Canton, NY 13617

Rev. Douglas A. Schirmer
Holy Cross Parish
7 Margaret Street
Plattsburgh, NY 12901

Rev. James W. Seymour
St. James Church
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Gouverneur, NY 13642

Rev. Scott R. Seymour
St. Andre Bessette Parish
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Malone, NY 12953

Rev. Alan D. Shnob
St. Mary's Church
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Champlain, NY 12919

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Canton, NY 13617

Rev. James V. Teti
St. James Major Church
PO Box 214
Speculator, NY 12164

Rev. Todd E. Thibault
St. James Minor Church
327 West Street
Carthage, NY 13619

Rev. Severinus Torwoe
St. Alphonsus-Holy Name of
Jesus Parish
40 Marion Street
Tupper Lake, NY 12986

Rev. Howard J. Venette
PO Box 418
Dannemora, NY 12929

Rev. John R. Yonkovig VF
St. Agnes Church
169 Hillcrest Avenue
Lake Placid, NY 12946

CLINTON NORTHERN FRANKLIN

CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

Altona — St. Ann's and Holy Angels Catholic Parishes to have a Christmas Festival.

Date: Dec. 14

Schedule: Bake Sale, Craft Fair, Gift Basket Raffle, Food and Refreshments at the Hall from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Concert and Live Nativity at the church from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Place: Holy Angels Hall and Church

Contact: For more information call 518-236-5632

FIRST FRIDAY

Champlain — St. Mary's to have Mass, Exposition and Benediction every first Friday of the month.

Date: Jan. 2

Schedule: 9 a.m. Mass followed by Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. 11 a.m. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

CELEBRATION OF LIFE PLANNING

Ellenburg Center - The Bereavement and Community Support Committee of Saint Bernard's and Saint Edmund's Parishes invites the public to a "Celebration of Life Planning Expo."

Date: Jan. 17 (if inclement weather, it will be Jan. 24)

Time: 10 a.m.

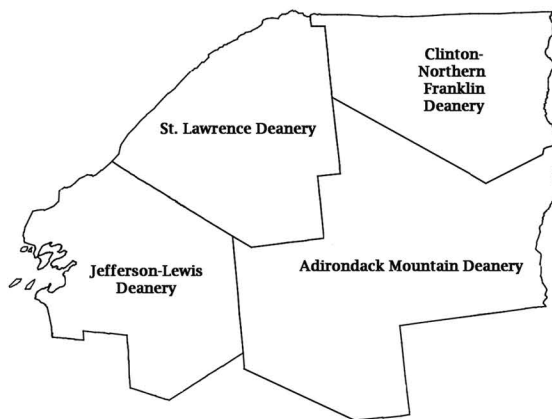
Place: St. Edmund's Parish Hall

Features: This free community event will provide helpful resources for families wishing to prepare for their end-of-life needs—spiritually, practically, and with peace of mind. Participants will include grief counselors, estate planners, legal and financial advisors, funeral directors, clergy, musicians, caterers, florists, monument and memorial specialists, cemetery and mausoleum representatives, and local organizations that assist families during times of loss.

Contact: For more information, contact Mary Ellen Tomo at (518) 569-4447

HOT DINNERS

Malone — St. André Bessette Par-



The North Country Catholic welcomes contributions to "Around the Diocese"

Parishioners are invited to send information about activities to:

North Country Catholic, PO Box 326,
Ogdensburg, NY 13669

e-mail news@northcountrycatholic.org.

Items must be received in the NCC office by the Wednesday before publication.

ish to offer free community hot dinners.

Date: Every Wednesday

Time: 4 p.m. to 5

Place: St. André Outreach Center

Features: Food is prepared by the BOCES Culinary Arts Students. Eat in only.

JEFFERSON-LEWIS

POLISH CHRISTMAS WAFFER

Houseville- The Polish Christmas Wafer or OPLATEK is available.

Cost: \$3 per package of 4 sheets, plus shipping and handling

Features: The Christmas wafer or OPLATEK, is part of a Polish, Lithuanian and Slovak custom that is observed during the vigil of Christmas (Wigilia.) After the first star is visible, family and friends gather around the dinner table to break and share the OPLATEK which symbolizes the presence of Christ, the Newborn Child. The OPLATEK is sent and shared with family and friends all over the world as a symbol of love, unity and forgiveness.

Contact: To order please call 315-348-6260 and leave your name and phone number.

SPAGHETTI & MEATBALL DINNER

Evans Mills — The Indian River Council 7471 Knights of Columbus

will be having a spaghetti & meatball dinner.

