

**INSIDE
THIS ISSUE**
Closing Mass held for
Jubilee Year
of Hope | Page 4

Funeral Mass
celebrated for Sister
Helen Hurley | Page 6

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NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

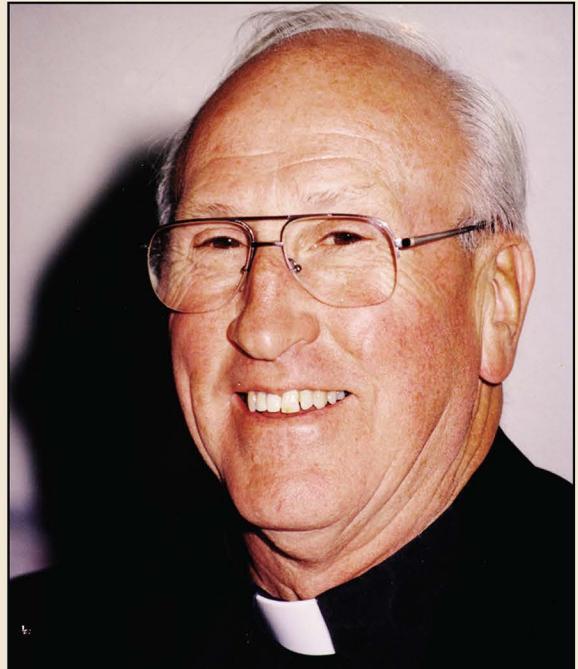
JANUARY 7, 2026

REASON FOR THE SEASON



Youth at St. Bartholomew's Church in Old Forge held a Christmas pageant leading up to the Christmas holiday.

REMEMBERING FATHER AUBIN



Father Pierre Aubin, a Missionary of the Sacred Heart, died Dec. 30.

[FULL STORY, PAGE 3](#)

Pope: Peace will not be built through force

By Victoria Cardiel
Catholic News Agency

Pope Leo XIV called Catholics to a steadfast openness to other people, warning that peace will not be built through force or exclusion, as he celebrated his first liturgy of the new year on Thursday.

"The world is not saved by sharpening swords, nor by judging, oppressing, or eliminating our brothers and sisters," the pope said in his homily for the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Rather, he added, it is saved by "tirelessly striving to understand, forgive, liberate, and welcome everyone, without calculation and without fear."

As is customary for the Jan. 1 Mass, a large group of diplomats accredited to the Holy See attended the liturgy in St. Peter's Basilica, underlining the international scope of the Church's prayer for peace on the World Day of Peace, observed each year on the first day of January.

At the start of his homily, Leo XIV pointed to the ancient biblical blessing proclaimed in the liturgy: "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace" (Num 6:24-26). He recalled that this blessing was addressed to a people

set free, Israel after slavery in Egypt, and he drew a parallel to the Christian life at the opening of a new year.

"For each of us, every day can be the beginning of a new life, thanks to God's generous love, his mercy, and the response of our freedom," he said. The coming year, he continued, can be seen "as an open journey to be discovered," lived with confidence "free and bearers of freedom, forgiven and bringers of forgiveness," trusting in "the closeness and goodness of the Lord who accompanies us always."

The pope centered his reflection on the mystery of the In-

carnation and Mary's decisive role in salvation history. "By her 'yes,' she helped give a human face to the source of all mercy and benevolence: the face of Jesus," he said.

Leo XIV invited the faithful to contemplate God's love through Christ's life: "Through his eyes — first as a child, then as a young man and as an adult — the Father's love reaches us and transforms us."

He urged Catholics to begin the year with renewed confidence in that love: "Let us ask the Lord to help us experience at every moment, around us and upon us, the warmth of his fatherly embrace and the light of his benevolent gaze."

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I didn't think I could do it.

I loved karate. Jake joined first. I later joined because he needed help with certain skills, and I didn't have those skills to share with him. I quickly grew to enjoy it. It was good exercise. It was good stress relief. It was good discipline. It was good for both of us.

Jake and I studied karate for years. I was eligible to test for my black belt, the highest rank in the karate belt system, a system that designates levels of mastery of specific skills, and Jake

was nearing eligibility for a sort of junior black belt.

Then my hip became seriously problematic. Not long after that, our karate club shut down.

Fast forward five years, and I was the proud owner of two hip replacements. While I'm known for not following restrictions, there's one restriction issued by my surgeon that I tend to follow - no hard contact sports.

I miss karate intensely, but even without the restriction, I was also convinced there was no way my aftermarket parts

could twist the way they needed to for karate kicks. I just didn't think I could do it!

For years, I didn't try. I thought failing would make me grieve losing karate all over again.

Then, a couple of months ago, God brought me the grace of acceptance - accepting where I am on my healing journey, even if that means accepting failure and brokenness.

I decided to try kicking and punching a punching bag.

I was almost shocked to discover that I could do a couple kicks I thought would be impossible. Can I kick at my head level the way I could years ago? Not

even close. But I can kick at shoulder level with one leg!

I was a little sad that I couldn't do a few kicks I once loved, but my excitement at being able to do others far overshadowed that sadness.

I have a decal on my insulated water bottle that says, "you are exactly where God wants you to be." I have it there because I'm the kind of person who always wants to be somewhere else - where I once was or where I think I should be, and I need the reminder. And I think God wants me to be the kind of person who embraces where I am now.

And with His grace, I'm pretty sure I can do it.



Darcy L. Fargo

I can, and I can't

Loving like the Holy Family



Today, I would like to start by telling you that I had a very happy Christmas week this year - plenty of family time. I celebrated Mass on Christmas Eve and Mass on Christmas Day. I focused my homily this year on peace, peace for this world of ours. I believe our dedication to be peacemakers was our most important gift on this Nativity of Our Savior, Jesus Christ. I did travel on Christmas Day. I went out to visit my sister, Anne, and my brother in law, Larry, and their family. I then headed home a bit tired, so I stayed put for the evening. I just settled down and watched, "It's a Wonderful Life." It was a happy Christmas for me.

Then on Sunday, I celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph. I consider this a very special celebration. On that Sunday, I began my homily by reminding everyone that we should celebrate and pray for our own family.

This year on Holy Fam-

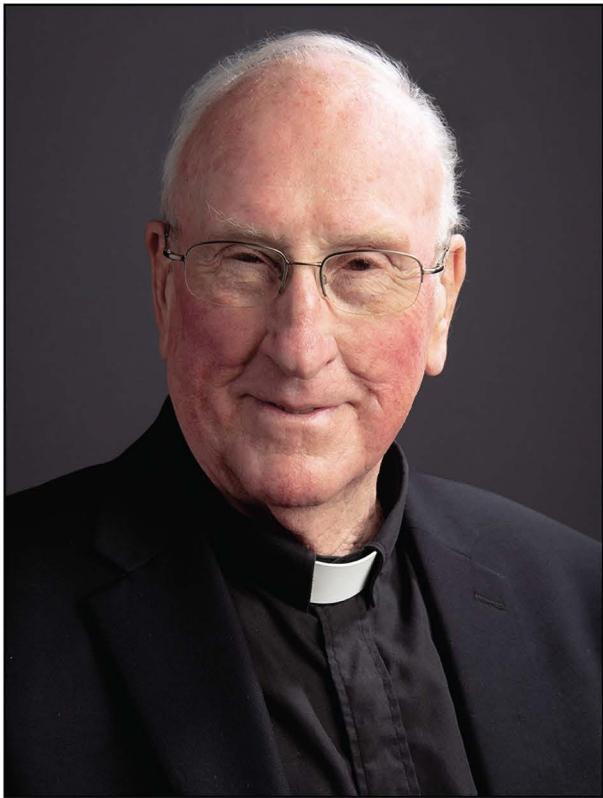
ily Sunday, the Gospel reading was the story about St. Joseph being instructed by an angel to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt - because of the threat from King Herod. Thinking of that scene, I imagined the Holy Family as refugees, homeless refugees.

