

# The Catholic Register

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## Church Avoids Christmas Decorations, Carols During Four Weeks Of Advent Season

By Carol Zimmermann  
Catholic News Service

**WASHINGTON (CNS)** -- During the weeks before Christmas, Catholic churches stand out for what they are missing.

Unlike stores, malls, public buildings and homes that start gearing up for Christmas at least by Thanksgiving, churches appear almost stark save for Advent wreaths and maybe some greenery or white lights.

"The chance for us to be a little out of sync or a little countercultural is not a bad thing," said Paulist Father Larry Rice, director of the University Catholic Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

By the same token, he is not about to completely avoid listening to Christmas music until Dec. 24 either. The key is to experience that "being out of sync feeling in a way that is helpful and teaches us something about our faith," he told Catholic News Service.

Others find with the frenetic pace of the Christmas season it is calming to go into an undecorated church and sing more somber hymns like "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." But that shouldn't be the only draw, noted Jesuit Father Bruce Morrill,

who is the Edward A. Malloy professor of Catholic studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee.

He said the dissonance between how the church and society at large celebrate Christmas is that the church celebration begins, not ends, Dec. 25. The shopping season and Christian church calendar overlap, but don't connect, he added.

And even though Catholic churches -- in liturgies at least -- steer clear of Christmas carols during Advent and keep their decorations to a minimum, Father Morrill said he isn't about to advise Catholic families to do the same.

"It's hard to tell people what to do with their rituals and symbols," he said, adding, "that horse is out of the barn."

He remembers a family on the street in Maine where he grew up who didn't put their Christmas decorations up until Dec. 24 and didn't take them down until Candlemas, commemorating the presentation of Jesus in the temple, which is celebrated Feb. 2 -- the 40th day of the Christmas season.

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CNS Photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

**ADVENT WREATH:** An Advent wreath is depicted in a stained-glass window at Christ the King Church in Commack, NY. Advent, a season of joyful expectation before Christmas, began December 3 this year. The Advent wreath, with a candle marking each week of the season, is a traditional symbol of the liturgical period.

## Adult Enrichment

### Class Schedule Announced

**Johnstown:** The Office of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Announces the upcoming schedule of classes:

- - Sacraments

Facilitator: Monsignor Robert Mazur; Location: Cathedral Seton Suite, Altoona. Mondays: 6:30 - 9:00 p.m., January 8, 12, 22, 29; February 5, 12 (This class is 6 weeks, classes are 2 1/2 hours);

- - or: Facilitator: Father D. Timothy Grimme; Location: Saint Michael Church Hall, Saint Michael. Tuesdays: 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., January 9, 16, 23, 30; February 6, 13, 20, 27 (Snow Date-March 7).

- - Living Your Strengths  
Facilitator: Monsignor Michael Becker; Location: Family Life Office, Lilly. Thursdays: 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., January 18, 25; February 1, 8, 15, 22; March 1.

- - Christian Prayer and Spirituality

Facilitator: Sister Marilyn Welch C.C.W.; Location: Saint Catherine of Siena, Duncansville. Wednesdays: 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., March 7, 14, 21, 28; April 4, 11, 18, 25;

- - or: Facilitator: Deacon Michael Russo; Location: Saint Patrick School, Johnstown. Tuesdays: 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., March 6, 13, 20, 27; April 3, 10, 17, 24.

- - Church History

Facilitator: Deacon Donald Gibboney; Location: Saint

Catherine of Siena, Duncansville;

- - or: Facilitator: Deacon Tom Buige; Location: Saint John Vianney, Mundy's Corner; March 6, 13, 20, 27; April 3, 10, 17, 24; May 1, 8.

- - Saint Paul

Facilitator: Monsignor Robert Mazur; Location: Cathedral Seton Suite, Altoona; Tuesdays: 6:30 - 9:00 p.m., January 16, 23, 30; February 6, 13, 20.

- - Patrology

Facilitator: Deacon Michael Russo; Location: Family Life Office, Lilly. Thursdays: 6:30 - 9:00 p.m., March 8, 15, 22, (no class March 29); April 5, 12, 19, 26; May 3.

For registration information, visit online at: [www.dioceseaj.org/lay-ecclisial-ministry](http://www.dioceseaj.org/lay-ecclisial-ministry).

## High Schools

### Wins Car

**Ebensburg:** This year's lucky winner of Bishop Carroll's annual car drawing was Dawn McDannell. Dawn won a 2017 Ford Mustang when her winning ticket was drawn on Saturday, November 4 at the school's Wine Festival fundraiser.

Dawn purchased her ticket from her son Tristan, a student at Bishop Carroll.

"Mrs. McDannell was in awe when she heard that her name was drawn. It is very exciting to share that news with the lucky winner. The students, parents, BC alumni and community members support Bishop Carroll every year through the car drawing and we are so grateful," said CEO Lynn Weber. "The annual Wine Festival is an event that the community and vendors enjoy and is a good venue for the car drawing. It is nice to see so many friends and neighbors come out to enjoy a wonderful evening."

### Higher Education

#### Fasting For Funds

**Loretto:** Eight students and two professors in the Saint Francis University Environmental Engineering department fasted for 36 hours (nothing but water) to raise funds for safe water projects in rural Bolivia and Ecuador. This 36 hour fast is in solidarity with those who suffer chronic hunger and unsafe drinking water.

Participating in the fast were students Ashley Rovder, Kari Lagan, Staci Wolfe, Andrew Potopa, Staci Shoemaker, Logan Madison, Missy McCreaery, Mitchell Hogue, and Colton West; former student Sarah Yeager; and Professors Brother Marius Strom and Dr. Bill Strosnider.

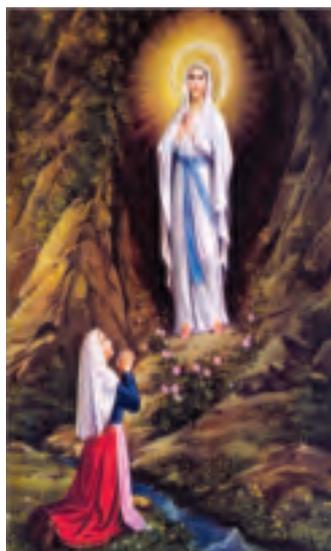


**HONORED:** Michael Johnson, a junior at Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic High School, Altoona, has been honored by Altoona Sunrise Rotary as their first Student of the Month. He has participated as a station leader since 6th grade at Saint Matthew Parish, Tyrone's bible school program and volunteers at Saint Patrick Parish, Newry's fish fries during Lent. In his passion for music and art, he volunteered as an assistant to the band director from all the schools participating in County Band. He plays clarinet in the Marching Band and preparing for the annual Christmas Concert. He is co-leader of the Diversity Club at BGHS, educating students on the importance of acceptance and diversity in the world and the school. As a participant in Drama, this year he was given the honor of illustrating the poster for the upcoming musical production. He is also a member of the scholastic quiz team. Michael can speak Chinese at a conversational level, and in the spring was given an award for excellent Chinese essay writing by Sewickly Academy in Sewickly. Art is his greatest passion and talent. He plans to major in art animation in college and has had art featured in local galleries including at the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art in Loretto, and Hollidaysburg Women's Club. Michael is the youngest son of Diane Hubona.