Date: Dec. 13

Time: 4 p.m. to 7

Place: St. Mary's Parish Center

Cost: Adults, \$12; Seniors, \$10; Children 12 and under, \$5; under 5, Free

Contact: For more information call 315-629-4678

ADVENT RETREAT

Watertown — The Sisters of St. Joseph invite you to an Advent Retreat.

Date: Dec. 14

Time: 2 p.m. to 4

Place: Sacred Heart Church

Features: The theme of the Retreat is "Living the Eucharist Today." Our speaker will be Sister Shirley Anne Brown, Major Superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Come and bring a friend where we continue to pray for peace in our troubled world. There will be Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, time for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Refreshments in Dostie Hall.

Contact: To register, please contact Sister Bethany Fitzgerald (srbethssj@gmail.com) or 315-212-6592 or Sister Mary Eamon Lyng, (smelyngssj@yahoo.com) or 315-767-5680.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Clayton - Join us in scripture and

song as St. Mary's Choir and Youth Choir, St. Cyril's Choir, and Turning Point Men's Barbershop Chorus collaborate to present a concert of sacred Christmas music.

Date: Dec. 14

Time: 4 p.m.

Place: St. Mary's Church

Features: Please enjoy this free concert as a gift to our community. Donations are welcome at the door to support our ministries. A brief reception will follow in the parish hall.

Contact: For more information please call the parish office: 315-686-3398

PANCAKE BREAKFAST

Carthage — Pancake Breakfast to be held in support of Augustinian Academy, sponsored by the Carthage K of C Father John Cosmic #291 and Ave Maria Circle.

Date: Dec. 14, Jan. 11, Feb. 8

Time: 8 a.m. to noon

Place: St. James Community Room

Cost: Adults, \$10; Seniors, \$8; Children under 10, \$5; Family of 4, \$30

Menu: Scrambled Eggs, Pancakes, French Toast, Ham, Sausage, Baked Goods, Juice, and Coffee

Contact: For more information call 315-493-3224

RAFFLE

Constableville — Raffle to be held for youth and Faith Formation activities.

Date: Drawing Dec. 21

Time: 10 a.m.

Place: St. Mary's after Mass

Cost: Tickets are \$5 each or 5 for \$20

Features: First-place winner will receive a Virtual Reality Headset, the second-place winner will receive a 50" smart television and the third-place winner will receive a ten-inch tablet.

Contact: They can be purchased after the 10am Mass, from various St. Mary's parents, by calling the Parish office at 315-348-6104 or by going online to <https://catholicparishesofslc.weebly.com/church-offering--raffles.html>

HOLY HOUR AND DIVINE MERCY

Houseville — Exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament and the Divine Mercy Chaplet will be observed the first Sunday of the month.

Date: Jan. 4

Time: Following 11 a.m. Mass

Place: St. Hedwig's Church

Contact: 315-348-6260

ST. LAWRENCE

MONTHLY BRUNCH

Norfolk — Parish of the Visitation and St. Raymond's will have their monthly Knights of Columbus Brunch.

Date: Dec. 14 (Second Sunday of each month)

Time: 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Place: Father Amyot Parish Center

Cost: Adults, \$10; under 12, \$5; under 5, Free; Omelets, add \$3; Take-outs available

Contact: For more information contact Grand Knight Gil Gonthier 315-212-5166.

RAFFLE

Potsdam — The Potsdam Knights of Columbus Council 340 will be having a raffle.

Date: Dec. 17

Time: 7 p.m. (winners need not be present)

Cost: \$5 a ticket or 5 for \$20

Features: First Prize, Cutco Knife; Second Prize, Syracuse Mets Family Fun Pack; Third Prize, Stay and Play at the Akwesasne Mohawk Casino; Thirty or more additional prizes.

Contact: For more information contact Grand Knight Michael Lahendro at mlanhendro@hotmail.com or joecatholictebo@gmail.com

TRIVIA NIGHT

Ogdensburg — The Vocations Committee for the Catholic Churches of Ogdensburg, Heuvelton and Lisbon is planning a Trivia Night.

Date: Jan. 2

Time: Doors open at 6 p.m., trivia starts at 7 p.m.

Place: Martin Fieldhouse

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

Book inspires Pope Leo's spirituality

By Kate Quiñones
Catholic News Agency

On the papal plane on the way home from his first international trip, Pope Leo XIV referenced a book that has greatly influenced his spirituality after being asked by a journalist about the conclave and what it's been like becoming the pope.

