Pope: ignoring God leads to violence

VATICAN CITY (CNS)-- It is the complete disregard for God, not his glorification, that leads to violence in this world, Pope Francis said.

That is why people of faith, particularly Christians and Muslims, must work together for peace, and governments must guarantee full religious freedom for their citizens and religious communities, he said Dec. 3 at his weekly general audience.

Just a few thousand people - huddled under umbrellas and plastic ponchos - gathered in St. Peter's Square for a rainy Wednesday papal audience.

The pope dedicated his general audience talk to a few of the highlights and hopes from his trip to Turkey Nov. 28-30.

The importance of religious freedom, he said, was the focus of the first day of the trip when he met with government authorities of the Muslim-majority nation with a constitution affirming the secular nature of the state.

With government leaders, he said, "we talked about violence and how it is precisely forgetting about God, not his glorification, that generates violence.

Religious Retirement Appeal

The annual Religious Retirement collection "Share in the Care" will take place in parishes of the Diocese of Ogdensburg this weekend.

Bishop LaValley encourages generosity to this appeal, writing that this Year of Consecrated Life is a "grace-filled time for the Church in the North Country to express our gratitude to the consecrated women and men who have educated our young, cared for our sick, provided pastoral care to our parishioners and Worked for justice for the oppressed."

SPECIAL SECTION, PAGES 7-10

Young Catholic Voice

The truth about 'Jesus Camp' - "Guggenheim has left its mark on my life"  
FULL STORY, PAGE 16

CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS

Artwork by Gillian Boule, a sixth grader at Seton Academy in Plattsburgh was chosen for the cover of Bishop LaValley's 2014 Christmas card. The bishop selected Jillian's design from among those submitted by children in Catholic schools and faith formation programs from across the diocese. Jillian, the daughter of Michael and Christine Boule, is shown above with her pastor, Msgr. Dennis Duprey of St. Peter's; her art teacher, Juliet Dubay and principal St. Joseph Sister Mary Helen Hermann. A photo of the front of the card is published on page 3.

CHRISTMAS CARDS: Share special greetings with your favorite priests, p. 4-5
EDITOR’S NOTE

Reasons for joy on Gaudete Sunday

As we look ahead to our joyful Advent Sunday, Gaudete, we have plenty of reasons to rejoice.

First of all, we are thrilled to welcome Father Muench back to his regular place on this page.

We are so grateful that he’s strong enough to write for us and hope that this is the case for many, many years to come.

We’re also happy to present the last – but certainly not least – story of our 2014 religious jubilarians.

Sister Maureen Sweeney, still an Irish lass, has given 50 years of service as a Sister of St. Joseph in every corner of the North Country.

Like most of the rest of this year’s jubilarians, Sister Maureen continues in active ministry.

With any other “career” these women could have retired years ago but I don’t know think anyone is surprised that they are still working hard – in classrooms and parishes – to bring God into our lives.

I think it’s safe to say that most of us took our sisters for granted when they taught in our classrooms for pennies. And we take them for granted now as they work through their 60’s, 70’s and 80’s.

This Gaudete Sunday offers us an opportunity to give back, just a little, to the religious women and men who have given their very lives to God for us.

The annual Religious Retirement Collection – Share in the Care – will be taken up in all our parishes this weekend. As we begin this Year of Consecrated Life, a little concrete recognition of consecrated life, i.e., a generous contribution to the collection would be in order.

As Bishop LaValley points out, that while many continue in some form of ministry, others are frail and need assistance. “This is a fitten occasion for us to express our gratitude for these faithful women and men,” he said.

Amen!

A PASTOR’S PERSPECTIVE

Advent: the patient is waiting patiently

Advent – patient waiting – patience.

Personally, as I go through these days of rehabilitation, I receive this Advent message from everyone I talk with, from family and friends, from doctors and nurses. “Be patient and good things will happen.”

During the Advent season, the Church of today looks back to the Hebrew community before Jesus. Those people were holding on to a promise, a promise that soon there would be a Messiah, a Savior, who would bring God’s peace and forgiveness, happiness and love, to a needy world.

Living out this promise demanded years of patience.

For the faithful people of Israel, it was constantly patience. For the great prophets of the Hebrew people patience was not easy. It often resulted in their frustration. They wrote and prayed “Come, Lord – come and save your people.”

As we remember and celebrate Advent, we use the songs and words of the psalms and prophets, especially the Prophet Isaiah.

The psalms are those wonderful songs of the Old Testament; constantly they plead with God to come. Psalm 85: “Lord, let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation. I will hear what God proclaims; the Lord – for he proclaims peace to his people. Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land.”

So, my personal companions during these days of patience are those generation of people who patiently waited – without losing faith and confidence that God would hear their prayers.

This year, Advent has truly become a time of patient-waiting for me as I go through this time of healing.

Each year, during Advent, the Church points me to Isaiah, His is the Advent message that is truly familiar to all of us. It is a most powerful message of faith and confidence in the Lord, a message of patience.

