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North Country Catholic
Dec. 17, 2014

‘Spend time in silence, service’

Rome (CNS) - In the heart of Rome’s high-end shopping district, sparkling with Christmas lights and shiny baubles in the windows of famous designers, Pope Francis prayed that people would spend time in silence and in service as they prepare to celebrate Jesus’ birth.

Celebrating the feast of the Immaculate Conception Dec. 8, Pope Francis prayed for Mary’s intercession so that, “in us, your children, grace also will prevail over pride, and we can become merciful like our heavenly Father is merciful.”

Before laying a basket of cream-colored roses at the foot of a statue of the Immaculate Conception near Rome’s Spanish Steps, Pope Francis recited a special prayer he composed for the occasion.

The feast is a major Rome holiday and thousands of people lined the streets near the Spanish Steps to catch a glimpse of the pope and pray with him for Mary’s assistance.

Pope Francis said Mary being conceived without sin should give all Christians hope and strength “in the daily battle that we must conduct against the threats of evil,” because her immaculate conception is proof that evil does not have power over love.

Advent: a season of prayer

The focus of this week’s NCC is “Advent as a season of prayer.”

The topics include:
• Our Lady of the Adirondacks House of Prayer in Ellenburg Center
• A prayerful pilgrimage of two diocesan priests along the Camino de Santiago
• Poetry as Advent prayer
• Suggestions for family prayer during the season from the diocesan family life director
• Scripture reflections on the Fourth Sunday of Advent
• Advent prayer as a way to “refresh our browsers”

Full Story, Pages 3, 4, 5, 7 & 12

For priests’ retirement

A gift to parish Christmas collection helps to support retired priests of the diocese

Full Story, Page 6

Father’s First Frosty

CNS Photo/Phil Haring
Pope Francis celebrates a Mass marking the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 12. As the year 2014 comes to a close, the pope continues to receive broad support from people around the world. Americans, in particular, have shown their fondness for Pope Francis, often extolling his simplistic style. According to the Pew study, 78 percent of Americans view the pope favorably.

Full Story, Page 16

Commissioned Lay Ministers: Gather for dinner in two diocesan regions... p. 8
EDITORS NOTE

A diocese at prayer during Advent

The world may believe that the Christmas season has arrived but, in the pages of the North Country Catholic, we’re hanging on tightly to Advent.

In this week’s issue we focus on the importance of prayer during this season of preparation for Jesus. Our North Country is blessed with special places to pray and inspiring people who lead us closer to God.

In the heart of our diocese, there is a gem - Our Lady of the Adirondacks House of Prayer. In an interview for this issue, one of the OLA board members explains why this house matters: “The presence of Christ is here, and his peace is here,” said Rita Breen. “People are hungry to know God in a personal way, and OLA is a wonderful place for that to happen.”

Those who love OLA want to make sure that people in all parts of the diocese know that they are welcome and encouraged to come to “listen, to pray and maybe even to live.”

We’re also featuring a message from the new family life director for the diocese. Steve Tartaglia shares ideas for family prayer during the season, taken from his own experiences as a husband, father and educator.

Local poets have shared some selections, columnist Kathy Gallagher has offered a simple, yet powerful, way to make these days holy and, of course, Msgr. Whitmore has given us wonderful words of wisdom about this Sunday’s readings.

And then we have our pilgrims. Father Joe Morgan and Father Kevin O’Brien spent six weeks this past fall, walking the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain, one of the oldest and most popular pilgrimage sites over the centuries.

Bishop LaValley, Father Doug Lucia and Father Jay Seymour just returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land—following closing behind Father Don Robinson who was leading a tour group of his own.

The Holy Land, of course, is a focal point for pilgrims of Christian, Jewish and Islamic faith and could be considered the origin of all pilgrimages. (Bishop LaValley will share his impressions about the places where Jesus lived and died for an upcoming issue.) While pilgrimages to places of spiritual significance offer great boosts to the faith of those who travel, it could be said that we are all on a personal pilgrimage, as we inch our way closer to God every day.

The prayerful season of Advent is our yearly opportunity to make a more intentional pilgrimage walk towards the Lord.

After all, as all our world travelers say, the real goal of a pilgrimage isn’t Compostela or Jerusalem. The real goal is heaven.

A PASTOR’S PERSPECTIVE

Season of Advent: a celebration of hope

As I continue through this rehabilitation, I have been attending Sunday Mass in the pews with the people at my brother’s parish Church, Holy Cross Church, in DeWitt.

This has been a rather good experience for me – sitting among families, many young families – I was distracted often by mothers and fathers as they watched over twisting and turning little ones.

During these days of Advent, these families reminded me of the spirit of Advent as we prepare for Christmas. There is the spirit of a constant search for hope, a search for the confidence in the Lord that only good things will happen for our family and for their children.

Advent is among other things a celebration of hope. We find through the prayers of Advent a time to build up our hope and confidence in the Lord, Our God. This confidence prepares all Christians for the birth of Our Savior; it gives us hope in all the good that Jesus brought into this world and continues to bring to us even today.

Each year as we go through another Advent, we are all challenged by our Church to discover a new and stronger hope in the Lord so that our lives will be filled with the confidence that makes us realize that our lives matter and in this Advent spirit we can make our world a better place.

Hope is about the things we invest our lives and dreams dreams about possible accomplishments. Often, this is something rather simple, something only human – maybe the success of our favorite football team.

Spiritually, Advent challenges us to have hope for the welfare of people and hope for salvation. This hope strengthens each of us to live our faith in Our Lord’s coming to our world so that we are ready and confident to bring that spirit of love and peace of the Lord to a world that often lacks any hope, lacks any hope that peace will ever come, that love will ever transform this world.

Advent hope strives to remove fear. Advent hope constantly reminds us that hope is possible, that peace and happiness is possible.

May the hope of Advent reach and transform each one of us. This Advent is about Christmas. During Advent, we remember and prepare to celebrate how our world was changed by the Birth of Jesus. Jesus became one of us. During Advent our hopes are high each year for this may be the year that Jesus, who comes as the Prince of Peace, will indeed bring peace to this world.

We pray in hope that the peace of Our Savior will reach each family and home with peace and joy and happiness.

This must never become an idle hope. Too many will hear of Advent hope and proclaim it impossible. Once we say impossible then all will be lost.