"Besides St. Augustine," Pope Leo said that "The Practice of the Presence of God" by a 17th-century Carmelite friar named Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection is a book that can help anyone to understand his spirituality.

"It's a very simple book by someone who doesn't even give his last name," the pope told journalists on the papal plane Dec. 2. "I read it many years ago, but it describes a type of prayer and spirituality where one simply gives his life to the Lord and allows the Lord to lead."

"And if you want to know something about me, that's been my spirituality for many years, in midst of great challenges — living in Peru, during years of terrorism, being called to service in places where I never thought I would be called to serve to — I trust in God, and that message is something that I share with all people," he continued.

After being asked what it was like for him during the conclave, Pope Leo mentioned the book and said: "I resigned myself to the fact, when I saw how things were going, [that] this could be a reality."

"I took a deep breath. I said, here we go. Lord, you're in charge, and you lead the way," he said.

Who was Brother Lawrence? "The Practice of the Presence of God" is a collection of Brother Lawrence's teachings — memorialized in about 30 pages of letters and records of his conversations.

Though Brother Lawrence was virtually unknown in life, Father Joseph de Beaufort compiled his wisdom into a pamphlet published soon after his death in 1691. The book is now beloved by Catholics and Protestants alike.

In his writings, Brother Lawrence presents a spirituality that involves being constantly in contact with God, being accompanied by him in all things — from cooking to shoe repair.

Before he was Brother Lawrence, Nicholas Herman was a soldier during the Thirty Years' War. Because of a war-time injury, his leg impaired his movement and caused him constant pain for life. But as a young adult, he had a vision of Christ that would inspire him for the rest of his life; or, as de Beaufort recalled: "which has never since been effaced from his soul."

He went on to join the Discalced Carmelite Prior in Paris, doing humble work as a cook,

and eventually working in the sandal repair shop as well.

Brother Lawrence believed that little things could please God just as much as great things.

"We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work but the love with which it is performed," he taught.

Amid the busy environment of a kitchen serving about 100 people, he still connected with God.

In one recorded conversation, de Beaufort recalled Brother Lawrence saying that "the time of business ... does not with me differ from the time of prayer."

"And in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess GOD in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament," he continued.

Around the diocese

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

Features: All funds raised will be donated to the Diocese of Ogdensburg to help offset the miscellaneous college costs for the seminarians. Join us for a night of fun and friendly competition in a contest of general knowledge across a variety of topics! Teams of up to 6 will compete for the bragging rights and the Grand Prize. All players are eligible for door prizes! Mulligans will be sold at the door.

Contact: More rules and registration at www.ogdensburgcatholics.net/trivia or email vocationsarenottrivial@rcdony.org

week or several. Any help is greatly appreciated.

Contact: If you are interested please contact Danielle Durant at 315-386-4730.

DIOCESAN EVENTS

NYS DISCERNMENT RETREAT

Utica - Are you a young man (age 18+) who feels called to the

priesthood? The New York State Discernment Retreat, sponsored by the NYS Vocation Directors, is an annual opportunity to gather with others who are discerning God's call.

Date: Jan. 8 - 10

Place: The Good News Center

Features: Vocation Directors and seminarians will share their stories of faith and offer guidance for discernment. The retreat includes time for personal prayer and social fellowship.

Contact: Register by Jan. 1 by emailing vocations@syrdio.org

HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN

Ogdensburg — Save the Date! Highway to Heaven: The Journey Continues! Featuring Fr. Jonathan Meyer, popular YouTube sensation and National Preacher of the Eucharistic Revival. Join Bishop LaValley for Holy Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, sacred music, and more. Additional details coming soon!

Date: May 16

Place: St. Mary's Cathedral

Contact: Mary Beth Bracy at marybethbracy@gmail.com for more information.

FOSTER GRANDPARENT

Foster Grandparents are role models, mentors and friends to children with exceptional needs. The program provides a way for volunteers age 55 and over to stay active by serving children and youth in their communities. They are placed in a classroom serving with a child or children who are in need of emotional support, development of basic learning skills, friendship, companionship, encouragement, individual attention and unhurried help. The pro-

gram currently has 40 volunteers and serves more than 100 kids per year. To volunteer in this program, you can live in one of the following counties. Franklin, Essex County, Clinton County, St. Lawrence County or Jefferson County

Contact: Melissa Howard, Volunteer Coordinator at (518) 359-7688 or E-mail: mhoward@cath-charities.org

NEIGHBORING DIOCESES

ADVENT DAY RETREAT

Canandaigua - Advent Retreat: "Blessed are they that Hope in the Lord: Advent Meditations on the Virtue of Hope" to be held.

