America
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FAITH AND CULTURE

FAREWELL, FRANCIS'

The legacy of the first Jesuit pope

Gerard O'Connell • The Editors

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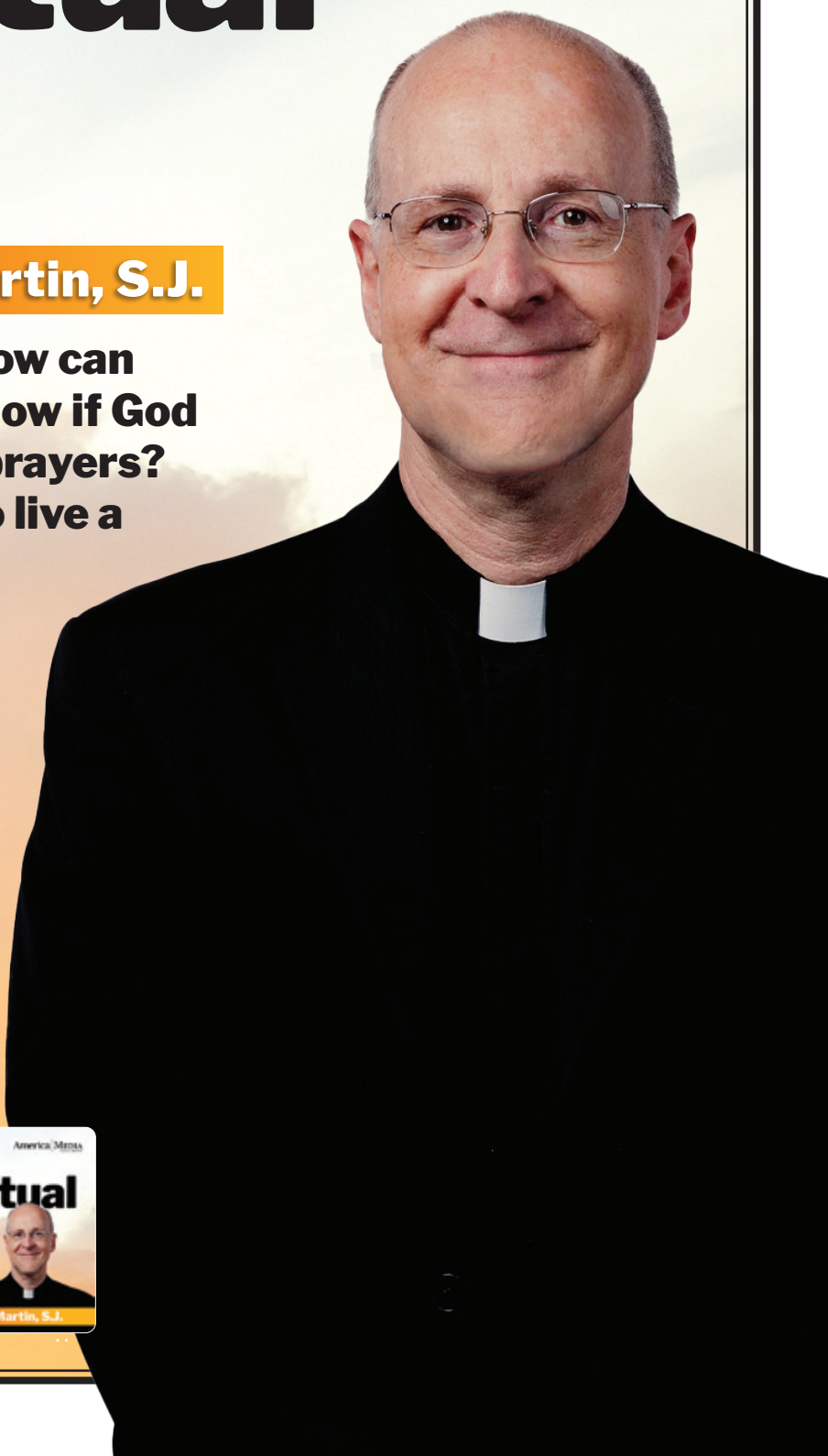
The Spiritual Life

with **Fr. James Martin, S.J.**



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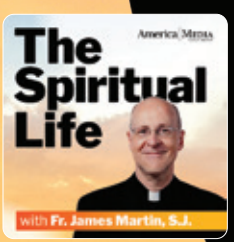

Close to Francis, Along With Everybody

"Here comes everybody." The line is overused, of course, to describe the life of the church, but there are times when nothing else will do.

I landed in Rome four days after Pope Francis passed away, with just barely enough time to drop off my bag, restore myself to some semblance of wakefulness and take a bus over to the Vatican.

Then, as I have experienced so many times along the Via della Conciliazione, leading up from the Tiber to St. Peter's Square, it was time to figure out how the lines would work. I have been lucky enough to be in Rome five times in the past few years, and every time the lines work a little differently. It reminded me of living in Boston through the Big Dig, when the highway interchanges were never the same from month to month.

This time, a kind woman in a yellow vest labelled "Protezione Civile"—a volunteer, I think—had pity on me and reassured me in English that I was in the right line to go and pray before Pope Francis' body. Or at least, her face and tone were reassuring. What she actually said, gesturing at the throng of people with unexplained empty spaces between some of them, was "One line, two line, three line, it's the same." Here comes everybody.

The reassurance was solid. I waited for about three hours, and the line snaked back and forth across the square three times, but I got into the basilica to see Francis one last time and pray for him.

Over those three hours, I heard more languages than I could recognize. I had conversations with people from Buffalo and Ireland and Philadelphia and Belgium. I happened to pass my own archbishop, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, just after praying before Francis lying in the casket, and got to shake his hand. I prayed one of the Missal prayers "for a pope" with pilgrims who had come just for Francis; I met others who were here for the now-postponed canonization of Carlo Acutis that had been scheduled for the Second Sunday of Easter.

The mood in the line was convivial and almost joyful, filled with a sense of being together at this unique moment. We all realized, I think, that this is a story we will still be telling years from now.

Inside the basilica, people were more somber. And before the casket, the sense of prayer became palpable. There was a feeling of loss, certainly, and of grief. But it was not quite sadness, or at least not simply so. Pope Francis gave his life over to the mystery of God's mercy, and now that giving had been completed. Thanks be to God for that.

The week in New York between Francis' death and the flight to Rome had been so full of activity for me that I had little time to grieve for the Holy Father. The place I came closest was on Easter Monday, celebrating Mass in the **America** office and skipping over the place in the Eucharistic Prayer where Francis' name would go—where his name had been spoken in every other Mass I had said since being ordained a priest in 2014.

Then I was sitting on a plane, about to take off for Rome, and a friend texted to ask how I was doing. I recounted that moment to her, and it hit in full force there, in quiet tears sitting on a taxiway.

Another friend, one of my Jesuit brothers, asked me to carry him with me in prayer as I paid my respects to Francis—to pray for him to have a heart like Francis'—pastoral, courageous and close to the people.

About a week later, I was in line again. This time, I was at the Basilica of St. Mary Major, across Rome from the Vatican, waiting to file past Francis' tomb. The place to get into that line was easier to find, and it was only an hour long. But it had been about an hour long since Francis was laid to rest. After filing past his tomb and then finding a spot inside the church to pray for a while, I came outside and realized that the Salus Populi Romani, the icon of Mary that Francis visited so often, had been placed in front of the basilica so that people could pray before it and with Francis. Across the street, a banner hanging from the windows of a building read "Grazie, Francesco." He was, again, close to the people.

The loss we are feeling, I think, is a measure of that closeness of Francis' heart. In his last encyclical, "Dilexit Nos," on the Sacred Heart, he wrote that Jesus "chose to love each of us with a human heart. His human emotions became the sacrament of that infinite and endless love" (No. 60).

In Francis' heart, in his desire always to be close to the people to whom the Lord gave him as a shepherd, we see perhaps a sacrament of that sacrament: a glimpse of how the heart can cooperate more and more fully with the love of God. And so within the loss is a longing and hope.

Shape our hearts as you shaped Francis' heart, Lord, so as to make our hearts more and more like yours.

Sam Sawyer, S.J.

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Left: Pope Francis' coffin is driven past the Roman Forum on its way toward his burial place in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome on April 26.

Cover: Pope Francis pictured on June 5, 2013, in Saint Peter's Square at the Vatican.

(Guido MARZILLA/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images)

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Language, poverty and discernment: Pope Francis as a Jesuit

Following the death of Pope Francis, **America**'s editor at large, James Martin. S.J., wrote a reflection (posted online) on the influence of Francis' Jesuit formation on his papacy, particularly in his spiritual language, his closeness to the poor and his emphasis on discernment in the life of the church. "Overall, Francis entered the papacy as a Jesuit, governed as one and died as one," Father Martin wrote. "To understand him was to remember that he was a Jesuit. And to misunderstand him was to forget he was one." **America**'s readers offered their own thoughts on Francis' Jesuit vocation in the online comments section.

Thank you for this concise and beautiful explanation of Pope Francis as a Jesuit. There is no doubt that he touched many lives around the world, and your words put his actions more clearly into focus. My wish and hope is that we can continue to build on his legacy. For me and many others, Pope Francis will always stand out for his compassion, his mercy and his commitment to the teachings of Jesus.
Marie Alessi

I grieve for the loss of such a good man and leader but pray for his soul and his help from heaven. While he was indeed a Jesuit, it seemed he also took on some Franciscan modes, including a connection with the environment and environmentalism. I can identify with that as a Carmelite, as both Franciscans and Carmelites desire "littleness." Something that struck me is that while he was archbishop, he used to get the newspaper before boarding the bus (or train) every day, then at the end of the week he would return the rubber bands to the newspaper man. That is a Carmelite "little way of environmental healing"—no action too small when done out of love because, as Mother Teresa said, our love makes it infinite.
Lynn Vincentnathan

The choice to follow Christ's poor is one of the most difficult choices to make, while also being the path that can bring one closest to him. Those who walk that path go through experiences that often escape language in their alienation from others. We are so fortunate to have those who exemplify this love of God and obedience to his will in this particular way—as outlined in the Spiritual Exercises—as models of discipleship for us to follow.
Edward Michel Gomeau

My family lived in Buenos Aires for several years. My father's name was Francis. I chose Francis as my confirmation name. The gender difference didn't matter to me; St. Francis of Assisi was my patron saint. Since I was a rather stubborn 10-year-old, the nuns and my parents were not about to argue with me! When the election results were announced and Pope Francis' chosen name was revealed, I was overcome and cried tears of joy. His preaching throughout his papacy brought me closer to the Catholic Church than I have been since childhood. His kindness and mercy made even non-Catholics—and certainly those of us who have fallen away—feel loved, accepted, forgiven and blessed. I thank the Lord for this pope coming during my lifetime, and I know in my heart that we will have another St. Francis. Thank you for this thoughtful and helpful tribute to our beloved pope.
Sue Erdman

I remember thinking, "He gets it" when I first heard Pope Francis speak. For years after, I drove around with a bumper sticker that said "This Pope Gives Me Hope." In 2023 I became a member of the Catholic Church. I will always remember him, and I am grateful for the spark he ignited in my heart.
Hilary Barboza

Of all the praise and criticism I have read about Pope Francis, this beautiful piece best expresses who Francis was and why he was as he was. It has been a privilege to live during his papacy. I knew the moment he came out on the balcony on that March 13 and humbly asked the people to pray for him, to bless him before he blessed them, that we had a special gift from the Holy Spirit.
Teresita Scully

A common comment that I've heard about Francis since his passing: "He made me uncomfortable the way he spoke." My response is always: "That was his job, especially as a Jesuit." We often want to be comfortable in our thoughts. To be uncomfortable just goes against the grain. To grow in our faith requires our being uncomfortable. Thank you, Francis.
Stephen Healy

A Pope of Monumental Surprises

A perfect Roman day dawned on Saturday, April 26, the morning the Catholic Church laid to rest our beloved Pope Francis. Below a sky of brilliant blue, a crowd of more than 250,000 gathered to bid farewell to an extraordinary pope. Embraced in the arms of Bernini's imposing colonnade and facing Maderno's facade of St. Peter's Basilica, the congregation in the square and the millions following from afar were greeted by the Vatican's Baroque splendor in all that glorious light.