As long as we keep faith in the Lord’s hope, we keep our hope possible that good things will happen and one day there will be peace for all.

Here is an Advent quote from the author, Caryll Houselander’s “The Reed of God.”

“The Light is shining in the darkness, but the darkness does not comprehend it. To a soul in such a condition, peace will come as soon as it turns to Our Lady and imitates her. In her, the Word of God chose to be silent. In her the light of the world shone in darkness. Today, in many souls, Christ asks that he may grow silently, that he may be the light shin-
OLLA - a home set apart for prayer

By Suzanne Pietropaoli
Staff writer

ELLENBURG CENTER - Quiet, humble, faithful, prayerful: Advent words all. Words, too, that describe Our Lady of the Adirondacks House of Prayer, where for 40 years people have come to listen, to pray, and - in some cases - to live.

Rich in history, and in opportunities for spiritual development, this house now faces an uncertain future.

Founded in 1972 by diocesan priest, Father Joseph Trombly, Our Lady of the Adirondacks House of Prayer focuses on helping people grow closer to God.

It is, according to its website, "...a home set apart from the distractions and responsibilities of daily life where a person may go to experience various kinds of prayer, leading one into the very Mystery of Christ Himself.

Drawing on its early connection with Madonna House in Combermere, Ontario (with which Father Trombly associated), OLA House of Prayer has continued the Russian tradition of Poustinia.

In this unique approach to seeking God in solitude, a person spends time - a day, half-day, or less - alone with the Lord and the Scriptures, fasting on bread and water, coffee or tea. Occasionally people who are used to this type of prayer will extend their time in Poustinia.

But solitude is certainly not the only way to pray at OLA.

Special prayer experiences

The House of Prayer hosts Eucharistic Adoration, Healing Masses, and group retreat days, as well as individuals who stop by to pray or to seek intercession for their needs or those of others.

Many have attended Life in the Spirit seminars at the house. Ongoing training has been offered in Christian Healing Ministries' School of Healing Prayer, as well as workshops in Ignatian spirituality, including meditation, contemplation, prayer of examination, and rules for the discernment of spirits.

Marian spirituality has been another focus, along with preparation for the Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary.

Why House of Prayer matters

Rita Breen of Dannemora has participated in most of these events. President of the OLA Board, she has also mowed the lawn, cleaned and painted, and helped install a new kitchen.

More than most, she knows why the House of Prayer matters.

"The presence of Christ is here, and his peace is here," she said. "The hospitality is beautiful - there is a warm welcome always. There is just so much love here!

"The love that built this place is evident everywhere, and is always offered to everyone," Mrs. Breen said. "All are welcome here; it is not our house, but God's house.

"People are hungry to know God in a personal way, and OLA is a wonderful place for that to happen," she said.

But Mrs. Breen fears that this vital work could end. "I, and lots of others, have prayed, asked, and begged on behalf of Our Lady of the Adirondacks. I don't want to see it close... but unless things change, it very well could."

Despite its warm hospitality and abundant offerings, Our Lady of the Adirondacks House of Prayer remains understaffed, underused, and underfunded.

Three pressing needs

Pat Hanley, resident director of the house, are shown in "The Lost Sheep Quilt Shop" adjacent to the House of Prayer. The shop was opened to bring income to the House of Prayer.

To send donations:

Donations to the house of prayer may be sent to: Our Lady of the Adirondacks House of Prayer, 7270 Star Road, Rt. 190, Ellenburg Center, NY 12934. Further information is available by phone, (518)594-3253; email: olaprayerhouse@gmail.com or website: www.home.catholic.web.com/OurLadyoftheAdirondacksHouseofPrayer
**On the Camino... the Way of St. James**

By Mary Lou Kilian

Father Joseph A. Morgan and Father Kevin J. O’Brien were following an ancient Catholic tradition when they followed the road from the French Pyrenees across northern Spain to Santiago de Compostela.

From Sept. 17 to Oct. 21, the two diocesan priests took part in the Camino de Santiago – the Way of St. James – an 800 kilometer (around 500 miles) foot pilgrimage.

Father Morgan, rector of St. Mary’s Cathedral in Ogdensburg and vicar general, and Father O’Brien, pastor in Heuvelton and Lisbon and moderator of the curia, completed the six week pilgrimage by walking six or seven miles each day.

Their journey ended at the cathedral of Compostela where the remains of the apostle St. James the Greater (Santiago in Spanish) are buried.

St. James was a pilgrim himself as he traveled from Jerusalem to this northwestern-most province of Spain, to evangelize the people there.

The city of Compostela has been a pilgrimage destination for 11 centuries with St. Francis Assisi included among many notable pilgrims. This year marks the 800th anniversary of St. Francis’ camino walk.

**Back in the 12th century, with the increased popularity of the route, hostels were built within a day’s walk of each other and churches were erected to accommodate the crowds of worshipers who passed by on their way.**

Father Morgan and Father O’Brien attended daily Masses – and received blessings for pilgrims at churches all along the way.

Father Morgan said, “a woman who was giving advice on how to get past a detour said, ‘always look for and follow the church on your camino and you will never get lost.’”

“This was true on many levels,” he said. “Coming into a town, we’d look for a church steeple and inevitably the camino route passed by there.

Father O’Brien said that “hearing the church bells and seeing crosses all along the way called us back to the reason we were doing this.”

Although many walk the camino for sport or adventure, Father O’Brien and Father Morgan were on a pilgrimage, a journey with the purpose to honor God.

Father Morgan joked that physical demands of the walk, along rough and mountainous terrain, meant that the two of them “prayed very hard” every day.

The priests walked in rain and heat, carrying all their belongings – including a scallop shell, the sign of St. James and camino pilgrims – in backpacks.

They slept in hostels and had their *credentials del peregrine* – camino passports – stamped at the spiritual stops along the way.

The most difficult part of the journey “was just getting used to everything,” Father O’Brien said, “following the arrows – shells – along the way.”

Father Morgan remembers getting lost for a bit as he missed an arrow while watching where he was placing his feet on a rocky path.

Father O’Brien pointed to the Pilgrims Prayer as a source of their strength. In part it reads, “Guard these your children who, for the love of your Name, make a pilgrimage to Compostela. Be their companions on their way, their guide at the crossroads, their strength in weariness, their shelter on the path, their shared in the heat, their light in darkness, their comfort in discouragement...”