They were asked to leave homeland, security and legal protection; they were refugees. I remember that Pope Francis once wrote, "Jesus is a migrant. He had to flee with his family to Egypt to escape Herod." Years ago, Pope Pius XII once wrote, "The Holy Family of Nazareth fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family."

Jesus Christ begins his saving work not from a throne but as a child in exile. Many spiritual writers speak about God entering human history through vulnerability not power. Jesus, Our Lord and Savior, comes among us as a humble teacher. He humbly suffered for us. Yet,

Jesus' first steps on earth were taken as a displaced child. This year, on the Feast of the Holy Family, we see Jesus, Mary and Joseph sanctifying the experience of refugees, migrants and the homeless. As disciples of Jesus, we are challenged to care for the migrants among us, here in our own land.

Pope Leo XIV recently reached out to us in an apostolic exhortation - demanding solicitude toward migrant refugees, those who have left home not simply to seek a better life abroad but who are forced to take flight because of violence and oppression in their own nation. Pope Leo writes: "The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are walking where the world sees threats, she sees as her children; where walls are built, she builds bridges. The Church knows that in every rejected migrant it is Christ Himself who knocks at the door of our community."



Father Pierre Aubin, MSC

Remembering Fr. Pierre Aubin

By Darcy Fargo
Editor

“He was a very good priest. He wanted to help people. That’s what he did, and that’s what he liked. It’s hard to pick out one thing that stood out about him except he was good at loving people and loving God.”

Beverly Hennigan of Watertown used those words to describe Father Pierre Aubin, a Missionary of the Sacred Heart who served parishes in Jefferson County for many years.

Father Aubin died December 30 at Sacred Heart Villa in Center Valley, Pennsylvania. He was 91.

Hennigan said she and her family first became acquainted with Father Aubin decades ago, when the priest was serving in Watertown.

“We went to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Watertown, and that’s where we met him,” she said. “My children were small then. It grew from there. I became a religious education teacher and then principal of the (religious education) classes.”

Father Aubin then asked Hennigan to serve as secretary for the Sacred Heart Foundation, an entity he founded, and as his personal secretary.

“He asked me if I would do it part-time, just

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Funeral Mass is Thursday

A Funeral Mass will be celebrated for Father Pierre Aubin, a Missionary of the Sacred Heart, at 11 a.m. on Thursday, January 8, at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, Watertown.

Calling hours will be held at the church on January 7 from 1 to 3 p.m.

Burial in an MSC plot at Calvary Cemetery, Watertown will be held in the spring.

Father Aubin was born in Quebec, Canada, on July 27, 1934, to Achille Aubin and Marguerite Montreuil. He graduated from the local school of St-Antoine de Tilly in 1947. In that year, he entered the Ecole Apostolique du Sacre-Coeur in Beauport, Quebec, the minor seminary of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in Canada. In 1951, Father Aubin entered the novitiate of the order in Waterloo, Quebec, making first profession of vows in 1952. He then continued his studies toward the priesthood at St. Joseph Apostolic School, Watertown, graduating in 1955. In that same year, he made perpetual profession of vows in Quebec City, Quebec.

Father Aubin was ordained a priest in St-Antoine de Tilly, Quebec, on June 22, 1958. From 1955 to 1965, he was engaged in specialized studies on the university and college level. He was awarded a B.A. degree by Laval University, Quebec City, in 1955; from Ottawa University, Ottawa, Ontario, he received an S.T.B. in 1957, an S.T.L. in 1959, and a B.Ed. in 1960. From 1961-62, he attended LeMoyne College, Syracuse, and continued studies at Fordham University, in New York City, receiving an M.A. in mathematics in 1965.

His first appointments overlapped his studies. From 1960-61, he served as teacher and prefect at the MSC seminary in Watertown. From 1963-66, he was also on the faculty of Immaculate Heart High School in Watertown. He was appointed superior of the Watertown MSC community from 1966-72. From 1968-72, he also served as vocation director and from 1968-71, as mission procurator. He was (Canadian) provincial councilor and president of the Northeast Province Corporation, from 1966-70. In 1968, he was appointed director of the MSC summer camp, Cape Vincent, and in 1971, he began a term as parochial vicar at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish in Watertown. Since 1967, Father Aubin has been provincial superior representative on

the board of directors of the Sacred Heart Foundation, which he founded and since 1977, project service director of the province.

He was also active in the Knights of Columbus in Watertown, Council 259, where he was chaplain from 1981-84. In addition, he was auxiliary chaplain at Dry Hill Air Force Station from 1978-80. He was assigned as pastor of St. Mary’s Parish, Evans Mills, and St. Theresa of Avila Parish, Theresa, in 1986-1999. In June of 1999, he was appointed pastor of The Church of All Saints in Chauumont. In June of 2002, in addition to his duties as pastor of All Saints, Father Aubin was also appointed pastor of St. Vincent of Paul in Cape Vincent and Saint Vincent de Paul in Rosiere.

He has been director of Mission Project Service in New York City since 1979. From 1981-87, Father Aubin was a member of the board of trustees of Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Illinois. From 1994 to 2000, he was superior of the Watertown community. With co-author, Rev. George Cotter, MM, he has written two books: Agencies for Project Assistance, which was first published in 1982 and is now (1991) in fourth edition, and Divided Loyalties, which was published in 1983.

His special interests include the Sacred Heart Foundation and sports, especially hockey, golf, fishing and hunting, and work at camp. Father Aubin was fluent in Fathernch and English. In 2018, Father Aubin became a senior associate in the parish of St. Vincent of Paul, with residence in Chauumont.

Later, in 2022, he moved to Sacred Heart Villa in Center Valley, Pennsylvania where he had knee replacement surgery. He lived in retirement there until he died peacefully in his chair on December 30, 2025, around 9:30 p.m.

He is survived by his brother, Camille Aubin; two sisters, Gabrielle Aubin and Lucette Aubin; and many nieces and nephews. Father Aubin was predeceased by his parents; two brothers, Robert and Andre; and three sisters, Jeanne Aubin, Madeleine Lafleur, and Suzanne Perrault.

Local arrangements are entrusted with Cummings Funeral Service, Inc., Watertown, and online condolences to his family, his MSC family and friends may be posted at www.cummingsfuneral.com.

Jubilee ends, but hope continues

By Darcy Fargo

Editor

While the Jubilee Year of Hope has ended, we continue to cultivate hope, Bishop Terry R. LaValley told those gathered for Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral on December 28 at 11 a.m., the closing Mass for the Jubilee Year of Hope in the Diocese of Ogdensburg.