The world's eyes, however, were focused not on architectural glories or nature's bounty but on a simple wooden box before them: the coffin of the 266th pope of the Roman Catholic Church.

Pope Francis was taken to his earthly rest in a stirring ceremony rich with tradition but also one with reminders of the simplicity he preferred—and which he requested for his own funeral. It was a poignant final note that the leader of a worldwide congregation of 1.4 billion believers was also first and foremost a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. The church no longer proclaims *sic transit gloria mundi* upon the election of a pope, but Francis clearly believed it: Our focus, that simple coffin emblazoned with a cross said, is ultimately on Christ, not on the passing glories of this world.

At this writing, the conclave that will elect his successor has just begun, but we must take the time to reflect on a revolutionary papacy, one inflected by lights and shadows as always, but more than anything defined by a sense of movement.

In a speech to his fellow cardinals before the 2013 conclave that ended with his election, then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio said, "The church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries." Under the first Latin American pope, it did. Francis reached away from the powerful and toward the marginalized; he moved the papacy away from the Apostolic Palace and toward simplicity; and he pushed the Roman Curia away from a centuries-old primacy of its office for doctrine toward an embrace of synodality and evangelization.

From the moment he first emerged on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, eschewing the papal mozzetta and pausing to ask for the prayer of the people in the square, Francis garnered widespread love—an affection that was cemented in the early months of his papacy, when he chose to live in a modest apartment and asked, during one of the freewheeling airplane press conferences that would become his hallmark, "Who am I to judge?" He was often called "the world's parish priest" for his pastoral style, one clearly grounded in people's personal experiences. It was a style that valued popular piety, embodying the Argentine "theology of the people" in which he was formed as a young Jesuit and as the archbishop of Buenos Aires.

Still, the personal edification many drew from Pope Francis did not always translate into a trust in his institutional reforms, in part because, as Francis often said himself, he was more focused on "starting processes" than "occupying spaces." A case in point was the Synod on Synodality, which aimed to shift the church from a centralized, top-down structure to a more participatory one. Francis saw this as the next step in implementing the reforms of the Second Vatican Council: making laypeople the protagonists of evangelization. But its own complicated and interlocking structures, including an implementation phase that is still ongoing, have varying levels of buy-in across the church and within the college of bishops.

If the synod did not fully move the church beyond the "self-referentiality" Francis warned against before the conclave that elected him, he made much more progress toward that goal when it came to his outreach to the world. Beginning with his 2013 visit to Lampedusa soon after his election, Francis highlighted migration as the defining issue of our time. He won fans in developing nations and earned ire from wealthy ones with his criticisms of an unequal world order—one in which the poor faced the ecological consequences of wealthy nations' exploitation without receiving proportional economic benefits. His constant stress was on a renewal of our lives through the values and message of the Gospel. Nowhere was this seen more clearly than in his landmark 2013 apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium" and his encyclical "Laudato Si'."

What will come next?

Pope Francis leaves his successor with a number of tasks he began but was not able to bring to completion. Among them are two that were pivotal in his own election: the reform of the Vatican bureaucracy and a more effective response to the abuse crisis. While he accomplished a significant cleanup of Vatican finances, achieving a sustainable budget and furthering constitutional reform of Curial departments will be left to the next pope. Similarly, while Francis made legislative reforms that provide a framework for greater accountability for how bishops deal with abuse in the church, he did not enact those processes frequently or thoroughly enough for them to be

well-tested.

Another major task for Francis' successor—one unforeseeable in 2013—is to determine what it means for synodality to be, as the synthesis document that Francis adopted into his own magisterium describes, a "constitutive dimension of the church."

Francis often said that his approach to reform prioritized changing hearts and cultures before imposing structural changes. Likewise, his changes to the papacy were most notable in his pastoral approach rather than in consolidating reforms of its structures. But he would almost certainly say that our hearts and cultures need to continue changing in order to make any structural reform possible or worthwhile. He would ask us to continue giving ourselves to the culture of encounter.

"Despite his frailty and suffering towards the end, Pope Francis chose to follow this path of self-giving until the last day of his earthly life," said Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re in his homily at Francis' funeral. "He followed in the footsteps of his Lord, the Good Shepherd, who loved his sheep to the point of giving his life for them. And he did so with strength and serenity."

Francis chose to be entombed not in St. Peter's, the traditional resting place of popes, but in the Basilica of St. Mary Major. The journey of his coffin, in the same white popemobile that he had ridden through St. Peter's Square for the last time one week earlier, surrounded by his flock along the ancient papal route through Rome to that final resting place was perhaps the most poignant moment of his funeral. The final words of "In Paradisum," the church's traditional antiphon sung for the dead on the way to their final resting place, might offer the words that are the most fitting farewell to a man whose pastoral love we were graced to witness:

> *May choirs of angels receive you*
> *and with Lazarus, once a poor man,*
> *may you have eternal rest.*

Grazie, Francesco. We are blessed to have walked with you.

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What Pope Francis taught us: Church teaching finds clarity in acts of mercy

Shortly after the death of Pope Francis, Archbishop Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York was invited onto "The Today Show" and asked what he would look for in the conclave when selecting a new pontiff. His response was characteristically chipper: While he hoped for someone with the "warmth, heart and smile" of Francis, he also wished to see "more clarity in teaching, more refinement of the church's tradition, more digging in the treasures of the past to remind us what Jesus expects of us."

Cardinal Dolan's prioritization of clarity echoes a common criticism of Francis—namely, that Francis was not explicit, consistent or even dogmatically faithful enough in expressing the church's creedal and moral teachings. For most in the church and most in the hierarchy, Francis was easy to love, even though some who trusted him were frustrated by his seeming imprecision. A smaller contingent, however, delivered this criticism as a protest against a pontiff whom they could not or would not understand.

Within the church's "magisterium," or teaching office, the pope, along with the college of bishops, is entrusted with the task of safeguarding the deposit of faith. So the desire for more clarity in teaching from the successor of Peter seems like it could only be a good thing. But before accepting the framing that a lack of clarity was a particular failing of Pope Francis, it is worth thinking more carefully about what he was deeply clear about and how he worked to protect the teaching of the church.

While moral and creedal beliefs are essential to Catholic teaching, the splitting of doctrinal propositions from the embodied witness of the teacher himself misunderstands the role of the magisterium and the particular lessons the church has learned from Francis' pontificate. Specifically, the focus on propositional and moral clarity misses how the teaching office of the magisterium was exercised by Pope Francis as an integrated, holistic pedagogy in living relationship with one's disciples.

Francis' style of teaching is closer to the experience of entering into intense friendship and, yes, even love, than attending a lecture or learning a curriculum. Jesus, the master teacher, never began with formal dilemmas, theological lectures or doctrinal tests. To the contrary, the Gospels depict his critics using such methods to ensnare him. Instead Jesus offers his entire person to those he encounters. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, two of the disciples ask Jesus, "Teacher, where are you staying?" Rather than give an answer, Jesus gives an invitation: "Come, and you will see." The disciples learn even more because they "stayed with him that day."

Francis' critics wrongly assume that his warmth, affection and informality could somehow impede or confuse the content of his teaching. Yet to oppose doctrinal clarity to Francis' joyful smile is to forget something vital about what his papacy offered the church. He was exceptionally clear about the spiritual dangers of prioritizing the wrong kind of clarity at the expense of the mercy at the heart of the Gospel.

In his magisterial role, Francis corrected several mistakes about the nature of church teaching, and he did so with profound clarity and force. Church teaching is not primarily abstract and intellectual, which would reduce it to merely another ideology. Nor is it a way to escape questioning, risk, ambiguity or dissent. The church's teachings cannot be passed along well without a certain vulnerability on the part of the teacher, which includes in some circumstances a willingness to draw close to people's uncertainty and varying situations even at the risk of scandalizing some who see such closeness as moral indifference rather than mercy.

In the Catholic view, truth is an embodied encounter, not simply a downloading of information. "I am the Truth," Jesus says. But the notion of a living and breathing truth seems strange to us because of the modern picture of humans as disembodied minds or intellects that contain ideas, a recurrent philosophical temptation from Descartes to Kant.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a glimpse of a different possibility. It explains that the magisterium is entrusted with the task of guaranteeing "the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus the pastoral duty of the magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abide in the truth that liberates" (No. 890). Truth is something we live in.

Over the last 12 years, Francis has taught the church that the experience of truth is not only about learning answers to questions but about learning how to enter into dialogue, one in which the questions run in both directions. We do not have an experience of truth when we are mere recipients of a monologue; rather, dialogue invites one into a relationship. Clarity and refinement of church teaching are not ends in themselves. They are necessary and laudable—but because they are means to the end of abiding in truth, not because they are the truth themselves.

One of the most systemic mistakes exposed by Francis is what he called a kind of gnosticism, or the habit of prioritizing knowledge and intellectual definitions over authentic

moral and spiritual transformation. As Francis wrote in "Evangelii Gaudium," gnosticism is "a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings.... [I]nstead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying" (No. 94).

Such a conception of teaching is sometimes found in the academy but sprouts up within the church, too. When this happens, the church becomes not unlike an endless seminar in which the superior knowledge of the teacher, or the competition of students for attention, becomes the main event.

In Francis' vision, by contrast, Catholic teaching does not simply inform but also transforms. He developed an approach to the magisterium that entered into encounter with his hearers, ultimately seeking not only knowledge but mercy and healing. He had a kind of genius for teaching in this way, as is evidenced in the moment where he spoke to a young boy who asked if his atheist father was in heaven. Loving those whom one teaches requires taking into account their personal histories, desires, dreams, ambitions, political preoccupations, health, economic situation and even their sense of beauty.

A masterful teacher like Francis enters into the open questions, wounds and traumas of others without fear. This can be risky: It always seems safer to take the modern disembodied route and deliver another lecture. The alternative is to enter into what Msgr. Luigi Giussani famously referred to as "the risk of education."

CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano

Pope Francis kisses the foot of an inmate on April 13, 2018, at Paliano prison outside of Rome.

A few decades before Francis, Giussani saw that Christian education was losing its force precisely by assuming a narrowly "rationalistic framework, which neglects the important fact that existential engagement is a necessary condition for one to have a genuine experience of truth, and, therefore, to have a conviction."

