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The Diocese of Ogdensburg Volume 80 Number 32

NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

DECEMBER 17, 2025

RECORD COLD



PHOTO BY JEFF BRANCH

Saranac Lake hit a record low temperature of -21 degrees on Friday, Dec. 5, creating a beautiful mist off the lake at Camp Guggenheim.

LOOKING FOR FAITH



Parishes around the diocese, as well as those in youth and young adult ministry, are seeing an increase in the number of individuals converting to the faith or returning to it. Some of those individuals will participate in the Rite of Election on Feb. 22 like this group from 2025.

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Pope Leo XIV: 'Death is not opposed to life'

By Victoria Cardiel
Catholic News Agency

Pope Leo XIV on Dec. 10 rejected technological promises to indefinitely prolong human existence — such as those proposed by “transhumanism” — and said the resurrection of Christ “reveals to us that death is not opposed to life.”

Speaking on a cold morning in St. Peter’s Square, the pontiff warned that numerous current anthropological visions “promise immanent immortality [and] theorize the prolongation of earthly life through technology.” That outlook, he said, is char-

acteristic of “the transhumance scenario,” a phenomenon that “is making its way into the horizon of the challenges of our time.”

In response, Leo urged people to consider two central questions: “Could death really be defeated by science? But then, could science itself guarantee us that a life without death is also a happy life?”

The Holy Father explained that death and life are not opposed, and that in the Christian meaning, death is “a constitutive part of [life], as the passage to eternal life.”

“The Pasch of Jesus gives us a foretaste, in this time still

full of suffering and trials, of the fullness of what will happen after death,” he added.

At the end of his audience, Pope Leo spoke out against violent clashes at the border of Thailand and Cambodia, saying he was “deeply saddened by the news of the escalation of the conflict.”

The hostilities have injured more than 100 people and displaced thousands of people in both countries. An estimated 13 people, including civilians, have been killed as the fighting entered the third day on Wednesday.

“I express my closeness in prayer to these beloved popu-

lations and I ask the parties to immediately cease fire and resume dialogue,” the pope said.

In his catechesis for the general audience, Leo XIV noted that throughout history, “many ancient peoples developed rites and customs linked to the cult of the dead, to accompany and to recall those who journeyed towards the supreme mystery.” But today, death “seems to be a sort of taboo” and “something to be spoken of in hushed tones, to avoid disturbing our sensibilities and our tranquility.”

The pope lamented that this attitude often leads people to avoid visiting cemeteries.

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PO Box 326
Ogdensburg, NY 13669
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Bishop Terry R. LaValley
President

Rev. Joseph A. Morgan
Vice President
James D. Crowley
Secretary-Treasurer
Darcy L. Fargo
Editor &
Communications Director



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"Is everyone riding the struggle bus right now?"

I posed that question to a close friend recently.

I think this time of year can be challenging for many people.

Approaching Christmas, it's easy to dwell on thoughts of the loved ones who won't be joining us around the tree this year.

It's stressful trying to complete all the shopping, wrapping, cooking, cleaning... that often accompany celebrations of the holiday, and everything is more expensive than it was in years past.

Those difficulties particular to this time of

year are in addition to regular life struggles, and some people have a lot of them.



Darcy L. Fargo

Families are struggling to afford food, clothing, housing and medicine. I know many people struggling to obtain or maintain good physical, mental and spiritual health, struggling in relationships, struggling financially...

I know a lot of people who are struggling.

I'm not exempt. I have my struggles (and seemingly the worst luck with cars).

I'm fairly certain no one is exempt. We all struggle. It's part of our hu-

manity.

I've been making a conscious effort to reduce the amount of time I spend on tasks and commitments that don't add value to my life or to something or someone important to me. I sat down recently and took a few minutes to try to figure out what I could drop from my calendar and what burdens I could make lighter by asking for a bit of help from my family, friends and colleagues.

Looking at my crazy calendar, I thought, "how am I even supposed to think about preparing for Christmas spiritually - preparing to celebrate the birth of our Savior - when I have all this to manage?"

It struck me like a ton of bricks: The struggles - the human condition - are exactly why I celebrate.

God - the embodiment of perfection and love - chose to take on this human condition. God chose to become man, to take on the struggles - including pain and grief - to save us from our struggles for eternity.

That's powerful love. That's love beyond understanding.

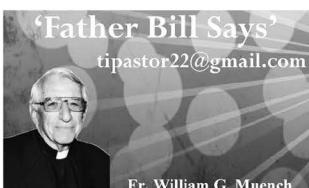
That's something to sit with as I prepare to celebrate the moment it happened. That's an incredible gift from an incredible God.

I'm very grateful that Jesus joined us and continues to join us as we ride the struggle bus.

A companion for Advent

If I could pick anyone that I could spend a day with at this Advent time, I would choose Isaiah, that Old Testament prophet. He is such a joyful person; his writings are full of hope. Each Advent, even now, he fills us with the Holy Spirit and continues to bring us closer to Jesus as we prepare for another Christmas. During Advent, at each Mass, Isaiah's writings are used as the first reading. His message is the same - prepare yourself, fill your world with peace.

On the Second Sunday of Advent, the first reading was from the 11th Chapter of Isaiah. This chapter begins by telling us that our Lord comes to us filled with the Spirit of God to give us that Spirit. "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of



Fr. William G. Muench

understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord." God continues to bless us with these gifts when we receive the Sacrament of Confirmation to make our lives what they should be and to make our world a better place.

In this same reading, Isaiah challenges us to make our Advent a time of peace and love. Isaiah presents a curious image - the wild animals and the domestic animals will co-exist in peace. "The wolf shall be the guest of the lamb." The strong will no longer prey on the weak.