Date: Dec. 13

Time: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Place: Notre Dame Retreat

House

Cost: \$60

Features: Christ calls His disciples to be lights of the world and salt of the earth- to do so means that we live with hope in a world that so often seems hope-less and full of despair. As we approach the conclusion of the Holy Year of Hope and prepare for the great Feast of the Nativity, spend a day meditating on this most important spiritual virtue — Hope.

Contact: For more information email Nancy Lynch at info@notredameretreat.org or visit www.notredameretreat.org



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SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE

Having second thoughts

Did you ever have second thoughts in life about your life? Things like, deciding to go to a particular college and after the first test questioning if you belonged there. Maybe, in dating a particular girl you discovered that she was way too sophisticated for you. Perhaps in dating a guy you realized that his middle name and way of life are "couch potato."

I recall one event in my life that really gave me second thoughts. I spent 12 years in the U.S. Army reserves as a chaplain. Early on, one day brought me second thoughts - my first helicopter adventure. I was excited about going up in a chopper seeing what the world was like from "on high." I was very excited until I discovered that they were not going to close the doors of the helicopter, that they flew with them open especially in the warm summer. Then, I had third thoughts as the helicopter began to

bank, and I found myself at what seemed to be a position parallel with the earth. I felt very close to God, in a way that I had not anticipated. Apparently, some law of physics kept us from falling out. So, I know all about second thoughts.

Today, we have John the Baptist who seems to have second thoughts about Jesus. From prison, John sends his friends to ask Jesus whether Jesus is the promised one. Effectively, John is probably wondering "What am I doing in prison if this Jesus isn't the Messiah, the one who was supposed to free us?"

Jesus tells them to look at the evidence: the blind see, the lame walk, and the "good news" is being preached. In other words, Jesus' answer is that he is truly the promised one.

John is a very interesting character. He did all the right stuff in life, and he ended up in prison. We do many wrong things, and it seems that



Msgr. Robert H. Aucoin

December 14

Third Sunday of Advent

READINGS

Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

we have total freedom. We can do almost anything, we have so much freedom, but we, too, are in prison....the prison of being a human being, plagued by the effects of what we call original sin, plagued with a tendency to do wrong things. John was trapped by iron bars. We are trapped by our human weakness.

Each one of us must live with our own conscience, but each one of us is likewise obligated to form and inform our conscience. In other words, we have human freedom, but we must learn how to use that freedom, how to live our lives. If we live according to what we feel like doing, rather than what we should be doing, we become slaves to our sin-prone selves, rather than faithful servants to Jesus who offers eternal life.

In the gospel Jesus, declares that John the Baptist is the greatest person born of a woman. But, then, listen to what he adds: "The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist." The meaning is clear, being a citizen of heaven means that we are far superior to even John the Baptist in his human life.

So, what does it take to be a citizen of heaven. It's simple: be a follower of Jesus Christ. Simply stating that we follow Jesus is much easier than doing the works of Jesus. Let me explain.

Before digital coupons, the Sunday newspapers used to be filled with paper coupons. I loved going to a store and using coupons to save money. One trip to Price Chopper added up to \$34. With coupons, that total became \$18. So, what does that have to do with the saving work of Jesus? Well, Jesus is a bit like the coupons we save. Those coupons do nothing for us unless we use them. We can stack them up. Unless we use them,

we get no advantage at all from them. So, too, with Jesus, if we just leave him on the shelf, we get no value from his work, and we remain in the prison of the human condition.

Jesus calls us to greatness and gives us the means. We have to cash in what he has given us. Our Advent season is a great opportunity to get closer to what Jesus has done.

Perhaps these words will help us understand better the mission of Jesus: Jesus, we believe that you reached out to us so that we might reach out to others. We believe that you understand us even when we don't understand ourselves. Jesus, we believe that you are always with us even though we are not always with you.

So, the choice is ours: remain captive to sin and human weakness or rejoice in the freedom given to us by the life of Jesus. Prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus by being his follower right now. Above all, never have second thoughts about following Jesus.

CALLED TO SERVE

Listen, discern act

I will detour from the "Why Do We Do That" series for a bit to write about vocations. Specifically, I want to consider "discernment."

The topic came to me as I listened to the speakers and potential future priests, deacons and sisters at the Andrew Dinners in November in Morristown and Norfolk.