## An Unforgettable Christmas Gift - -

## A Gift To Share

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*Accompanied by Monsignor Timothy P. Stein  
Pastor, Saint Mary, Immaculate Conception Parish  
Editor of The Catholic Register*

(Continued On Page 3.)

# In The Alleghenies



**FRUIT BASKETS:** Religious education students at Saint Mary, Immaculate Conception Parish in Altoona, made 22 fruit baskets for delivery to residents of Marian House Manor, an apartment complex for the elderly located in the parish's former convent, on Sunday, December 3. Debbie Bartley is director of religious education, and Monsignor Timothy P. Stein is pastor. Kathy Carey is manager of Marian House Manor, which is sponsored by the parish.



**GIFT TREE:** The Family Life Committee of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, Altoona, sponsored a "Light Up A Life" Tree where parishioners hung new Children's gloves, hats, scarves, socks, and mittens to be given to those in need in the area. Hanging items on the tree are Ali and Shane Gority.

*(Continued From Page 2.)*

The Environmental Engineering department sends a group of students to Bolivia every other year as a study abroad trip. In Bolivia, they work with Engineers In Action (EIA) to bring clean water to rural communities by applying the skills we develop here with water sampling and chemistry. Every year, EIA hosts a "Clean Water Fast" to raise both money and awareness towards their cause.

This year, they held their own Fast Fest in the Science Center, where they had South American inspired food, alpacas from Lilly Mountain Alpacas, raffles and games for the community. Students from the Environmental Engineering Society helped out with the event, and those who went to Bolivia this past summer to work with EIA shared their experiences with visitors. Student, Ashley Rovder, says "I am so proud of all of my fellow classmates for the effort they put into this fundraiser, and incredibly thankful for all the support we've received."



**ADVENT WREATH:** Kindergarten and first grade students at Saint Benedict School, Carrolltown, took part in the blessing and lighting of the Advent Wreath Monday, December 4. Pictured are (left to right) First row: Dawson Groer, Derek O'Leary. Second row: Taylor Marsh, Jonah Deckard, Issac Horvath, Easton Link. Third row: Madelyn Goss, Mariah Yeckley. Fourth row: Linkon Baker, Bryson Nagle, Emmit Whited, Sophia Cunningham, Alexis Rezk. Fifth row: Kennedy McConnell, Callie Greene and Madeline Farabaugh.

The group has collectively raised over \$3,200, though they're still campaigning. That number includes the efforts of each individual faster as well as the funds raised from Fast Fest. To contribute to Engineers in Action Clean Water campaign, visit: <http://bit.ly/2AlzCeL>.

is given in the public chapel at Carmel, followed by veneration of the relic of Saint Therese.

## Prayer

### Infant Jesus Novena

**Loretto:** The Discaled Carmelite Nuns announce their annual private Novena in honor of the Infant Jesus, in preparation for the Solemn Feast of Christmas.

The Novena will begin Saturday, December 16, and conclude on Christmas Eve, Sunday, December 24.

The regular monthly private novena honoring Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Therese will take place at the same time. All intentions will be remembered in the special Novena prayers offered following daily Mass.

Those desiring to share in the graces and blessings of these nine days of prayer are requested to send their petitions to Mother Prioress, Carmelite Monastery, P.O. Box 57, Loretto PA 15940.

Every Sunday afternoon at 4:00 p.m. and every First Friday of the month, Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament

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## Point Of View

Do you struggle with packaging?

I have just opened a fresh box containing an over-the-counter pain reliever and now need a double dose because of the discomfort caused by the act of prying the lid off the bottle.

My neighbors probably think I ordered all of my Christmas gifts in one purchase because of the huge cardboard shipping "crate" blocking my front door -- but all I did was order a few, small items from an online retailer.

And oh, the puzzle of plastic wrapping tightly around my latest compact disc purchase. I really didn't need my fingernails, did I?

Whether groceries or new gizmos for our home office, packaging seems to have hit a new high of abundance and new low of ease of removal. I understand childproofing and theft-detering, but when you would do well to buy a tool to remove what wraps on or around an ordinary item, well, doesn't that seem a bit too much?

Lately, I reveled in shopping at a local farmer's market, where you bring your own bag and select your own, unpackaged produce. The joy of such immediacy was utterly refreshing! I could smell the sweet/tart apples, feel the smooth texture of the eggplant and test the ripeness of heirloom tomatoes -- all while enjoying color and contrast sans a coating of plastic that would otherwise dull their beauty.



## Living Well

By Maureen Pratt  
**Problems With Packaging**

The more unfettered shopping, and the upcoming gift-giving season, which brings with it a greatly ramped- and wrapped-up kind of packaging, made me wonder about some ways that we could simplify the whole boxed-in issue to give our gifts, tangible or not, a more direct entree into our lives and to share them more (pardon the pun) organically with others.

Inner joy fueled by the Holy Spirit, when expressed in a smile that reaches into the eyes is all the more contagious when we don't try to couch it in endless explanations of what, concretely, makes us glow. Perhaps scientists might need to dissect such emotion, but we don't need to in order to share it.

Compassion need not be confined to a specific time and place. If we open our eyes wider as we move about the day, we'll see many opportunities to assist someone in need. Opening a door and holding it for someone to pass. Speaking a random, kind word. These and other acts don't require elaborate calendaring.

Worship as a community, when focused as reverent prayer and not production, allows us to

breathe into the liturgy, listen without distraction to the readings and come together more gratefully at the eucharistic table.

The Christmas season is full of opportunities to pare down our packaging and let the warm glow of light that is the true meaning of the time shine widely. Gifts handcrafted, however simply, contain that extra bit of ourselves that is worth more than any expensive purchase. Food home-cooked, even if a little singed, extends love. And words, simple words: "I love you," "Thank you," "I care," can be more profound than the most elaborate, glitter-dusted card.

We can, of course, recycle all that cardboard and plastic containing whatever we buy. But it will soon be remade into more boxes and wrappers, arriving on the doorstep again. Over time, we might become weary of receive-recycle-receive.

But less packaged forms of expression and care become something else entirely when given away -- they thread through our lives and connect us with one another and Christ, and arrive back home, not as the "same old," but something wonderful, joy-filled and new.



## Another Perspective

By Monsignor Timothy P. Stein  
**Lead With Your Good Foot**

I've been hobbling around a bit, lately.

A few weeks ago, I had a brace fitted to my left ankle; I needed some additional support on a limb that had been operated on in 1991. The brace has made a world of difference. On my recent vacation trip to London I was able to walk all about town with no problems. I felt invincible!

Four hours after I returned from that trip, I missed a step as I was going into the rectory, and landed on my right foot. I heard the snapping sound as I landed. Sure enough, my foot was broken. The brace on my left foot has now been paired with a surgical shoe on my right. I've also added a cane to my ensemble. I make quite the fetching picture!

One of my parishioners, a physical therapist, offered me some advice after a weekend Mass. "Monsignor, always lead with your good foot." Easier said than done, thought I -- at this point, one's as bad as the other!

But although I'm not able to carry out that instruction, literally, I think there's much wisdom to be gained from pondering on the thought "Lead with your good foot." If we always lead with the good -- if we always went out with a positive attitude, how much better off we would be.