Isaiah tells us that this Savior, this Messiah, will transform our world because he will come with gentleness and patience. Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise his voice, nor make his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break – and a dimly burning wick he will not extinguish; he will faithfully bring forth justice.”

So, my model and my example is our Lord and Savior – whom Isaiah looked forward to – Jesus who would come in peace and love, bringing his message to our world, gently and patiently.

Jesus would accept our humanity – even the suffering and a death for us – and he accepted it all so patiently. I must walk with Jesus, walk in his patience, always confident that something good will come.

In this Advent spirit, I also turn to the Lord and plead that Jesus will come and walk with me, guiding me, supporting me, giving me the patience that I will not be afraid.

Isaiah says: “A voice is calling, clear the way of the Lord in the wilderness, make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low, and let the rough ground become as a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley.”

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Warm up with Good News!

E-MAIL: news@northcountrycatholic.org
I am a native of County Donegal, Ireland, the oldest of four children to the late Edward and Ellen Sweeney. I have two sisters and a brother.


In the Ogdensburg Diocesan Catholic Schools, I taught in Sacred Heart School in Watertown, St. Mary's School in Ticonderoga, St. Joseph's School in Dannemora, St. Agnes School in Lake Placid, Holy Name School in Ausable Forks, St. Patrick's in Watertown and Holy Family in Malone.

I was assigned as Superior of our Motherhouse for six years and was involved in the General Administration of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

My ministry at the Motherhouse, Teaching Ministry and Pastoral Ministry each brought its own joy and blessings in my life.

I thank God for my family who taught me the importance of praying, as I was growing up and for supporting me in my vocation.

I am very grateful to the Sisters of St. Joseph who provided the opportunity to study and receive a Bachelor's degree from Chestnut Hill College, Pennsylvania and a Master's degree from Duquesne University in Pennsylvania.

My education and religious life helped me to appreciate the hard work and sincerity that I witnessed working with people whom I have served in my ministry.

These fifty years have been grace-filled with many blessings and opportunities to see God working in my life.

Sister Maureen Sweeney, SSJ
Share Christmas greetings....

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St. Mary’s reconstruction gets a boost from Knights

TICONDEROGA- When students return to St. Mary’s School in Ticonderoga next fall, it will be with the assistance of the Knights of Columbus.

Knights from around New York State have contributed $16,475 to rebuild the school, to date. The latest donation, $5,000, came from the Ticonderoga St. Isaac Jogues Council 333.

The gift was presented to St. Joseph Sister Sharon Dalton, school principal, and Father Kevin McEwan, pastor, following the Knights’ annual Memorial Mass and dinner Nov. 23.

“This has been a challenging time,” Father McEwan said at the dinner, “but the Knights of Columbus and so many people have been very generous.”

“Thank you to the Knights of Columbus for all you do to support us,” he said, “not just as a result of our fire, but throughout the year.”

St. Mary’s School was heavily damaged by a suspicious fire Sept. 5, forcing classes to be relocated to the basement of St. Mary’s Church and the First United Methodist Church.

While the school was insured, there will be costs not covered by insurance, Father McEwan said. Work has started to clean up the fire site with plans to repair the building in time for classes next fall.

The Ticonderoga Knights raised $5,000 for the school through a members-only raffle.

“The St. Mary’s fire has been a unifying force that has brought our brotherhood together,” Mike Edson, Ti Grand Knight, said. “We’re pleased we can make this donation to the school.”

Besides the $5,000 from the Ticonderoga Knights of Columbus, St. Mary’s School has received $5,000 from the New York State Knights of Columbus and $6,475 from individual councils in the region.

Making donations were Knights from Plattsburgh, Massena, Keeseville, Canton, Old Forge, Malone, Port Henry Adams, Morrisonville, Peru, Saranac Lake, Indian Lake, Bloomingdale, Champlain, Tupper Lake, Waddington and Winoski, Vt.

Frank McCabe chaired the Ticonderoga raffle, with assistance from Dick Liddell and Les Bilow.

“We did this within the confines of our own club,” McCabe said of the $5,000 donation from Ticonderoga Knights. “We set a goal to raise $5,000 and we did it. It was a good venture.”

There were nine winners in the Ti raffle. Chris Connery, Tom LaPointe, Mike Graney, Chris Blanchard and Joe Liddell each won $100. Wendy Michalak and Tony D’Aebbo won $500. Robert Palandrani Sr. won $1,000 and Dominick Viscardi claimed the $2,500 top prize.

The St. Isaac Jogues Council 333 has 259 members and a long history. The local Knights of Columbus formed April 24, 1898, with 42 members.

The Knights of Columbus is a Catholic men’s organization dedicated to the core principles of charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism.

The Ticonderoga council has dedicated thousands of hours and monetary gifts to St. Mary’s Church, St. Mary’s School and the community.