The Lord will come as the champion of the poor and restore peace. He will guide us and walk with us.

On the Third Sunday of Advent, Isaiah urges us to be joyful and reminds us God will bless us all. As an image here, Isaiah sees this barren land of Israel will bloom with abundant flowers celebrating the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God. This reading from Isaiah 35 is described as a time of healing, a joyful blessing. "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf will be cleared, then will the lame leap like the stag." Isaiah urges us to find healing of all that keeps us from our God. This will be a time of mercy and compassion.

On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the reading is from Isaiah 7. Isaiah tells all who will listen - even

now - that this is a Messianic time, a time to rejoice, a time to spread happiness. They will call this Messiah, Emmanuel - God is with us. May the Lord bring all now a time of peace and love. Our Savior is always with us.

Each Advent, Isaiah comes to walk with us, to lead us and guide us, making us open and prepared to receive the Lord in a new and special way. In this way, Advent will be a time of personal transformation. We all will become united with the Lord in love and peace, united with each other joyfully. Each Advent, we pray for peace; we are challenged to pray to do all we can to bring Jesus to all that we meet. Isaiah and his writings bring such wisdom and joy to us all. Let Isaiah be with you during this time of Advent.

DECEMBER 17, 2025

Christmas collection: Supporting our priests

There are currently 37 retired priests along with 11 active priests aged 70 and older, receiving pension benefits from the Priests' Retirement Fund. These priests will be direct beneficiaries of the generosity of Catholics in the North Country who contribute to their parishes Christmas collection.

This Christmas, parishes will contribute 75% of their Christmas collection to the Priests' Retirement Fund. Parishes will keep the remaining balance of the Christmas collection.

Your gift this year will help support not only priests currently receiving support from the Priests' Retirement Fund but also priests who will be retiring in the future.

Actuarial studies are per-

formed annually to assure the diocese is preparing for its future obligations to retired priests. The firm of Frank J. Walters Associates, Inc. has determined that adequate provisions are being made in 2025-26 to fund the Plan.

It is the diocese's goal to provide an annual pension increase when able to do so. On July 1, 2025, an increase of \$30 in the monthly benefit paid to retired priests of the diocese became effective.

Estimated pension payments for the 2025-26 fiscal year are \$985,000. In addition, 100% of the cost of health insurance for retired priests is funded through the Plan. The 2025-26 fiscal year estimate for this benefit is \$320,000.

Retired priests of the diocese also receive pensions from the Social Security Administration. Because priests' income is typically modest, their Social Security benefits are not large, and most priests rely heavily on their diocesan pension for a good portion of their financial support.

The value of investments in the Priests' Retirement Fund decreased over a one-year period from \$8,440,586 on June 30, 2024, to \$8,297,974 on June 30, 2025. The diocese's Investment Advisory Committee, diocesan administration, and the investment portfolio's investment managers closely monitor monies invested in support of the Plan.

The Priests' Retirement Fund

of the diocese is also assisted through extraordinary gifts. Information about gift opportunities to benefit the Priests' Retirement Fund is available from the diocese's Executive Director of Development, Scott Lalone. Scott can be reached in Ogdensburg at (315) 393-2920 or by email at slalone@rcdony.org.

Your personal generosity to the Christmas collection in your parish will support all retired priests of the diocese and will benefit in the longer term the diocesan religious priests serving you today. Your priests, retired and active, will appreciate your support tremendously!

Mark T. Mashaw
Diocesan Fiscal Officer



Adoration in the Diocese of Ogdensburg

The following is a list of Adoration hours and sites across the Diocese of Ogdensburg. If your parish offers Eucharistic Adoration or if this information is incorrect email news@rcdony.org

Holy Angels Church, Altona
After 8 a.m. Mass Dedicated to Vocations and the church

St. Patrick's Church, Brasher Falls
Wed. & Fri. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

St. Mary's Church, Brushton
First Wed. 6 p.m. to 7

St. Mary's Church, Canton
Tues. 4:10 p.m. to 5:10
Fri. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. ending with Divine Mercy Chaplet

St. Vincent of Paul, Cape Vincent
First Friday of the month

St. James Church, Carthage
Wed., 3 p.m. to 6
Thurs., 10 a.m. to 11
First Friday, 10:15 a.m. to 7 a.m.
Saturday morning

St. Mary's Church, Champlain
First Fri. 9 a.m. Mass followed by Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
11 a.m. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament

St. Patrick's Church, Chateaugay
Wed. 5 p.m. to 6, Adoration
First Friday 8:30 a.m., Communion Service followed by Adoration for Vocations

All Saints Church, Chaumont
First Thursday of the month 3 p.m.

Sacred Heart Church, Chazy
At various times as needed, please contact parish 518-846-7650

St. Mary's Church, Clayton
First Fridays after 9 a.m. Mass

St. Francis of Assisi, Constable
Second Fri. of the Month, 5 p.m. to 6

St. Mary's Church, Constableville
First Fridays 6 p.m.

St. Stephen's Church, Croghan
First Friday, 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 including prayer for Vocations

St. Joseph's Church, Dannemora
Wed. & Fri. 11 a.m. before noon Mass

St. Elizabeth's Church, Elizabethtown
Fri. after Mass 8:30 a.m. to 9:30

St. Edmund's Church, Ellenburg
Monday after 5:30 p.m. Mass

St. Mary's of the Fort, Covington
Tues. 5 p.m. to 6, Sat. 9 a.m. to 10 except when it's a First Saturday

St. James Church, Gouverneur
9:45 a.m. to 10:45 every second Sunday

St. Hedwig's Church, Houseville
First Sunday following 11 a.m. Mass

Immaculate Conception, Keeseville
Sun, 1 p.m. to 4

St. Agnes Church, Lake Placid
Tues 10 a.m. to 5:20 p.m.
Vocations and Divine Renovation our of our parish are emphasized

St. James Major, Lake Pleasant
7:30 a.m. before 8 a.m. Mass on the First Sunday.