The highlight of the camino for Father Morgan and Father O’Brien was its culmination at the cathedral in Compostela.

“We had such a sense of accomplishment and unity,” Father O’Brien said. “Everyone was celebrating.”

The pilgrim Mass is celebrated at noon each day and pilgrims, including the two priests, climbed up to give a hug to the ancient statue of St. James.

Even after walking for six weeks, Father Morgan and Father O’Brien know their journey is not complete.

“The real goal is heaven,” Father O’Brien said.

Father Morgan quoted one of the signs he saw along the way: “Your journey, your camino, does not end in Santiago but in the very heart of God.”
Seton Catholic School in Plattsburgh recently held its annual student retreat. The day concluded the school's vocation awareness week featuring a weeklong visit from Father Bryan Stitt and St. Joseph Sister Gregory of the diocesan Vocation Office. Students took part in four workshops, one of which was a scavenger hunt. Topics included How Do I Know What My Calling is?, How do I Pray? and The Three Traditional Ways of Life. Presenters included Father Thomas Higman, Father Timothy Canaan, RoseAnn Hickey, Will Neves, Dominican Sister Debbie Blow, Samantha Fazioli and Paul Poulin. The day ended with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the gym, led by Father Stitt, shown above.

Seventh grader Tom Murray and 12th grader Noah Ractette work together on the scavenger hunt.

Father Timothy Canaan, pastor of the Roman Catholic Church of St. John the Baptist in Plattsburgh, conducted a workshop on prayer.

**Divine Love**

By Hedy Strauss

I can hear your voice in my dream.
I can feel it in my heart.
Some day we will be together.
But for now, we are apart.
I'm mesmerized by your love.
By your presence, by your touch.
I try to live without you.
Sometimes it is just too much.
I can hear your voice in the wind.
I can feel your touch with the breeze.
When I bask in your divine love.
It just brings me to my knees

**Follow Me**

By Hedy Strauss

Follow me into the wilderness
Follow me into the sun.
Follow me into the future
So that the two of us can become one.
Follow me into the white light.
Follow me into the sky.
Follow me into eternity
So that our love will never die.

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**CHRISTMAS (The Day of Christ’s Birth)**

Written by Barbara J. Morris 11-16-2014

The Real Reason why we Celebrate CHRISTMAS

Christians celebrate the birth of their Savior on this glorious night,
Heaven was lit up by one star; which was truly a magnificent sight.
Rejoicing the Three Wisemen bringing gifts for the new born king,
Incredible gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh was what they would bring,
So they journeyed far and wide to find where the Messiah would be,
They came upon the Stable in Bethlehem in the town of Judea, and they all did agree.
Mary and Joseph and Baby Jesus were in the Manger, when the three Wisemen arrived,
And thousands of years have passed; yet this story of Christ's birth is still alive.
So "Jesus is the Reason for the Season".... Keep Christ in Christmas... Wish Everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

If you take the first letter of each sentence it will spell out "The Birthday of Our SAVIOR!"

Dedicated to Father Joseph W. Giroux - Pastor -St. Andre Bessette Parish, Malone, New York. In response to his question - What Are We Doing to keep Christ Alive?
Priests’ Retirement Plan provides benefits for 46 priests of the diocese

By Michael J. Toohey
Diocesan Fiscal Officer

The 36 retired priests of the diocese who currently receive pensions from the Priests’ Retirement Fund will be direct beneficiaries of the generosity of Catholics in the North Country who contribute to their parishes in the Christmas collection. Also, 10 priests age 70 and older who remain active in their ministry in the Diocese of Ogdensburg are receiving partial retirement benefits. Your gift this year will help support not only priests currently receiving support from the Priests’ Retirement Fund but also benefits to be paid to future retirees.

The Priests’ Retirement Fund of the diocese receives 75% of the Christmas Collection proceeds given to each parish, as compared to 100% the past three years.

Actuarial studies are performed annually to assure the diocese is preparing for its future obligations to retired priests. The firm of Frank J. Walters and Associates has determined that adequate provisions are being made in 2014-15 to fully fund the Plan. The Priests’ Retirement Fund of the diocese currently pays monthly pensions to 36 retired priests and 10 active priests eligible for a partial retirement benefit. Estimated pension payments in this fiscal year amount to $793,400.

Effective July 1, 2014, retired priests in the diocese received an increase of $40 per month in their pension benefit. It is the diocese’s intention to provide a pension increase in every year in which the diocese is able. Ninety-five percent of the cost of health insurance for retired priests is also funded through the PRF.

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

The value of the investments of the Priests’ Retirement Fund increased over a one-year period from $11,128,546 to $12,524,557 on June 30, 2014. The diocese’s Investment Advisory Committee, diocesan administration, and the investment portfolio’s investment managers closely monitor monies invested in support of the PRIESTS’ RETIREMENT Plan.

The Priests’ Retirement Fund of the diocese is also assisted through extraordinary gifts. Information about gift opportunities to benefit the Priests’ Retirement Fund is available from the Development Director of the Diocese, Scott Lalone. He can be reached in Ogdensburg at (315) 393-2920 or through e-mail to slalone@rcdony.org.

Your personal generosity to the Christmas collection in your parish will support all retired priests of the diocese and benefit longer term the diocesan and religious priests serving you today. Your priests, retired and active, will appreciate your support tremendously!
Advent: a time for families to grow closer to God

By Stephen Tartaglia
Diocesan Director of Family Life

Growing up, we put up our artificial Christmas tree on Dec. 13 because it was my brother's birthday. Now, as an adult with my own family, I continue to put the tree up sometime in the middle of December.

The traditions that families establish during Advent build lasting memories and are an easy way for parents to catechize their children.

We still have an artificial Christmas tree which we use year after year. The sturdy kind that doesn't mind the ... toddlers pulling on branches, older kids running into it, playing under and around it, etc.

As long as we tie it to a hook in the wall securely, we're fine! True, it loses some (a lot) of its fake plastic needles each year and somehow I think we've misplaced one of the branches. We just turn that side toward the wall each year.

My wife's parents gave it to us when we were newlyweds and we never would've dreamt of getting rid of it.

Each year as we pull out the tree we make the same jokes, we have the same process of assembling it and decorating it and we use the same decorations we have for years. Of course we continue to add the new ornaments that our children make each year in art class in school. I still have one that I made when in grammar school...a little Christmas tree with elbow macaroni glued on as ornaments and the whole thing spray painted with gold paint. Tacky, but sentimental!