Sadly, all too often, we lead from a position that is somewhat less than good. Even though it might hurt, we find ourselves leading from a point of weakness or bitterness. We make our bad humor an excuse for almost any kind of attitude or behavior. Instead of building up, we are more concerned with tearing down. Instead of accentuating the positive, we emphasize the negative. We go out of our way to find something nasty or malicious to say about another person. We let our thoughts and feelings be corrupted by the bad experiences from our past, instead of looking to what is right and good in our present. When we lead from the bad, it's inevitable that we will slip and fall. We've nothing solid to move forward from. We've only got the quicksand of a bad disposition to fuel us and pull us back.

My resolution for this Advent season, this new Church year, is to remember to lead with the good; to make a conscious effort to see what is good and positive and life-giving in the people I meet and the situations I find myself in. If I lead with the good, surely goodness will be there, waiting for me. If I lead from the bad, I'm only going to go from bad to worse.

We've always been told to "put your best foot forward." Not a bad piece of advice, at all. Lead with the good foot, lead from what is best and brightest, and surely you will find more good than bad wherever you go and whoever you might meet.

Happy New Church Year to you!

# Diocese Names Director For New Office Of Children And Youth Protection

The Diocese of Altoona - Johnstown has announced the creation of the Office of Children and Youth Protection and the hiring of Cindy O'Connor as the Director of that office.

The Office of Children and Youth Protection will be responsible for implementing and overseeing the full Diocesan response to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and compliance with the law. Through online and in-person educational training programs, presentations, and resource materials, the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown will be able to assist church personnel in responding to the mandates of the Diocese's safe environment policies. Additionally, the office will organize the annual audits required by the Charter, oversee required background screenings and training of church personnel consistent with the Diocesan safe environment policy, and assist in the internal investigation process relating to child abuse allegations involving church personnel.

As Director of the Office of Children and Youth Protection, O'Connor will oversee the efforts to protect children and young people in the Dio-

cese of Altoona-Johnstown. Her responsibilities will include creating safe environments, reviewing organizational structures for maximum efficiency, increasing and coordinating communication efforts, implementing best practices for record keeping, and ensuring all compliance measures are being met.

Since 2004, O'Connor has served in a leadership role for several local non-profit agencies. Her extensive experience includes coordinating programming for youth development, engagement, and prevention and volunteer recruitment and management. Her background and community involvement has provided her multiple opportunities to work with diversified and vulnerable populations, understand the importance of building relationships of mutual respect, and, above all, ensure the safety of all.

O'Connor has a degree in Organizational Leadership and Management from Saint Francis University in Loretto. She is a member of Resurrection Parish in Johnstown.

## Support For Survivors

Support for survivors of sexual abuse is always available throughout the Diocese of Altoona-Johnston. Survivors are encouraged to seek help for recovery through any of the sexual assault centers in their area. All of the sexual assault centers offer:

- \* 24/7 Hotline Services
- \* Crisis Intervention
- \* Case Management
- \* Individual Counseling
- \* Legal Advocacy and Accompaniment
- \* Medical Advocacy and Accompaniment
- \* Prevention and Awareness Education Programs
- \* Sexual Assault Response Team (emergency medical care, emotional support, and medical/ legal examination)
- \* Professional Trainings
- \* Information and Referrals to other community services

### Bedford County

Your Safe Haven Inc.  
(800) 555 - 5671  
Yoursafehaven.org

Also offers: \* Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing  
\* Transportation \* Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

### Blair County

Family Services, Inc.  
(814) 944-3585  
Familyservicesinc.net

Also offers: \* Therapy/ Therapeutic Counseling \* Transportation \* Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

**Cambria-Somerset Counties** Victim Services, Inc.  
(814) 288-4691 and (800) 755-1983  
Victimservicesinc.org

Also offers: \* Therapy/ Therapeutic Counseling \* Support Groups \* Group Counseling

### Huntingdon - - Mifflin - - Juniata Counties

The Abuse Network  
(717) 242-2444  
Abusenetwork.org

Also offers: \* Crisis Counseling \* Support Groups \* Group Counseling \* Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing \* Transportation \* Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

### Clinton County

Clinton County Women's Center (  
(570) 748-9509  
Ccwcsafe.org

Also offers: \* Therapy/ Therapeutic Counseling \* Support Groups \* Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing \* Transportation \* Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

### Franklin - - Fulton Counties

Women in Need/ Victim Services  
(717) 264-4444  
Winservices.org

Also offers: \* Support Groups \* Group Counseling \* Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing \* Transportation \* Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

### Centre County

Centre County Women's Resource Center  
(814) 234-5050  
Ccwrc.org

Also offers: \* Support Groups \* Therapy/ Therapeutic Counseling \* Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing \* Transportation \* Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors \* Civil Legal Representation in family, law, immigration or Title IX matters \* Safe Custody Exchange and Supervised Visitation

## Reporting Child Abuse

Bishop Mark L. Barchak and the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown are firmly committed to protecting children and young people. If you have any information concerning suspected sexual or other abuse of minors, you are urged to report it immediately to:

- PA Child Line 1 - 800- 932 - 0313 (intake is available 24/7)
- Pennsylvania Attorney General Hotline (888) 538 - 8541
- Pennsylvania State Police Headquarters (717) 783 - 5599 or your local Pennsylvania State Police Station
- Your local police department

If there is an indication of imminent danger, you should call 911 immediately.

The Diocese reports all information regarding sexual abuse of minors to law enforcement. You are urged to do the same. Anyone may and should report suspected child sexual abuse.

To report to the Diocese any suspected abuse of a minor, please call Jean Johnstone at (814) 944 - 9388.

# Don't Wait To Be Perfect To Answer Vocational Call, Pope Says

By Junno Arocho Esteves  
Catholic News Service

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)** -- Men and women contemplating a vocation to the priesthood, consecrated life or marriage should not be afraid because God wants only for them to experience the joy that comes from serving others, Pope Francis said.

"Our slowness and our sloth" should not delay a response and Christians need not be "fearful of our limitations and sins, but instead open our hearts to the voice of the Lord," the pope said in his message for the 2018 World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

"It will not fill our hearts if we keep standing by the window with the excuse of waiting for the right time, without accepting this very day the risk of making a decision," the pope wrote. "Vocation is today! The Christian mission is now!"

The papal message for the day of prayer, which will be ob-

served April 22, was released Dec. 4 at the Vatican. The 2018 theme is "Listening, discerning and living the Lord's call."

In his message, Pope Francis said God's call "is not as clear-cut as any of those things we can hear, see or touch in our daily experiences" because God "comes silently and discreetly, without imposing on our freedom."

Christians, he said, must learn to listen carefully and "view things with the eyes of faith" in order to listen to his voice which is "drowned out by the many worries and concerns that fill our minds and hearts."

"We will never discover the special, personal calling that God has in mind for us if we remain enclosed in ourselves, in our usual way of doing things, in the apathy of those who fritter away their lives in their own little world," the pope said.

Listening is increasingly difficult in today's society, which is "overstimulated and bombarded by information" and "prevents us from pausing and enjoying the taste of contemplation" and discerning God's plan, he said.

Often stifled by "the temptations of ideology and negativity," he said, Christians need spiritual discernment which allows them to "discover the places, the means and situations through which" God's calls them.

"Every Christian ought to grow in the ability to 'read with-



CNS Photo/Paul Haring

**ORDAINS PRIEST:** Pope Francis ordains one of 16 new priests during Mass in Suhrwardy Udyan park in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Friday, December 1. In a message for the 2018 World Day Of Prayer For Vocations, Pope Francis said "Vocation is today! The Christian mission is now!" and urged those considering a vocation to ordained ministry or consecrated religious life not to be afraid of God's call to them.

in' his or her life and to understand where and to what he or she is being called by the Lord, in order to carry on his mission," Pope Francis said.