Those considering a vocation were responding to a feeling each has been called by God or was Called By Name during the diocesan vocation department's ini-

tiative in their parish.

The men and women who came to the sessions wondered if the time commitment to each formation program would be too much to take on at this moment in her or his life. They wondered about how the pursuit of a clerical or religious life would change their lives. They wondered why they agreed to be at the meeting at all.

Father Chris Carrara told those gathered this was not the time to worry about the impact they might feel on their

lives and how it might be interpreted by those around them. This is the time, he said, to discern if God has called you to serve Him and the Church. Father Chris wears many hats in his work for the diocese. One of the jobs is director of Vocations.

AI (artificial intelligence) told me discernment "is the ability to make wise judgments, perceive things clearly, and dis-

tinguish between similar or obscure things."

That would prompt me, as a reader, and probably you too, to wonder where the author, that's me, is going with this. Hold on.



Deacon Kevin Mastellon

Have you noticed recently that every time you look something up on a computer or other device it starts with an AI overview? Forgive me, I digress.

Later in this enlightened definition, Mr. AI

informs us "In a religious context, particularly in Christianity, it can refer to the ability to distinguish between good and evil or to understand divine will."

There it is. The definition ALL the presenters at the dinners were pointing to as they spoke to the potential candidates. Discernment is understanding Divine will. Is God speaking to me?

Bishop Terry LaValley asked the audiences to Listen, Discern, and Act.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



The Pontifical Mission Societies of the Diocese of Ogdensburg, Inc.

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith
Sister Mary Ellen Brett, SSJ, Director

622 Washington St., Ogdensburg, NY 13669
(315) 393-2920; fax 1-866-314-7296
info@rcdony.org

Christmas appeal

As Catholics across the globe prepare for the coming Advent season, we take time to reflect on God's many blessings; especially the generosity and compassion of those like you who help bring the light of Christ to the 1,124 mission territories around the world: regions where the Church is still young, materially poor, or faces persecution.

For a few hundred years in Vietnam, because of persecution and martyrdom, Catholics have needed to gather in secret in their homes and hidden chapels in order to worship God. They passed the faith to future generations quietly, teaching them to love Jesus in the Holy Eucharist even when saying His name out loud was forbidden.

Because of their efforts, the faith is still alive and well in Vietnam.

This Advent season we would like to tell you the story of a hidden Catholic community in Vietnam; a leprosy colony in the Diocese of Kon Tun, nestled in the country's remote Central Highlands.

Earlier this year The Pontifical Mission Societies of the USA national office visited this community. Leprosy is a disease that affects a person's nervous system and causes disfigurement. Through donations like yours, The Pontifical Mission Societies was able to provide specially fitted shoes for every member of the community and provide them with the sacraments.

"We had the great privilege to take Jesus to those lepers in this colony who are incapable of getting to Mass," Msgr. Landry recalled. "The first leper we visited, with great hunger, looked up to the Lord through watery eyes and received the Lord on his tongue because he no longer had hands. His hands had been given back to God. And he received with great faith."

He described another visit: "We brought Communion to a woman in her home. She was so excited to receive the Lord Jesus, she crawled down the hallway on all fours. Even though she had no hands left, she came onto a carpet that had been set, to welcome the Lord Jesus. And then received him with great love."

"This is our Catholic faith," he added. "This is what The Pontifical Mission Societies strive to do: to make it possible to bring Jesus, the Light of the World, to people no matter what they are suffering."

Your donation this Advent season helps The Pontifical Mission Societies, through Pope Leo XIV, to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of those like the sick in the Diocese of Kon Tun.

I hope you will consider making a gift this holiday season to help sustain this kind of transformational work happening in Vietnam and all over the world. Donations can be made at <https://www.rcdony.org/mission.html> or be sent to our office at P.O. Box 369 Ogdensburg, NY 13669.

Together in Mission,
Sister Mary Ellen Brett, SSJ

OBITUARIES

AuSable Forks — Alfred Halsey Bombard, 92; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 1, 2025 at Holy Name Church; burial in Fairview Cemetery.

Brushton — Carol A. (Orce) Crump, 77; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 13, 2025 at St. Mary's Church.

Canton — Agnes Irene LaBrake, 91; Mass of Christian Burial Nov. 26, 2025 at St. Mary's Church; burial in St. Mary's Cemetery, Potsdam.

Chateaugay — James William Dwyer, 93; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 5, 2025 at St. Patrick's Church; burial in St. Patrick's Cemetery.