One year I decided to try something different. I downloaded prayers for the Blessing of a Christmas tree from the site of the Catholic bishops of the United States (http://www.usccbpublishing.org/client/client_pdfs/xmastree.pdf)

I invited family members over to help put up and decorate the tree, and when it was done we all participated in a little ceremony to bless the tree.

I wasn't sure how this would be received, but it was easy, fun, and very meaningful for all of us.

It opened the door for spiritual conversations and helped us to focus on the true reason for Advent and Christmas.

The next year I decided to try something else. We replaced the children's normally longer bedtime prayers with one verse of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." It was a big success, so we continued it each year since then. It's easy to learn and since we sing it every night, by the end of Advent even the youngest one can join in.

I'm a little hesitant to admit this but one reason my children love Advent is because prayers at bedtime are shorter and a little more fun.

In fact, it was so successful that I decided to introduce the practice in the Catholic school I was working at. As principal I led prayer every morning. During Advent I replaced the normal morning prayers with one verse of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and invited anyone who wanted to come to my office to sing with me.

By the end of Advent my office was packed with children and adults Who wanted to sing. So I invited everyone to go Christmas carolling throughout the neighborhood with me, and the response was very positive. Whole families joined us.

We began in the school parking lot with a prayer and ended on the school playground that was decorated and lit with Christmas lights. We received a blessing from the pastor and then enjoyed hot chocolate and Christmas treats. The carollers loved it and so did the neighbors.

Advent is a great time for families to evangelize. Christmas carolling, reaching out to people Who are alone during the holidays, offering unexpected gifts or kindnesses to neighbors, are great ways of spreading the love of God. So too are religious decorations, Christmas cards and other well-wishes to family and friends.

The celebration of Advent is rich in rituals and symbolism and is one of the best times for parents to help their families grow closer to God. The traditions that families establish during Advent build lasting memories and are an easy way for parents to catechize their children.

Advent celebrated well helps children learn that the real meaning of the season is the coming of Christ, and it strengthens the family's resolve not to get swept away by the secularized focus on materialism at this time of year.

Many Catholic families - including the Leaders in Gouverneur - create and pray around Advent Wreaths during the weeks leading up to Christmas. Here, Stephen Tartaglia, diocesan family life director, shares other ideas for family celebrations of Advent.
They find it helpful to come who come for retreat days.
who come for Poustinia or "We
from other parts of the dio
cerned that the House of
other individual retreats, and
Prayer
unique, but few outside our
people and groups who
make use of the house: those
Daughters, and other groups
 calibrated to bring in a bit of income. It

Finally, Mrs. Hanley cites
she said.
field was, "Now when I got up
at the moment."
and he was at table in his house
many tax collectors and sinners came
and sat with Jesus and his disciples. If the Pharisees
and sinners, "I heard this and said: 'Those who are well do not need a
physician, but the sick do.'" Go and learn what
the meaning of the words, I desire mercy, not sacrifice.
I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The Call of Matthew (v. 9) As Jesus passed on from
there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the
customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he
got up and followed him. 10 While he was at table in
his house many tax collectors and sinners came
and sat with Jesus and his disciples. If the Pharisees
saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your
Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 11 He
heard this and said: "Those who are well do not need a
physician, but the sick do. [12] Go and learn what
the meaning of the words, I desire mercy, not sacrifice.
I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

"Economic uncertainty is woven into OLA past and
present," she explains. "We have always existed on
donations and stipends for the use of the facility. Recently
we have been relying heavily on two bequests, but the fut
future looks bleak unless our revenues increase substan
tially."

Mrs. Hanley has even tried
an unusual approach to this
problem: she opened "The
Lost Sheep Quilt Shop" adja
cent to the House of Prayer
to bring in a bit of income. It
also brings quilters together
for good fellowship and
sometimes offers opportuni
ties to pray for their needs.
Father Jack Downs, OLA's
spiritual director, was a close
friend of the founder, Father
"Father Joe devoted much
of his life to this place," he
recalls, "and he worked tire
lessly to encourage growth in
prayer and community. He,
like we, knew how important
volunteers are to help meet
the many needs of the House
of Prayer.
"There is," he laughs, "one
kind of help we need which
he did not - somebody with
advanced computer skills!"
Father Downs notes that,
"The house has been blessed
by Bishop LaValley's visits
and by his interest in OLA.
He has encouraged us to ex
and our board to pull in
more expertise, and we are
doing that now.
"The bishop is very sup
portive of our mission," Fa
ther Downs said.
Marika Donders, Diocesan
Director of Evangelization,
recently visited Our Lady of
the Adirondacks House of
Prayer for the first time and
came away impressed.
"The House of Prayer is a
fabulous resource for parish
groups - councils, catechists,
leadership teams - looking
for a place for retreats/work
shops," she said. "It is a place
to 'come away for a while'
and be blessed."
Father Downs, Father Cosmic, Msgr. Poissant, Msgr. McCarthy, Father Muench….
five of the 46 priests who benefit from the diocesan Priests Retirement Fund

Merry Christmas

A gift to the Christmas Collection in your parish helps to support our retired priests.
The Church and climate change

By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- When a Vatican official suggested that Pope Francis was contemplating an encyclical on the environment a year ago, he signaled that climate change and environmental degradation were such pressing concerns that the pope wanted to address them in a teaching document.

No word has emerged on what the encyclical might say or when it would appear in 2015, but references by officials at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace have pointed to a document that Catholics can apply in everyday life:

Pope Francis is expected to address climate change and environmental degradation in a 2015 encyclical

Catholics working on environmental issues and climate change in the U.S. are eagerly awaiting the encyclical and have spent much of the last year preparing for it.

"There's never been an encyclical just on the environment. It's clear something like this is needed to move, especially policymakers, but even the church," said Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant.

"I've always said we need to recover ancient traditions that we've always had but we just forgot. About how we're supposed to care for creation. About how St. Francis said it's all kin, we're all connected, together somehow. 'Brother Sun, Sister Moon,'" he said.

As anticipation builds for the encyclical, Catholic voices have become more prevalent on environmental topics in parallel with President Barack Obama's ambitious plans to tackle climate change during his final two years in office. From raising awareness about hydraulic fracturing practices to a daylong seminar on the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan for reducing carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants, the work of Catholic clergy and laity have focused on the sacredness of creation and the importance of protecting human life and dignity.