The biggest risk of Catholic teaching is the same one that we take when we venture into the deepest of life's relationships: the risk of sharing one's entire existence, and the possibility of being misunderstood, humiliated and even forcefully rejected. A near-absolute prioritization of clarity offers a comfortable but illusory invulnerability. It reduces the living demands of Christian witness to a moral and theological system long since worked out and only requiring defense from lofty battlements and against obvious enemies. But Francis the teacher had the courage to remain open, to let his guard down, even as he taught the church and in the face of the vocal doubts of others.

Christians cannot teach mercy and love as propositional truths without living mercy and love as a concrete relationship with those they encounter—let alone those they instruct. Over and over again, Jesus first offered a friendship to those he met, despite their false ideas—the woman at the well, the rich young man, Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus. He never first demanded their assent to an abstract code.

In the last hours before his death, Francis left a final, unmistakable sign about the meaning of the magisterium. In dangerously poor health, struggling to breathe and speak, he resisted the counsel of his advisors to stay indoors. He insisted on traveling outside to greet the faithful at Easter, even at his own mortal danger.

Francis taught the church, in short, that the magisterium finds its clarity not merely in propositions but in acts of mercy. His words from 2013 ring even more powerfully today: "I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security."

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Pope Francis pushed the U.S. church to move beyond the culture wars—with mixed results

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

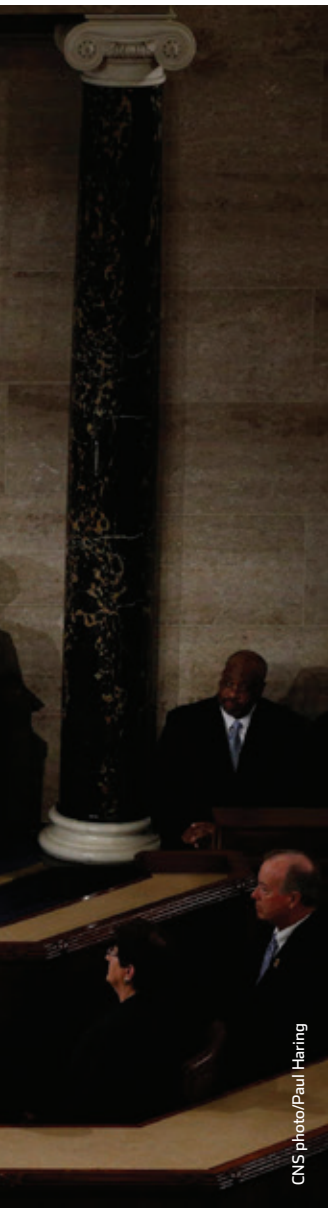
When Pope Francis visited the United States in 2015, crowds lined the streets to greet him in Washington, New York and Philadelphia. He prayed with bishops, visited prisoners and spoke to a joint meeting of Congress. But the day he departed, one story dominated the headlines: a meeting with a controversial former county clerk who had denied wedding licenses to same-sex couples in Kentucky.

While Francis had planned his first and only visit to the United States to call attention to issues like migration, climate change and interfaith dialogue, individuals involved in the seemingly never-ending U.S. culture wars sought to co-opt the pope's popularity for their battles. The Vatican scrambled to explain that Francis was unaware of the full biographies of the individuals he had briefly greeted and then tried to move the focus back to the marginalized.

Pope Francis, who died on April 21 at age 88, was overwhelmingly popular with ordinary Catholics in the United States. But Francis' priorities often failed to take root here, and he was unable to move the U.S. church away from culture wars and toward what the late pope called the "field hospital" for the most vulnerable.

Still, the pope's supporters say Francis will be remembered for his efforts to reorient the church away from historic seats of power and out toward the peripheries, as well as to make room for difficult conversations about the contemporary church.

"Francis had an uphill battle almost from the very


CNS photo/Paul Haring

Pope Francis addresses Congress on Sept. 24, 2015.

start," said David Gibson, the director of the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham University. "At a certain point, he didn't quite give up but just sort of shrugged his shoulders and said, 'The church will be what it will be; it's up to the Holy Spirit.'"

Mr. Gibson, a longtime Vatican commentator and journalist, noted that the challenges Francis encountered in trying to make his mark on the U.S. church included decades of episcopal appointments by his two predecessors, a numerically shrinking priesthood and "a culture of culture war that has shaped and framed everything in the U.S. church."

"So when Pope Francis came along, it was as though he was literally speaking a different language, a language of mercy and outreach and evangelization that they couldn't understand," Mr. Gibson said.

Difficulties aside, enthusiasm for Francis among U.S. Catholics remained high throughout his pontificate. The percentage of U.S. Catholics who said they held a favorable opinion of Pope Francis regularly hovered around 80 percent. The pope's relationship with the nation's church leaders was sometimes more frosty.

Francis himself seemed to acknowledge this dynamic, saying in 2023 that "a very strong reactionary attitude" existed in the United States, which he said was "organized and shapes the way people belong, even emotionally."

He called this posture "backward-looking" and warned that when it takes hold, "ideologies replace faith."

Bishops and other leaders sometimes criticized the pope publicly, especially those who took offense at the pope's stinging remarks about the rigidity of young priests or his denunciation of runaway capitalism. Other critics lamented that Francis was not clear in upholding church teaching strongly enough on issues like homosexuality or abortion. But Kathleen Sprows Cummings, a professor of American studies and history at the University of Notre Dame, said Pope Francis simply tried to bring attention to other issues that sometimes failed to attract the same kind of passion among some U.S. Catholics.

In 2024, Donald Trump, campaigning partly on a pledge to undertake the largest deportation effort in U.S. history, won an estimated 54 percent of the Catholic vote in his successful bid to return to the White House. Later, Francis implicitly admonished Vice President JD Vance, a convert to Catholicism, over comments he made supporting the Trump administration's immigration policies.

Professor Sprows Cummings noted that Francis did not waver when it came to speaking out in defense of migrants. "What John Paul II tried to do for the unborn, Pope Francis has tried to do for migrants," she said.

The pope's focus on migration was often centered on Europe, where record levels of migrants sought refuge over the last decade. But Francis occasionally entered the fraught debate in the United States as well, including during a visit to the U.S.-Mexico border amid the 2016 presidential campaign. Standing on a platform in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, Francis faced El Paso, Tex., and silently prayed for those who had lost their lives trying to make their way north.

The visit, and subsequent comments from the pope about how "a person who thinks only about building walls... is not Christian," led to a spat with then-candidate Trump, who said it was "disgraceful" for the pope to question his religious faith. The two would eventually meet in Rome at St. Peter's the following year.

A Disconnect With U.S. Church?

Even though Francis was able to appoint many U.S. bishops, his vision for the church did not take hold among church leaders. Research conducted in 2023 by The Catholic Project, a national study of Catholic priests, showed that young priests in the United States identified as politically "very conservative" or "conservative" at much higher rates than older priests. Other surveys and analyses find that at the same time, on a number of social and ecclesial issues U.S. Catholics overall are becoming more liberal.

Francis also used harsh language when talking about young priests and seminarians who favored more traditional styles of worship and spirituality, frequently calling them "rigid." That kind of characterization led the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2023, Archbishop Timothy Broglio, to give a strong defense of young priests during his address to bishops, calling young seminarians "a sign of hope for the future."

In an interview with **America** that year, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the papal nuncio to the United States, noted, "There are some priests and religious and bishops who are terribly against Francis, as if he was the scapegoat

Pope Francis greets children outside Our Lady Queen of Angels School in East Harlem during his visit to New York on Sept. 25, 2015.

[for] all the failures of the church or of society."

Cardinal Blase Cupich, previously the bishop of Spokane, Wash., was the first major bishop's appointment in the United States by Pope Francis. Upon his surprise appointment as archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Cupich immediately became a leader in the U.S. church.

Cardinal Cupich said Francis will be remembered "as someone who has helped us reconnect with each other in terms of our common destiny," highlighting the pope's commitment to the spiritual life, his advocacy for environmental protections and his "care for people who live at the margins."

"If there's a word that he has helped us recover, it's 'together,' that we are all in this together," Cardinal Cupich said.

As younger people drift from religion more broadly, it is possible that those who might agree with the pope's moral stances on questions like immigration, economic justice and the climate may not be active in church. But Cardinal Cupich said he is confident that in the long run, Francis will be shown to have been an influential pope.

"I think that because what he has said is true, and the truth will always win out," he said.

While Francis won accolades in some quarters because of his focus on migration, his outreach to the L.G.B.T. Catholic community and his diversification of the College of Cardinals, even his supporters in the United States say he had blind spots, especially when it came to his handling of sexual abuse by priests and the cover-up of it by bishops.

While Pope Francis created a Vatican office to deal with abusive priests and implemented a process to hold bishops accountable, critics said the reforms lacked institutional support to carry out their objectives.

'A Breath of Fresh Air'

"For individuals who already felt in their hearts that they wanted to be welcoming, but who also felt that the church required them to be the opposite, Pope Francis made them feel that they had permission to be welcoming," said Yunuen Trujillo, a lay minister and author of *L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics: A Guide to Inclusive Ministry*.

Pope Francis made outreach to the L.G.B.T. Catholic community a priority of his papacy, regularly meeting with members of the community and even going so far as to allow priests to bless Catholics in same-sex relationships and to declare that transgender people had a right to serve as godparents. There were also occasional moments when L.G.B.T. Catholics felt let down by the pope, including when the Vatican released a document on human dignity in 2024 that listed "gender theory" among other threats to human dignity, like war and poverty.

But Ms. Trujillo said that overall, she viewed the pope's legacy as positive for L.G.B.T. Catholics in the United States. "Everything that Pope Francis has tried to do, it's been a breath of fresh air. It has opened doors to allow many of us to talk about these issues more publicly," she said.

If there was one lesson Pope Francis tried to teach the church, it was to remember the poor, urging Catholics to strive to be "a church that is poor and for the poor." Catholic leaders in the United States said that the pope's vision regarding the poor took root here, though it will take generations to manifest itself.

Kerry Robinson, the president and chief executive officer of Catholic Charities USA, pointed to the pope's address to Congress in 2015 as an example of how committed Francis was to highlighting the plight of the poor, even when addressing the powerful.

"Beyond merely pointing out the growing inequity in our midst, he repeatedly and beautifully articulated a strategy for addressing it: Embrace a culture of accompaniment," Ms. Robinson said. "Pope Francis taught us to encounter and accompany those who are suffering in our midst in meaningful, purposeful and sustained ways."

"He will be remembered," she said, "as a pope for whom mercy is integral to Christian integrity."

Michael J. O'Loughlin *is the executive director of Outreach.*

How Pope Francis expanded roles for women in the church


CNS photo/Pablo Esparza

Pope Francis greets Sister Chantal Desmarais, a member of the Sisters of Charity of St. Mary and a synod delegate from Canada, at the Vatican on Oct. 4, 2024.

As Pope Francis' legacy is debated, one key area for examination will be his advancements of women in the Vatican: whether his changes were sufficient and whether they will last.