St. Peter's Church, Lowville
First Friday of the month with intention to Vocations

St. Bernard's Church, Lyon Mountain
First Friday of the month after 9 a.m. Mass

St. Peter's Parish, Massena
Held at Sacred Heart Church Thursday 12:45 p.m. to 1:45
First Friday 2 p.m. to 6

St. Ann's Church, Mooers Forks
after 8 a.m. Mass Dedicated to Vocations and the church

St. Alexander's Church, Morrisonville
Wed. at 8 a.m. before 9 a.m. Mass

St. Augustine Church, North Bangor
Tues. after 9 a.m. Mass until 10 a.m.

St. Andrew's Church, Norwood
Fri after 8:30 a.m. Mass until noon

St. Mary's Cathedral Parish, Ogdensburg
Entryway for the Deacon Winter Chapel

Thurs. before First Friday from 7 p.m. to 8
Adoration each Wed. 3 p.m. to 6 (No Christmas Eve or New Years Eve) and Fri. 10:45 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.

St. Augustine's Church, Peru
Every Friday following 8 a.m. Mass to 7 p.m.

St. John's Church, Plattsburgh
Holy Family Basement
Wed., Thurs., Fri., 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

St. Patricks Church, Port Henry
Mon. after Mass 8:30 a.m. to 9:30

St. Martin's Church, Port Leyden
Rectory Chapel Wed. Mornings after Mass for 30 min.

St. Mary's Church, Potsdam
Tues. 12:45 p.m. to 4:30
First Friday 8:30 a.m. to 9:30

Church of the Assumption, Redford
Tues. & Thurs. 11 a.m. before noon Mass

St. Ann's Church, St. Regis Falls
Fridays after 8 a.m. Mass until 9 a.m.

St. Andrews Church, Sackets Harbor
Fri. 3:30 p.m. to 4:30

Our Lady of Lourdes, Schroon Lake
First Wed. after 9 a.m. Mass

St. Alphonsus-Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Tupper Lake
Monday 7 p.m. to 8

Holy Family Church, Watertown
Monday's following noon Mass

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, Watertown
1 hour prior to Mass, First Friday of the Month

St. Anthony's Church, Watertown
First Sun. of the Month 2 p.m. to 3
Tues. 3 p.m. to 6

St. Patrick's Church, Watertown
Every Thurs. after Noon Mass until 7 p.m.

St. Ann's Church, Wells
Half an hour after Sunday Mass every Third Sunday of the month.

St. Joseph's Church, West Chazy
First Friday after 9 a.m. Mass until 11 a.m.

St. Philip Neri Church, Westport
(Memorial Day - Columbus Day)
Weds. after Mass, 8:30 a.m. to 9:30

St. Philip of Jesus, Willsboro
Full Holy Hour on First Fridays (before Mass Winter/after Mass Summer)

Looking for faith in tumultuous times

By Keith Benman
Contributing Writer

Blessed Sacrament Parish in Watertown had 17 people sign up for the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA) this fall, a record number by far for recent years. The Blessed Sacrament program provides preparation for adults wishing to convert to the Catholic Faith or desiring to complete their reception of sacraments in order to come back to the Faith.

A hundred miles northeast in Malone, at St. André Bessette Parish, they also have a record number seeking instruction in the Catholic Faith through OCIA. And at Our Lady of Grace Church, in Morristown, Pastor Father Christopher C. Carrara reports getting more than half a dozen inquiries about converting or reverting to the church in the past year. Three of those are now in OCIA and more seem to be in the pipeline. That number compares to just one convert coming forward in Father Carrara's first eight years at the parish.

"Finally our young people are turning to a place where they will get truth," Father Carrara said.

Some other parishes are reporting similar surges.

"I get the feeling that we aren't unique," said Deacon Kevin Mastellon at Blessed Sacrament Church about the increase in OCIA candidates there. "That it's happening. That it's widespread. ... the pendulum is swinging back a little. We're having more people come to church and come back to the Church."

In addition, diocesan youth leaders report dra-



NCC FILE PHOTO BY JESSE SOVIE

A large group of individuals participated in the Rite of Election and Call to Conversion in 2025, part of the process of the Office of Christian Initiation for Adults, the formation of individuals converting to the faith or completing their sacraments of initiation. Parishes around the diocese are reporting a large number of OCIA participants this year.

matic increases in attendance at events such as diocesan-wide retreats, leadership groups, Mass, and certain prayer rituals.

That all runs counter to national surveys conducted over the last few decades that have shown the number of Catholics declining and less church participation by those that remain. But one of the most recent national surveys seemed to pick up on the trend. According to a 2025 survey by the Catholic non-profit Leadership Roundtable, young adult Catholics are now the most likely of all age groups to attend Mass and engage in parish activities beyond Mass. That's a reversal from previous surveys which showed they were the least likely of all age groups to do those things.

That finding didn't surprise Patrick Looby, the Ogdensburg Diocese's

director of Youth Ministry and Campus Ministry. People are looking for truths they can put to use in their lives and relationships, he said.

That's one reason why three young people, non-Catholics, joined the St. Francis Solanus Church youth group recently in Harrisville looking to convert, he said. And a few others have followed them there since. And it's why youth retreats like ones for college students at Camp Guggenheim in September are attracting increased numbers.