Donnie Ellis, associate director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, said the encyclical will help extend the discussions beyond the science of climate change and the need for alternative energy sources to include the moral questions about how climate change affects the world's poorest people.

"There's not really been the assertion that we have a moral obligation to make something of this, whether it's right or wrong," Ellis said. "Whether we're doing wrong by our brothers and sisters around the world is not even part of the conversation."

Alice Laffey, associate professor of religious studies at College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, is hopeful that the attention church leaders place on the environment will create greater awareness of how personal consumption habits in the developed world affect the most vulnerable people.

"It's essential within the (Catholic) tradition that we respect creation," she said. "It's the poorest and the animals and the plants that suffer," she continued. "Whether it's plants and animals that can't defend themselves or the weakest people who can't defend themselves, it's still a problem."

Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami, chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, highlighted such moral concerns during a daylong workshop Oct. 20 in Washington.

The archbishop told the gathering that the church is concerned about pollution and climate change because they adversely affect human life.

Humans, he said, have been designated as co-creators by God to be good stewards of the earth's resources. "The Catholic conception of stewardship of the environment is also rooted in the dignity of the human person and his relationship with God. This relationship finds its origin for us, 'in the beginning,'" the archbishop said, referencing Genesis.

The focus on environmental stewardship came as the worldwide climate warms. The first 10 months of 2014 were the warmest since record-keeping began in 1880, according to data compiled by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the World Meteorological Organization.

The year also saw the fossil fuel divestment movement gain momentum as major organizations committed to withdrawing funds from oil coal and natural gas companies and partially reinvest in alternative and renewable energy firms.

Among those acting were the Marianist-run University of Dayton in Ohio. The school's board of trustees unanimously approved a plan to shift funds first from fossil fuel firms. The university is believed to be the first Catholic higher education institution to undertake such action.

"This really is a huge priority because of our religious convictions that this earth is a gift. We are meant to protect it and sustain it," Marianist Father Martin Solma, provincial superior of the order's U.S. province and vice chairman of the university's board of trustees, told Catholic News Service in June. Later in the summer, the Diocese of Stockton, California, joined a partnership with the solar energy firm Sungevity to help members of three parishes reduce their electric bills while raising funds for their church and local Catholic Charities programs.

Introducing the program Aug. 16 at the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Stockton, Bishop Stephen E. Blaire said the effort gives parishioners the opportunity to add a solar energy system to their homes with little or no upfront cost while reducing their dependence on fossil fuels.

The year ended with the U.N. climate summit, Dec. 1-12 in Lima, Peru. Nearly 200 governments gathered to produce the first draft of a global deal to cut emissions greenhouse gas, a major cause of climate change. The draft is important because world leaders will meet in Paris next December where it is hoped that the first agreement to cut global emissions that includes developed and developing countries will be finalized.

In the middle of the summit, faith leaders gathered Dec. 7 in #LightForLima prayer vigils in Canada, United Kingdom, Bangladesh, Russia, South Africa and U.S. locales. Patrick Carolan, executive director of the Franciscan Action Network, was among those who prayed near Washington's Lafayette Square.

"The fact that these events were happening all around the world, knowing we're all connected, the spirit of one all around the world, was very inspiring," Carolan told CNS.

He credited Pope Francis for awakening the Catholic voice on climate change.

"He's really gotten people out of this mindset there's nothing we can do or climate change is God's will," he said. "It's an understanding this is the important issue."
The whole church is in mission,' says Maryknoll superior general

By Beth Griffin
Catholic News Service

MARYKNOLL, N.Y. (CNS) - For Father Raymond J. Finch, the new superior general of Maryknoll, "nothing is more rewarding than to go out and help people deepen their faith."

"If you don't share the faith, it stops growing. The more you give of it, the more there is. The less you give, it shrinks," he added.

Maryknoll, the 103-year-old Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, works in 26 countries around the world. Father Finch began a six-year leadership term in November. He spoke to Catholic News Service Dec. 8 at Maryknoll headquarters.

For Catholics, mission today is more of an everyday experience and less of an exotic concept than it was in the past, Father Finch said. "The world is much smaller and people come and go. You won't find many young people who haven't left the country."

There are also more people from the United States working in mission than ever before, Father Finch said. "Mission is so much bigger than Maryknoll. We have a role and a contribution, but the whole church is in mission."

Pope Francis talks about people becoming missionary disciples and that's what Maryknoll is trying to promote, Father Finch said. "He said we have to go beyond our needs to share with one another, deepen our own faith and be transformed by God's grace."

"He speaks of the joy of mission and becoming who we are called to be," Father Finch said.

In Maryknoll's early years, the United States was considered a mission-sending country and the overseas locations were mission- receivers. But Father Finch said the Second Vatican Council helped Catholics appreciate "a growing awareness of the mutuality of mission."

Missioners, priests, brothers and sisters have been joined by significant numbers of laypeople and parish groups, he said. Laity serve Maryknoll through both a long-established lay mission program, Maryknoll Lay Missioners, and a newer initiative that welcomes volunteers for stretches of six weeks to 12 months.

A group of five people joined the ranks of Maryknoll Lay Missioners Dec. 1 after a 10-week orientation period. They will leave in January to serve in El Salvador, Kenya, Tanzania and Cambodia for at least three years.

Maryknoll Lay Missioners came out of the umbrella and tradition of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, but it functions independently.

"We help people motivated by the Gospel find situations, adapt to them and use their talents in culturally appropriate ways," Father Finch said.

Lay involvement in Maryknoll has always been strong, but has grown as more laypeople take responsibility for parishes and their faith lives, he said.

Individual lay volunteers in short-term assignments work alongside Maryknoll mentors in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Groups from parishes and universities experience Maryknoll through immersion trips. Father Finch said the experience is more valuable to the participants than the Maryknoll hosts, but is a blessing for the church in the United States. "There's something privileged about being able to live the faith and share it with another culture on a deep level," he said.

"Mission isn't just for professional missioners. It's for everybody. You were called by God in Baptism to be a messenger of God's presence in the world," Father Michael J. Snyder told CNS. He is the coordinator of Maryknoll's program for short-term volunteers.

Volunteers do not accomplish physical tasks, such as digging latrines, but develop a camaraderie with the people they encounter overseas and come to appreciate the richness of the world, he said. "It helps us realize we're all brothers and sisters in God's family."