Undoubtedly, Francis appointed more women to positions of authority, most notably in 2025, when he appointed both the first female prefect (the top position) of a Vatican dicastery and the first female president of the Vatican City's government. Still, progress was slow, at times marked by embarrassing gaffes; to some observers, it stood in tension with his opposition to ordaining women to the priesthood or diaconate.

Francis' reforms with respect to the roles of women in the church are best understood through his reform of the Roman Curia's constitution in 2022, when he officially separated the power of governance in the Vatican from the sacramental power conferred on a man by holy orders. His distinction between these two kinds of authority in the church is the key to understanding his promotion of women to roles previously held only by cardinals and bishops without making women cardinals and bishops.

The Vatican Francis leaves behind looks very different from the one he was elected to lead in 2013. In addition to appointing the first woman prefect of a dicastery and president of the city-state's government, Francis appointed the first woman secretary (the number-two role in a dicastery) and several women undersecretaries, both religious and lay.

A review of the numbers shows an increase in the proportion of women working in the Vatican under Francis—from 17 percent of Vatican employees in 2010 to 24 percent in 2019—and an acceleration in the appointments of women to medium-high positions like undersecretary, from three in 2009 to eight in 2019. Still, women remain a minority of employees in the Vatican, and even more so in its leadership.

Despite his strong and often-stated opposition to ordaining women to the priesthood or the diaconate, Pope Francis did officially open several lay ministry roles to women, though women had served in many of them unofficially for years.

In 2021, Francis allowed women to be officially installed as lectors and acolytes for the first time, although they often held that role without a formal installation; that same year, he created the official lay ministry of catechist, a role primarily held by women. This decision followed the Synod on Amazonia, which, in part, sought a solution to the shortage of priests in the rainforest region, where many Catholic communities were led by female catechists.

Francis' openness to women in ministry, however, did not extend to ordained roles, although he allowed debate about this topic in official church spaces in a way that previous popes had not.

Francis strongly opposed women's ordination, often warning that ordaining women would not end clericalism but would instead "clericalize" women.

Asked to justify the ban on female priests, Francis often invoked the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar's concept of the so-called Marian and Petrine ministries in the church, arguing that women, like Mary, are meant to serve the church in a motherly role, whereas men, like Peter, are given the duty of ordained institutional leadership.

While Francis stated clearly that he would not ordain a woman to the diaconate, he endorsed the Synod on Synodality's final document, which said that the debate should continue. He oversaw two separate commissions on women deacons, both of which were confidential.

While Francis opened doors to women in church leadership, he faced criticism for the way he spoke about women, often relying on what critics saw as outdated ideas of gender complementarity and a vague, undefined idea of a "female mystique." He was often criticized for speaking about women's roles primarily as wives and mothers.

How women's progress in the Vatican will continue depends on several factors: Francis' successor's willingness to push forward despite resistance, the female appointees' willingness to continue in what are often unforgiving roles and the slowly eroding (to borrow the words of Sister Nathalie Becquart, the synod undersecretary) "patriarchal mindset" of the Vatican. Ultimately, only the long view of history will show whether the Francis papacy represented a shattering of the church's "stained-glass ceiling" or only the breaking of a few of its panes.

Colleen Dulle, *associate editor.*

On migration, taxes, nuclear disarmament and more: Gauging the Francis effect

Pope Francis releases a dove outside the Basilica of St. Nicholas in Bari, Italy, in July 2018.

Pope Francis' consistent, compassionate attention to migration has been well known from the earliest days of his pontificate. And his efforts to promote integral development and ecology were also clear from the beginning. "Laudato Si'," published in 2015, offered a vision of a global economic order that placed care for creation and the human person at the forefront.

But other global issues of concern to Francis were more obscure, like tax fairness, his support for *tierra, techo y trabajo* ("land, lodging and labor") efforts, just and sustainable development, the equitable distribution of global wealth, and his growing anxiety over the rise of autonomous (A.I.) weapons systems.

Eric LeCompte is the executive director of Jubilee USA Network, a global debt relief advocacy group. The pope's predecessors, St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, he said, shared many of his views "regarding inequality, tax and debt, and how those issues impact the poor." But Pope Francis was able to shine a light on these issues as few world leaders have been able to, he said.

What distinguished Francis was his poignant, personal experience with the issues of poverty and debt justice, Mr. LeCompte said. As a Jesuit and archbishop in Argentina, Pope Francis "saw directly how the impacts of unfair financial policies make poverty worse and create more difficult global challenges." Pope Francis unabashedly talked about the injustice of tax evasion, tax fraud and tax avoidance, acts that in the end mean that in a world of wealth and abundance, "we don't have the resources to deal with poverty."

Among the pope's final acts was the declaration of 2025 as a Jubilee Year that would include a focus on addressing the immiserating debt burden of poor nations as a new global debt crisis looms. The pope consistently pointed out, Mr. LeCompte said, that in historical terms the earth's riches have been extracted from the world's vulnerable peoples and delivered to the affluent West, while powerless states imported poverty, ecological ruin and debt. Addressing those historic inequities through a practical, persisting debt jubilee process, the pope insisted, would be a measure of justice, not an act of charity.

The pope also returned the church's focus to nuclear disarmament and peacemaking, frequently decrying the global arms trade and urging the end of conflict and a return to dialogue in the Middle East, South Sudan and Ukraine. The Vatican under Francis turned a spotlight on what had been the arcane issue of autonomous weapons systems, which hold the potential to allow missile and drone targeting to be done by artificial intelligence without the intervention of human decision-makers.

"Pope Francis said the dramatic things that had to be said about nuclear weapons," Mary Ellen O'Connell, a professor of law at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, recalled. The church has, since "Pacem in Terris" in 1963, condemned the use of nuclear weapons as inherently immoral owing to their indiscriminate and potentially earth-ending destructive power. But in an address in Hiroshima in November 2019, Pope Francis declared the mere possession of nuclear weapons also morally indefensible.

"Previously, the church had the position that nuclear deterrence essentially could be allowed as long as countries were working toward disarmament," Alicia Sanders-Zakre, a policy coordinator for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, recalled. "But Pope Francis really saw the state of the world as it was and recognized that deterrence is inherently destabilizing," she said, "that as long as nuclear weapons exist, the countries that possess them are investing billions of dollars into weapons of mass destruction instead of taking care of their people."

"He made it very clear that deterrence is wrong-headed," Dr. O'Connell remembered, because it runs the risk of accidental detonations or unintentionally triggering a nuclear exchange and relies on untested theories about human behavior (the "mutually assured destruction" gambit) that could end in mass suffering and destruction.

"It took someone from the Global South who didn't live in a country with nuclear weapons to say to everyone else that the emperor has no clothes. 'You've built this incredibly expensive, problematic construct on a myth, on an empirical fallacy, and it's got to end.'"

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*

J.D. Long García

Pilgrims line up behind Rome's Basilica of St. Mary Major to pay their respects at Pope Francis' tomb.

Pilgrims from around the world visit Pope Francis' tomb

Pope Francis was laid to rest on April 26 in Rome's Basilica of St. Mary Major in a tomb, according to his wishes, "in the earth; simple, without special decoration and with the only inscription: *Franciscus*." Catholics and non-Catholics from around the world have been lining up at the tomb to pay their respects to their beloved pope.

Pedro Barcelone, a 16-year-old from Córdoba, Argentina, wanted to visit the resting place of the first pope from his home country. He said Francis' charisma helped the pope connect with young people.

His grandmother, Graciela Rios, stood next to him. "He was one of the few voices that stood up for the vulnerable, who spoke with sensitivity amid so much craziness, a voice for peace, a voice that was valiant and heard," she said. "We have lost an Argentinian, but I believe he will continue to guide us."

Anna Basquez waited to pay her respects with her friend, Patrick Dunne. Ms. Basquez is a Catholic journalist who covered Pope Francis' visits to Dublin, Philadelphia, Juárez and Fátima.

"He's a pope of mercy, a pope for the poor," she said. "I respected how he was so in tune with his community in Argentina and with humanity."

Mr. Dunne, who arrived from Dublin, said he "came to a beautiful city, with a beautiful girl to pay his respects to a beautiful man who gave a damn, especially for the people who needed to be given a damn about."

João Beto Bettencourt and his brother Igor came to Rome from Brazil for the canonization of Blessed Carlo Acutis, postponed because of the death of the pope. They attended Pope Francis' funeral Mass and wanted to pay their respects at the pope's tomb.

"He was a great man," Mr. Bettencourt said. "He defended many causes, especially for the poor. He loved Brazil, and Brazil loved him."

J.D. Long García, *senior editor.*

How Francis Changed the Church

The first Jesuit pope was a champion of Vatican II, inclusion and the poor

By Gerard O'Connell

When the cardinals voted to elect Jorge Mario Bergoglio as the 265th successor of St. Peter on the evening of March 13, 2013, few of them imagined what kind of pope he would be. They surprised the world by electing the first Latin American and first-ever Jesuit pope. But the 76-year-old archbishop of Buenos Aires surprised them in even bigger ways from the moment of his election by choosing a name no previous pope had dared to take—Francis. He continued to surprise them right up to the very end of his 12-year pontificate.

His death on April 21, 2025, concluded a momentous and at times turbulent papacy that both supporters and detractors of the pontiff would agree has changed the church in significant ways.

On the night of his election, the world quickly discovered that Francis was not only a spiritual, humble man, but he was also an inspiring leader with a fearlessness that had been forged during the years of military dictatorship in his homeland of Argentina.

His first public appearance on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica soon after his election revealed that he possessed a sense of humor and a gift for communicating by word and deed in ways that reached people's hearts. No pope in recorded history had bowed down before the crowd in St. Peter's Square and asked them to pray to God to bless him before he imparted his first blessing to them.

Elected after the historic resignation of

Pope Francis waves from the popemobile as he greets people in St. Peter's Square before celebrating his inaugural Mass at the Vatican on March 19, 2013.

CNS photo/Paul Haring

No pope in recorded history had bowed down before the crowd in St. Peter's Square.

Pope Benedict XVI, Francis invited people during that first appearance to pray for his predecessor and spoke to him by phone immediately afterward. It was the start of a unique relationship between the Argentinian-born bishop of Rome and his German predecessor that has no precedent in the 2,000-year history of the church. The relationship survived until Benedict's death, notwithstanding determined but failed efforts by those who opposed Francis to bring Benedict XVI onto their bandwagon.

At the time of the conclave, Francis was widely recognized as the leader of the Latin American church, following the central role he played at the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM) held at Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007.

With Francis, the rich theological vision that had developed in Latin America in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and had found its richest expression in the final Aparecida document now came to center stage on the See of Peter, offering a whole new missionary vision from the Global South to the worldwide Catholic Church. He presented the church as a pilgrim people that goes out to the peripheries, both geographical and existential, a field hospital that works for reconciliation and healing, a community that promotes peace and solidarity.

Dismantling the Papal Court

From the moment he took office, Francis astounded Vatican officials as he began to dispense with the trappings of worldly power and status that had been features of the papal court for centuries. He refused the gold cross and ring and the papal mozzetta, the short cape previous popes had worn. On his first morning as pope, he insisted on riding in a small economy car, not the papal limousine, and without police escort to the Basilica of St. Mary Major to pray before the revered icon of Our Lady, Protectress of the Roman People. Afterward, he went to pay his bill at the Vatican residence for clergy where he had resided before the conclave.