"Once they get in there, there is a thirst for what's being offered," he said.

The "hook" for getting young people into youth activities 30 years ago might have been things like pizza or music, Looby said. Now, ancient rituals like Eucharistic Adoration seem to be a fascinating enticement

for many of the young.

"To sit in silence and reach out in faith and pray is much more acceptable now, because people are open to it," he said.

At Blessed Sacrament, OCIA co-leader Kathy Allan has also noticed the pull of tradition. She said would-be converts are often "in awe" of Catholic churches when they first walk in. And it's something more.

"Many of them come because the world is so unstable. And they've researched this. They say 'This is the church Jesus gave to Peter,'" she said.

The extent of that research is another big change Allan has noticed over the years. Some OCIA candidates at Blessed Sacrament were already among the 2.7 million YouTube followers of Bishop Robert Barron or the 1.2 million who follow Father Mike Schmitz before coming

to parish offices to inquire about conversion.

"Soldiers on base (Fort Drum) will actually talk with each other about it," she said. "One will say to another 'You should listen to Bishop Barron' or 'You should listen to Father Schmitz.' It's like that now."

The diversity of the OCIA classes also gives Allan hope. This year's included a 76-year-old, a professional hockey player, soldiers, soldiers' spouses, three older teens, and a corrections officer. Some are of Hispanic heritage and bilingual.

"The single most important thing is witness," said Deacon Mastellon. "We have to be the same person outside of Church that we are in the Church. ... That attitude is obvious and becomes obvious to anyone who is searching. The person says, 'I want what he has or what she has.'"

Dying with Christ, Living with Hope

By Colleen Miner
Diocesan Respect Life Director

Twenty-seven gathered Saturday, November 29, at St. Bernard's Church in Saranac Lake to learn about the pending Physician Assisted Suicide bill in New York State and how "Medical Assistance in Dying" MAID has progressed throughout Canada.

Among the 27 were five deacons, one priest and one Catholic sister who works with hospice. People traveled from Ellenburg, Plattsburgh, West Chazy, Keene, Malone, Mooers Forks, Canton, Hogansburg, Saranac Lake, Bloomingdale, Vermontville, Albany and Canada.

Participants viewed the *Dying with Christ/Living with Hope* three-video series focused on demystifying death and the dying process by discussing suffering, grief and our duty to care.

Small groups shared personal stories, some of which will be featured in the taping of the program's professional panel.

Those gathered were invited to submit questions or ask during the Q & A panel. Those on the panel included: Jessica Rodgers, coalition director of Patients Rights Action Fund; Dale Barr, a registered nurse for 40 years, working in a Canadian hospice home; Dr. Maura Fehlner, theology and Mariology; and John Miner, Diocese of Ogdensburg Respect Life director.

Steve Tartaglia, Diocese

of Ogdensburg Family Life director, served as the facilitator of the panel.

Each of the small group leaders previously completed the Christian Medical and Dental Association of Canada Dying with Christ program.

Tartaglia and Miner led the men's small group. Deacon John and Dr. Maura Fehlner and Angelo and Suzanne Pietropaoli, directors of the Natural Family Planning office, lead the other small groups.

Light of Truth Radio is creating a recording of the educational pieces of the day, which will be available soon.

The hope is to have similar days offered in other areas of our diocese in the spring in Watertown and Plattsburgh.

If you wish to register for the online courses, there are three upcoming sessions being offered free of charge:

- January 14, 21, 28 at 7 p.m.
- February 2, 9, 16 at 6:30 p.m.
- February 25, March 3, March 10 at 1 p.m.

Register at this link: <https://cmdacanada.org/dying-with-christ-living-with-hope/>

Special thanks to Father Martin Cline, pastor of St. Bernard's Church, who graciously hosted the event, and Amee Rock, who donated her notary services for the Health Care Proxy forms.

If you wish to host an educational day in your parish, please contact The Respect Life Office.



PHOTOS BY COLLEEN MINER/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

(Above) A crowd of 27 people gathered at St. Bernard's Church in Saranac Lake on November 29 to learn about the pending Physician Assisted Suicide bill in New York, Canada's implementation of their "Medical Assistance in Dying," as well as other end-of-life issues. (Below) The event included small-group discussion of a video series, "Dying with Christ, Living with Hope."



Environmental Stewardship

Visiting nature in Advent

Important occasions or events require preparation. We prepare for exams, for athletic competitions and for vacations. And we are periodically reminded that preparation is good for meeting God, whether it be for a brief afternoon prayer, going to Mass or in the days before dying.

Probably the most common types of spiritual preparation are taking deep breaths and clearing the mind of negative thoughts. It is also important to try to open your heart and surrender judgments you may have made about another individual or group. Additionally, it is wise to develop a willingness to quietly sense the feelings of light and love which God so freely radiates to those who wish to receive His graces.

Taking a peaceful stroll into woods or along the edge of a river or lake are great ways to practice these exercises. Trees, shrubs, birds and squirrels have all demonstrated that they have a consciousness that allows them to interact with entities around them. Developing the sensitivity to detect the energy that many components of the natural world radiate is never easy. It can take a lifetime to become adept at detecting the energies of other organisms. However, the first step in this process is to learn to recognize that all life comes from God and therefore must be given the same respect and admiration as any of His creations.

The condition of your spirit after an encounter with nature will tell you if you are on the correct path. Joy is the byproduct of interacting deeply with trees and living things that do not judge. Like a mirror, those organisms reflect positive energy back to its source and amplify goodwill with a unique form of love. So, as part of your Advent routine, don't hesitate to interact with nature as much as possible as the experiences can be quite uplifting to your soul, which is a good attitude to possess when Christmas Day arrives.