Its emphasis on youth citizenship has included sponsorship of local Little League teams, the Knights of Columbus free throw competition, the Distinguished Young Woman and the Year program and high school athletes and athletic teams.

As a community service the Knights host many social events each year, including the Irishman of the Year dinner, a Valentine’s Day event and many fund-raising dinners and events for local groups and individuals in need.

The Knights of Columbus also host private functions such as graduation, wedding and anniversary parties and receptions.

Bishop’s Schedule

Nov 30 – Dec. 11 - Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Dec. 12 – 4:30 p.m., Deanery Clergy Advent Penance Service at St. Mary’s Cathedral

Dec. 15 – 2:30 p.m., Episcopal Council Meeting at the Spratt Building in Ogdensburg followed by dinner at the Bishop’s Residence in Ogdensburg

Dec. 16 – 9:30 a.m., Diocesan Department Heads Meeting at Wadhams Hall in Ogdensburg.

7 p.m., Advent Penance Service at Notre Dame Church in Ogdensburg

Protecting God’s Children

The Diocese of Ogdensburg has scheduled sessions for Protecting God’s Children for Adults. Pre-registration online is required in order to participate. Participants may pre-register at www.virtus.org by selecting the registration button and following the directions. All employees and volunteers who participate in church sponsored activities with minor are required to participate in this training. Further information is available from Atonement Sister Ellen Donahue, 315-393-2920, ext. 1440

Upcoming programs:

Jan. 22- 8 p.m., SUNY Potsdam

To Report Abuse

If you have a complaint of suspected misconduct involving diocesan clergy, religious employees or volunteers, contact Victims Assistance Coordinator, Terrianne Yanulavich, Adult & Youth Counseling Services of Northern New York, PO Box 2446, Plattsburgh, NY 12901; e-mail: terrianneyanulavich@yahoo.com Phone: 518-483-3261; or Father James Seymour, the Episcopal Vicar for Clergy at 315-393-2920, ext. 1340

Environmental Stewardship

The family needs a home . . . “The family needs a home . . . for the human family, this home is the earth.” (Pope Benedict XVI). It is from this sacred earth that our Lord Jesus took flesh in the womb of Mary; it is from this same earth that we took flesh in our mother’s womb.

Simple actions this Advent can help protect the sacredness of God’s creation and all its inhabitants.

When purchasing gifts this Christmas, consider buying local foods and crafts that support our local people while reducing transportation costs.

Consider eating one meatless meal during the week during Advent, or less meat at a meal, reducing the environmental impact on the earth. Remember that even in Isaiah’s prophesy of the new Kingdom, “. . . the lions shall eat hay like the oxen!” (Is. 11:6)

Contact Cuomo’s Office regarding fracking in NYS. urging him to consider the environmental impact on the health of the people, our fresh water and every aspect of the environment upon which all generations now and in the future depend upon, before he makes the decision whether or not to allow fracking in NYS.

Contact info .518-474-8390 or go to www.governor.ny.gov/contact/GovernorContactForm.php

Rest in Peace

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

Dec. 10 – Rev. James Hogan, 1882


Follow Pope Francis on Twitter!
www.twitter.com/Pontifex

#Pontifex
RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT COLLECTION 2014

Share In The Care
December 13th and 14th

Please give to those . . .

who have given a lifetime.
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

As you know, the Church has designated this as the Year of Consecrated Life. Pope Francis tells us, “Every consecrated person is a gift for the People of God on its journey.” We celebrate their generous response to God’s call, giving their lives of selfless love in dedicated service to God’s people. What a grace-filled time for the Church in the North Country to express our gratitude to the consecrated women and men who have educated our young, cared for our sick, provided pastoral care to our parishioners, and worked for justice for the oppressed.

Next weekend, all of our parishes will be conducting the Retirement Fund for Religious collection. This annual appeal benefits some 35,000 senior consecrated Religious sisters and brothers and Religious order priests. This appeal provides you and me an opportunity to support them in this phase of their journeys. While many continue in some form of ministry, others are frail and need assistance. This is a fitting occasion for us to express our gratitude to these faith-filled women and men.

The Diocese of Ogdensburg is blessed in having fourteen religious congregations represented in our local Church. Last year, we distributed the results of our Collection to these congregations and eighteen other congregations who have served in our Diocese in the past. Most of our older Religious worked for years for small stipends, leaving a substantial gap in retirement savings. Today a majority of the religious communities struggle to provide necessary medications, nursing care and basic services for their older members. Your generosity helps to fill the gap.

In addition to our continued prayers, next week let us offer our beloved consecrated Religious a generous contribution to this important annual Appeal. Thanking you for whatever donation you are able to make, I am

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley
Bishop of Ogdensburg
Grateful remembrance of the past
(Year of Consecrated Life)
Embracing the future with hope.

“Religious men and women are prophets. They are those who have chosen a following of Jesus that imitates His life in obedience to the Father, poverty, community life and chastity.”