Weeks later he made the shocking announcement that, unlike his predecessors in the 20th century, he would not reside in the papal apartment of the apostolic palace but would remain instead in a small three-room suite in Santa Marta, the Vatican guesthouse where the cardinals had sojourned during the conclave.

On his first Sunday as pope, greeting the vast crowd in St. Peter's Square and a global audience following on television and social media, Francis introduced a central theme of his pontificate: God's mercy. He had first experienced this mercy in a quasi-mystical way at the age of 17 when he went to confession in a church in Buenos Aires and saw himself as a sinner to whom God showed mercy like Jesus had shown to Matthew, the tax collector—*Miserando atque eligendo* ("Mercifully, he chose him"). He chose those same words for his episcopal and papal coat of arms.

On the second anniversary of his election, Francis announced an extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. Breaking with eight centuries of tradition, he opened the Jubilee in the cathedral of Bangui, the capital of the war-torn Central African Republic, on Nov. 29, 2015.

His insistence on mercy throughout his pontificate and his call to priests to always be merciful in the confessional drew opposition from some bishops, priests and others in the church who viewed morality, especially in sexual matters, in black-and-white terms.

The opposition went public at the two-part Synod on the Family (2014-15) over discussions about the pastoral approach to persons in irregular situations in terms of church law. It became even more intense in some quarters after the publication of "Amoris Laetitia," his 2016 post-synodal exhortation that suggested a path for Catholics who had remarried after a divorce to receive Communion under certain circumstances. This led five cardinals to publicly demand that he respond to their "dubia," or questions on the issue of Communion for the divorced and remarried, but Francis refused to answer questions framed in a "yes" or "no" format.

The World's Parish Priest

While ever conscious of his authority as pope, Francis considered himself first and foremost as "the world's parish priest," as he confided to me soon after his election when I visited him in his apartment at Santa Marta. He was always a pastor at heart and remained so to the end. He revealed this in myriad ways as pope by reaching out with tenderness and compassion to persons grieving or in great difficulty. He invited many to come to talk with him; he contacted others by phone or with a handwritten note. The world still knows little of Francis' pastoral ministry from Santa Marta, and his accompaniment of countless people over these years. I experienced this in the way he accompa-

Bergoglio family photo via AP, File

AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko, file

Left: Jorge Mario Bergoglio, left, and his brother Oscar in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Right: Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio celebrates Mass outside the Church of San Cayetano, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Aug. 7, 2009.

nied my own family.

Pope Francis was an inspiring preacher. His homilies, deeply rooted in the Gospels and always centered on Jesus, were spiritual masterpieces, accessible not only to the learned but to those with little or no education. He brought the Gospels to life and constantly encouraged people to read them.

In accordance with the phrase often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, he believed in preaching the Gospel "by actions and, if necessary, by words." Thus, for example, he embraced a man whose face was disfigured from neurofibromatosis in St. Peter's Square in November 2013. Another iconic instance of this was his standing alone in a rain-drenched St. Peter's Square on March 27, 2020, pleading with God to save humanity from Covid-19.

Francis was the son of Italian immigrants to Argentina and, not surprisingly, he was ever attentive to the plight of migrants. By the time of his election, involuntary migration had become the most serious humanitarian crisis since World War II. He sought ways to alert the world to this unfolding tragedy and used his first trip outside the Vatican to visit the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, on July 8, 2013. There, denouncing "the globalization of indifference," he threw a wreath into the Mediterranean Sea in memory of the thousands of migrants who had drowned in it on the perilous journey from North Africa to Europe.

Throughout his pontificate, he pleaded with governments, including multiple U.S. administrations, to respond with generosity and humanity to the refugees and migrants knocking on their doors.

In the same vein, he continued what he had been doing as archbishop in Buenos Aires: combating human trafficking. He sought to alert governments and public opinion to this "crime against humanity."

The Poor at the Center

Before the conclave, most cardinals knew Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio as a man deeply committed to the poor who frequented the shantytowns of Buenos Aires. When he met the international press on March 16, 2013, he revealed that he had chosen the name Francis after the Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes whispered in his ear as the votes were being counted, "Do not forget the poor." He told the press, "How I would like a church which is poor and for the poor!"

For Francis, the poor are "at the heart of the Gospel," and throughout his pontificate, he affirmed this by deed and word. He transformed the hitherto quasi-invisible office of papal almoner into a creative, daring expression of his concern for the poor by appointing a Polish monsignor, Konrad Krajewski, whom he later made cardinal, to head that office. He encouraged him to find ways to assist the

CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano

Pope Francis waves to the crowd as he appears for the first time on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on March 13, 2013.

needy around St. Peter's and had him install showers for the poor under the arcades in St. Peter's Square and provide medical services for them.

To ensure that the poor would remain at the center of the church's attention, Francis established the World Day of the Poor on Nov. 20, 2016, and decreed that henceforth it be celebrated every year in Catholic churches worldwide.

Francis linked "the cry of the poor" to "the cry of creation" as evidenced by the dramatic effects of climate change. He gave powerful expression to this in his historic and widely acclaimed encyclical "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home." The document was published on June 18, 2015, the eve of the United Nations-sponsored Paris Conference on Climate Change (COP21), and is recognized as having influenced several delegations.

Seven years later, on Oct. 4, 2023, on the eve of another U.N. conference on climate change, COP28 in Dubai, he issued a follow-up document to that encyclical, in the form of an apostolic exhortation called "Laudate Deum."

Advocating for the poor, Francis called for a new type of economics, one that puts the human person, not profit, at the center. His trenchant criticism of capitalism caused some to denounce him as a communist or Marxist, but that did not deter him; he repeatedly insisted that he was simply proclaiming the church's social doctrine.

Seeking Conversion

Francis was an outsider to the Vatican when elected pope. He had never studied in Rome, and as archbishop of Buenos Aires, he visited the Vatican only when strictly necessary, even after being made a cardinal. His inclusive, nonjudgmental pastoral ministry in the Argentine capital, including baptizing children born out of wedlock, demonstrated his willingness to prioritize those on the margins over the propriety that might be expected of a high-ranking prelate.

Like Pope John Paul II, he had an inherent distrust of the Vatican. John Paul II approached the Vatican bureaucracy by placing people he trusted, often Polish clerics, in every office of the Roman Curia. Francis, instead, created a council of nine cardinal advisors from all continents to advise him on the reform of the Roman Curia and the governance of the universal church. But he also sought advice from people outside the Vatican whom he trusted, as well as from the Society of Jesus. In the end, he made the decisions himself, after much prayer and discernment.

He tended to micro-manage. He always kept his cards

close to his chest, so much so that at times not even the top-ranking Roman Curia officials knew what was happening until he made his decision public. The process by which he named new cardinals is a case in point.

He tended to manage his own communications and gave some 200 face-to-face interviews. (The first of these, given to a consortium of Jesuit journals, was published in **America** in 2013. **America** published another interview with Pope Francis in 2022.) Not infrequently, his communications department learned about the interviews after they were done. His press conferences during return flights from foreign countries were spontaneous and open-ended. His freewheeling way of communicating was not infrequently a cause of much concern in the Vatican, with some bishops saying his style created confusion.

He wrote four encyclicals in 12 years, the first of which was the completion of a text already partly written by Benedict XVI, "Lumen Fidei" (June 2013). The other three were "Laudato Si'" (2015), "Fratelli Tutti" (2020) and "Dilexit Nos" (2024). He also wrote seven apostolic exhortations: "Evangelii Gaudium" (2013), "Amoris Laetitia" (2016), "Gaudete et Exultate" (2018), "Christus Vivit" (2019), "Querida Amazonia" (2020), "Laudate Deum" (2023) and "C'est la Confiance" (2023).

Francis had clear ideas when he was elected pope; he was not navigating in a fog. This became clear when he published his first apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel" ("Evangelii Gaudium") on Nov. 24, 2013, a text he had written by early August. It was the programmatic document for his pontificate, aimed at propelling the church into missionary mode.

In it, he advocated a "conversion" throughout the whole church, starting with the papacy. He sought to promote the culture of encounter, not culture wars. He worked to change the culture of the Roman Curia before changing its structures, to ensure that it is at the service of both the pope and the bishops. He sought to decentralize decision-making in many areas from the Roman Curia to the diocesan bishops, most significantly in cases of marriage annulments.

Did he succeed in this work of conversion? Only time will tell. He viewed his role as starting processes that he hoped his successors would develop and bring to fruition.

Implementing Vatican II

As a young Jesuit, Jorge Bergoglio was deeply inspired by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. As Jesuit provincial, he endorsed the efforts of the Latin American bishops' conferences to implement that council through the CELAM assemblies, starting with Medellín in 1968. As

With Francis, the rich theological vision that had developed in Latin America following Vatican II now came to center stage.

pope, he felt the need for a greater effort at the fuller implementation of that historic council, hence his creative commitment to ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and the liturgical renewal implemented after Vatican II. His decision in recent years to restrict the use of the pre-Vatican II liturgy has to be seen in this light. He took that decision after consulting the world's bishops, many of whom saw attachment to and efforts to expand the usage of the Tridentine liturgy as part of a wider attempt to roll back Vatican II reforms.

In the same light, he recalled that Pope Paul VI had established the synod of bishops as a permanent institution in September 1965 in response to the desire of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to keep alive its spirit of collegiality.

As archbishop of Buenos Aires, he had attended several synods and saw the weakness of the existing way of functioning.

As pope, he introduced major changes in the synodal process, and in the last years, he worked with determination to build a synodal church. He believed that "synodality" is the way forward for the Catholic Church in the 21st century and envisaged it also as a fundamental step toward attaining unity with other Christian churches. He therefore launched a global synodal process in October 2021, starting at the local diocesan levels, then proceeding to the continental levels, and concluding with two world synods in the Vatican in 2023 and 2024, where for the first time laypeople—including women—participated in unprecedented numbers and, most significantly, with the right to vote.

Reform of the Curia and Vatican Finances

The cardinals at the 2013 pre-conclave meetings had asked that the new pope reform the Roman Curia and clean up the Vatican finances that had become a source of scandal and an impediment to preaching the Gospel. As pope, Francis considered this a top priority, and began by invit-

Francis linked ‘the cry of the poor’ to ‘the cry of creation.’

ing international financial consultancy groups to study the situation. He established the Secretariat of the Economy in February 2014 and appointed Cardinal George Pell as its first prefect. The Australian cardinal made considerable headway in the face of strong internal opposition but had to leave his post in July 2017 to return to his homeland to stand trial on allegations of historical sexual abuse of minors.

When the cardinal’s term of office ended, Francis appointed a Spanish Jesuit, the Rev. Juan Antonio Guerrero Alves, as the secretariat’s second prefect, on Nov. 14, 2019. Francis supported his push for reform by approving legislation that covered all aspects of Vatican finances, to ensure transparency and accountability. He decreed the transfer of all funds from the Secretariat of State to the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See in the wake of a scandal that saw the Secretariat of State purchase an upmarket property in London with money from Peter’s Pence. When Father Guerrero resigned, the pope appointed the Jesuit’s right-hand man, a Spanish layman, Dr. Maximino Caballero Ledo, as the new prefect.