"I've always had back problems," Bishop LaValley said, opening his homily. "It was in sixth grade. I guess I complained enough that I can remember getting out of school. My mother took me to the doctor in Plattsburgh. His office was on Broad Street. I remember like it was yesterday. And I was on the table and the doctor said, 'So, what happened? What's going on?' And I remember my mother was sitting next to the window, and I pointed over at her and I said, 'It's all her fault. She makes us kids go out and pick weeds in the garden and cultivating and that's that bending over that screwed up my back.' Well, don't think I didn't have to pick weeds and cultivate when I got home. But that idea of cultivating, I think, is a powerful image. And I was thinking of that when the Holy Father first proclaimed this Jubilee Year of Hope. Because you see, we've got to cultivate the virtue of hope. If we don't cultivate, if we don't weed the garden, it ends up a mess and there's very little to show for by way of production and beauty. And if we don't cul-



Bishop Terry R. LaValley celebrates the closing Mass for the Jubilee Year of Hope at St. Mary's Cathedral on Dec. 28.

tivate the virtues with which we've been given, if we don't tend to be a person of hope, it's not going to be very fruitful virtue for us."

Bishop LaValley noted that Pope Francis, who proclaimed the Year of Hope, encouraged bishops to "pay attention to those who would perhaps have a short supply of hope in their lives. He said, 'go to the prisons. Go to the nursing homes. Go to your parishes. Go to the hospitals.'"

"So, I got quite a few miles on my car this past year," Bishop LaValley said. "And the message was to cultivate hope. And I told the folks, you know, I can't see how we can be truly a hope filled people unless we pay attention to what happened - what happened on the cross. Jesus Christ was born among us. He lived, suffered, and died so that we can live forever. And you can't top that when it comes to having a reason for hope. It's a

gift, but it's a gift that we need to tend to. It's a gift that we need to cultivate."

Bishop LaValley suggested cultivating hope through gratitude.

"I would argue that the best way to cultivate the virtue of hope is to recognize the gifts in our lives and learn how to say, 'thank you,'" he said. "In so many ways today, our world is lacking in that attitude of gratitude because we think whatever we have is ours and we earned it."

Bishop LaValley said hope should also be cultivated through spending time with Jesus in the Eucharist and through prayer.

"Don't just go because you have to on Sundays," he said. "Try some weekday Masses as well. The word 'Eucharist' means 'thanksgiving,' and it's there that we praise and give glory to our God, and we're nourished with food for the journey - a journey that sometimes

makes it hard for us to be people of hope. And so we pray... Prayer is not all about rules and regulations. It's about a relationship."

Bishop LaValley encouraged the diocese to share their hope with those around them.

"Something as simple as a smile can make all the difference to someone who is without hope in a day or several days," he said. "We can smile because we know that the one born among us wants us to be happy with him forever in heaven. And so, we try to follow as best we can. And for the times in which we stumble and fall, we thank God we have others around us to support us and help us up and continue on this this journey."

Bishop LaValley said this year of hope filled him with the virtue as he became more aware of the work being done to bring Christ and His hope to others.

"I come away even more hope filled when

I go to nursing homes and I see parish missionaries there regularly with programs and with prayers and presence to those who might be lacking in hope in the nursing homes especially those who are lonely," he said. "When I look at the outreach that takes place, social outreach in our parishes from one end to the other, north, south, east, and west, I'm hope filled because of so many folks that are taking the time to sacrifice in our outreach ministries. And certainly we can look at our own community here in Ogdensburg, the many ways this faith family reaches out to others. Whether it's the Project Gabriel, whether it's our Catholic Daughters, whether it's the Legion of Mary, whether it's the Knights of Columbus, organizations that are about being harbingers of hope for those who are hurting. And the list goes on, how our parishes, our families are so vibrant in their faith, because not only do they come into the sacred space to be nourished, but once they leave these sacred walls, they give evidence of what they've received in the life outside the church walls."

And that work continues, even as the Year of Hope concludes.

"Yes, the formal Jubilee Year of Hope is concluded with this Mass here as it will be in all the dioceses throughout the world today, but let this be a launching pad, a launching pad for you and me to be especially conscious of that virtue," Bishop LaValley said.

Remembering Father Aubin

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

a few hours each week, and that was alright," she said. "I started being his full-time secretary when he went to Evans Mills as pastor, and I was with him when he went to Chau mont and then to Cape Vincent. He really wanted to go to Cape Vincent. He wanted to be near the water."

Hennigan said she and Father Aubin remained col-

leagues and friends for more than 50 years.

Hennigan said her friend treasured his vocation as a priest.

"He loved being a Missionary of the Sacred Heart," she said. "He was a priest, and that was his main focus. He did whatever he could do to help others."

That desire to help others pushed him to create the Sacred Heart Foundation, which

helps support men entering the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart to follow God's call to serve as priest or consecrated religious, and Mission Project Service, an entity that aids missionary clergy, religious and lay people in finding funding to support their mission projects.

"He was one of those people who could ask for money and could make things hap-

pen," Hennigan said. "But he wouldn't ask for anything unless it was needed."

Even when he wasn't directly helping others, Hennigan said Father Aubin shared his love of God and God's people.

"He always treated people like they were his friend, even if he didn't know them," Hennigan said. "He was a very good friend to me and my family."

Funeral Mass celebrated for Fr. James Vacco

Father James T. Vacco, 70, a Franciscan Friar, passed away on Friday, Dec. 19, 2025 at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Friary in Pulaski, Wisconsin. A beloved educator, pastor and counselor, he served as a Franciscan friar for 48 years and a priest for 43 years.

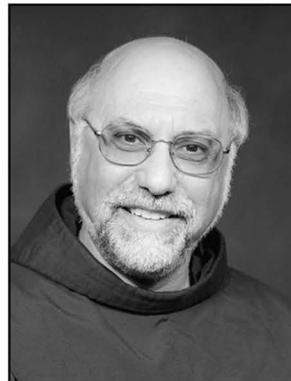
He was born on December 28, 1954, in Buffalo, New York, to Vito and Lucy (née Carnevale) Vacco. His family operated a fruit and vegetable farm south of Buffalo in the townships of North Collins, Brant and Eden. Father James attended Immaculate Conception School in Eden, New York, and graduated from St. Francis High School in Athol Springs, New York. He earned his undergraduate degree from St. Bonaventure University (1976) and a graduate degree from Washington Theological Union (1982).

Father James entered the Order of Friars Minor in Brookline, Massachusetts, on June 23, 1977, and made his first profession there the following year, on June 10, 1978. He took his solemn vows in New York City on June 20, 1981, and was ordained as a priest in Silver Spring, Maryland on May 15 1982. His initial role was providing summer assistance in Croghan, New York in

1978. In 1979, while at St. Patrick friary in Buffalo, New York, he spent one year training as a chaplain student at Erie City Medical (CPE). Afterwards, he began an internship as an alcohol rehabilitation counselor at St. Joseph Addiction Treatment and Recovery Center in Saranac Lake, New York.

Father James began his service in Croghan as a deacon intern and associate pastor from 1981 to 1982. He then moved to Buffalo, where he worked as a religion teacher and guidance counselor in Bishop Timon High School until 1985. Between 1985 and 1992, he was a parochial vicar at Holy Angels Catholic Church in Allegany, New York. Following this role, he served as guardian and pastor at Our Lady Queen of Peace in West Milford, New Jersey from 1992 to 1995. From 1995 to 1999, he became director at the Newman Center in Fredonia, New York while simultaneously beginning a 12-year part-time position as chaplain at Mercy Hospital, Buffalo.