Rest in Peace

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

Dec. 18 — Msgr. Narcisse Lorrain, 1915; Rev. Laurent Legoff, O.M.I., 1932; Rev. Louis Kopp, M.S.C., 1946; Msgr. Harold J. Skelly, 1980; Rev. George A. Fontaine, 1990

Dec. 20 — Rev. Luke Harney, 1892; Rev. Jean B. A. Barette, O.M.I., 1955

Dec. 21 — Rev. Camillus Mondorf, O.S.F., 1914; Rev. Charles A. Grady, O.S.A., 1981

Dec. 22 — Rev. Edgard Thivierge, O.M.I., 1975

Dec. 23 — Rev. John B. P. Honoret, O.M.I., 1862

Protecting God's Children

The Diocese of Ogdensburg is able to schedule sessions of the training, Protecting God's Children for Adults. This required training addresses child abuse, the methods and means by which abusers commit abuse, and the five steps to prevent abuse from occurring and stop it from continuing. To arrange for training, call 315-393-2920 or email jgrizzuto@rcdony.org

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

CALLED TO SERVE

Why do we do that: Part V

The Mass is one of the liturgies of the Church. It is the first in rank. The bishops of the Catholic Church wrote in a document of the Second Vatican Council: "At the Last Supper, Our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his Body and Blood, by which the sacrifice of his Cross is perpetuated until he comes again; and till then he entrusts the memorial of his Death and Resurrection to his beloved spouse, the Church."

Pope Francis, of happy memory, said of liturgy, "it is a primary way Catholics encounter the Lord." The Pope was addressing the



**Deacon
Kevin Mastellon**

worship congregation of the Church in February 2019.

"The liturgy is in fact the main road through which Christian life passes through every phase of its growth," Francis said. "You therefore have before you a great and beautiful task: to work so that the People of God rediscover the beauty of meeting the Lord in the celebration of his mysteries."

Serving at the Altar, proclaiming the Gospel, preaching and distributing the Body and Blood are among my most cherished responsibilities. We ministers should focus on our role, particularly when we are serving. We should think of our role in the Mass as contributing to the "irreplaceable nourishment for the organic growth of the People of God," as Pope Francis said.

We should all be happy when we attend Mass; happy to be participating in this memorial.

When I have the chance to sit in the congregation, I can be a bit critical of the way a priest, deacon, reader, extraordinary minister, or altar server conducts him or herself during a Mass. I blame my days as an altar boy and later through formation as a deacon as something of a "liturgy cop." Usually, I just grumble to myself and to my wife. Occasionally, I will say something

to the individual.

Changes in the rituals are not accepted. Improvisation is a no-no. "A harmonious planning and execution will help dispose the people spiritually to take part in the eucharist."

But this is a real time event. Mass is live. Stuff happens.

Like the deacon who told me he knocked over a cup on the Altar that had unconsecrated wine in it; or the fly buzzing around the Chalice during the Eucharistic Prayer; or the time a celebrant leaned over to me just before the scripture readings to ask what I thought of Mrs. So-n-so's new hat. I almost managed to keep a serious face.

There was a time a celebrant finished the Consecration, turned to me, and said, "You take it from here. I don't feel well."

He left.

A few deacons have comparable stories. Priest do, too, about deacons and others.

Some improvisation is necessary, but we can all get serious about our reason for gathering.

The Missal tells us, "For in the Mass is spread the table both of God's Word and the Body of Christ and from it the faithful are to be instructed and refreshed."

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

Pew study: Religion holding steady in U.S.

By Tessa Gervasini
Catholic News Agency

The number of American adults who identify with Christianity, with another religion, or with no religion have all remained steady, a new Pew Research Center report finds.

Surveys conducted since 2020 have generally found that about 70% of U.S. adults identify with a religion. The numbers have slightly fluctuated, but there has been no clear rise or fall in religious affiliation over the five-year period.

A Pew Research Center study, Religion Holds Steady in America, summarizes the latest trends in American religion and examines religion among young adults.

The report is based on Pew's National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS), which has annually surveyed a random sample of U.S. adults since 2020.

It also draws from the U.S. Religious Landscape Study (RLS), which surveyed 36,908 adults from July 17, 2023 to March 4, 2024.

The report also uses data from the General Social Survey and the American Time Use Survey.

The research revealed that after Pew found a decline in Christianity in the country from 2007 to 2020, the decline has halted and there is a stable presence of Christianity and religion in the nation.

Young women's religiosity shifts

While the polling shows no clear evidence of a religious increase among young adults, it did find that young men are now almost as religious as women in the same age group.

The finding differs from past studies which found that young women tended to be more religious than young men.

This shift was found to be due to a decline in religiousness among American women, rather than an increase in the religiousness of men. In contrast to the young adults, the data revealed older women are more religious than older men.

Overall, young men and young women surveyed in 2023 and 2024

are less religious than those questioned in 2007 and 2014 studies.

In 2007, 54% of women and 40% of men ages 18 to 24 reported they prayed daily. Data from 2023-2024 revealed only 30% of women and 26% of men in the same age group said they pray daily, indicating the gender gap among religious men and women is closing.

Young adults remain less religious than older Americans

The data found no evidence that any age group has become substantially more or less religious since 2020. In the 2025 NPORS, 83% of adults 71 or older identified with a religion, similarly to the 84% in 2020.

Among the youngest group of adults ages 18 to 30, 55% identify with a religion in 2025. This data is similar to the 57% who reported the same in 2020.