Father Finch, 66, entered Maryknoll in 1966 and was ordained a priest in 1976. He served in Bolivia and Peru for 38 years and was superior general from 1996 to 2002. Although he was elected by a majority of his Maryknoll confreres, the Brooklyn native attributes his return to the leadership post to God's sense of humor.

He was very happy in Latin America but said, "One of the things very important in mission is to listen to what I am being called to do and try not to say no.

Father Finch said he will try to do better in his second term. One of the biggest challenges is "we are fewer and we are older. At the same time, I see people still giving and doing what they can to bring the Gospel and God's love," he said. There are 350 Maryknoll priests and brothers, a decline from 400 in 2011.

"We do what we can," he said, quoting Maryknoll co-founder Father James A. Walsh. "Our job still is to go where we are needed but not wanted and stay until we are wanted but not needed."

"Numbers are not the point. Maryknoll is about giving things over to the local church, forming the local clergy and the local people. Today, we call all people to mission," Father Finch said.

Vatican sends bishops preparatory questionnaire for 2015 synod

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- To help set the agenda for the 2015 Synod of Bishops on the family, the Vatican is sending the world's Catholic bishops' conferences a list of questions on a range of topics, including matters of marriage and sexuality that proved especially controversial at the 2014 family synod. Together with the final report of the 2014 assembly, the 46 questions published by the Vatican Dec. 9 comprise a preparatory document, known as a "lineamenta," for the Oct. 4-25 synod, which will have the theme: "The vocation and mission of the family in the church and the modern world." Bishops' conferences are being asked to consult with "academic institutions, organizations, lay movements and other ecclesial associations" in preparing their responses, which are due at the Vatican by April 15. The bishops' responses will serve as the basis for the synod's working document, to be published by summer. A list of 38 questions, sent to the world's bishops in October 2013, was widely circulated on the Internet and helped generate advance interest in the 2014 synod. The questionnaire for 2015 instructs bishops' conferences to "avoid, in their responses, a formulation of pastoral care based simply on an application of doctrine," in favor of what it describes as Pope Francis' call to "pastoral activity that is characterized by a 'culture of encounter' and capable of recognizing the Lord's gratuitous work, even outside customary models."
Will our hearts be ready for Jesus to be born?

In the first reading today, God scolds King David for trying to build Him a house of gold, when for years, God says he has been perfectly satisfied to live in a tent - the Ark of the Covenant.  

In today's readings, God says, "Not yet!" Through the prophet, Nathan, God tells the King that He'll let Solomon do the building of a Temple. Later, God is going to do something truly awesome. He is going to send His Son Jesus, and Jesus will choose for His Temple, a human person who is full of grace, obedience, and love.

Mary will be God's Temple. How can this fulfill God's promise to David that He will place His Son, Jesus, someday on David's throne? Through the fact that Mary herself is a descendant of the House of David, God thinks of everything. God will come into the world through His Son, Jesus. He will be born in a stable, die on a cross, and only then find His permanent throne in that heaven from which He came! The details are beautifully told in today's Gospel. God sends His Angel, Gabriel, to ask Mary if it will be all right with her. After a discreet inquiry as to how all of this will come about, Mary, queen that she is, returns a regal, simple, incredible answer, "I am the handmaid of the Lord."

Then she adds on another sentence, "Let it be done to me according to your Word. "Fiat voluntas tua". May your will be done, God. She doesn't worry any more about the "how", because the angel has assured her that nothing is impossible with God, and, as a matter of fact, God will be on location the whole time. The meaning of Christmas is summed up in His name - Emmanuel - God is with us to destroy our fears and make us ambassadors of the Light.

We have all the facts. God does the rest. From the moment that God is born in our hearts, we are set free to receive all the joy and comfort that God brings. He can comfort us when we are broken, and He can bring us comfort through our entire life.

So how do we respond? How do we respond, as a world, to the arrival of Christ? The first reading reads, "Please see are prepared to receive Him. Will our hearts be ready?"

DECEMBER 21

Fourth Sunday of Advent

READINGS
2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

Advent, has been all about waiting. And now we know what the meaning of Christmas will be all about - to live our lives, consoled in the midst of our frustration with war and corruption, as well as with our own personal failures.

For God is with us, making sense of all the suffering, all the misery, helping us believe that we are in a much larger plan - waiting for Love to be born for the last time when all those prophecies we heard read to us in the last few weeks are brought to fulfillment. It's a question of that mysterious presence in our hearts that call forth from us faith and hope and love.

If we can only say a simple, unqualified "yes", life could be so simple, and God would be so pleased with us. That's why it's so important that all of us confess our sinfulness before Christmas, and be absolved of anything that could keep Jesus out of our hearts.

Advent ends this week, and Christmas is just around the corner, when Jesus will be born again in hearts that are prepared to receive Him. Will our hearts be ready?

REFRESHING OUR BROWSERs'

‘Refreshing our browsers’ with Advent prayer

By Kathleen M. Gallagher

Director of Pro-Life Activities
New York State Catholic Conference

I am not a patient person. My blood pressure rises whenever a traffic jam prevents me from getting to wherever I am going in a timely manner. I'm a Type A personality, always jumping up at night during television commercials to finish washing the dishes or prepare lunches for the following day.

As a political news junkie, my impatience is perhaps best demonstrated by my constant need to refresh my internet browser on election night, anxiously awaiting the results of all the races. (While I am watching the results come in on CNN.)

I offer this background to let you know why Advent is perhaps the most challenging season for me. I'm just not good at waiting. So this year, I decided to use my waiting time productively. Each time I am called upon to wait, I pray.

Instead of seething in a (germ-laden) magazine in the doctor's waiting room, I pray.

Instead of becoming enraged with frustration as I wait on the phone line for a live person, (you name it - the insurance company, the credit card company or the cable television company), I pray.

Not only do I pray, but I pray for those who are the very source of my irritation and anxiety.

Yesterday I sat in the Amtrak station waiting on a delayed train and I prayed for the conductor and other employees, for their wakefulness, dedication and dexterity.

I prayed for the locomotive engineers and mechanics, for those who monitor the signals and inspect the track conditions, for their vigilance and attention to detail.

I thanked God for each and every one of them. And then I prayed for the health and security of the passengers, that they arrive safely at their destinations and be united with loved ones and friends and colleagues.