He later returned to St. Bonaventure University as a campus minister. During his time there, he also served three years on the Council of Priests for the Diocese of Buffalo. In 2008, he briefly



Father James T. Vacco, OFM

took on the role of temporary administrator at St. John Parish in Olean, New York.

In 2010, Father James served for two months at St. Francis Church in Paddington, Australia. In 2011, he became the temporary administrator of St. Philomena Parish in

Franklinville, New York, appointed by the Diocese of Buffalo. From 2014 to 2022, he held various positions at St. Bonaventure University, including regional vocation assistant, pastor in residence at the university friary and vicar forane of the Southern Cattaraugus Vicariate. At that time Father James taught homiletics at Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora for 5 years

He was assigned to the U.S. 6 interprovincial postulancy program at Holy Name College in Silver Spring in 2022. He became pastor at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Pulaski in 2024, a return to service in a rural community much like the one he began his Franciscan ministry in Croghan.

Father James is survived by his brother and sister-in-law, Vincent and Louise Vacco; his nephew Jay (Mollie) Vacco; and his niece, Danielle (Nick) Quinones; and six grandniephews and one grandniece; and by his brother friars of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Besides his parents Vito and Lucy, Father James is predeceased by a brother William Vacco.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Jan. 3 in Immaculate Church, Eden. Burial was in Holy Cross Cemetery, Angola.

Memorial donations may be made to the Vito and Lucy Vacco Memorial Scholarship Fund of the St. Frances High School.

Words of sympathy may be left on www.LaingFuneralHome.com



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Environmental Stewardship

Nature and epiphany

The word epiphany has two meanings. It can refer to that moment when a great truth or profound insight is realized. It can also refer to the three wise men visiting Jesus after studying the night sky and closely observing a uniquely prominent star.

The Epiphany on Jan. 6 celebrates the success of these "wise men" using a star to both inform them of an event that took place and guide them to the exact location of the Holy Family. Any component of the natural world can provide valuable information, ideas and concepts to those that can read and understand its unwritten language. Perhaps the greatest value of nature is that it can provide insight into the mind of God. Mystics and many saints throughout history have been able to experience directly His infinite love by studying nature and experiencing the beauty and wonder that creation contains.

It is our responsibility to preserve the health and well-being of all things God has fashioned. Every item, ranging from a far away galaxy to a mature tree in your front yard, to a swarm of fireflies on an early summer night are like books that some individuals can examine and form new ideas for understanding how the universe works. While most of us will never be able to garner great knowledge and understand from studying the environment, we can all help to preserve as many pieces of this tapestry as possible for other wise men and women to study.

Climate change is wreaking havoc with not only many forms of life on this planet, but it also has altered weather patterns that creates unstable air masses leading to more clouds and overcast skies. Looking upward at night during November, December and into January will not reveal many stars because of adverse weather conditions. Currently, it would be hopeless for anyone with knowledge of astronomy to try to navigate across the landscape using only the stars for reference. Hopefully, this will someday change.

Sister Helen Hurley died Dec. 30

A Funeral Mass for Sister Helen Hurley, a Dominican, was celebrated Dec. 30 at St. Clara Chapel, Sinsinawa, Wisconsin.

Burial followed in St. Clara Cemetery.

Sister Helen died Dec. 18, 2025, at St. Dominic Villa, Hazel Green, Wisconsin.

She was born Sept. 2, 1936, to Francis "Frank" and Mae (Peterson) Hurley in Green Bay, Wisconsin. She made profession with the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa in 1956

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

Rest in Peace

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

Jan. 7 – Rev. Leonidas Geoffrion, 1954; Rev. Vincente F. Jazmines, 2021

Jan. 8 – Rev. Michael Moris, 1893; Rev. Frederick C. Hatch, 1961; Msgr. Robert John Arquette, 1969; Rev. Leo McCarthy, O.S.A., 1975; Rev. Roland Gaulin, O.M.I., 1984; Rev. Anthony F. Pease, 1997; Msgr. Morris L. Dwyer, 2004

Jan. 9 – Rev. James P. Santoni, O.M.I., 1890; Rev. Joseph Ferdinand Durin, M.S.C., 1897; Rev. Fred Commins, O.S.A., 1924; Rev. Joseph Edward Doyle, 1958; Rev. Jeremiah Albert O'Brien, 1974

Jan. 10 – Rev. Christopher C. Poulin, 1904; Msgr. James O'Driscoll, 1913; Msgr. Frederick P. Diviney, 1961

Jan. 11 – Msgr. John Andrew Cotter, 1964; Msgr. Anthime D. Charbonneau, 1976; Most Rev. Walter P. Kellenberg, 1986

Jan. 12 – Msgr. Francis Joseph Maguire, 1978; Rev. J. Roger McGuinness, 2022

Jan. 13 – Rev. Eugene Derome, 1951

and received the religious name Sister Marcellus. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Edgewood College, Madison, Wisconsin, and her Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Sister Helen's ministry was dedicated to teaching. In Illinois, she taught at St. Patrick School, Lemont, and St. Richard School, Chicago. In Wisconsin, she taught at St. Mary School, Appleton; St. Thomas Aquinas School, Milwaukee; and St. Jerome School, Columbus. She was director of religious education at St. Patrick Parish, Green Bay. Sister Helen was an associate professor in early childhood education at Edgewood College. She served as pastoral associate at St. Kilian Parish, Hartford, and at St. Olaf Parish where she also served as director of religious education, DeForest. She was assistant prioress at the Dominican Motherhouse, Sinsinawa Mound. Elsewhere, she served as teacher at All Saints School, Los Angeles, California; physical therapist at St. Dominic Villa, Dubuque, Iowa; principal at St. John Vi-



Sister Helen Hurley, OP

anney School, Spokane, Washington; and pastoral administrator at St. Helen Parish, Malone, New York. She brought a spirit of cooperation and community to every place she ministered.

Sister Helen was preceded in death by her parents; sisters Mary Becker, Theresa Rose Hurley, Alice Wall, Katy Kyles, Edith Jonet, and Sally Clarksen; and brothers Eugene, Maurice, and David Hurley.

She is survived by nieces, nephews, and her Dominican Sisters. Memorials may be made to the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, 585 County Road Z, Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, or given online at sinsinawa.org/donate.

Arrangements were through Miller Funeral Home.

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Executions rise in 2025

By Daniel Payne

Catholic News Agency

A rise in executions in the United States in 2025 occurred alongside “shifting public opinion” against the death penalty, offering anti-death-penalty advocates a hopeful sign going into 2026 even amid high levels of capital punishment.

The Death Penalty Information Center, a nonprofit group that tracks and catalogs executions in the United States, said in its year-end report that 48 prisoners were executed in the U.S. in 2025, up from 25 the year before.

The near-100% increase in executions was driven in large part by Florida, which at 19 executions counted for about 40% of the year's total, the group noted.

The year also saw the expanded use of a controversial method of execution, that of nitrogen gas. Louisiana and Alabama both killed two condemned prisoners using this method, which advocates have said poses the risk of a slow, agonizing death. Alabama murderer Anthony Boyd reportedly took around 20 minutes to die during his execution by gas.

South Carolina executed two inmates by firing squad, the first such executions in the U.S. in 15 years. Lawyers alleged that one of those executions was botched, leading to the inmate suffering before dying.