Pope Francis

Questions and Answers

Why We Ask You to Help ...

Skyrocketing Costs

- There are more than 35,000 religious past age 70 living in the United States. In 2013, the average annual cost for their care was $39,400 per person.

- For each of the last five years, the total cost to support women and men religious has exceeded $1 billion.

Insufficient Income

- By 2024, retired religious are projected to outnumber wage-earning religious by four to one.

- For most of their lives, elder religious worked for small stipends. There were no 401(k) plans or pensions.

- The average annual Social Security benefit for a religious is $5,123.43—roughly one-third the amount received by the average beneficiary in the United States.

How much was received and distributed from the 2013 Diocesan Collection?

The Diocese of Ogdensburg distributed $111,802 among the religious congregations who served in our Diocese.

Sister Catherine Cummings, RSM, far left, and a team of parish nurses bring hope into the lives of the sick among us with their commitment to mercy care.

Mission of Hope, directed by Sister Deborah Blow, OP, at right, extends our diocesan presence into Nicaragua. Sister Debbie and Sister Stephanie Frenette, OP, provide many of our Catholic laymen with missionary opportunities.
“I WANT TO SAY ONE WORD TO YOU AND THIS WORD IS JOY. WHEREVER CONSECRATED PEOPLE ARE, THERE IS ALWAYS JOY!”

Pope Francis

WE JOY in our newest members in our Diocese

Religious pray daily for donors who have contributed to their ministries in the past and continue to support their ministerial efforts in the present.

Grateful for all the support you have given us throughout the years.

Religious of the Diocese of Ogdensburg

Amount Enclosed: $ ____________
Name ____________________________________________
Address __________________________________________
City ______________ State _____ Zip _________

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

You can express your gratitude for all the religious have done and will continue to do by giving to your parish’s annual collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious

- OR -

send your donation directly to:

RETIREMENT FUND FOR RELIGIOUS
P.O. Box 369
Ogdensburg, NY 13669

Comforting • Nurturing • Teaching • Nursing • Sharing • Loving • Caring
As Advent got underway, Vatican to release findings of investigation of U.S. women religious

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The final report of a five-year, Vatican-ordered study of communities of women religious in the United States will be released by the Vatican Dec. 16. The top two officials of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and three leaders of women’s congregations were to take part in the presentation, according to Cardinal Father Thomas Rosica, head of Canada’s Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation and assistant to the Vatican spokesman. Although it was too early for the Vatican press office to announce the event, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, told Catholic News Service that a news conference was “foreseen” on that date. The final report of the findings of the apostolic visitation also was expected to be made available online, Father Rosica told the Detroit Free Press Dec. 2 during a visit to Detroit. According to the priest, who has assisted the Vatican press office during major events including the recent extraordinary Synod of Bishops, the officials expected to take part in the Vatican news conference were: Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, prefect of the congregation for religious; Archbishop Jose Rodriguez Carballo, congregation secretary; Mother Mary Clare Millea, superior general of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the apostolic visitor appointed by the Vatican; Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, superior general of the Sisters of Life and chairperson of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious; and Sister Sharon Holland, vice president of the Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Some see unity vision reinvigorated by pope, patriarch’s gestures in Turkey

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (CNS) -- After watching firsthand as Pope Francis bowed his head for a blessing from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew during the pope’s Nov. 28-30 trip to Turkey, an American-born Orthodox priest felt a joyful disbelief.

“I couldn’t sleep that night,” said Orthodox Father Emmanuel Lemelson, an American priest of the Ecumenical Patriarchate who was part of the official Orthodox delegation during the papal visit to Turkey. Father Lemelson, who holds a bachelor’s degree in theology and religious studies from the Jesuit-run Seattle University and master’s of divinity from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, told Catholic News Service that, as a young man, he fostered a vision that Catholics and Orthodox Christians would soon be reunited. “Suddenly that vision has been reignited,” he said. “I believe Pope Francis is truly a great leader and has shown great humility, and that he is not afraid,” Father Lemelson said, adding that he thought the ecumenical meeting in Turkey was a sign of greater things to come, of more meetings and of moving forward in the right direction. The Catholic and Orthodox churches split in 1054 over differences on several matters, including the primacy of the papacy. The two churches have grown closer together in recent decades, but there are long-running tensions in Russia and Ukraine, especially between Orthodox faithful and Eastern Catholics, along with some internal resistance to ecumenical dialogue, especially among the Orthodox.

Preparing for Christmas one papal homily at a time

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) - As Advent got underway, Pope Francis included in his morning Mass homilies specific graces Catholics should pray for as they prepare for Christmas.

In the chapel of his residence Dec. 2, Pope Francis ended his homily by telling the small congregation, "Let us ask the Lord during this Advent time to draw us closer, closer to his mystery and do so on the path that he wants us to take: the path of humility, the path of meekness, the path of poverty, the path of recognizing we are sinners."