Wow. I was enveloped by an overwhelming sense of calm, and focused on folks I ordinarily take for granted. The hustling, bustling, noisy train station became tranquil for me, almost soothing.

I was centered on Christ, on seeing His face in the people around me, on listening to Him in the stillness of my heart.

While we wait expectantly for the birth of the Baby Jesus, know that He is already here. We can see Him in the most unlikely places. We simply must choose to see Him.

Try it! It's the Christmas gift that keeps on giving.

Just like hitting the "refresh" button on our web browser will load new changes, refreshing our spiritual browser will also bring change. We should always be refreshing our browsers, always be preparing to see Him.

Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas to all!
**Exodus: Gods and Kings**

By John Mulderig

Catholic News Service

Time was when the biblical extravaganza was a Hollywood staple. In fact, from the silent era through the mid-1960s, it seemed a safe bet that selected slices of the best-selling volume of all time -- or fictional spin-offs from it like "Ben-Hur" -- translated to the screen on a large scale would yield box-office gold.

Post-Beatles irony and the baby-boomer generation's antipathy toward authority and tradition may have put that calculation to rest for a few decades. But, as earlier movie offerings from this year -- ranging from "Son of God" to "Noah" -- suggest, some in Tinseltown are apparently dusting off their copies of the Scriptures and taking a second look.

The latest to do so is director Ridley Scott ("Gladiator," "Kingdom of Heaven"). The bad news is that his 3-D epic "Exodus: Gods and Kings" (Fox) turns out to be big but boring. The good news is that, somewhere, Cecil B. DeMille is at ease, knowing his 1956 blockbuster "The Ten Commandments" remains the definitive mass-media take on this crucial portion of the Old Testament.

Scott's tale is not without its promising aspects. Chief among them, for viewers of faith, is the conversion story his film introduces into the life of Moses (Christian Bale). Here, the patriarch's series of trials and triumphs takes him from religious skeptic to true believer.

Raised as a foster son to Egypt's Pharaoh, Seti (John Turturro), and adoptive brother of Seti's heir, Ramses (Joel Edgerton), Moses is sent into exile when Hegen (Ben Mendelsohn), a corrupt official whose wrongdoing he has uncovered, reveals his lowly origin as the child of a Hebrew slave.

Working as a shepherd in Midian, Moses finds solace in married life (Maria Valverde plays his loyal, devout spouse Zipporah). But his contentment is once again disturbed when God -- oddly personified by an 11-year-old boy (Isaac Andrews) -- calls on him to lead his enslaved compatriots to freedom.

While Scott's picture has computer-generated effects to spare, especially in the plague scenes, its human interaction is stilted and uninvolving. Thus Moses' potentially intriguing spiritual development is only sketched out in the dialogue, and lacks the heft that might propel the audience along on its trajectory.

Additionally, the collaborative script -- penned by Adam Cooper, Bill Collage, Jeffrey Caine and Steven Zaillian -- is skittish where religious themes requiring mature discernment as well as restrained sexual content. The Catholic News Service classification is A-III -- adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 -- parents strongly cautioned.
**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

**Features:** Anthems, carols, and hymns illuminate the Christmas story along with community readers and congregational singing in the tradition of King’s College, Cambridge. NAVE, under the musical direction of Andrew M. Benware, is a mixed chamber choir of professional and amateur singers that perform choral music from a variety of periods and styles in four to eight parts.

**Cost:** $10 suggested donation
**Contact:** drew.benware@gmail.com

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**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

**Features:** Anthems, carols, and hymns illuminate the Christmas story along with community readers and congregational singing in the tradition of King’s College, Cambridge. NAVE, under the musical direction of Andrew M. Benware, is a mixed chamber choir of professional and amateur singers that perform choral music from a variety of periods and styles in four to eight parts.

**Cost:** $10 suggested donation
**Contact:** drew.benware@gmail.com

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**QUILTING CLASSES**
Ellenburg Center - Upcoming Quilt Classes at The Last Sheep Quilt Shop.

**Place:** Our Lady of the Adirondacks

**Schedule:**
- Beginners Quilting Class – Jan. 10, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Star Quilt or Winter Star – Jan. 24, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Your choice of two quilt designs. Can be made table topper up to crib size. Cost $20.

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**JEFFERSON**

**DECEMBER ULCERYA**
Watertown - Cursillo Community celebrating December ULCERYA.

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

**Features:** Cursillists’ reunion. Also, we welcome those interested in deepening a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and sharing it with other Catholics.

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**JEFFERSON**

**Eucharistic Adoration**
Plattsburgh — Eucharistic Adoration is held throughout the year every Wednesday evening, Thursday, and Friday.

**Place:** St. John’s “Holy Family” Adoration Chapel, downstairs

**Time:** 9 a.m. to 9 p.m
**Contact:** call 518-561-5083 or email sjohnsadoration@aol.com

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**FREELANDER**

**DEVOTION AND HOLY HOUR**
St. Regis Falls – First Saturday Devotion and Holy Hour to be held.

**Date:** First Saturday of each month.
**Time:** immediately following the 4:30 anticipated Mass.

**Place:** St. Ann’s Church
**Contact:** 518-856-9656

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**ST. LAWRENCE**

**Eucharistic Adoration**
Lowville — 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.

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**HOLY HOUR FOR VOCATIONS**
Watertown — Holy Hour for vocations to be held.

**Date:** Mon.-Fri.
**Time:** 9:30 – 10:30 a.m.
**Place:** Holy Family Church

**Features:** Eucharistic Adoration & personal prayer
**Contact:** 315-782-2468

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**LIFEFIGHT MEETING**
Watertown - Lifefight of Watertown, a pro-life educational organization, meets the first Wednesday of the Month.

**Time:** 1 p.m.
**Place:** 312 Sherman St.
**Contact:** Phone: 315-788-8480

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**LAWS**

**EUCHARISTICADORATION**
Lowville — 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.

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

**Place:** St. Hedwig’s Church

**Schedule:** The display may be seen on the following Sundays: Dec. 14, 21, 28 and Jan. 4 (2015). The display may be viewed after the 11 a.m. Mass or from 1 p.m. to 3 on the above dates, or by appointment.