The U.S. Supreme Court, meanwhile, “denied every request to stay an execution” in 2025, the Death Penalty Information Center noted, while several states passed laws expanding the death penalty or otherwise supporting it.

Though executions were up in 2025, data indicate a growing public opposition to the death penalty, both in poll numbers and in the declining number of prisoners condemned to death in the United States.

The Death Penalty Information Center noted that new death sentences were down in 2025, declining to 22 from 24, with “only 14 juries nationwide” reaching unanimous death verdicts.

Though the decline was relatively small, it reflects a decades-long overall trend in the reduction of death sentences in the U.S., which peaked at 325 in 1986.

A Gallup poll this year, meanwhile, found that public support for the death penalty reached a 50-year low of 52%, while 44% of Americans oppose the death penalty, the highest level recorded since 1966.

A majority of those under 55, mean-

while, oppose the death penalty.

The shift suggests changing opinions in a country known for its relatively high levels of executions. The U.S. ranked third in 2023 for the number of executions in countries where that number was known.

And while countries such as China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia regularly record significantly more executions than the U.S., many of the United States' traditional geopolitical allies outlaw executions entirely, including effectively all of Western Europe.

A near-majority of U.S. states outlaw executions, which could help to explain decreasing public support for the practice.

Yet while opinion is shifting, Catholics notably remain largely supportive of the practice: A November poll from EWTN News and RealClear Opinion Research found a majority of Catholic voters in the U.S. support it.

Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, the executive director for the anti-death penalty group Catholic Mobilizing Network, admitted that 2025 was a “tough year” for pro-life advocates looking to abolish capital punishment in the U.S.

“We started off the year on a high note,” she told CNA, pointing to former President Joe Biden’s December 2024 commutations of 37 federal prisoners on death row. The beginning of the Catholic Church’s jubilee year, meanwhile, offered a spiritual bolster to life advocates.

But “executions have been happening at breakneck speed” in 2025, she said.

“The Trump administration was talking about the death penalty from day one,” she said. “They haven’t been able to do much in terms of executions [at the federal level], but it’s kind of permeated things and given political cover to elected officials in states.”

Murphy acknowledged that Florida carried out “the lion’s share” of executions in 2025. “I’ve talked to almost every Catholic bishop in the state of Florida,” she said. “They’re stumped. It’s very troubling.”

Like many bishops in the U.S., Florida bishops regularly petition the state government to commute death sentences, though to no avail. The last clemency granted by an executive in Florida was in 1983, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

Executive clemency is rare in the U.S., though at times it has been used dramatically, including Biden’s mass clemency order as well as North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper’s commutation of 15 death row cases at the end of 2024.

CATHOLIC WORLD AT A GLANCE

Court allows White House cuts to Planned Parenthood

A federal appeals court will allow federal funding cuts to Planned Parenthoods that provide abortion, permitting a key Trump administration policy to go forward after a lower court blocked it. The Dec. 30 ruling held that the federal government had likely not exceeded its authority when it ordered Medicaid funding cuts to certain nonprofit groups that perform abortions, many of which constituted Planned Parenthoods. The suit against the Trump administration was brought by nearly two dozen states. The policy had originally been passed in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Seventeen missionaries were murdered in 2025

A total of 17 missionaries were killed worldwide during 2025, the Jubilee Year of Hope. With these figures, the number of missionaries and pastoral workers who have lost their lives by violence since the year 2000 to the present day has risen to 626. On Dec. 30, Fides News Agency published its annual report, which documents the murders of missionaries and all Catholic Christians involved in pastoral activity who have died by violence. The report includes priests, nuns, seminarians, and laypeople who died because of their faith in contexts often marked by violence, extreme poverty, and injustice. In many cases, they were true witnesses to the Gospel who remained faithful to their mission until the end, freely offering their lives to Christ. Africa is once again the hardest-hit continent, with 10 missionaries murdered: six priests, two seminarians, and two catechists. Four deaths were recorded in the Americas — two priests and two nuns — while in Asia, a priest and a layperson were killed. In Europe, the report includes the murder of one priest.

Pope sends truckloads of humanitarian aid to Ukraine

Pope Leo XIV has sent three trucks carrying humanitarian aid to parts of Ukraine hit hardest by bombardments, where residents are facing severe shortages of electricity, water, and heat. Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the pope’s almoner, disclosed the delivery to Vatican media on Dec. 27, saying the convoy carried special food that can be dissolved in a small amount of water to produce energy-rich soups with chicken and vegetables. Krajewski described the shipment as a small gesture of closeness from the pope to Ukrainian families on the feast of the Holy Family, celebrated Dec. 28. The trucks, he said, arrived in the Vatican shortly before Christmas loaded with supplies donated by South Korean food company Samyang Foods. As had happened on previous occasions, including during the pontificate of Pope Francis, the aid was then redirected to war zones most severely affected by strikes, where basic utilities are often unavailable. Krajewski said the delivery underscores that the pope not only prays for peace but also wants to be concretely present with families who are suffering.

ADIRONDACK MOUNTAIN

ALPHA

Lake Placid – ALPHA to be held, all are invited no matter your background or beliefs.

Date: Starting Feb. 22 on Sundays for 11 weeks There are breaks for Spring vacation and Easter

Time: 11:15 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Place: St. Agnes School

Features: Meet new people and unpack faith together. Alpha is for anyone who's curious. No judgement, no pressure. Each session unpacks a big question of life, faith and purpose and is designed to spark conversation. This is a free event and includes lunch.

Contact: For more information contact Debra Lennon at lennon-debra26@gmail.com, 518-524-4388

CLINTON NORTHERN FRANKLIN

SOAKING PRAYERS SESSIONS

Plattsburgh – Come enjoy a relaxing prayer opportunity the first Monday of the month.

Date: Jan. 5, Feb. 2, March 2, April 6, May 4 and June 1

Time: New time, 1:30 p.m. to 3:30, no more evening sessions.

Place: Newman Center

Features: Session includes a praise and worship segment followed by scripture readings, soaking prayer and healing prayers. Led by Eve McGill, Living Waters Ministry. All are welcome.

Contact: evemcgill16@charter.net

CELEBRATION OF LIFE PLANNING

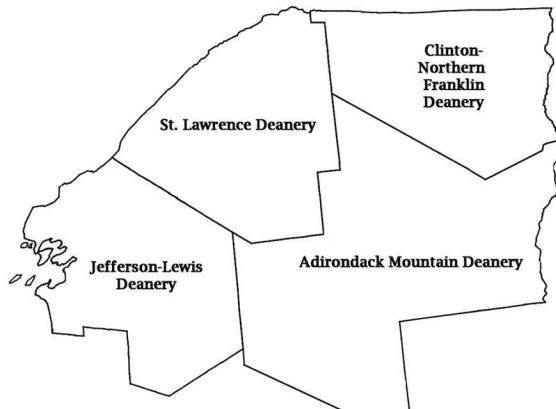
Ellenburg Center - The Bereavement and Community Support Committee of Saint Bernard's and Saint Edmund's Parishes invites the public to a "Celebration of Life Planning Expo".

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



The North County 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.

grief counselors, estate planners, legal and financial advisors, funeral directors, clergy, musicians, caterers, florists, monument and memorial specialists, cemetery and mausoleum representatives, and organizations.