He also urged men and women to live out their calling once it is discovered and "become a witness of the Lord here and now," whether in marriage or priesthood or consecrated life.

"If (God) lets us realize that he is calling us to consecrate ourselves totally to his kingdom, then we should have no fear!" Pope Francis said.

"It is beautiful -- and a great grace," he said, "to be completely and forever consecrated to God and the service of our brothers and sisters."

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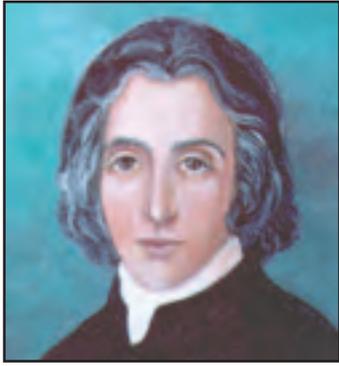
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# A Prince In The Service Of The Great King

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1770 - 1840

## Books Shed New Light On Beloved Saints

By Graham Yearley  
Catholic News Service

It's good to have new biographical works of two women saints: St. Clare of Assisi and St. Therese of Lisieux. Both are famous saints to Catholics, but there is limited knowledge of them outside the church. These

publications may correct that.

Eight hundred years separate the lives of these two women. Clare lived in the 12th and 13th centuries and Therese in the 19th.

But both sought the religious life early, both had no interest in following the standard roles of women as wife and mother and both practiced forms of self-mortification and self-de-

nial that make us uncomfortable to hear about in the 21st century. We no longer believe that extreme fasting and sleeping on beds of twigs makes us dearer to God.

Bret Thomas' **St. Clare of Assisi** is not a biography, as the author openly states in the preface. Some parts of St. Clare's life are well documented, but there are other parts where there is no record. Consequently, the author has imagined scenes and thoughts from her life, so "St. Clare of Assisi" bears greater resemblance to an historical novel than a biography. It is, nonetheless, a lively and informative read.

Clare, born into a wealthy noble family of Assisi's upper class, had an early sense that the life of an arranged marriage and child rearing was not for her. She got to know Francis, who became St. Francis, from an early age in Assisi. She was attracted to his preaching and dedication to a life of poverty that imitated the life of Christ. When she turned 18, she sold off her possessions and gave her inherited money to the poor.

On Palm Sunday in 1212, Clare escaped by night with the help of a sympathetic servant. Several miles from Assisi, she met up with Francis and some of his followers. That night she was given her tonsure by Francis, her hair was cut short and she was dressed in a rough woolen tunic.

Her family traced her and demanded that Clare return to Assisi with them, but she refused. Henceforth, she would dedicate her life to living in a

community of women in poverty.

Three years after her escape, when she was 23, Clare was declared the abbess of San Damiano. Clare recognized that the women who became her followers could not lead an itinerant life, begging for alms as Francis' followers did, so she established a stable community and would create other communities led by other women.

But that did not mean the 'Poor Clares,' as they became known, lived in comfort. All the women slept in one large room on hard mats; Clare herself slept on a bed of sticks. The rigors of poverty and sustained fasting undermined Clare's health and she would live for many years confined to her bed. Despite the toils she exacted on her body, Clare still lived over 60 years, a very advanced age in the 13th century.

August Pierre Laveille's **The Life of St. Therese of Lisieux** is a biography, but not a new one, as it was published originally in 1925. Laveille's work was commissioned by Therese's own sister Pauline, who also had been her prioress in the Carmelite order. Eventually, four daughters of Louis and Zeligie Martin would join the order.

One could say the girls got their call to the religious life directly from their parents. Louis Martin had wanted to be monk; Zeligie had wanted to become a saint. They lived as a married couple in harmonious celibacy. It was a priest who pointed out to them that bearing children was a natural and holy vocation, too. The couple would take that advice to heart and bear nine children, but only five survived to adulthood, all girls. Therese was the youngest.

The first great crisis was her mother's death when Therese was 4 and a half years old. From then on, Therese was raised by her sister Pauline. Her second crisis came when Pauline joined

the Carmelites several years later.

Her sister's departure, however, only intensified Therese's desire for the religious life. At 15, she asked the prioress of the Carmelite convent in Lisieux if she could be allowed to enter and she was refused. She went to the local bishop and asked again and was refused again. Both wondered if the beautiful but delicate Therese could withstand the rigors of religious life.

But it was within the walls of the convent that Therese began thinking and living out her "Little Way," a pathway toward holiness through prayer and self-denial and self-debasement.

Being "little" in God's world was not something to be resented, but accepted joyfully. The smaller we are the greater the gift of God's love becomes, in Therese's view. If one was accused falsely of a mistake, take the blame anyway; refuse lighter work and insist on doing the humblest jobs. As her health declined, partly because of sustained fasting, her superiors asked Therese to write down her spiritual discoveries.

What emerged as **The Story Of A Soul** began as an exercise in humility, with no thought of publishing her diaries or other written works. In her final months of dying of tuberculosis, she endured agonies of pain, but Therese seemed to respond with gratitude that she was nearing death and would be joined with God

It was reported after she died Sept. 30, 1897, her face, which had been contorted with pain, suddenly transformed into a face filled with beatific ecstasy.

While Therese's life is a fascinating one, this first biography is essentially hagiography, uncritical and overly reverential. The style is so syrupy one feels like one is drowning in caramel. It is a pitfall that is hard to avoid when one is dealing with lives so extremely and heroically dedicated to serving God.

## Prayer For Father Gallitzin's Intercession

O God, light of the faithful and shepherd of souls, who sent Servant of God Demetrius Gallitzin to serve God's people in the Allegheny Mountains, feeding your sheep by his words and forming them by his example, pour out your Spirit to sow seeds of truth in people's hearts and to awaken in them obedience to the faith.

May the Gospel continue to be preached and the Sacraments bring power and grace to the faithful. By the example of this man of faith, Demetrius Gallitzin, may your people advance in the path of salvation and love.

Confident of your faithfulness to us, we humbly ask you, our God, to grant us the favor of (name your intention).

May Christ's saving work continue to the end of the ages, and may we feel a more urgent call to work for the salvation of every creature. We pray this, as did your priest Demetrius Gallitzin, through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

+ + +

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# Word of Life



## The Pope Teaches

By Pope Francis  
Jesus Is 'Spiritual GPS'

**YANGON, Myanmar (CNS)** -- Jesus' love "is like a spiritual GPS" that guides people past the everyday obstacles of fear and pride and allows them to find their way to a relationship with God and with their neighbors, Pope Francis said.

Christ's message of "forgiveness and mercy uses a logic that not all will want to understand, and which will encounter obstacles. Yet his love, revealed on the cross is ultimately unstoppable," the pope said Nov. 29, celebrating his first public Mass in Myanmar.

According to the Vatican, 150,000 people attended the Mass at the Kyaikkasan sports ground. Thousands of them had traveled hundreds of miles to be at the Mass, and many of them camped out on the sports field the night before the liturgy.

Pope Francis acknowledged the sacrifices made by the people as well as the struggles Catholics face as a tiny minority in Myanmar and as citizens of a country struggling to leave violence behind and transition from military to democratic rule.