**Contact:** 348-6260

**POLISH CHRISTMAS WAFFER**
Houseville - The Polish Christmas Wafer, Oplatke, is available from St. Hedwig’s Church.

**Cost:** $3 per package plus postage.
**Features:** Oplatke, is part of a Polish, Lithuanian and Slovak custom that is observed during the Vigil of Christmas (Wigilia). After the first star is visible, family and friends gather around the dinner table to 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:** 348-6260

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

**Date:** Jan. 2 at 6 p.m. to Jan. 4, 12 p.m.
**Place:** Spiritual Renewal Center
**Cost:** $250
**Contact:** spiritualrenewalcenter.com; Phone: 315-472-6546; Email: mail@spiritualrenewalcenter.com

**24 HOUR RETREAT**
Syracuse — A 24 hour retreat to be held.

**Schedule:** From March 13 at 7 p.m. to March 14 at 7 p.m.
**Place:** Spiritual Renewal Center
**Cost:** $140
**Contact:** spiritualrenewalcenter.com; phone: 315-472-6546; Email: mail@spiritualrenewalcenter.com
Thinking about Christmas

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

In thinking about Christmas, children immediately come to mind. As we seek always the best for the children in our own lives, we know that so many children in the world tragically live with immense suffering and violence; others facing extraordinary poverty and its related challenges.

These children are truly the “most vulnerable,” as Pope Francis says. These children in our mission family need us, especially as Christmas comes.

Each year, your support of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith directly reaches children in some 1,150 countries, many of whom live in extraordinary poverty and its related challenges. There are the children who learn of God’s great love for each of us, the “Good News” of great joy proclaimed by the angel at that first Christmas in programs for catechesis and Christian formation.

This year, our Christmas Appeal for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith invites you to “be an angel” for children in the Missions – to pray and provide that direct help, and so offer them, through the loving care of priests, religious Sisters and lay leaders, the love and hope that every child needs and should have.

Won’t you add the children of the Missions – often the “most vulnerable” – to your gift list this Christmas? Your prayers and gifts are life-saving, life-giving, life-changing. As I thank you for reaching out to the world’s most vulnerable children, I promise prayers for you and your intentions throughout Advent and especially at Christmas.

May Jesus, born of Mary, always be close to you and to the children in your lives!

Please remember “The Society for the Propagation of the Faith” when writing or changing your Will.

D. L. Calarco
Funeral Home, Inc.
135 Keyes Avenue
Watertown • 782-4910
The Year in Review - 2014

Pope continues to ‘take the world by storm’

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- During the second year of his pontificate, Pope Francis was still feeling the love, and not just from Catholics or those from his homeland of Argentina.

A Pew Research Center study released Dec. 11 showed that the pope has broad support across much of the world. Sixty percent of the 43 nations polled had a positive view of the pontiff.

And Americans, in particular, have shown their fondness for Pope Francis, often extolling his simplistic style. According to the Pew study, 78 percent of Americans view the pope favorably.

Put another way: Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, who just completed his first year as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the pope has "taken the world by storm."

He recently told Catholic News Service that 2014 brought worldwide attention to almost everything Pope Francis said and did, which "in so many ways," he said, made the U.S. bishops' work easier.

And the bishops were not the only ones to recognize the pope’s appeal.

The pontiff, who was on the cover of many magazines in 2013, still had the coveted cover spot - not usually reserved for religious leaders - on Rolling Stone magazine this February.

He was also the topic of a number of books issued this year and innumerable Catholic discussions either during coffee and doughnut socials after Masses or larger-scale symposiums at Catholic universities.

During a Feb. 3 talk on the "Francis factor" at Georgetown University, panelists used descriptors such as "troublemaker" and "anti-establishment" in their discussion about Pope Francis. They also commended his strong leadership and management style and of course, his popularity.

Kerry Robinson, executive director of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, said the pope's strongest action so far had been urging people to personal conversion.

The conversion he seeks in the world, she said, "starts now, with us."

At the same gathering, hosted by Georgetown’s Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, John Allen, associate editor at the Boston Globe, said there are likely some cardinals who might say the pope has done things that make them nervous, but they would still no doubt appreciate his overall appeal.

One catch, so far with the pope's popularity, is that it has not, as of yet in the U.S., drawn more people, or those who have left the church, back to Mass or the sacraments in measurable numbers, according to a Pew Research Center poll earlier this year.

Some observers have said the pope’s impact shouldn’t be measured in returning Catholics, but in the restored image of the Catholic Church and the number of Catholics who feel proud of their faith again thanks to Pope Francis.

Eileen Burke-Sullivan, associate theology professor at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, told CNS in March that in visits to various parishes in the country, she heard numerous stories of parents’ grown children who were inspired by the example of the pope and want to come back to the church.

She also said parishes should be prepared for these returning Catholics and be sure they are ready to serve as "field hospitals" welcoming all, as the pope has said they must do.

This fall, the pope had a lot of eyes on him during the extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family at the Vatican.

The pope opened the first working session, but never expressed his views during the gathering.

At the synod’s end, many news outlets said the final report was a "setback" or "loss" for the pope, because it did not include the midterm’s conciliatory language toward people with ways of life contrary to church teaching, or reflect the theme of mercy, the pope so often articulates.

German Cardinal Walter Kasper, who gained attention during the synod for his proposal to make it easier for divorced and civily remarried Catholics to receive Communion, told an audience at The Catholic University of America in Washington in early November that Pope Francis is "a pope of surprises."

In using words that almost sound like something the pope would say, the German cardinal said Pope Francis has "succeeded in a short time in brightening up the gloomy atmosphere that had settled like mildew on the church."

He also acknowledged that the pope has his detractors, saying, "What for some is the beginning of a new spring, is for others a temporary cold spell."

The cardinal said the pope doesn't "represent a traditionalist or a progressive scheme," but instead "wants to lead faith and family back to their original center," to the heart of the Gospels.

That’s a recurring theme of Pope Francis and for many it was echoed in the pope’s appointment this fall of Archbishop Blase J. Cupich as the new archbishop of Chicago.

The archbishop’s simple and very pastoral style has often been compared to Pope Francis.

And certainly many Catholics will accompany each other next fall when Pope Francis will make his first visit to the United States to attend the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia in late September.

Plans call for the pope to attend the Festival of Families Sept. 26 - a cultural celebration expected to draw up to 800,000 participants - and to celebrate Sunday Mass the afternoon of Sept. 27 on the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art for a crowd of about 1 million people.