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

FIRST FRIDAY

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

Date: Feb. 6

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

HOT DINNERS

Malone – St. André Bessette Parish 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

SPAGHETTI & MEATBALL DINNER

Evans Mills – The Indian River Council 7471 Knights of Columbus will be having a spaghetti & meat-

ball dinner.

Date: Jan. 10

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; Sauce or meatballs available for \$6 per quart

Contact: For more information call 315-629-4678

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: 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

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: Feb. 1

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: 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.

ROSARY WITH DEVOTIONS

Ogdensburg – The Legion of Mary will pray the rosary with devotions for First Saturday.

Date: Feb. 7

Time: 8 a.m.

Place: Notre Dame Church, Ogdensburg

Features: Rosary with devotions

FIRST SATURDAY ROSARY

Massena – Sacred Heart Church to have first Saturday Rosary Devotion.

Date: Feb. 7

Time: 3:15 p.m.

Features: First Saturday Rosary Devotion to OUR Lady of Fatima. Confessions will be available. Saturday Vigil Mass at 4 p.m.

MENS GROUP

Massena – Men's group to meet the first Saturday of every month.

Date: Feb. 7

Time: 9 a.m. Mass with meeting to follow

Place: Sacred Heart Church

DIOCESAN EVENTS

THE RESCUE PROJECT

Ogdensburg – Join us for a 9-week experience to hear how awesome the Good News of the Gospel really is!

Date: Starts Feb. 1 until Palm Sunday

Time: 12:30 p.m.

Place: Brzana Hall at St. Mary's Cathedral

Features: Each session of this free program consists of a video presentation unpacking the story of the Gospel followed by small group discussion.

Contact: Register online at <https://www.rcdony.org/rescue> For more information: contact Marika Donders at mdonders@rcdony.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 11toAsoltero@rcdony.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. 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

Roumie reflects on Jesus role in 'The Chosen'

By Francesca Pollio Fenton
Catholic News Agency

In a new sit-down interview with Father Mike Schmitz, who is best known for the "Bible in a Year" podcast and YouTube videos on Ascension Presents, actor Jonathan Roumie spoke in depth about his role portraying Jesus in the hit series "The Chosen."

"Everything in my life has prepared me for this role," Roumie told Schmitz in the 43-minute-long interview, which aired Dec. 28 on the Ascension Presents YouTube channel.

Looking back at his childhood, Roumie recalled a couple of moments and experiences that deeply impacted him and his own portrayal of Jesus. He said at 12 years old he reenacted Christ's passion and crucifixion in his backyard after watching Robert Powell's portrayal of Jesus in "Jesus of Nazareth."

"I had 2-by-8 planks that I found and I hammered them together and I hammered the nails where the hands would go and I painted the blood and the same thing with the feet," he recalled. "And then I grabbed like a bush, a piece of a branch of a bush, and made my own crown of thorns and I painted blood on it and everything and I processed around to the side of my garage."

Roumie also opened up about his experience being bullied as a child and how it led him to offer up his past trauma to God as he was reenacting the Crucifixion during filming of Season 6 of "The Chosen," which focuses on Jesus' passion and crucifixion.

"I was bullied as a kid a lot and I had to kind of look at what Jesus went through as a righteous man and a peaceful man



PHOTO BY ASCENSION PRESENTS

Actor Jonathan Roumie, known for his portrayal of Jesus in "The Chosen," and Father Mike Schmitz, known for the "Bible in a Year" podcast, sit down for an in-depth interview.

and meek and humble and see just the level of devastation and terrorized bullying that he received to the point of death," he said.

"So for me, I think, and I'll go back and look at all those experiences I had as a kid, which might have been part of the reason that led me to reenact the Passion, as something that I could relate to and I think all of that prepared me for this role."

He added: "I understand it now a bit more, at least I think, in my own sort of human ignorance and pride... Of course I don't know exactly what all of this is about but it feels authentic. Like, 'Well, I went through that as a kid and my compassion increased and my empathy increased and now I'm playing the most compassionate, empathetic human being that was God in the universe for all time.' So I can lend that experience in his suffering and in his empathy even in wanting to forgive his enemies, which I had to do."

"I was beaten pretty bad. So, I had to offer up all of my past trauma to him as I was recreating

it, knowing that that was part of my own personal sacrifice — was my own offering for him on behalf of what he suffered for humanity."

The actor shared that before beginning the filming of Season 6, he asked God in prayer that "if it were his will to allow me a fraction of a fraction of what he went through."

Before traveling to Matera, Italy — the location where the Crucifixion was filmed — Roumie injured his right shoulder after falling while filming a scene. An X-ray and MRI showed that he had separated a bit of his AC joint from the clavicle, causing sharp pain.

"It was the right shoulder, so the shoulder that was carrying the beam [of the cross] on and it was extremely painful," Roumie said. "And that was just one of many things."

Roumie added that while filming the Crucifixion "certain adjustments" also had to be made due to pain being felt by the metal and real nails being used during filming.

"He [God] gave me exactly what I asked for

— just a glimpse, just a glimpse," he said. "And I think the thing that I got was that I got to enter into it in a way that I had never entered into it before."

Schmitz asked Roumie how his experience portraying Jesus' passion and crucifixion has impacted the way he attends or prays at Mass. Roumie shared that in the past year he began to feel "convicted to give more reverence to Christ in the Eucharist."

"I started receiving on my knees and on the tongue, which I hadn't before," he said, adding that it was slightly "disorienting at first."

He recalled an experience at Mass where he kneeled to receive the Eucharist but the priest asked him to stand up. He hesitated but rose and continued on with the Mass. Afterward, he asked his spiritual director if that was permissible, to which he responded

ed that a priest "shouldn't do that but it happens."

After this experience, Roumie shared that he "doubled down on it and now I'm prepared to just wait as long as I need to until somebody concedes because I'm not going anywhere."

Returning to his time portraying Jesus in the series, Schmitz told Roumie that "the show is called 'The Chosen' in the sense that it's also about those who were chosen, but you were chosen and there's something in that that has changed you. You being chosen to not only portray Jesus, but to be his disciple, an imitator of him, as St. Paul says, and that's changed you."

"That's something I'm trying to wrap my head around and identify with," Roumie responded. "It wasn't somebody else. He picked me. And I, of course, said yes, because I needed the work initially. I didn't know what it was going to do to me internally."

Once the final season of "The Chosen" airs, it will have been a span of 10 years that Roumie will have been portraying Jesus. He said that this experience is something that might take "the rest of my life to unpack."

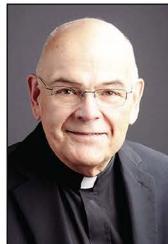
"So, I have to give myself a little bit of grace, but it's something that I think I will always live with. And in fact, I don't know that I want to let it go because it keeps me connected to him, especially when the show ends."

SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE

Celebrating the Baptism of Jesus

Here's a hypothetical situation: You suddenly find out that you are not baptized even though you always thought that you were. What would you do? Would you panic? Would you reflect and say something like: "Well, I have gotten along quite nicely so far without being baptized. What difference does it make?" But then there is the nagging question: Isn't Baptism like a "boarding pass" for heaven? Don't we need it to get in and get a good seat?

Well, today, we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John the Baptist. I doubt very much that Jesus or John understood baptism to be a boarding pass to heaven. Rather, their understanding as is ours is that baptism is the time



Msgr. Robert H. Aucoin

for us to believe and to change our behavior. To believe in God as He has revealed Himself and to change our behavior so that it conforms to what God expects of us.