Reform of the Roman Curia

The reform of Vatican finances was only one part of Francis’ wider reform of the Roman Curia. This was only the fourth time in the past 500 years that any pope had enacted such a reform. The new constitution for the Roman Curia, “Praedicate Evangelium” (“Preach the Gospel”), promulgated by Pope Francis on March 19, 2022, established “evangelization” as the top priority of the Roman Curia and listed the Dicastery for the Evangelization of Peoples as the supreme dicastery. This upended the centuries-old tradition according to which the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Holy Office) had been the “supreme” congregation.

Significantly, it separated the power of governance from orders, thereby opening up the possibility of appointing non-bishops, including lay men and women, to senior positions of responsibility in the Roman Curia. By Feb. 17, 2025, breaking with tradition, Francis had already appointed a woman as prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and another woman as governor of the Vatican City State. Earlier he had appointed two laymen as prefects of Vatican dicasteries.

Affirming the Role of Women

Throughout his pontificate, Francis sought to promote and affirm women in the life of the church and especially in the Vatican. Besides appointing women to top executive posts, he also named two women as secretaries of Pontifical Commissions, and several as members of the congregations (boards) of various dicasteries, including doctrine of the faith and bishops.

He advocated for the education of girls and the promotion of women to roles of responsibility in both church and society. He pleaded for the protection of women from violence and human trafficking.

By March 1, 2024, Francis had opened the ministries of lector, acolyte and catechist to women. The question of the ordination of women to the diaconate came up repeatedly during his papacy, including extensive conversations during the Synod on Synodality. While Pope Francis said “no” to the women’s diaconate in a 2024 interview, he later approved and adopted into his own magisterium the synod’s final report, which said that the question of women’s access to diaconal ministry “remains open.” On multiple


AP Photo/Andrew Medichini, file

Left: Pope Francis, surrounded by shells of destroyed churches, arrives to pray for the victims of war at Hosh al-Bieaa Church Square, in Mosul, Iraq, on March 7, 2021. Below: Pope Francis meets refugees at the Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos, Greece, on April 16, 2016.


CNS photo/Paul Haring

occasions, he affirmed John Paul II's teaching that the church does not have the authority to ordain women as priests.

The Second-Most-Traveled Pope

Francis was the second-most-traveled pope in history. By Dec. 31, 2025, he had made 47 foreign trips and visited 67 countries. Perhaps his most memorable trip, made in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, was to war-torn Iraq in March 2021, to give hope to its long-suffering people.

Like the first Jesuits, Francis looked especially to Asia, where two-thirds of humanity lives, as a priority for evangelization. By Sept. 30, 2024, he had made six journeys to Asia, visiting South Korea (2014), Sri Lanka and the Philippines (2015), Myanmar and Bangladesh (2017), Thailand and Japan (2019), Kazakhstan (2022), Mongolia (2023), and Indonesia, Timor Leste and Singapore (2024), when he also visited Papua New Guinea.

Francis made five journeys to Africa, visiting 10 countries, three of them conflict-ridden: the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan in a historic ecumenical visit with the archbishop of Canterbury and the moderator of the Church of Scotland.

He went to the Holy Land in May 2014, visiting Jordan, Palestine and Israel, accompanied by two friends, a rabbi and a Muslim leader from Buenos Aires. He also visited Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

He journeyed to the American continent eight times, visiting 12 countries, but he did not return home to Argentina. He strongly supported peace efforts in Colombia and Venezuela and helped the rapprochement between Cuba and the United States.

Provisional Agreement With China

Most significantly, perhaps, and notwithstanding opposition from within church circles and from the political world, including from the United States, Francis made history by reaching a provisional accord with the People's Republic of China in September 2018 on the nomination of bishops in mainland China, something John Paul II and Benedict XVI had wanted but failed to achieve. According to that secret accord, renewed in October 2020, 2022 and 2024, the pope would have the last word on episcopal nominations. As a result of this, for the first time since 1957 (when Beijing started ordinations without papal approval), all the Catholic bishops in mainland China are now in communion with the pope.

While far from an ideal agreement, Vatican officials said it was the best they could get at that time to prevent Beijing from appointing bishops independently of Rome in the more


CNS photo/Vatican Media

than 40 dioceses that were then without a pastor in mainland China. Nevertheless, the agreement left many important questions unresolved, including the fate of the underground church communities and their pastors. On the positive side, it opened a dialogue with the world's emerging superpower.

Seeking Peace

From the beginning of his pontificate, Francis sought to promote peace in countries at war, starting with Syria, and including South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. As conflicts multiplied, he said the world was witnessing a Third World War being waged "piecemeal," which risked becoming a full-scale world war with the threat of the use of nuclear arms.

He spoke out strongly against the war in Ukraine and appointed a special envoy, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, to work for the release of prisoners and the return of children abducted by Russia, and to try to foster a climate for peace negotiations. He repeatedly called for a cease-fire in the Israeli-Palestinian war in Gaza, the release of hostages held by Hamas and the provision of humanitarian aid. He warned that war could never guarantee peace in the Holy Land and advocated a two-state solution. Even during his final hospital stay, he continued his regular communication with Palestinians sheltering in a parish church in Gaza.

Ecumenical Outreach

In a historical breakthrough on the ecumenical front, Francis became the first bishop of Rome ever to meet a Russian Orthodox patriarch of Moscow. He met Patriarch Kirill at José Martí International Airport in Havana, Cuba, on Feb. 12, 2016. Their relationship was put on pause by Kirill's support for Russia's war on Ukraine.

Pope Francis developed a deep, personal relationship with Bartholomew I, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, the first among equals among the leaders of the Orthodox Church. They met several times, and Francis invited Bartholomew to contribute to the writing of the encyclical on the environment, "Laudato Si'."

Francis also enhanced relations with the Protestant churches by attending the opening ceremony of the commemoration for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, at Lund, Sweden, on Oct. 31, 2016.

Interreligious Initiatives

During his papacy, Francis developed an extraordinarily close relationship with the grand imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, the most influential figure for Sunni Muslims, who account for 85 percent of the world's Muslims. In an act without precedent in Christian-Muslim relations, Pope Francis and the grand imam jointly wrote the groundbreaking "Document on Human Fraternity," which they signed and presented to the world at an event in Abu Dhabi, hosted by the United Arab Emirates on Feb. 4, 2019. He was the first pope to visit the Arabian Peninsula and to celebrate Mass there.

He visited other Muslim countries, including Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population.


AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia, File


CNS photo/Alex Castro, AIN handout via Reuters


AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia, File

Left: Pope Francis delivers his extraordinary blessing "urbi et orbi" ("to the city and the world") during a prayer service in the portico of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on March 27, 2020, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Middle: Pope Francis hugs 8-year-old Dominic Gondreau, who has cerebral palsy, after celebrating his first Easter Mass in St. Peter's Square on March 31, 2013. Top right: Pope Francis and former Cuban President Fidel Castro meet at Castro's residence in Havana on Sept. 20, 2015. Bottom right: Retired Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis exchange greetings at the conclusion of a consistory at which Pope Francis created 20 new cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Feb. 14, 2015.

Combating the Abuse Crisis

Throughout his papacy, Francis sought to address the abuse of minors by priests. The scandal emerged first in 1985 in the United States when John Paul II was pope, but in the first decade of the 21st century, it was revealed to be a global problem that undermined the credibility of the church and its evangelization effort. Benedict XVI struggled to address it, even as he committed to meeting victims and introduced important legislation to deal with the crisis.

When he became pope, Francis, notwithstanding missteps, moved with determination to eradicate the triple forms of abuse in the church relating to conscience, power and sex, which he discerned as having deep roots in clericalism.

In December 2013, he established the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which included lay women and men, and survivors of abuse, and appointed Boston's Cardinal Seán O'Malley as its president. On June 4, 2016, he issued the *motu proprio* "Come una madre amorevole" ("As a loving mother"), which holds bishops accountable for failing to protect children and vulnerable adults and envisages their removal from office for not doing so.

In July 2018, in another decision without precedent, Francis demanded the resignation of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick from the College of Cardinals for sexually abusing a minor. On Feb. 16, 2019, he confirmed Mr. McCarrick's dismissal from the clerical state. He then authorized the investigation of Mr. McCarrick's case and subsequently approved the publication of the McCarrick Report.

In February 2019, Francis convened a summit in the Vatican of the presidents of all the Catholic bishops' conferences and heads of religious orders to focus on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons and agree on further steps to be taken. The summit underlined the need for responsibility, accountability and transparency in this field.

Opening to the L.G.B.T. Community

Francis broke new ground too in relations with the L.G.B.T. community, starting with his remark on the flight from Rio de Janeiro in July 2013; when asked about a Vatican official alleged to have engaged in homosexual behavior, he concluded his response saying, "If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him?" As archbishop of Buenos Aires, he had reached out to L.G.B.T. people, and he continued doing so as pope.

He supported the legal recognition of gay unions, but always distinguished it from marriage, which, in accordance with church teaching, he affirmed is only between a man and a woman. He approved a declaration allowing some blessings of persons in irregular marital situations, including same-sex couples, "Fiducia Supplicans," issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on Dec. 18, 2023, which created much controversy in the church, with many African bishops opposing it, as did some prelates of Eastern churches in union with Rome.

Francis Encounters Opposition

Every pope in the 20th and 21st centuries encountered opposition, but Francis faced it in a historically unprecedented

Pope Francis considered himself first and foremost as 'the world's parish priest.'

way because of its dissemination through social media, blogs and popular television shows, including some Catholic media. They criticized his stances on the economy and climate change, his rejection of the culture wars, his refusal to prioritize abortion above other moral issues and his openness to those in irregular marital situations as well as L.G.B.T. persons. They objected to his teaching the death penalty is "inadmissible" and his restrictions on the Tridentine Latin Mass. Although the opposition to him was relatively small, and mainly confined to the United States and some European countries, his detractors had powerful megaphones.

Like every pope, Francis chose with great care the cardinals who would one day elect his successor. He created many cardinals from the Global South, making the College of Cardinals more international, less European. By Dec. 8, 2024, he had created some 78 percent of the cardinals who can vote in the next conclave, in the hope that they would elect a pope who can continue his legacy and further the synodal church.

One cannot conclude this obituary without recognizing that from the beginning to the end of his pontificate, Francis was ever a Jesuit, the first Jesuit pope. During his early life, he delved deep into the springs of Ignatian spirituality, and this greatly enriched and influenced his thinking and writing and his governance of the Roman Curia and the Catholic Church worldwide. He had met Pedro Arrupe, S.J., in Santa Fe, Argentina, in late 1965, soon after Father Arrupe's election as superior general of the Society, and was greatly inspired by him. As pope, he prayed at Arrupe's tomb in the Church of the Gesù in Rome and visited the rooms where St. Ignatius spent the last period of his life.

Francis celebrated Mass in that same church on Sept. 27, 2014, on the 200th anniversary of the restoration of the Society, and in his homily he recalled that "the ship of the Society has been tossed about by the waves and there's nothing to be surprised at in this. Even the barque of Peter can be tossed about today. The night and the powers of darkness are always close. It's tiring to row." He called on his brother Jesuits, "Let us row together!"