Colton — Ronald Philip Sullivan, 90; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 5, 2025 at St. Patrick's Church.

Croghan — Duane Benjamin Schwendy, 86; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 3, 2025 at St. Stephen's Church; burial in St. Stephen's Cemetery.

Fort Covington — Deborah (Keating) Fleury, 64; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 4, 2025 at St. Mary's of the Fort; burial in St. Francis of Assisi Cemetery, Constable.

Glenfield — Barbara A. (Carn-cross) Dunn, 90; Graveside services in the spring at St. Stephen's Cemetery.

Harrisville — Irene (LaCross) Manchester, 98; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 5, 2025 at St. Francis Solanus Church; burial in Pitcairn Cemetery.

Malone — Paul J. Walbridge, 65; Mass of Christian Burial Nov. 29, 2025 at Notre Dame Church; burial in Notre Dame Cemetery.

Massena — John W. Whalen, Sr., 85; Mass of Christian Burial Nov. 29, 2025 at Sacred Heart Church.

Mooers Forks — George Burleigh, 67; Mass of Christian Burial Nov. 24, 2025 at St. Ann's Church; burial in St. Ann's Cemetery.

Ogdensburg — Todd W. Dumas, 60; Funeral Services Dec. 6, 2025 at Frary Funeral Home; burial in Brookside Cemetery, Waddington.

Ogdensburg — Myra Ann (De-noncourt) Pitcher, 69; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 4, 2025 at St. Mary's Cathedral; burial in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Peru — Russell H. Moore, 77; Funeral Services Nov. 29, 2025 at the Hamilton Funeral Home.

Plattsburgh — W. Harney Davey, 89; Mass of Christian Burial Nov. 25, 2025 at St. John the Baptist Church.

Plattsburgh — George R.C. Har-

ison, 89; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 5, 2025 at St. Peter's Church.

Port Henry — David John Gayton, 65; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 2, 2025 at St. Patrick's Church; burial in St. Patrick's Cemetery.

Port Leyden — Judith Anne Smith Korman, 85; Mass of Christian Burial Nov. 29, 2025 at St. Martin's Church; burial in Saratoga National Cemetery.

Potsdam — Jeanette A. (Miller) McGowan, 85; Funeral Services Nov. 25, 2025 at Donaldson-Seymour Funeral Home; burial in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Potsdam — Diane M. (Wells) Spencer, 75; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 3, 2025 at St. Mary's Church; burial in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Rouses Point — Patricia Jean (Manor) Bedard, 87; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 1, 2025 at St. Patrick's Church.

Ticonderoga — Elizabeth Alberta "Betty" (Flack) Dolback, 91; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 1, 2025 at St. Mary's Church; burial in family cemetery.

Watertown — Philip A. Marra, 92; Mass of Christian Burial Nov. 26, 2025 at St. Patrick's Church; burial in on Grindstone Island.

Listen, discern

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Listen to the messages God is sending, discern if those messages are truly God's will, and act on the feeling. You will never be one hundred percent sure, but trust in the Lord to let you know if the path you have selected is the right one.

Deacon Garry Stevens reflected on his vocation during the Holy Hour at

each location. He talked about the joys and struggles he faced with his wife and family over the years and finally recognized that God has prepared him for ordination by teaching and strengthening him. Deacon Garry discerned God's will in every event in his life.

Join me in a prayer that others will similarly discern a vocation

that serves God and the Church.

Let's all pray that future ministers in the Church will listen, discern, and act if God's will is for him or her to consider a vocation.

Deacon Kevin Mastellon ministers in Watertown. He is the director of Permanent Deacons for the Diocese of Ogdensburg.

HIT WITH THE SPIRIT

Photos by Keith Benman, Anita Soltero & Catherine Russell



NET missionary Stephanie Moraes plays a game of "guess that celebrity" with confirmation candidates at the diocese's western region confirmation retreat at St. Mary's Church social hall, in Massena, on Nov. 22.



NET missionary Ella Nelson gives witness before confirmation candidates at the diocese's western region confirmation retreat at St. Mary's Church social hall in Massena on Nov. 22.



Net missionary Lizzy Rodriguez prays with a confirmation candidate during Eucharistic Adoration at St. Cecilia's Church, in Adams, on Nov. 21.



A NET missionary prays with a kneeling confirmation candidate during Eucharistic Adoration at Holy Cross Church, in Plattsburgh, at a confirmation retreat for the diocese's eastern region on Nov. 23.