Here's my personal analogy for baptism. I love to mold perfectly the small sliver of bar soap left from a large bar into a new bar so that the small sliver becomes perfectly grafted into the larger piece. It's funny how little things can give us pleasure.

Well, in baptism we are like the little sliver of soap that tries to be grafted to the larger piece, in this case Jesus himself. In baptism, we want to become one with Christ, one with his body, the Church.

Without baptism, we retain original sin, the sin passed on to us from

January 11

The Baptism of the Lord

READINGS

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Acts 10:34-38

Matthew 3:13-17

our first parents. Baptism removes that original sin and takes us from the water to the embrace of God our Father. Baptism is the moment when, like the small bar of soap, we become grafted to Jesus becoming part of his life that he shares with us.

We think of baptism as a baby sacrament. We baptize infants because parents want for their children what is best for them, a relationship with Jesus.

That bonding with Jesus needs nourishment. Baptism is a once in a lifetime event, but an event that needs constant attention. How do we nourish our baptism? It starts with the basics.

Weekly participation in the Eucharist is necessary. Sunday worship is not an optional event for the Catholic Christian; it is rather the hallmark of the Catholic's life. Nothing can be more important for a Catholic than regular Sunday Mass. Willfully missing Sunday Mass is stating that something else is more important than God in one's life.

Prayer is another essential element to nourish our faith. Without regular conversations with God in prayer, our faith life will be weak, and we end up depending only on ourselves, not a good option.

When a couple presents a child for baptism, the child will be baptized in the faith of the parents since the child cannot express for himself his faith and the desire to avoid evil. If the parents have not been practicing their faith, the priest or deacon will remind them

about their commitment to raise the child as a Catholic. After all, family is the place where children experience faith through the faith of their parents.

So, the Baptism of Jesus displays his humanity. This celebration gives us the opportunity to review how we, as humans, are doing in our grafting with the Lord. Are we becoming one with Him, letting him lead, or are we going our own way without him? Tough questions requiring a personal response.

This little prayer may help us understand how important it is for us to be one with Christ:

Arms of Jesus, lift us up when we fall. Voice of Jesus, call us back when we stray. Blood of Jesus, wash us clean when we become soiled. Body of Jesus, feed us when we grow hungry. Heart of Jesus, help us love one another as you love us.

CALLED TO SERVE

Are we missing a Sunday?

Why does the Church go from Christmas time to Ordinary time beginning with the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time? What happened to the First Sunday?

Good question!

The Church celebrates several unique events after Christmas. The solemnity of Mary, Mother of God is a Holy Day. That happened on January 1. I hope you fulfilled your obligation. It is the day we honor Jesus' mother.

Epiphany is on the following Sunday. This year it fell on January 4. The Baptism of the Lord is the following Sunday this year, January 11.

Sometimes it moves

to Monday, but do not get me started on that. Thankfully, it is a Sunday this year and Ordinary Time starts the following day.

Ordinary Time, in the Catholic Church, begins on the day following the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The Christmas season ends on that feast. Ordinary Time starts the next day.

Christmas decorations in church and at home do not have to be removed until the Christmas season ends. Some folks, even some churches, undecorate immediately after the celebration of the birth of Jesus. I noticed a tree out for recycling on

my street the day after Christmas.

That's too bad.

Christmas with its theme of peace of earth and goodwill to all people should be in our hearts and minds all year long. I hope the theme lasts longer than that fir tree.

We could "do" Christmas all year around our house. In fact, one homemade wooden sled and the requisite reindeer pulling a Santa figure has graced the top of a bookshelf year-round for a couple of decades

now.

We never miss an opportunity to visit a Christmas themed shop when we travel. The real reason for Christmas is never lost on us, but we enjoy the commercial side of the holiday too.

Therefore, there is no First Sunday of Ordinary Time but there is a first week of Ordinary Time. The Sunday following the feast of the Baptism of the Lord

is always the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time.

The priest will wear green vestments when he



Deacon
Kevin Mastellon

presides at Mass in Ordinary Time. Green represents growth and hope. We are led by the Church immediately after the birth of the Christ child to his adult ministry. It is time for us to grow, and to learn to live the Gospel message of Jesus.

Ordinary time continues until the day before Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026 and resumes after the Easter season.

And the cycle continues.

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



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

'We ask the Child Jesus for the gift of wisdom'

"Maintenance work on the paths and roads in the parish territory has begun again. At a time of year when agricultural work slows down, a small wage is very helpful and gives encouragement to many people. The two main roads leading to the local agricultural markets are now more passable, even by mule. And for our students, the path to school is also safer." This is the testimony of Father Massimo Miraglio, a Camillian missionary in Haiti, writing from the community of Pourcine Pic-Macaya, describing the resilience that animates the entire population in such a difficult context as that of the Caribbean island.

"Before dawn," continues the missionary, parish priest of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, "at least a hundred children, young people, adults, and the elderly go down to the river to carry, each according to their means, a little sand to continue building the small house intended to welcome visitors, for the hospitality of those who will come to support community projects. Without a doubt, this is a beautiful community initiative," emphasizes Father Massimo, "in preparation for the work that awaits us in the near future for the construction of the outpatient clinic."

Wednesday, December 17, was the last day of classes for the students of the parish literacy school. "Classes will resume, we hope with the same enthusiasm, on January 7. The exams are over, and on Saturday the 20th we had our Christmas celebration, which everyone attended." After the opening prayer and a few words about the meaning of Christmas, the dancing, singing, and poetry began. From the youngest to the oldest, everyone showed a great desire to demonstrate their skills. This enthusiasm fills us with hope to start anew, from the youngest, to rebuild a different community. "We ask the Child Jesus for the gift of wisdom to guide our children well," the Camillian priest concluded.

The school has about 230 students and fifteen teachers, distributed among several classes spread throughout the parish territory.

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

Alexandria Bay – Richard W. Branche, 73; Funeral Services Dec. 22, 2025 at Costello Funeral Home.

Canton – Karen E. Mousaw, 71; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 22, 2025 at St. Mary's Church.

Carthage – Carl A. Pignone, 88; Mass of Christian Burial Jan. 2, 2026 at St. James Church; burial in St. James Cemetery.

Carthage – Jean M. (Nevills) Williams, 85; Private services to be held.

Chaumont – John "Jack" Heins, 95; Memorial Services at a later date at All Saints Church.

Chateaugay – Janice N. (Tacy) Cook, 82; Mass of Christian Burial in the spring.

Chateaugay – Marjorie M. (Broadway) Decosse, 85; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 29, 2025 at St. Patrick's Church; burial in St. Patrick's Cemetery.

Clayton – Francis "Joe" Joseph Kehoe, 97; Mass of Christian Burial July 1, 2026 at St. Mary's Church; burial in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Constable – Irene May (Empey) Dailey, 74; Funeral Services Jan. 2, 2026 at Flint Funeral Home, Moria.

Heuvelton – Sally A. (Hawley) Cote, 81; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 31, 2025 at St. Raphael's Church; burial in Dexter Cemetery.

Lowville – Sharon Marie (Shaw) Baker, 79; Graveside services in spring at Beaches Bridge Cemetery, Watson.