Pope Francis pauses in prayer on the threshold of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Dec. 24, 2024, after he opened it and inaugurated the Holy Year 2025.

Pope Francis asked to be buried in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome, close to the revered ancient icon of Our Lady, Protectress of the Roman People, an image to which the Jesuit order has been particularly devoted from its beginning. As a cardinal Pope Francis used to pray there on his visits to Rome before becoming pope, and it is where he went to pray more than 100 times during his pontificate, including before and after his foreign trips. It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that the first Jesuit pope has been laid to rest in this basilica, where St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, celebrated his first Mass as a priest on Christmas night, 1538, and where Francis so often prayed.

Gerard O'Connell *is* ***America****'s Vatican correspondent and author of* The Election of Pope Francis: An Inside Story of the Conclave That Changed History. *He has been covering the Vatican since 1985.*

Pope Francis greets Gerard O'Connell, **America**'s Vatican correspondent, during an audience with members of the International Association of Journalists Accredited to the Vatican on Jan. 22, 2024.

A Final Farewell to My Friend, Pope Francis

On Tuesday April 22, I walked with my wife, Elisabetta Piqué, to the chapel of Santa Marta in Vatican City to bid our final farewell to Pope Francis, a man who had been our friend for more than 20 years. It was a profoundly emotional moment as we stood in front of his simple coffin. We then sat and prayed in that chapel where we had prayed many times with him before.

So many memories raced through our heads: then-Cardinal Bergoglio baptizing our children in St. Ignatius Church in Buenos Aires; him joining us for dinner on the night of Feb. 28, 2013, when together we watched on television the historic moment when the doors of Castel Gandolfo closed and the Swiss Guards departed, marking the end of Pope Benedict XVI's papacy. I remember how he called me when Elisabetta was reporting from Gaza in 2012, at a time of heavy bombing, and asked how she was and said he was praying that God would protect her. We had lost a friend on earth, but we now have a friend in heaven.

I saw him up close and alive for the last time at 12:47 p.m. on Easter Sunday, April 20, as he was driven in his jeep through St. Peter's Square and down the Via della Conciliazione. The look on his face gave me the distinct impression that this was his final farewell to the people, and he seemed to know it. The next time he would return to this square would be in a coffin, less than 72 hours later.

Pope Francis had asked to be driven in the jeep through the crowd of some 50,000 people after delivering his "Urbi et Orbi" blessing to the city of Rome and the world from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica on Easter Sunday.

I was there when he made his first appearance on that same balcony immediately after his election on the evening of March 13, 2013, reporting for CTV Canada. I remember well the explosion of joy in the crowd when he greeted them with "Buona Sera!" and the total silence in the square when he asked them to pray for him and then bowed down before them.

On Easter Sunday, his last act as pope from that balcony was to bless the people.

Immediately afterward, he drove among them in the white jeep on a journey of goodbye.

Vatican Media reported that afterward, "tired but content," the 88-year-old pope thanked his personal nurse, Massimiliano Strappetti, who had encouraged him to go around the square, with "Thank you for bringing me back to the square." The Vatican said these were his last words.

We now know that Pope Francis passed a peaceful last afternoon, had dinner and slept until around 5:30 a.m., when he suddenly felt ill, triggering a response from those caring for him. He then suffered a stroke.

Around an hour later, after making a gesture of farewell with his hand to Mr. Strappetti, Pope Francis, lying in his bed on the second floor of Santa Marta, fell into a coma. At that point, **America** has learned, his Argentine private secretary, the Rev. Juan Cruz Villalón, who had cared for him with great tenderness throughout his recent 38-day stay in the hospital and during his four weeks of convalescence, understood that the pope's life was now in danger and administered the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.

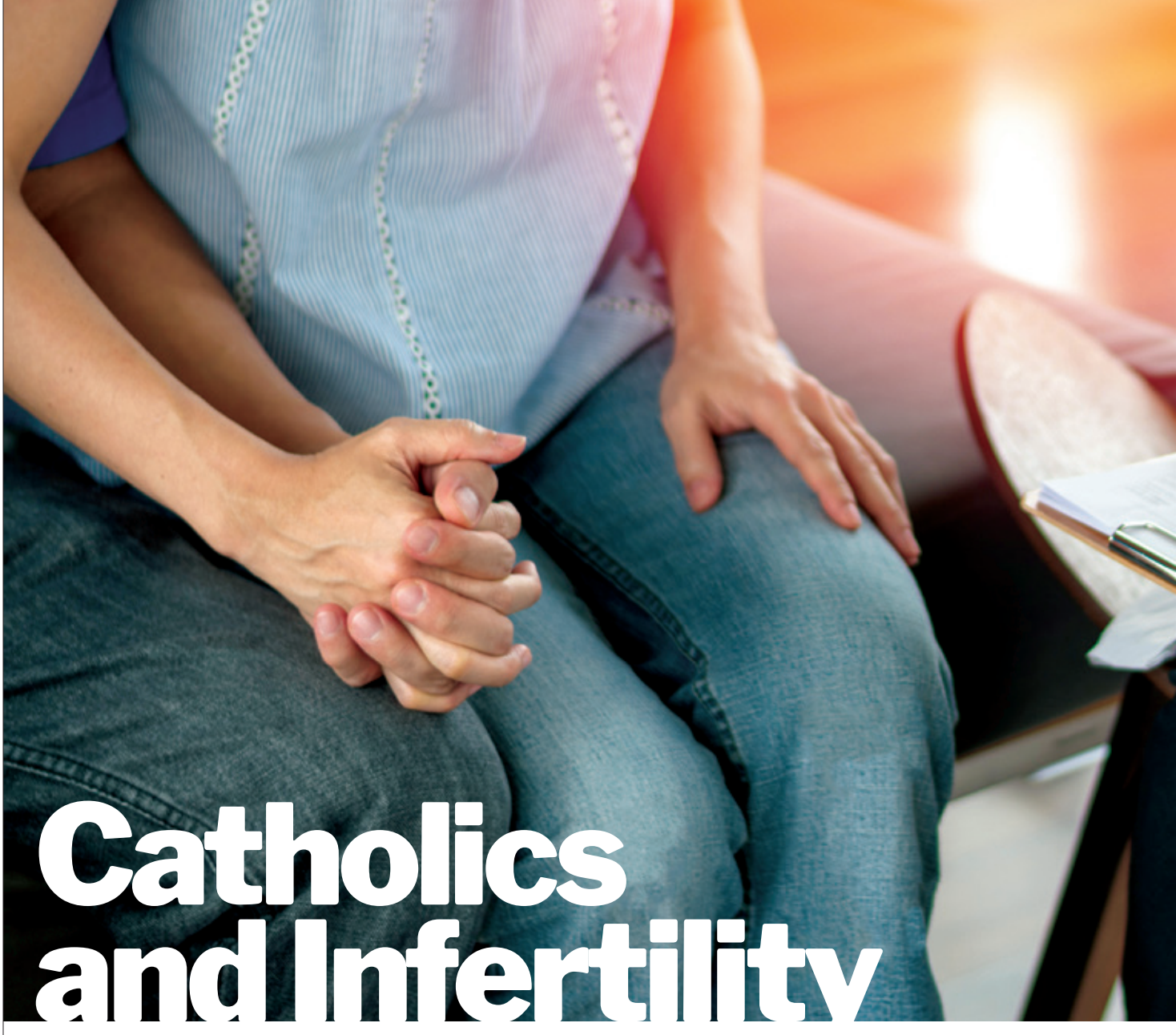
Pope Francis did not suffer at this last moment of his life, according to those present. Death came suddenly, as he had always wished, with an irreversible cardiovascular collapse. He died peacefully at 7:35 a.m. Easter Monday morning. God had granted him this grace.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, the Vatican camerlengo and a man Francis trusted greatly, announced his death to the world.

Later that day, the Vatican published the pope's last testament, in which he made clear the cost of his burial would not fall on the Vatican; a benefactor had provided the means to defray those costs.

He concluded his testament with these words: "May the Lord grant the deserved reward to those who have wished me well and will continue to pray for me. The suffering that marked the final part of my life, I offer to the Lord, for peace in the world and brotherhood among peoples."

— Gerard O'Connell



Catholics and Infertility

The spiritual, ethical and emotional challenges of trying to conceive

By J.D. Long García

Out the window, Aimee Arnold could see the Embarcadero and the San Francisco Bay beyond it. It reminded her of her time living in the city. She and her husband, unable to conceive a child, had traveled back to San Francisco from Oregon to visit a well-regarded fertility clinic.

"It was beautiful," she said of the office. "Very tranquil, very comforting. Everyone was so nice."

Ms. Arnold was 40 when she and her husband began trying to conceive a child. She described herself as business-oriented, and her career became part of her identity. Her husband supported her in that.

She was fit, and members of her family had many children, so Ms. Arnold expected a pregnancy would happen eventually. But by the time she was 43, the couple still had not conceived, and so she found herself sitting by that window in San Francisco.

"For some reason, I didn't get the memo about trying to conceive at a younger age," Ms. Arnold quipped in an interview with **America**. "Like, that's how women's bodies are made."


iStock/Pornpak Khunatorn

The World Health Organization estimates that, worldwide, one in six couples of reproductive age at some point struggle with infertility, which they define as "the failure to achieve pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse." Studies show that infertility cases are increasingly common, and many factors involving both men's and women's bodies, as well as environmental issues, can contribute to the problem.

According to couples with whom I spoke, doctors often recommend in vitro fertilization, or I.V.F., a well-known treatment for infertility. I.V.F. enjoys bipartisan support, and earlier this year, President Trump signed an executive order seeking recommendations for ways to make the treatment more affordable. Still, many Americans, including Catholics, do not fully understand the process.

The Catholic Church does not approve of I.V.F. because it involves the creation of human embryos outside of the womb, in a laboratory setting. There are church-approved fertility treatments, as well as support groups for couples struggling with infertility, but they are relatively unknown, which leaves many Catholic couples feeling lost and alone as they consider their options.

Ms. Arnold was raised Catholic but stopped practicing. She certainly didn't know about I.V.F. alternatives or support groups and did not fully understand the church's teaching when she and her husband were experiencing infertility. What she and her husband did know was that they wanted a baby more than anything.

"Trying to conceive at an older age can be a very lonely, solitary thing," she said. "I didn't want to let anyone else in. Everyone has their opinions. I didn't want that to crowd my mind."

Their doctor recommended I.V.F. and said they had to move quickly, given Ms. Arnold's age, so they began the process.

How I.V.F. Works

In 1978, Louise Brown became the first "test-tube baby"—that is, the first person born using I.V.F. Her mother, Lesley, had been unable to conceive because of fallopian tube blockage. The media widely covered Ms. Brown's birth in England, which made the cover of Time magazine.

It took nearly a decade of research and experimenting for that to happen. Over those years, doctors attempted to implant embryos in 282 women. While five had become pregnant, none had given birth to a living baby before Ms. Brown. In 1981, Elizabeth Carr became the first I.V.F. baby born in the United States.

Today, the success rate for I.V.F. varies considerably, depending on the mother's age. According to the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology, an egg retrieved from a woman under 35 has about a 45 percent chance of leading to a live birth. If the woman is over 42, the success rate drops to below 3 percent.