"I know that many in Myanmar bear the wounds of violence, wounds both visible and invisible," the pope said in his homily. "The temptation is to respond to these injuries with a worldly wisdom" or to think that "healing can come from anger and revenge. Yet the way of revenge is not the way of Jesus."

Pope Francis prayed that Catholics in Myanmar would "know the healing balm of the Father's mercy and find the strength to bring it to others, to anoint every hurt and every painful memory. In this way, you will be faithful witnesses of the reconciliation and peace that God wants to reign in every human heart and in every community."

Father Francis Saw from St. John Cantonment Church in Yangon said he had 400 guests at his parish. "Many people came from the hill towns. I welcomed them and fed them and then they came here at 10 p.m." the night before the Mass.

"We are very happy and encouraged by the pope's visit," he said. "It is good for our country and for our church."

Some people had reserved seats close to the altar. "Every parish got some VIP tickets for those who are very involved in the parish, very poor or sick," said Noeli Anthony, a ticket-holder from the Myanmar Catholic community in Perth, Australia.

Salesian Father Albert "Sam" Saminedi, pastor of the Perth community, said the immigrants he ministers to "love their country" and "are very strong, very loud and full of faith." More than 100 of them traveled home to be with the pope.

The "VVIP" section at the sports field was reserved for government officials, diplomats and representatives of other Christian communities and other religions.

The Rev. U Chit Toe Win, chair of the Myin Thar Baptist Church and deputy chairman of an interfaith dialogue group in Yangon, sat with the Anglican, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim members of his group in the very front row.

Like any Baptist minister, Toe Win said, "I believe in Jesus first," but "these are my brothers. We are for unity."



**ONE MORE TIME:** More than a dozen figures designed in Italy by Fontanini, comprise the nativity scene at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, in Altoona. The creche is traditionally displayed in front of the Blessed Mother Chapel. These images are from a 2007 Cathedral guide book.

On Nov. 14, Kevin Janson Neal paced about a remote elementary school in the small Northern California community of Rancho Tehama Reserve, apparently looking for children to shoot during a killing spree that left five dead and at least 10 wounded in seven different locations.

Thanks to the quick actions of a school secretary, the shooter was unable to enter the classrooms and was left firing a semi-automatic rifle through windows and walls, seriously injuring one child.

When the news broke during the bishops' fall assembly in Baltimore that same day, Bishop Jaime Soto of Sacramento, California, took the microphone to ask his brother bishops to pray the Hail Mary for those victims of the shooting in his diocese.

That the shooting did not engender further discussion at the bishops' assembly, nor a great deal of coverage in the media, may be a sign of how desensitized we are all becoming to the terror of mass gun violence. Five years after the Newtown, Connecticut, massacre of 20 children, even the targeting of a school no longer surprises.

The bishops did release a statement Nov. 7 in the wake of recent mass shootings in Las Vegas (where 59 died and at least 440 were injured) and the First Baptist Church of Sutherland



## Amid The Fray

By Greg Erlandson  
Mass Murder  
And Our Culture Of Death

Springs, Texas (27 died and 20 wounded).

In that statement, Bishop Frank J. Dewane of Venice, Florida, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, urged "a real debate about needed measures to save lives and make our communities safer."

Bishop Dewane said the U.S. bishops continued to urge a "total ban on assault weapons," as well as universal background checks, limitations on high-capacity magazines and "improved access to mental health care for those who may be prone to violence."

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, the president of the U.S. bishops' conference, also issued a forceful appeal: "We must come to the firm determination that there is a fundamental problem in our society. A culture of life cannot tolerate, and must prevent, senseless gun violence in all its forms."

A report by **The New York Times** that compared the United

States with other countries in terms of mass shootings came to the conclusion that "the only variable that can explain the high rate of mass shootings in the America is its astronomical number of guns."

Americans make up 4.4 percent of the world's population, but the **Times** said we own 42 percent of the world's guns. Only Yemen has a higher rate of shootings, and it has the second-highest rate of gun ownership.

America also leads in gun suicides: 21,175 suicides by gun in 2013, almost twice as many deaths as by homicide. As an addiction counselor recently told me, the availability of a gun makes the suicide impulse more likely to be successful, especially for men.

The church reminds us that choosing a culture of life not only means addressing abortion and physician-assisted suicide, but also the proliferation of weapons that contribute so terribly to the suicide, homicide and mass shooting rates that are plaguing our society.



## Question Corner

By Father Kenneth Doyle  
Fasting And  
Holy Communion

**Q.** I've heard several different takes on the rules with regard to fasting before receiving Communion. On the one hand, I've been told that we are not to ingest any food or drink within one half-hour of a service. But I've also heard that water or even coffee are not included in this prohibition.

Someone had mentioned to me also that this fasting doesn't apply if there are health issues involved. It seems to me that older parishioners take a stricter view on this and younger parishioners, a more relaxed one. Can you clarify for me what the real rules are? (southern Indiana)

**A.** The current rules on fasting before holy Communion are simple and clearly expressed in the Code of Canon Law. They provide that one must abstain for one hour from all food and drink, with the exception of water or medicine, prior to receiving the Eucharist (Canon 919).

But that same canon notes that "the elderly, the infirm

and those who care for them can receive the most holy Eucharist even if they have eaten something within the preceding hour." Perhaps the fact that these rules have changed several times within my own lifetime may explain why, in your words, there are "several different takes."

For centuries, Catholics were required to abstain from all food and drink (including water) from midnight of the evening before. (Since my family usually went to one of the later Masses on Sunday morning, I can tell you that this rule was something of a challenge.)

In 1953, Pope Pius XII decided that water or medicine no longer broke the fast. Four years later, that same pontiff -- anxious to make the Eucharist more easily available while still wanting to maintain proper reverence for this sacred gift -- reduced the time period; no longer would you have to fast from midnight but, instead, for only three hours.

Then, in 1964, Pope Paul VI reduced it even further -- to

only one hour -- and that is still the rule. Note that fasting is required for one hour before the actual reception of Communion, not one hour before the start of Mass. (And note, too, that coffee drinkers do not get a pass; coffee does break the fast!)

**Q.** My question as a faithful Catholic is this: Is it wrong for me to pray daily and unceasingly for death? I have been in prison now for 25 years. I am so tired of this existence that I am seeking legal action to have my sentence changed from life in prison to the death penalty.

I have always been opposed to capital punishment, but the past few years have made me realize the unbelievable suffering that results from a life term and what a relief death would bring. Nearly every one of my fellow prisoners -- even those on death row -- thinks that execution is much less cruel than life without parole.

Is there any help for me? Is there anybody on my side? (Jefferson City, Missouri)

**A.** I don't see a problem with your praying for death. There are many accounts of saints asking to be taken into the peace of heaven and to be released from the pain of the present life. I think, though, that as a faithful Catholic, you should not be seeking the death penalty.

In October 2017, Pope Francis stated quite clearly that the death penalty "is, in itself, contrary to the Gospel." He said this in a talk marking the 25th anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and suggested that the catechism's rejection of the death penalty needs to be stronger and more explicit.

More than anything else, though, I would like to respond to your plaintive cry, "Is there any help for me?" I believe that there is. Why not speak to a priest-chaplain or counselor at your prison to help sort out the agony you are experiencing? Perhaps, through God's grace and human guidance, you might be able to play a part in lifting some of the daily burdens of your fellow inmates.