Lyon Mountain – Patrick G. Cayea, 74; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 27, 2025 at St. Bernard's Church; burial in St. Bernard's Cemetery.

Malone – Audrey A. (Martin) Bessette, 101; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 30, 2025 at Notre Dame Church.

Malone – Genevieve Trombly, 89; Funeral Services Jan. 2, 2026 at Frary Funeral Home.

Massena – Norma Jean (Finnie) Dauphinais, 90; Mass of Christian Burial in 2026 at St. Mary's Church.

Mooers Forks – Timothy C. Goyno, 57; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 30, 2025 at St. Ann's Church.

Mooers Forks – Barbara Ann (LaValley) Guay, 83; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 23, 2025 at St. Ann's Church.

Mooers Forks – Richard Michael Seymour, 47; Funeral Services Dec. 21, 2025 at the Hamilton Funeral Home; burial in St. Ann's Cemetery.

Morrisonville – Mabel (Goddeau) King, 82; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 23, 2025 at St. Alexander's Church; burial in St. Alexander's Cemetery.

Norwood – Joyce Marie (Smith) Hough, 83; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 23, 2025 at St. Andrew's Church; burial in Evergreen Cemetery, Canton.

Ogdensburg – Carol J. (Beckstead) Sharlow, 78; Mass of Christian Burial May 9, 2026 at St. Mary's Cathedral.

Peru – Elinor Carole Santor, 91; Funeral Services Jan. 3, 2026 at Hamilton Funeral Home; burial in St. Augustine's Cemetery.

Port Henry – Charles M. Bryant, 99; Mass of Christian Burial Jan. 3, 2026 at St. Patrick's Church.

Port Henry – Paul Mazzotte, 88; Mass of Christian Burial Dec. 29, 2025 at St. Patrick's Church.

Redford – Patrick Buckley, 68; Mass of Christian Burial Jan. 8, 2026 at Church of the Assumption.

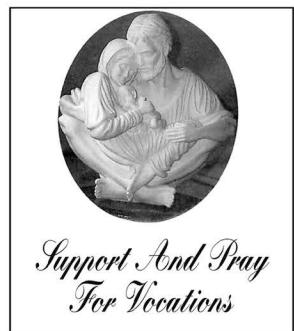
Saranac Lake – Frank Camelo, 95; Mass of Christian Burial to be held at a later date.

Watertown – Rebecca Ruth Beyette Coyne, 53; Funeral Service Dec. 31, 2025 at Reed & Benoit Funeral Home; burial in North Watertown Cemetery.

Watertown – Patricia C. Spaziani, 81; Mass of Christian Burial Jan. 6, 2026 at St. Anthony's Church; burial in Glenwood Cemetery.

Watertown – Karen M. (Schneider) Tarzia, 78; Funeral Services Jan. 4, 2026 at D.L. Calarco Funeral Home, Inc.; burial in Glenwood Cemetery.

Watertown – Beatrice "Midge" (O'Connor) Travers, 78; Mass of Christian Burial Jan. 5, 2026 at St. Patrick's Church; burial in Brookside Cemetery.



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Divorce rates rise for couples over 65

Catholic experts suggest fostering connection, focusing on healing and forgiveness

By Tyler Arnold
Catholic News Agency

The rate of married couples filing for divorce has begun to trend downward in recent years, but the rate of "gray divorce" — divorces of couples in their 60s or older — has continued to climb.

A July 2025 report from the Institute for Family Studies found that about 40% of today's first marriages will end in divorce — much less than the oft-cited estimates of about 50%. This is partly because marriages are more selective and some younger people are waiting longer to marry or shunning marriage altogether.

In spite of that overall downward trend, the report explains that the 40% estimate is based on the assumption that divorce rates will remain stable. It acknowledges though that "prediction is no easy task," and if later-year divorce rates continue to surge, the number of divorces may be higher.

A 2024 study by the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University found that the divorce

rate among married couples aged 65 or older nearly tripled over the past three decades, from about 5.2% in 1990 to 15.2% in 2022. Divorce among older couples is frequently called gray divorce.

Julia Dezelski, associate director of marriage and family life for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth, told CNA the factors leading to gray divorce are often different from the factors that lead to divorce among younger or middle-aged married couples.

"The new challenges [are] faced by couples who find themselves newly 'alone' with themselves after their kids have left home for college, careers, etc.," she said. "As empty nesters, the couple is faced with a new season of 'rediscovery' as a couple, and this can be a source of stress as well as disillusionment as they learn that the years of child-rearing and careerism may have changed them as individuals and as a couple."

Dezelski said other factors include health

and hormonal changes that come with age, and many couples are unprepared for changes that accompany perimenopause and menopause, and this can sometimes cause "greater tension between the couple."

Gray divorce, she said, can exacerbate the feelings of "lowliness and social isolation" and can be "harder to navigate in some ways." The impact on the couple's grown children is different than it would be on young children but is "always significant and a form of trauma" regardless of the age of the children, she said.

"For the older children of divorce, it can be particularly hard to commit to a similar life journey with confidence if your own parents' marriage is unraveling or to explain to their own children why their grandparents are separating," she said.

WHAT DO CATHOLIC EXPERTS SUGGEST?

Although many of the root causes for gray divorce are distinct from the root causes of divorce for younger couples, Sheila Oprysko — who serves on the leadership team for the Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) — told CNA that many of the solutions are "very similar."

WWME is a Catholic organization that offers retreats for married couples to help them build their connection with each other," adding: "It's easier to blame your spouse

and with God.

For couples in their 60s, one issue can often be that they "really haven't communicated with each other" properly in years, she said. This is often because their efforts focused on their children, their house, their jobs, and other things.

Her husband, Peter Oprysko, who also serves on the leadership team, told CNA gray divorce is often "because couples have lost track of each other — their life has been about everything but their relationship."

Peter said: "We have seen an increase in the number of older couples attending the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekend Experience." He said a goal is to teach them "a form of communication that enables couples to connect at a different level — at a feeling level."

Sheila added that "sharing your feelings is one of the tools," as well as a need to "reevaluate where we spend our time [and] how do we even communicate to one another?"

"And when things go awry, we talk about the importance of healing and forgiveness," she said. "... Not just saying 'I'm sorry,' but saying 'please forgive me' and the other person acknowledging that yes they are forgiven."

She said the inability to communicate amid life changes can cause couples to "make judgments about each other," adding: "It's easier to blame your spouse

for the change rather than look at what the change really was."

In addition to better communication and hearing each other out, Sheila said married couples need to reflect on "the graces of the sacrament [of marriage and] the beauty of the sacrament."

"A couple's love is a reflection of God's love for all to see," she said.

They also emphasized the importance of not simply praying for each other but also praying with each other.

"God really enters into the relationship [through that process]," Sheila said. "So it becomes the three."

Dezelski said for older couples it's important to "begin with gratitude" and review the greatest blessings of the marriage and to "continue with hope" and "renew the reason for your love: Reflect on what drew you together by God's grace on your marriage day."

"Don't let the sun set on your resentment, anger, [or] frustration: Give and ask for forgiveness," she added. "The new year is a wonderful time to begin anew by seeking God's mercy in the sacraments."

The Opryskos pointed to their programs as options for married couples who are struggling with the thought of divorce. Dezelski also recommended seeking faith-based therapy through Alpha Omega Clinic or MyCatholicDoctor and other Catholic resources.

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