Preaching two days later, he said, “Let us ask the Lord to help us be based firmly on the rock that he is; our hope is in him. We are all sinners, we are weak, but if we put our hope in him we can move forward.” With highlights from his morning Mass homilies available online and on Vatican Radio, millions of people use Pope Francis’ homilies as a guide through the church’s liturgical year.

The first Sunday of Advent, Nov. 30 this year, marks the beginning of a new year of Mass readings, a full calendar of seasons and feast days.

While every celebration of Mass is a commemoration of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the church’s liturgical calendar is designed to help Catholics focus on specific events as they progress through the year and through time.

Beginning a new church year with the Advent preparation for Christmas, he said in 2013, “we rediscover the beauty of all being on a journey: the church, with her vocation and mission, and all humanity, peoples, civilizations, cultures, all on a journey across the paths of time.” When people grow weary and feel the weight of sinfulness or struggle to keep moving forward with hope in the new life Christ brings, Pope Francis wants them to realize how strongly the Scripture readings for Advent Masses emphasize God’s love, tenderness and forgiveness. In fact, the pope wants people to know that the strength to recognize their sins and ask God’s mercy comes from knowing that God will welcome them back with open arms.

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“The Lord, the great God, is not afraid of tenderness. He is tenderness, he is born a baby, he makes himself small,” the pope insisted during a Mass one Advent day last year.

A desperate search for perfect gifts may be part of many people’s Advent days, but Pope Francis thinks it might be even tougher to find the perfect Advent atmosphere: a bit of silence. It is good during this season to listen to God, who speaks quietly, tenderly, like a mother or father, the pope stressed in another Advent homily in 2013.

“When a child has a bad dream and wakes up crying, Dad goes and says: ‘Don’t be afraid, don’t be scared. I’m here.’ The Lord speaks this way too.”

That, said the pope, “is the music of the language of the Lord, and we, in preparation for Christmas, ought to hear it.” While Christmas usually “seems to be a very noisy holiday,” he was confident “it would do us good to have a little silence and to hear these words of love, these words of such nearness, these words of tenderness.”

In Advent, and throughout the year, Pope Francis’ homilies are a lens for examining and understanding the key themes of his pontificate, particularly God’s mercy, human sinfulness, the evils of gossip and corruption, and the humility required of Christians.

In his short homilies -- usually three to five minutes long -- he uses catchy, down-to-earth phrases. For example, recently he coined the term “ecclesiastical micro-climate” to describe the temptation of Catholics to treat the church as a private club.

As Advent drew to a close in 2013, Pope Francis asked Catholics to imagine themselves as Mary. During Advent’s final week, “the church is like Mary: She is awaiting a birth,” Pope Francis said. Like Mary, believers should say of Jesus and mean with all their hearts: “Come! I want to see your face.”

CNS PHOTO/PAUL HARRING
A girl holds baby Jesus figurines for Pope Francis to bless during his Angelus delivered from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican Dec. 15, 2013. While the days leading to Christmas are filled with shopping and other holiday preparations, the pope recommended that people also find time for silence so they can listen to God.
Entering into the hearts of Mary and Joseph

Today we reach the midpoint of Advent. It’s a joy-filled celebration, both in the readings and in the rose color of the vestments the celebrant wears today. In the second reading, we hear “Rejoice! Again I say to you ‘rejoice!’ Why?”, we ask.

The reason for joy is the same as that of the early Christians. They held to their firm belief that Jesus Christ has paid the price for their sins, and that He would bring them to glory in the life of the horizon. Yet we can be left emotionally unmoled at this teaching. A false “holiday” spirit has robbed Jesus of His own birthday. So we need to spiritually enter into the hearts of Mary and Joseph as they excitedly await the child’s arrival.

St. Paul knew that the early Christians would be tested, so he exhorts them (and us) to “pray without ceasing and give thanks always.” Above all, he warns them in today’s second reading, “Don’t quench the Spirit.” In this way they will be “preserved blameless in spirit, soul, and body...for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.” For many, Christ came quickly as their faith led them to martyrdom. But they never lost their joyful spirit.

Today’s Gospel continues the preaching of John the Baptist. How carefully he makes clear to the Pharisees that he is not the Christ, nor the light, but a voice testifying to the light that has come into the world.

Fear and doubt thrive in darkness. Just as turning on a light in dark room can take fear away from a child, we can’t always care about the ethics involved. And proponents use the faith principles to support ideas which are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

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Feeding the hungry

I read the November 19 article “Feeding the Hungry.” It was good. I was surprised to learn that 40% of food waste is food that is rotting in farmers’ fields—blemished food that won’t sell in stores. Surely, our farmers and other groups, especially Church groups, could come up with a solution that helps farmers and those in need! Apparently it is being done in some areas already.