## For The Journey

By Effie Caldarola  
Winter's Dark Days

On the Great Plains, we had a gorgeous fall.

Then, on Oct. 28, my journal read: "Winter moved in during the night. It had been pushing on us with strong, gusty winds all week, but last night it arrived with a hard, killing frost and this morning, triumphant cold."

It is wonderful to live in a place with seasons, because often they correspond with the seasons of the heart. The killing frost that put an end to my roses and mums quieted something inside of me, too.

The novelist Willa Cather wrote about Nebraska's prairie and its immigrants.

In **O Pioneers!** she said about winter: "Winter has settled down ... again; the season in which Nature recuperates, in which she sinks to sleep between the fruitfulness of autumn and the passion of spring."

History and Scripture don't give us a clear idea of when Jesus was born, but tradition places our celebration of his coming in the darkest days of winter, and for good reason.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light," the prophet Isaiah said, and Christmas impresses on us that his words were not just metaphorical, speaking to our spiritual darkness, but ultimately physical. In the midst of night and darkest winter, we yearn for light.

Cather would have been familiar with the rural area where I grew up, where night brought star-studded blackness. Her novel, **My Antonia**, was about a Bohemian immigrant family. My nearby hometown saw a wave of Bohemians arrive in the earliest 20th century.

When I was a little girl, you could hear aged women wearing babushka scarves chatting in their native tongue on the downtown streets. They seemed welcome there.

Today, America seems to be in a time of darkness. Immigrants still arrive, but Congress fails to provide any path to citizenship or any immigration reform, and there is a strange meanness that haunts our streets and our dialogue.

I have friends who came as Syrian refugees a year and a half ago, but a brother whom they expected to follow remains stuck in Turkey because now it is so much harder to obtain refugee status even after intensive screening.

My friend Ruth has been visiting a Somali man imprisoned for well over a year in a local jail. He fled persecution by the terrorist group al-Shabab in Somalia, and was granted asylum by a judge here. But repeated, repetitive appeals by the government keep him confined for no discernible reason.

He is at the mercy of jail guards, some kind, some vindictive.

These stories reflect a nationwide reality.

At their recent meeting, the U.S. Catholic bishops again urged immigration reform. Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami said, "We can make America great, but you don't make America great by making America mean."

President Ronald Reagan spoke hopefully of morning in America, but right now it feels like a winter night. Advent falls into this time of darkness, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Darkness encourages introspection and reflection.

If, as Cather said, winter is Nature's time of recuperation, perhaps we, too, can allow this holy season of waiting for our Savior to encourage healing. We might examine the anger in our own hearts, anger that divides us as a nation and sometimes as a church.

A Midwestern farm landscape in winter can be bleak, a palette in black and white, yet it strips things to their essence.

December often brings frenetic activity, overconsumption, wastefulness. Maybe this year, Advent and our winter can slow us down and help us reflect as we wait for the light.

Our Lady Of  
Guadalupe  
16th Century  
Feast - December 12



Under this title, Our Lady is the patron of Mexico, the United States and all of the Americas, as well as the protector of unborn children. In 1531, she appeared in a vision to the peasant Juan Diego, on Tepeyac Hill near Mexico City, and charged him with asking the bishop to build a church on that spot. But the bishop demanded a sign, so Our Lady had Juan gather flowers in his cloak, in December, to take to the bishop. When Juan opened his cloak, the colorful image of Guadalupe was emblazoned on the cactus-cloth. That icon is preserved in the most famous shrine in the Western Hemisphere and Our Lady of Guadalupe continues to inspire poor and oppressed people worldwide.

# Advent Time Of Preparation, Waiting

(Continued From Page 1.)

He is pretty sure that family's children or grandchildren aren't keeping up that tradition.

Father Rice similarly doesn't give families a lot of advice on when to do Christmas decorating, but when he has been pressed on it, he said, he has advised families to do it in stages -- such as put up the tree and have simple decorations on it and then add to this on Christmas Eve.

It's a joyful time, he said, which Catholics should tap into.

Celebrating Advent is a little tricky in campus ministry, he noted, since the church's quiet, reflective period comes at the same time as students are frantic over exams, papers and Christmas preparations.

This year, the day before the start of Advent, he said students planned to gather to decorate the Catholic center with purple altar cloths, pine garlands and some white lights.

As Father Morrill sees it, decorating churches with white lights or greenery almost bridges the secular and religious celebrations of Christmas and that's OK by him. It beats using blue instead of purple for Advent wreaths or liturgical vestments, which he said some parishes did in the '80s, until church leaders came down on it.

Liturgical notes for Advent posted online by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops -- <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/advent> -- points out that the liturgical color for Advent is purple, just like Lent -- as both are seasons that prepare us for great feast days.

It says Advent "includes an element of penance in the sense of preparing, quieting and disciplining our hearts for the full joy of Christmas. This penitential dimension is expressed through the color purple, but also through the restrained manner of decorating the church and altar."

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CNS Photo/Paul Haring

It also points out that floral decorations should be "marked by a moderation" as should the use of the organ and other musical instruments during Advent Masses.

The way the church celebrates Advent is nothing new. Timothy Brunk, a Villanova University associate professor in theology and religious studies, said it began in the fourth century in Europe but has never had the history or significance of

Easter for the church.

But even though Advent doesn't have the penitential pull of Lent -- where people give something up for 40 days or do something extra -- that doesn't mean the season should slip by without opportunities for spiritual growth.

Father Rice said it's important for Catholics to engage in spiritual preparation for Christmas even in the middle of all the other preparations.

His advice: When you write a Christmas card, say a prayer for that person; while shopping, try to go about it in a slow and thoughtful way not frantically running around and let someone take that parking space you were eyeing.

Those actions, he said, are modern works of mercy on a simple and immediate level.

They also don't require batteries or store coupons.



CNS Photo/Tony Gentile, Reuters

**ANGELUS MESSAGE:** Pope Francis waves during his Angelus in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican December 3. Advent is a time to be watchful and alert to the ways one strays from God's path, but also to signs of his presence in other people and in the beauty of the world, Pope Francis said.

## Pope Says Advent Is Time To Identify Sin, Help The Poor, See Beauty

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)** -- Advent is a time to be watchful and alert to the ways one strays from God's path, but also to signs of his presence in other people and in the beauty of the world, Pope Francis said.

Reciting the Angelus prayer Dec. 3, the first Sunday of Advent, Pope Francis told people gathered in St. Peter's Square, "Being watchful and alert are the prerequisites for not continuing 'to wander far from the Lord's path,' lost in our sins and infidelities; being watchful and alert are the conditions for allowing God to break into our existence, to give it meaning and value with his presence full of goodness and tenderness."

Like the ancient Israelites who wandered in the desert, the pope said, "we, too, often find ourselves in a situation of infidelity to the Lord's call; he indicates the right path, the path of faith, the path of love, but we look for happiness elsewhere."

Advent gives people time to review the paths they have taken and to turn back to the ways of God, he said.

It is a time for paying attention to the needs of others, "trying to counter the indifference and cruelty" present in the world, the pope said. But it is also a time to "rejoice in the treasures of beauty that also exist and should be protected."

"It is a matter of having an understanding gaze to recognize both the misery and poverty of individuals and societies, but also to recognize the riches hidden in the little things of daily life precisely where God has put them," he said.