While there was not a large change in the number of adults who practice religion, older generations continue to be more religious than younger ones.

Adults aged 71 or older tend to pray more than those ages 18 to 30, with 59% of older adults reporting they pray daily compared to 32% of young adults.

There were also discrepancies among age groups based on how often individuals attend religious services. Adults 71 and older attend the most with 43% reporting they attend at least monthly.

Adults 31 to 40 were found to attend the least with 29% reporting they go monthly.

The data shows that today's adults between the ages of roughly 18 and 22 are at least as religious as the age group slightly older than them who are in their mid to late 20s.

Some aspects revealed that the younger U.S. adults may be more religious than the age group slightly older than them.

The 2023-24 RLS found 30% of adults born between 2003 and 2006 said they attended religious services at least once a month, which is higher than the 24% of people born between 1995 and 2002.

CATHOLIC WORLD AT A GLANCE

Bishops, groups denounce rule change for migrant workers

U.S. Catholic bishops and prominent Catholic nonprofits are calling on the Department of Homeland Security to rescind a recent rule change they say will "disproportionately harm immigrants and their families." The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), along with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) and Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), are calling for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to rescind a policy change halting automatic extension of employment authorization documents for immigrants in the U.S. The Dec. 1 statement comes after USCIS announced an interim final rule (IFR), titled "Removal of the Automatic Extension of Employment Authorization Documents," on Oct. 30. "Given our organizations' ministries to immigrants and refugees around the country, we are deeply concerned that the changes in the IFR will disproportionately harm immigrants and their families," read the statement, co-signed by CLINIC and CCUSA. "The IFR will guarantee widespread employment-authorization gaps; destabilize fragile households; generate severe backlogs and administrative burdens for affiliates; impede the functioning of state agencies, such as Departments of Motor Vehicles; and impose substantial costs on U.S. employers and local economies," the groups said. "Most importantly, the IFR will produce these harms without any demonstrated countervailing benefit."

Poll: Catholics support death penalty despite catechism

A majority of Catholic voters in the United States support the death penalty for convicted murderers in spite of the Catechism of the Catholic Church calling capital punishment "inadmissible," according to a poll published by EWTN News and RealClear Opinion Research. The survey of 1,000 Catholic voters between Nov. 9 and Nov. 11 found that 55% support the death penalty "for a person convicted of murder." Only 20% said they oppose the death penalty in such situations, and another 25% are unsure. Based on the poll, Catholics who attend Mass regularly are much more likely to say they oppose the death penalty than Catholics whose attendance is less frequent. Among Catholics who attend Mass at least once per week, 52% say they support the death penalty for convicted murderers, 26% say they oppose it, and 22% are unsure. For Catholics who attend less than once per week, 57% say they support the death penalty, just 16% oppose it, and 27% are unsure. Although many Catholics still support the death penalty, a 2024 analysis of the Association of Religion Data Archives' General Social Survey shows a decline in Catholic support for the death penalty in recent decades, especially among those who attend weekly Mass. The catechism, per the 2018 revision, states: "The Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that 'the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,' and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide."

Hidden histories come alive in new films

By **Francesca Pollio Fenton**
Catholic News Agency

The Black and Indian Mission Office in Washington, D.C., recently released two documentaries — one highlighting African American Catholics on the path to sainthood and the focusing on Native American Catholic communities in the United States.

“*Trailblazers of Faith: The Legacy of African American Catholics*” tells the inspiring story of how African Americans found a home in Catholicism without abandoning their identity or culture.

From the pioneering Oblate Sisters of Providence and St. Frances Academy to the lives of Venerable Henriette DeLille, Julia Greeley, Father Augustus Tolton, and Sister Thea Bowman, the documentary celebrates a legacy of leadership and faith.

The second film, “*Walking the Sacred Path: The Story of the Black and Indian Mission Office*,” uncovers the often-hidden story of Native American Catholics in the United States.

The film explores the powerful intersection of faith and culture — where the beauty of Native traditions and the universality of Catholicism meet — and highlights more than 140 years of the Black and Indian Mission Office’s mission to walk alongside Native American communities.

Father Maurice Henry Sands is the executive director of the Black and Indian Mission Office. He told CNA in an interview that these documentaries were created “to educate people about these two groups of people that a lot of people don’t know much about,” as well as “to educate people about the work that our office is doing with these two groups of people.”

The Black and Indian Mission Collection was the first national collection established at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 and is still taken up yearly funding the Black and Indian Mission Office.

The United States bishops recognized the need to support missionary work among African American and Native

American Catholics and since its creation the collection has allowed for grants to be given to dioceses across the country to operate schools, parishes, and other missionary services that build the body of Christ in Native American, Alaska Native, and Black Catholic communities.

Sands shared that it is important for Catholics to walk alongside these communities because “we are all part of the human race that the Lord directs his work of salvation towards.”

“It’s important that we learn how to live together and walk together because as human beings we do put up walls and barriers and we see differences among ourselves,” he said, adding that racism “has caused a lot of difficulties for the two groups of people.”

“So, we have a fundamental call as disciples of Christ, as Catholics, as Christians, to help the Lord and his work of salvation to love one another and to have a special concern for those of our brothers and sisters who are disadvantaged

and in need,” he said.

Speaking specifically to the documentary on the African American Catholics on their way to sainthood, Sands explained that the six individuals included all serve as great role models for the faithful because “each of them had very challenging beginnings but went on to be great lovers of Our Lord and were a great witness to others and helped people in need as they saw the needs of people around them and were very effective in doing that.”

He added that the early Church missionaries who served Native Americans also serve as role models in how to “help people where they are to come to know Christ, to love him, and to have a relationship with him.”