However, I must urge great caution for those who think that genetically modified foods (GMO’s) are the answer. GMO’s are being sold because of the myth of overpopulation and famine. I know that the proponents of GMO’s claim they benefit the farmer and the consumer, but there is a lot of information out there that contradicts those assertions. And, scientific data is lacking, as well as long-term data. GMO’s seem to be more about a company controlling food production and less about feeding the hungry.

There is a potential for planetary disaster with GMO’s. Besides decimating soil, superweeds and resistant pests are now spreading across farmland. I have also read articles discussing the toxic effects of GMO’s on multiple body organs, thus increasing diseases among humans and increasing the cost of health care.

Feeding the hungry

John 1:6-8, 10-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Christmas is only for children!

When John in prison sends emissaries to Jesus to ask if He is really the Messiah, Jesus sends back the answer that He is already fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (first reading). He tells John that the blind now see, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the Good News preached to them! John must have been filled with joy, even in prison.

In these troubled times, we must be guided by Our Holy Father. He has just returned from Turkey where he begged the leaders of Islam, all Christian Churches, and Judaism to raise their voices against radical misreading and action in the name of God, and to unite in the power of authentic morality and faith.

May the world listen to His voice and act on it!

Letters to the Editor

We welcome letters from readers of the North Country Catholic.

• Due to space limitations, we ask that the number of words be limited to 300.
• We cannot accept letters which support ideas which are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Send letters to North Country Catholic, PO Box 326, Ogdensburg, NY, 13669 or e-mail to news@northcountrycatholic.org.

• Join the conversation!
Cosmology and metaphysics, both challenging enough as academic topics, don’t blend well into an autobiographical film. That’s the lesson of "The Theory of Everything" (Focus).

With a script by Andrew McCarten - based on the memoir "Travelling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen" by Jane Hawking, ex-wife of famed physicist Stephen Hawking - director James Marsh's drama is, for its first hour, an impressive period piece set in 1963 Cambridge University.

After that, the story shows the hazards of having to tiptoe decorously around messy domestic complications when all those involved are still very much alive.

Sensitive and deeply religious, poetry student Jane (Felicity Jones) and Hawking (Eddie Redmayne) meet at a campus dance. They are, in the romantic comedy style, perfectly mismatched.

He’s working on his doctorate, and tells her that his cosmological specialty, the study of the origins of the universe, is "a kind of religion for intelligent thinkers." Hawking adds that he has "a slight problem with the whole celestial dictator premise."

Love finds its way nevertheless. But just as both their romance and his academic career are blossoming, the blight of Stephen's motor-neuron disease - an offshoot of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known as Lou Gehrig's disease - takes hold.

Doctors give him just two years to live.

He stubbornly overcomes that prognosis, although at a steep price for Jane, who endures his physical deterioration and the stress of raising their two young children. Discussions of religious faith, or the presence of God in the workings of the universe, disappear altogether.

She's feeling trapped and unhappy when her mother, Beryl (Emily Watson), suggests she join a church choir. Jonathan (Charlie Cox), the choir director, is handsome, sensitive and helpful. So much so, that he becomes both an au pair for the kids and a volunteer attendant serving Stephen's needs, which include being taken to the toilet.

So yes, we see where all this is headed - or perhaps we infer it would be the better phrase. There’s the occasional gesture, sometimes a line or an exchange of glances, and meanwhile, Stephen keeps smiling through.

One senses the input of platoons of lawyers in these portrayals.

Jane and Stephen never really have a falling-out. They simply grow apart as his fame speeds up, along with the pace of his lecture tours.

By the time of the 1988 publication of his immensely popular "A Brief History of Time", Stephen has taken up with his nurse Elaine (Maxine Peake), an earthy type who recognizes he’s still a sexual being and happily delivers his monthly Penthouse magazine.

Hawking himself, of late, has embraced atheism. But any sense of a spiritual journey, whether positive or negative, is not to be found in this movie. Instead, this depiction of them only allows Hawking and Jane to be completely human and occasionally flawed.

The film contains fleeting references to marital infidelity and pornography and some sexual banter. The Catholic News Service classification is A-III -- adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 -- parents strongly cautioned.

**THEORY OF EVERYTHING**

**YOUNG CATHOLICS SHARE TIME AND TALENT TO HELP PEOPLE IN NEED**

Students from South Lewis High School raised funds to help out the Port Leyden Food Pantry. The South Lewis Service Organization and Student Council members sold tickets for two Thanksgiving Raffle baskets which consisted of a full meal for the holiday. The group raised over $300 for the food pantry. Felicia Birgenheier is shown with her students presenting the donation to Donna Pfendler, Food Pantry Coordinator. From left are Nathan DeSantis, Taylor Eaton, Leif Ostrum, Patti Ann Strait, Morgan Austin, Mrs. Birgenheier and Mrs. Pfendler.