Pope Francis, who had returned to the Vatican late the night before after a six-day trip to Myanmar and Bangladesh, also used his midday address as an opportunity to thank everyone who had prayed for the trip's success and everyone who had a hand in organizing it.

The pope said he carried with him "the memory of so many faces tried by life, but still noble and smiling. I carry them in my heart and in my prayers."

# In Myanmar And Bangladesh, Pope Francis Calls For Dialogue And Respect For All

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)** -- As on every papal trip, Pope Francis' visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh included a mix of meetings with government officials and events focused firmly on the nations' Catholic communities.

The political implications of his Nov. 27-30 stay in Myanmar and his Nov. 30-Dec. 2 stop in Bangladesh grabbed the headlines mainly because of the situation of the Rohingya people, a Muslim minority being pushed from Myanmar's Rakhine state and seeking refuge in Bangladesh.

But the political and pasto-

ral sides of his trip were interwoven, including his attention to the Rohingya and his defense of their rights.

Meeting Rohingya refugees at the end of an interreligious gathering in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Dec. 1, Pope Francis said each human being is created in God's image and likeness. "Today, the presence of God is also called 'Rohingya,'" he said after listening to each of the 16 refugees briefly tell their stories.

"They, too, are images of the living God," Pope Francis told Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu leaders. "Let's not close our hearts. Let's not look away."

The Catholic communities in both Myanmar and Bangladesh are very small; Catholics



CNS Photo/Paul Haring

**PRAYS:** Pope Francis prays with religious leaders and Rohingya refugees from Myanmar during an interreligious and ecumenical meeting for peace at the archbishop's residence in Dhaka, Bangladesh, December 1.

make up slightly more than 1 percent of the population in Myanmar and only a quarter of 1 percent of the population in Bangladesh. Yet, in both countries, the influence of the church is disproportionately large because of the contributions of Catholic schools, hospitals and other activities.

In Myanmar, the majority of people are Buddhist and in Bangladesh the majority are Muslim. On the return flight to Rome Dec. 2, Pope Francis was asked about how a Catholic should balance a commitment to interreligious dialogue and a commitment to evangelization

with the hope of welcoming converts into the church.

The key, the pope said, always is witness. It is not a Christian's job to try to persuade someone to become Christian. That is the Holy Spirit's job, he said, but individuals must prepare the way by offering a living witness of what it means to be Christian.

The main ingredients of witness, he said, are living according to "the Beatitudes, giving testimony to Matthew 25 (feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick), the Good Samaritan and forgiving 70 times seven."

The pope met privately with a varied group of religious leaders in Myanmar before holding a formal meeting with leaders of the nation's Buddhist community Nov. 29.

Quoting Buddha and a prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, the pope insisted that in a land where the powerfully bonded pairing of religion and ethnicity have been used to prolong conflict, it was time for religious leaders to reclaim the greatest values and virtues of their faith traditions.

Pope Francis also held separate meetings in both countries with the nation's bishops. In Myanmar, he told the bishops that the idea that differences are a threat to peaceful coexistence is an example of an "ideological colonization" sweeping the world and trying to make everyone the same.

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(Continued On Page 13.)



CNS Photo/Paul Haring

**WITH CHILDREN:** (Top Photo) Pope Francis walks with children as he visits the Mother Teresa House in the Tejgaon neighborhood in Dhaka, Bangladesh, December 2. (Bottom Photo) The Pope greeted members of the local community who had come to welcome him to the Mother Teresa House.



*(Continued From Page 12.)*

“The unity we share and celebrate is born of diversity,” he said. Unity in the church and in a nation “values people’s differences as a source of mutual enrichment and growth. It invites people to come together in a culture of encounter and solidarity.”

As Myanmar continues its transition to democratic rule and tries to deal with the challenges of development and full equality for all its ethnic groups, Pope Francis told the bishops to ensure that their voices are heard, “particularly by insisting on respect for the dignity and rights of all, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.”

Before leaving the country, he celebrated Mass Nov. 30 with thousands of young people from throughout Myanmar. He told them to be messengers of the Good News of God’s love and mercy.

“As messengers of this good news, you are ready to bring a word of hope to the church, to your own country, and to the wider world,” he said. “You are ready to bring good news to your suffering brothers and sisters who need your prayers and your solidarity, but also your enthusiasm for human rights, for justice and for the growth of that love and peace which Jesus brings.”

Witness was also the theme he highlighted at a large Mass in a park in Yangon, Myanmar’s capital.

“I know that many in Myanmar bear the wounds of violence, wounds both visible and invisible,” the pope said in his homily. The temptation is to think that “healing can come from anger and revenge. Yet the

way of revenge is not the way of Jesus.”

Pope Francis prayed that Catholics in Myanmar would “be faithful witnesses of the reconciliation and peace that God wants to reign in every human heart and in every community.”

In Bangladesh, his only public Mass was celebrated Dec. 1 and included the ordination of 16 priests, who came from different dioceses and religious orders. He read the prescribed homily from the rite of ordination, but then spoke off the cuff to thank the thousands of people who had traveled far for the Mass. He also encouraged them to pray for their priests.

The next day, before leaving Bangladesh, he met with priests, religious and seminarians at Holy Rosary Church in Dhaka. He told them the harmony, mutual respect and peace that should reign in relations between members of different religions must first be found between members of the Catholic Church.



CNS Photo/Paul Haring

**REFUGEE CHILD:** A Rohingya refugee child from Myanmar is pictured after refugees met Pope Francis during an interreligious and ecumenical meeting for peace in the garden of the archbishop’s residence in Dhaka, Bangladesh, December 1.

# Now Showing

## Beloved Christmas Tale Comes To Life In Charming Movie

By John Mulderig  
Catholic News Service

**NEW YORK (CNS)** -- Its rather ill-chosen title notwithstanding, "The Man Who Invented Christmas" (Bleecker Street) involves no denial of the Nativity.

Instead, this charming fact-based historical drama tells the origin story of Victorian author Charles Dickens' beloved 1843 novella, "A Christmas Carol."

Dan Stevens brings brio to his portrayal of the complex writer, whose humanitarian instincts seem, initially, to ben-

efit all but those closest to him. And the film as a whole shares much of the warmth of the slender volume whose creation it chronicles.

With his last three titles having failed to sell, Dickens fears falling into debt if his next production is equally unpopular. But, having struck on the idea of a holiday-themed narrative, he struggles with writer's block and with the endless distractions of his burgeoning family's domestic life.

A visit from his feckless father, John (Jonathan Pryce), whom Dickens blames for the sufferings of his childhood --



CNS Photo/Bleecker Street

**THE MAN WHO INVENTED CHRISTMAS:** Dan Stevens and Christopher Plummer star in a scene from the movie "The Man Who Invented Christmas." The Catholic News Service classification is A-II -- adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG -- parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.

flashbacks show us his grim life as an apprentice in a shoe polish factory -- is a particular source of worry and conflict. Dickens, who fancifully summons up, and interacts with, his own characters, also spars with dour miser Ebenezer Scrooge (Christopher Plummer) who here serves as a naysaying critic of Dickens' work.

When his publishers, Chapman (Ian McNeice) and Hall (David McSavage), turn the prospective volume down, Dickens resolves to publish it himself, thus raising the financial stakes still further. He does at least en-

joy the steady encouragement of his patient wife, Kate (Morfydd Clark), and of his friend and unpaid literary agent, John Forster (Justin Edwards).