Sands said he hopes viewers will feel moved to “learn more about how they can support the ministry to these two groups of people and to learn more about how they can support the work that we are doing in our office.”

Both documentaries can be viewed on Formed.

Around the diocese

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Date: Jan. 11 (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.

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

RITE OF ELECTION

Ogdensburg - The Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion to be held.

Date: Feb. 22

Time: 2:30 p.m.

Place: St. Mary’s Cathedral

Contact: RSVP deadline: Feb 11 to Asoltero@rcdny.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 program 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@cathcharities.org



*Support And Pray
For Vocations*

SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE

A holiday full of presence

it's no big secret. In fact, it's not a secret at all. Christmas is just around the corner. For children, it can't be soon enough; for adults, there is some expectation; for those who have not yet done their Christmas shopping, it's way too close.

I, too, am looking forward to lots of presence. Lots and lots of presence! Big presence, little presence, smiley presence, beau-



Msgr. Robert H. Aucoin

Charlie Brown and says: "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown." Then, he adds: "So who needs Santa Claus?"

"That's what it's all about" is not one of my favorite expressions. When we use this expression, the meaning of "it" and "that" are a bit fuzzy. So, let me fill in the meaning of "it" and "that" for you.

Christmas is all about presence, God present to us, and us present to God, and trust in God and God's trust in us.

Christmas presence is awesome. We have the story of God becoming a man. What a tremendous presence and present! Jesus is both the divine presence and a present to all of humanity.

In these last days before the celebration of Christmas, as we think

December 21

Fourth Sunday of Advent

READINGS

Isaiah 7:10-14

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-24

about the last-minute gifts and if we have the right gift for the right person, we should likewise think about the divine presence that we will celebrate. After all, that divine presence is God's gift, God's present, to us. To be reciprocal, our lives should be a gift - a present - to God.

God continues to be present to us in so many ways: creation, in his word, and in person and in our celebration of the Eucharist. So, at Christmas that divine presence comes alive in so many ways as we recall the historical event of Christmas, as we celebrate that event at Christmas Mass. Even as we gather as families to worship and

celebrate, God should be at the center of our celebration. Amidst the trees, the food, the wrappings and the gift cards, we need to remember who the real gift of Christmas is. God's presence in Jesus Christ is our present.

Another characteristic of Christmas is trust. Think of the trust that Joseph had to exhibit. An angel tells him to accept his betrothed who is with child. Think of the trust that Mary had to practice when an angel from nowhere tells her about God's plan. Two human beings, each trusting in God, and each trusting in each other. Do we trust God as much as they did? Do we trust each other as much as they did?

In life, we just have to let go every now and then and let God take charge. Without trust in God, we cannot make that leap of faith. With faith and trust in God, like that of Joseph and Mary, we can

let go and let God's will be done.

St. Augustine said it best: "Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to God's love and the future to God's providence."

So, all of us should want lots of presence for Christmas but just remember how to spell that presence. With that divine presence, we can then trust in God who challenges us as he did Mary and Joseph to let go and let God take charge.

Christmas is a great celebration. I encourage you to bask in the great gift God makes of himself to us. In fact, avoid being politically correct and wish everyone a very blessed Christmas. Charlie Brown said it so well. To celebrate Christmas, we really do not need a Santa, an elf or even a politically correct, but very bland, "holiday." Our Christmas present is God's presence to us. Let us trust in his love and mercy.

NY archdiocese pursues settlement for victims

By Daniel Payne

Catholic News Agency

The Archdiocese of New York is looking to pay out nearly a third of a billion dollars to victims of clergy sex abuse, Cardinal Timothy Dolan said this week, what would be one of the biggest Church payouts in U.S. history in order to compensate for the "horror of abuse" by clergy there.

Cardinal Dolan said the archdiocese is aiming to raise "a total of more than \$300 million" for abuse survivors as part of a "global settle-

ment" with victims.

The archdiocese has made "a series of very difficult financial decisions" to help fund the settlement, Cardinal Dolan said in the Dec. 8 statement, including staff layoffs and a 10% reduction in the archdiocese's operating budget.

"We are also working to finalize the sale of significant real estate assets," the prelate said. He pointed to the recent sale of the former archdiocesan headquarters in Manhattan, which was bought by a development group for about \$100 million.

The news comes a decade after the founding of the archdiocese's Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program, which seeks to "promote healing and bring closure" by offering compensation to clergy abuse victims.

The archdiocese and lawyers are working with retired California Judge Daniel Buckley to help mediate the process. Buckley last year helped mediate the Los Angeles archdiocese's own abuse settlement, one that saw a record \$880 million agreement for abuse survivors.

Cardinal Dolan said the archdiocese is seeking to ensure "the greatest possible compensation to victim-survivors" while still pursuing "vital ministries for the good of our parishes, families, and communities."

The cardinal also said the archdiocese is still engaged in a legal conflict with its longtime insurer Chubb. In 2024 the archdiocese launched a lawsuit against Chubb, claiming the corporation was "attempting to evade their legal and moral contractual obligation" to pay out financial claims to sex abuse

victims.

"Despite accepting millions in premiums from the archdiocese, Chubb has steadfastly refused to honor the policies it issued," Dolan said on Dec. 8.

Cardinal Dolan urged the faithful to pray "for the victim-survivors, their families, and all who have experienced the horror of abuse."

Earlier this year the Diocese of Rochester, New York agreed to a near-\$250 million settlement for abuse victims. The Diocese of Syracuse this year also agreed to a \$176 million settlement.