The third annual Musical Mission, a multi-denominational "Musical Celebration of God's Love," was held Nov. 14 at Holy Family Church in Watertown. All of the entertainment was provided by local musicians -- including Ryan Grant, a parishioner of Holy Family, shown above - who gave time and talent to benefit Urban Mission. A donation for the Urban Mission was asked from those attending.
**ADIRONDACK**

**FESTIVAL OF LESSONS, CAROLS**
Lake Placid - The Northern Adirondack Vocal Ensemble (NAVE) will perform a Festival of Lessons and Carols.

- **Date:** Dec. 28
- **Time:** 4 p.m.
- **Place:** St. Agnes Church

**CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL**
Moores Forks - St. Ann's is holding a Parish Christmas Festival.

- **Date:** Dec. 14
- **Time:** 6 p.m.
- **Place:** St. Ann's Parish Hall

**CLINTON**

**PANCAKE BREAKFAST**
Treadwell Mills – St. Alexander & St. Joseph's Church will hold an all you can eat pancake breakfast.

- **Date:** Jan. 4
- **Time:** 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 a.m.
- **Place:** St. Joseph's Parish Hall

**LESSONS AND CAROLS BY NAVE**
Plattsburgh - The Northern Adirondack Vocal Ensemble (NAVE) will perform a Festival of Lessons and Carols.

- **Date:** Dec. 27
- **Time:** 7:30 p.m.
- **Place:** St. Peter's Church

**RIDEAWAY MEETING**
Watertown - An ecumenical bereavement meeting will be held.

- **Date:** Dec. 15
- **Time:** 7 p.m.
- **Place:** Hearthside Hospitality Center of the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse

**CLINTON**

**HAMILTON-HERKIMER**

**ST. JAMES CHRISTMAS PARTY**
Lake Pleasant - St. James' annual Christmas party to be held.

- **Date:** Dec. 12
- **Time:** 5 p.m.
- **Place:** Lake Pleasant Fire Hall

**Bereavement Support Group**
Sacred Heart/Sacred Heart of Mary's Family Room

**ST. LAWRENCE**

**ADVENT RETREAT**
Adams - The Ladies of St. Cecilia are sponsoring an Advent Women's Day of Reflection.

- **Date:** Dec. 13
- **Time:** 9 a.m. to noon
- **Place:** St. Cecilia's Church

**HOLY HOURS**
Holy Hours/Hendon - Holy Hours to be held.

**Date:** First Wed. at St. Cecilia 6:30 p.m.; Jan. 7; Feb. 4; March 4; Third Mon. at St. Cecilia 5 p.m., followed by potluck Dec. 15; Jan. 19; Feb. 16; March 16; Thursday at Queen of Heaven 5:30 p.m.: Nov. 20; Dec. 18; Jan. 22

**AVENUE MYSTERY PLAYERS**
The Advent schedule for the IHM Mystery Players has been announced.

**Date:** Dec. 14 - 7:30 at St. James Church in Carthage

**DECEMBER UTLREY**
Watertown - Cursillo Community celebrating December Utlreya.

- **Date:** Dec 18
- **Time:** 6:30 p.m. to 8
- **Place:** Chapel of St. Patrick's Church

**INTERNATIONAL CRECHES**
Houseville - An international exhibit of Christmas Creches-Nativities Will be on display, free and open to the public.

**Date:** Dec. 14

**POLISH CHRISTMAS WAFER**
Houseville - The Polish Christmas Wafers, Oplatek, is available from St. Hedwig's Church.

**Contact:** 315-626-0160

**LAUSDRAW**

**ST. LAWRENCE**

**LESSEONS AND CAROLS**
Potsdam - Festival of Lessons and Carols to be held.

**Date:** Dec. 14

**Contact:** 315-792-2468

**LIFEGIRTMEETING**
Watertown - Lifegirt of Watertown, a pro-life educational organization, meets the first Wednesday of the Month.

**Date:** 1 p.m.

**Contact:** 315-788-8480

**EUCARISTIC ADORATION**
Grantville - Eucharistic Adoration to be held.

**Date:** Dec. 18

**Time:** 3 p.m. to 6

**Place:** St. Peter's Church

**Features:** The Divine Mercy Chaplet, Silent Adoration, The Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, and Benediction.

**LEWIS**

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**Contact:** 315-626-0160

**LATIN MASS**
Potsdam - A Tridentine (Latin) Mass is celebrated each Sunday.

**Date:** 12:30 p.m.

**Place:** St. Mary's Church

**Contact:** Msgr. Robert H. Aucoin

**EUCARISTIC ADORATION**
Massena - Sacred Heart/St. Joseph's hold Benediction and Adoration every Friday.

**Date:** 9 a.m. to 10

**Place:** St. Mary's Family Room

**BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP**
Massena - Sacred Heart/St. Lawrence holds a Bereavement Support Group last Tuesday of each month.