The conversion story Dickens' eventually pens finds a real-life counterpart in the amendment of his own behavior. So director Bharat Nalluri's adaptation of Les Standiford's 2008 book has some positive moral lessons to convey about consideration and forgiveness.

Since it's also family-friendly in most respects -- a

solitary instance of mild bedroom humor is based entirely on inference -- "The Man Who Invented Christmas" will likely prove a winner with a broad range of age groups.

The film contains a very vague sexual joke and a single mild oath. The Catholic News Service classification is A-II -- adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG -- parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.

## Coming Up On 'Proclaim!'

Upcoming guests on "Keeping The Faith," Bishop Mark L. Bartchak's segment of "Proclaim!" will include:

**December 17** - - As she prepares to retire from years of service at the Diocesan Missions Office, Sister of Saint Joseph Patti Rossi recalls her life of missionary service.

**December 24** - - On this Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve, local Catholic school students join Bishop Mark to discuss the true meaning of Christmas.

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# Angel Figurines Deliver Message Of Love At Ohio Senior Care Facility

By **Jerri Donohue**  
Catholic News Service

## BEDFORD, Ohio (CNS)

-- Sister Helen Scasny studied the wall of glass-enclosed cases stretching from floor to ceiling inside the entrance of Light of Hearts Villa, a senior care center in Bedford.

Almost 900 angel figurines of various ages, sizes and materials crowded well-lit shelves, but Sister Helen wouldn't choose a favorite among them.

"My favorite is sitting at my bedside in Bertha," Sister Helen said of the guardian angel she named years ago. "I say good-night to Bertha. I thank her for keeping me upright. I haven't fallen!"

The senior care facility welcomes the public to check out its angel display all year-round, but Christmas angels come out of storage to take a prominent spot during Advent.

Now 85 years old, Sister Helen keeps bees and promotes her honey as "nun better," but in the late 1940s she was a young teacher who witnessed the angel collection blossom.

"People like to give nuns gifts, but they never know what to give them," she said. "People gave us angels. In those days, we couldn't keep our gifts, and so we turned them in."

At Christmas, the Vincentian Sisters of Charity, as they were known then, welcomed the faithful to the motherhouse chapel and its large Nativity scene. The sisters eventually started placing their angels around the creche, prompting even more presents of boxed figurines wrapped in tissue paper. Donors returned year after year to see "their" angel.

"People would come to the convent and it was like they were giving something to the baby Jesus at Christmas," Sister Helen said. "It was their love that brought them to that crib. They treasured that angel."



CNS Photo/Jerri Donohue

**ANGELS:** Sister Helen Scasny, a member of the Sisters of Charity, holds a harp playing angel Nov. 14 above the chapel of Light of Hearts Villa, a senior care center in Bedford, Ohio. Nearly 900 angel figurines of various ages, sizes and materials crowd the shelves. Christmas angels come out of storage to take a prominent spot in the collection during Advent.

Realizing how important the angel collection became to the lay community, the late Mother Joseph Slavic designated a nearby room for overflow angels. Displayed on "steps" draped with fabric and placed against the walls, the exhibit soon included angel choirs, angels wearing ethnic garb, and angels playing sports.

When angels on skis joined the collection, maintenance staff devised a mountain to display them. Lights and Christmas music were added, too.

People brought their children to the display, and adults often lingered to share a cup of coffee with the sisters.

"It was such a joyful time," Sister Helen said. "Hospitality is so important."

So that the laity could see their collection after the holiday frenzy, the sisters exhibited it throughout January. They remembered guardian angels all year-round, however, and taught

parochial school students about them. Mother Joseph reminded local men entering military service to count on their guardian angels.

Meanwhile, the world changed. Enrollment declined in the sisters' high school, Lumen Cordium (Light of Hearts). When it closed in 1987, Sister Helen, its principal, and her friend Sister Regina Kusnir spearheaded the project to convert the beautiful building into a residential health care facility. Aware of the love that had

developed the angel collection, they insisted their architect find a way to display it.

Today angels peer from hutches and curio cabinets throughout Light of Hearts Villa, but the largest group remains

in the reception area, seizing the attention of first-time visitors -- be they deliverymen, job interviewees, or relatives of residents.

The figurines officially became the facility's property when the Vincentian Sisters of Charity merged with the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati in 2004.

Sister Regina, who oversees pastoral care at Light of Hearts Villa, maintains the collection of approximately 2,000 angels. Like Sister Helen, she regularly addresses her guardian angel, whom she calls "Gibbs" after a character on the "NCIS" television series.

Before Christmas, Sister Regina stores some figurines in order to share Christmas angels and Nativity sets from around the world. She invites the public to view the collection upon signing in at the reception desk.

Noting that angels are God's messengers, Sister Helen believes each donated figurine was a missive of love.

"The whole bottom line for angel giving is love," Sister Helen said. "Jesus -- who was born because of God's love for us, and then these angels (present) at the birth of Jesus -- Mary, Joseph and this choir of angels. It must have been beautiful!"

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# Advent Changes Gears In Mid - Season

By Carol Zimmermann  
Catholic News Service

**WASHINGTON (CNS)** -- While most Catholics know the season of Advent is roughly four weeks before Christmas, they might not know it has two parts.

Technically, Advent, the time of preparation before Christmas, begins on the Sunday that falls on or closest to Nov. 30 -- which this year is Dec. 3 -- and ends on Christmas Eve.

But right in the middle, Dec. 17, Advent changes gears.

Jesuit Father Bruce Morrill, the Edward A. Malloy professor of Catholic studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee, said that up until Dec. 17, the tone of Advent is anticipating Christ's second coming, which is particularly reflected in the Mass readings from the Old and New Testaments. Other prayers in the Mass those first weeks also are about the second coming.

But by Dec. 17, the emphasis shifts to Jesus' birth, which is why Father Morrill said when he was young, his family began their Christmas decorating at this time. This also is when some people start singing or listening to Christmas carols.

Timothy Brunk, an associate professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova University, outside of Philadelphia, explains the breakdown of Advent this way: "Christ who has come is also coming. Advent, like Christmas, looks back but also looks forward."

He said in an email to Catholic News Service that even though Advent is about preparation for Christmas, it also is about "assessing how one has welcomed the Christ who has come and one's readiness for the Christ who is coming."

The third Sunday of Advent is called "Gaudete" Sunday (Latin for "rejoice") when the Advent candle and priests' vestments are pink or rose. "This is the church's way of further heightening our expectation as we draw ever nearer the solemnity of Christmas," according to resource material provided by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on Advent and available at <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/advent>.

This year, the USCCB resources include liturgical notes on the season and prayers and blessings for it. It also offers printable bilingual Advent calendars including one specifically for families with daily suggestions for prayers and activities to prepare for Christmas such as making a Jesse Tree, blessing the family Nativity or taking time to learn about Advent traditions around the world.

Advent calendars have a special appeal, Father Morrill said, because everyone loves a countdown.

And Paulist Father Larry Rice, director of the University Catholic Center at the University of Texas at Austin, said Advent calendars range from those with daily Scripture verses to daily chocolate and even whiskey treats. The point is, Advent is about "waiting and joyful anticipation," he said.



CNS Photo/Octavio Duran

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