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

Hospitality in tragedy

"The worst is over, but the emergency continues. Floods and landslides have swept away entire villages. Many people are homeless. Rescue teams are now trying to reach the displaced: for some it is possible, for others it is not, because the areas remain isolated," Friar Yoseph Norbert Sinaga, Provincial Superior of the Capuchin Friars Province in Sibolga, in northern Sumatra, Indonesia, told Fides.

In the region, Tropical Cyclone Senyar brought torrential rains, floods, and landslides, leaving numerous dead and missing, 1.5 million people affected, and more than 570,000 displaced.

The Capuchin Friars of Sibolga have mobilized, helping to evacuate people, providing aid, and accompanying the displaced throughout the territory of the Diocese of Sibolga. The Capuchins are an important presence in the area: the Franciscan fraternity established itself there more than 100 years ago. Today, with some 65 professed friars and more than 30 novices, nearly a hundred Franciscan friars bear witness to and carry on the charism of St. Francis of Assisi in a territory where, out of 3 million inhabitants, mostly Muslim, there are 200,000 Catholics.

Friar Sinaga explains: "Now we are suffering from the lack of water and electricity, but above all, the lack of drinking water is a serious problem. Even we, in the monasteries, don't have water and must collect it from springs in the forest." "There are thousands of people in the Sibolga territory who have lost everything; they are homeless. Soon we will have to help them resume a normal life, starting with rebuilding their homes," the friar points out.

In this spirit, the friars have opened the doors of the monastery and are welcoming more than 200 displaced people to the Novitiate: "They are families, children, and the elderly; they live with us, and the friars try to offer not only food for their bodies, but also moral and spiritual comfort. The young friars, for example, play with the children, creating an atmosphere of fraternity and joy even in this situation of hardship and suffering. We don't know how long they will stay with us, but we trust in Providence," he explains.

"Now our brothers and sisters need immediate help. Later, we will also try to help rebuild their homes," he concludes. The friars of Sibolga have launched an appeal for solidarity to all Franciscan communities in Indonesia—religious men and women and lay people—who are responding with compassion and promptness.

Article from FIDES missionary news service of the Pontifical Mission Societies. Please remember the Pontifical Mission Societies of the Diocese of Ogdensburg INC. when writing or changing your will.

OBITUARIES

Adams – Nancy (McCord) Gillespie, 86; Mass of Christian Burial in spring at St. Cecilia's Church; burial in St. Peter and Paul's Cemetery.

Canton – Lita Myers Maroney, 91; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 5, 2025 at St. Mary's Church.

Carthage – Ronald J. Sanders, 85; Funeral Services Dec. 5, 2025 at Lundy Funeral Home & Cremation Service, Inc.; burial in New St. James Cemetery.

Chateaugay – Richard T. Widelski, 87; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 11, 2025 at St. Patrick's Church; burial in St. Patrick's Cemetery.

Chazy – Robert H. Underwood, 80; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 5, 2025 at Sacred Heart Church; burial in Assumption of Mary Cemetery, Redford.

Croghan – Eleanor Marie (Davoy) Campeau, 100; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 10, 2025 at St. Stephen's Church; burial in St. Stephen's Cemetery.

Hogansburg – Deborah A. (Steinhil) Benedict, 69; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 5, 2025 at St. Regis Church.

Indian Lake – Dolores (Curico) Antinucci, 96; Memorial Services Dec. 10, 2025 at St. Mary's Church.

Keeseville – Donna Leah (Rock) Pray, 69; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 19, 2025 at St. John's Church; burial in Port Douglas Cemetery.

Lowville – Wallace D. Balash, 70; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 10, 2025 at St. Peter's Church; burial in St. Peter's Cemetery, New Bremen.

Malone – Franklin F. Fisher, 85; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 13, 2025 at Notre Dame Church; burial in St. Joseph's Cemetery.

Massena – Dorothy Jean (Beaudette) Page, 99; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 10, 2025 at Church of the Sacred Heart; burial in Calvary Cemetery.

Ogdensburg – Sally Margaret (DeCoste) LePine, 85; No services at this time.

Peru – Barbara A. (Senecal) Hodil, 93; Funeral Services Dec. 6, 2025 at Hamilton Funeral Home; burial in St. Peter's Cemetery.

Plattsburgh – Ramona Ducatte Champagne Wood Arthur Gabriel, 96; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 12, 2025 at St. Peter's Church; burial in St. Peter Cemetery.

Plattsburgh – Nancy Carol (Jessey) Guynup, 83; Funeral Services Dec. 11, 2025 at Town of Plattsburgh Community Mausoleum.

leum.

Plattsburgh – William T. Meconi, 77; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 19, 2025 at St. Peter's Church.

Plattsburgh – Martha "Marty" A. (Duffy) Schmidt, 87; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 13, 2025 at St. John the Baptist Church; burial in St. Peter's Cemetery.

Plattsburgh – William Thomas as Whalen, 70; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 12, 2025 at Our Lady of Victory Church.

Rosiere – Scott F. Bourcy, 54; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 5, 2025 at St. Vincent DePaul Church; burial in parish cemetery.

Watertown – Peter M. Crabb, 85; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 12, 2025 at St. Anthony's Church; burial in Riverside Cemetery, Cape Vincent.

Watertown – Barbara Henry DeVito, 95; Mass of Christian Burial at Holy Family Church; burial in Glenwood Cemetery.

West Chazy – Ronald F. Brunelle, 87; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 17, 2025 at St. Joseph's Church.

West Chazy – Mary L. (Seymour) Paul, 86; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 13, 2025 at St. Joseph's Church.

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Photo taken at the 2025 Jubilee Mass

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