**Date:** 2 p.m.

**Place:** Sacred Heart Convent

**Contact:** 315-769-3137

**SILENT RETREAT**
Syracuse – A silent directed retreat to be held.

**Date:** Jan. 2 at 6 p.m. to Jan. 4, 4:12 p.m.

**Place:** Spiritual Renewal Center

**Contact:** 315-792-6546; Email: mail@spiritualrenewalcenter.com

**NEIGHBORING DIOCESES**

**Polish Christmas Wafer**
Ogdensburg - Notre Dame Church is holding a Polish Christmas Wafer be served.

**Date:** Dec. 14

**Time:** 5 p.m. to 6

**Place:** St. Peter's Church

**Features:** Oplatek, is a part of a Polish, Lithuanian and Slovak custom that is observed during the Vigil of Christmas (Wigilia). After the first star is visible, family and friends gather around the dinner table to share the oplatek, which symbolizes the presence of Christ, the Newborn Child. The oplatek is sent and shared with family and friends all over the world as a symbol of love, unity, and forgiveness while wishing God's Blessing on each other this Holy Night.

**Contact:** 315-626-0160

**School of Music**
Syracuse School of Music will be music director for the event, leading the Choir of St. Mary's & guest organists & choirs of Potsdam Churches.
Christ’s light shines on the North Country

From the Director’s Desk
Sister Mary Ellen Brett, SSJ, Diocesan Mission Director

As the season of Advent prepares us to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we have seen racial tension, disease, terrorism at work, continued war and a problematic economy. As we reflect upon this, we come to realize what millions of people in developing countries have endured for their lifetime.

Candles of all sizes in traditional Christmas colors are familiar decorations. We become mesmerized by their flickering flames. Candles remind us of the warmth and the love the Christmas Season brings into our lives. People caring for each other in special ways are a familiar sight throughout the Diocese of Ogdensburg which is truly letting Christ’s light shine through generosity.

There is light in the darkness in the third world countries because of missionaries. Yes, missionaries like yourselves let the light of Christ shine in the lives of people in the missions as they receive your generous donations.

On behalf of missionaries and the people they serve who benefit from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Missionary Childhood Association and the Missionary Projects of the Diocese of Ogdensburg, I thank you for your support in bringing Christ’s light into the darkness of the suffering poor in mission lands.

Yet, there is so much yet to do. There is still unthinkable suffering. We always need your help and we pray for the strength and courage to do God’s work. Again, thank you for your generous support.

Please remember “The Society for the Propagation of the Faith” when writing or changing your will.
I have been going to Camp Guggenheim for seven years. Most people at our school may not even consider its original name of Guggenheim, but instead refer to it as “Jesus Camp,” a perfectly acceptable term in my opinion. However, there have been some common myths circulating about this place, and questions as to why, over decades, hundreds of people from all across the country travel to Saranac Lake to experience something they can’t get anywhere else.

Yes, you go to Mass every day. Yes, you have confession during the week. Yes, you sing songs out of canticles. Yes you have all these so called “boring” things of the Church, but at Guggenheim you see what they really mean. You aren’t in an echo filled, gray stone church, but at a place where it is acceptable to wear sweatpants to Mass.

You are surrounded by teenagers who love Jesus with a passion, which you may not have known existed.

On Wednesdays (you can even wear pink if you want to), the Reconciliation service is done with such power and emotion that you walk away from the priest a different person.

I have had a personal experience with confession at Guggenheim that left me wanting to be a part of God more than ever, realizing where in my life I was missing Him.

The songs at Guggenheim are unlike any standard “church” song you have heard before. We are encouraged to sing until we can literally sing no more, praising God with the harmony we make together, knowing that singing is really praying twice.

Now while Guggenheim is centered around God and Jesus (who is awesome, by the way), it’s not everything the camp ensures. Major mountain hikes, daily swims in the lake, canoeing to mini islands, “Olympics”, a bonfire, volleyball tournaments, and even a full blown, fist pounding dance are all incorporated in the real Guggenheim experience. I’ve made friends there that could easily last a lifetime. I’ve been more myself to complete strangers there than I have with some people I’ve known for years. It is my home, my safe haven, my ideal vacation spot, and I could not imagine a life without it.

Guggenheim has made me into the person I am today, and I don’t know if I could ever express in words to you how much this place means to me and how it is so much more than some strict Catholic camp where we listen to scripture readings all day, because it is nothing like that.

My faith has gone from somewhat there, to an indescribable love for God and for my faith that words can’t embody. It comes from within ourselves, where we humans can not physically or even emotionally reach, but where God can reach alone.

To some of you I might sound crazy. How could something that is so out of this world have such an effect on you? Do you even know He really exists? Does He even care about you? The answers are simple, but not so simple for the individual mind to discover on its own, and that is why a place like Guggenheim exists. Where “crazy” is the norm and Jesus isn’t a topic that is avoided.

Guggenheim has left its mark on my life, one of late nights eating Twizzlers and drinking soda, of scary stories that I still have to cover my ears to (even if I know what the ending will be), and especially of the love God has for me, and yes, even for you.