During I.V.F. treatment, a process in which conception occurs in a laboratory, women are injected with medication that first shuts down their reproductive systems. Next, they take drugs that stimulate the ovaries to produce many follicles, where the eggs are housed. Doctors then retrieve the eggs through the woman's abdomen using a needle.

To provide the sperm, the man must masturbate (which the church considers immoral). An embryologist in the lab combines the egg and the sperm. The resulting embryos are left to culture for five days, at which point doctors judge which embryos—called blastocysts at this stage—have a

Courtesy of Lauren Allen

Lauren Allen and her husband struggled to conceive a child. They eventually adopted two boys.

higher likelihood of surviving implantation.

"The idea behind the I.V.F. approach is that if we get enough eggs collected, fertilize all of them, then we can select the embryos that are most viable," according to Craig Turczynski, who used to run an I.V.F. laboratory and is trained as a reproductive physiologist. His experience in this dates back to the 1990s.

The number of eggs retrieved from a woman's ovaries varies, he said, but it often surpases the number of eggs generated in a year of ovulation. The average number of eggs retrieved is around 10. Of those, about eight will become embryos. In the early 2000s, doctors would routinely transfer three to five embryos for implantation, Dr. Turczynski said, but now the practice is to attempt one or two at a time. The remaining embryos are frozen in cryopreservation for possible future use. Anywhere from 20 to 50 percent of embryos do not survive cryopreservation.

In Ms. Arnold's case, doctors created five embryos after egg retrieval. After culturing, the clinic deemed only one viable for implantation. The doctors suggested freezing it while Ms. Arnold took measures to physically prepare to receive it. But a month later, the clinic called to inform the couple the embryo was no longer viable. They were devastated.

Katie McMahon was 33 when she and her husband began the I.V.F. process after seven years of marriage. They had adopted their daughter three years into the marriage but still desired to conceive a child. They first sought treatment for her husband's low sperm count, and their doctor recommended better sleep and a change in diet.

When that treatment did not work, they began I.V.F. Ms. McMahon had worked for years as a nurse, so she was familiar with the process. The doctors created 12 embryos, seven of whom they deemed viable after they were cultured. The couple transferred one, and the others went into cryopreservation. They joyfully welcomed another daughter to the family nine months later.

Still, Ms. McMahon kept thinking about the six remaining embryos. Month after month, the family paid the fee for cryopreservation, and this reminded the couple of their embryos. "Part of the reason for thinking about them was just the financial piece," Ms. McMahon said.

She started to pray more, including for the embryos, and the couple considered the church's position against cryogenic preservation.

"As I began praying for them, I realized, 'Oh my gosh, these are in fact children that God wants us to take care of, and we can't take care of them in the freezer," Ms. McMahon said.

It is impossible to know how many embryos are in

cryopreservation, according to Dr. Turczynski. While some estimate the number at 1.5 million, he believes it is more likely between five million and 10 million. That number takes into account that 800,000 embryos are created each year, of which 100,000 are transferred. Half of the remaining embryos, or 350,000, are frozen. Labs began freezing embryos in 1985, 40 years ago.

In the McMahons' case, the couple decided to transfer and try to give birth to their remaining embryos. "We really did feel like we were pursuing the I.V.F. transfer as a way to save them," she said. "Either they would be born or they would die in the process, and kind of return to God."

They miscarried two, and two did not survive the thawing process. After mourning the miscarriages, they tried again. Their third daughter was born nine months later.

"I live with both the joy that I.V.F. can bring and the sorrow," Ms. McMahon said, adding that she and her husband will not pursue I.V.F. in the future. "A piece of me regrets that I didn't choose something that God would have wanted for me to see how [God] would show up. He showed up amazingly in spite of the crooked lines that I wrote."

The church has expressed great concern for couples struggling with infertility in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well as in "Donum Vitae" and "Dignitas Personae," two Vatican teaching documents on bioethics.

"The community of believers is called to shed light upon and support the suffering of those who are unable to fulfill their legitimate aspiration to motherhood and fatherhood," according to "Dignitas Personae." At the same time, the church is clearly opposed both to artificial means of conception and to practices such as "selective reduction," in which multiple embryos are transferred simultaneously to increase the chance of achieving pregnancy, with some later being aborted to maximize the chance for safe delivery of those that remain.

Ms. McMahon has come to accept that teaching, but she added that she and her husband did not find much support in the church for people dealing with infertility.

"We were so desperate, my husband and I would have probably done anything," she said. "No one walked us through the idea of redemptive suffering. And a lot of times, that's the way we get closer to God. Like we really should be reaching out to God first."

Eventually, she did find someone who would accompany her.

Ministries of Accompaniment

In Texas, a lack of resources for those struggling with infertility drove Lauren Allen to start her own community of support. Her journey began even before she was married, when she started charting her menstrual cycle. Through charting, Ms. Allen discovered she might have polycystic ovarian syndrome.

> **Trying to conceive at an older age can be a very lonely, solitary thing.**

Ms. Allen and her husband tried to conceive immediately after their marriage because they understood it would be difficult. They have been married for five years and still have not had a pregnancy.

"The Catholic Church does, in my opinion, a very poor job on focusing on what the vocation of being a wife and mother is," she told me. "Even in our marriage prep, there was never a conversation on infertility. It was, 'You're going to be open to life and multiply.' So as a Catholic woman, there's that pressure and the idea, 'This is what I'm supposed to do to glorify God: give my husband a child.'"

Ms. Allen found some blogs from women sharing their infertility stories, but the blog would end if its author conceived a child. She searched for resources online but found few. Eventually, she pitched the idea of starting a website to a support group on Facebook.

Within a week, it all came together, and Ms. Allen launched The Fruitful Hollow, a Catholic resource and a community for those who struggle with infertility. Ms. McMahon discovered the collaborative group after her experience with I.V.F.

"Our goal is to help women carry the cross of infertility with grace," Ms. Allen said. "There's no judgment with us. There's a lot of love and respect for human life."

Over the last few years, Ms. Allen has connected with countless Catholic women who report feeling judged when they go to church because they do not have children. She said she met one woman who had 15 miscarriages.

"They need accompaniment," she said. "Infertility leaves big wounds. People don't think about it. It comes with fear and anxiety. We never want to make people feel like they're not welcome or like we're condemning what's happening. The important thing is love and compassion for what everyone is going through."

Eventually, Ms. Allen and her husband adopted two boys.

Like the Allen family, Ann M. Koshute and her husband started trying to have children right away. She was in

Lisa and Millán Zorita, after struggling to conceive, were able to welcome their daughter Catalina thanks to assistance from a NaPro doctor.

Courtesy of Lisa Zorita

her early 40s when they married.

"I'm the youngest of two and he's the youngest of 16," she said. They knew it might be more difficult given their age but believed they would eventually welcome a new life into their home. "We come from loving, faithful Catholic families," Ms. Koshute recalled thinking. "Even if it takes a little bit longer, that's OK. God is going to bless us with children."

But month after month and then year after year, it didn't happen.

Ms. Koshute, who has been married for 14 years, described the tendency of some fellow Catholics to measure the holiness of a couple by their family size. When couples do not have children, she said, some in parish communities assume they are using contraception or are more focused on their careers.

"We get into murky waters when we make those kinds of judgments about other people without knowing their story," she said. "For the most part, couples who are carrying this cross are not going to reveal that or talk about it openly."

Many Catholic couples with infertility feel ashamed, she said.

Before she was married, Ms. Koshute earned a graduate degree from the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family. She said she understands and believes in the church teaching on I.V.F., but also understands why couples consider it.

"There were moments in the deepest part of my sadness and despair and confusion about the whole thing when I thought, 'Why can't we just do this? Why can't the church make this accommodation for a desire and a suffering that is so great?'" she said. The thought was fleeting, but Ms. Koshute stressed the importance "for the church, for our pastors, for people in our families, for those who are going through this struggle, to be able to acknowledge the deep desire, pain, sadness—so many complex emotions that go with this particular cross."

Ms. Koshute did not find the pastoral support she needed from the church, and neither did Kimberly Henkel, her classmate from the institute. Ms. Koshute lives in Pennsylvania and Ms. Henkel lives in Ohio, but the two co-founded Springs in the Desert in 2019. The Catholic infertility ministry has grown into a national effort with a seven-person core team that works alongside volunteers and contributors.

"We like to say our focus is on Christ and not conception. We're here to walk with people, wherever they are on the path of infertility or loss," Ms. Koshute said.

"Infertility is a circumstance. It's not our identity, and it doesn't define a marriage. Every single marriage is good and is called to be fruitful in so many ways, often ways that are unexpected."

Both Ms. Allen and Ms. Koshute said the church can do more. To begin with, priests and people in the pews should be aware of the prevalence of infertility and be sensitive to the complex emotions that come along with it, Ms. Koshute said.

"To be aware that the miracles that happen—and they certainly do—don't necessarily happen for every couple in every situation," she said. "We place such a value on children, and rightly so. Marriage is ordered toward children. But it isn't only ordered toward children."

Fruitfulness, in other words, is not limited to birthing children.

"All Christians are called to give life in the world," Ms. Koshute said. "We're called to conceive Christ in our hearts and to birth him through so many different ways that we interact in our families and in the world."

If one in six couples struggle with infertility, Ms. Allen said, it does not make sense to focus only on the "big Catholic family."

Being Catholic in a Pro-I.V.F. World

Molly McBride lives with her husband and four children in Rochester, N.Y. She had a miscarriage early in her marriage and had a pregnancy with twins who were stillborn.

"Seven total—four who are currently trashing my house," she told **America**. "I knew at the very beginning that I cared about my Catholic faith and about sticking with what I thought was morally right. And in hindsight, it's easier for me to say that because it all worked out for me. I ended up with what I wanted."

Like Ms. Allen, Ms. McBride has polycystic ovarian syndrome.

"The first doctor I went to was like, 'You can do nothing or you can do I.V.F.,'" she said. "It's like they're not even addressing what is wrong with my personal body. They're just pushing me down this conveyor belt of I.V.F."

Ms. McBride described walking into I.V.F. clinics and finding beautiful baby pictures everywhere.

"It's like, 'You want to have a baby. We want you to have a baby. Let's have a baby by Christmas!'" she said. "It's all so positive, you could very easily get sucked into it."

In her case, Ms. McBride had to advocate for herself. The Catholic doctor in town did not take her insurance. But she found a doctor who, despite not sharing her moral reservations about I.V.F., still listened to her opinion.

"And actually the issue that I have can sometimes be controlled by losing weight or controlling your diet or reducing stress—or taking more vitamins," she said of her experience in the clinic. "Not everything that happens in a fertility clinic is terrible. Not every person who steps foot in there is doing something morally wrong."

> **Most couples who are carrying this cross are not going to talk about it openly.**

Ms. McBride hopes other women in her situation will find a doctor who will respect their values. The church might also consider helping with the cost of adoptions, she said, which in the United States can range from $20,000 to $45,000, according to a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Child Welfare Information Gateway.

Ms. McBride also hopes couples who have conceived using I.V.F. do not feel judged by the church. "It's just such a core desire for people that I can understand why people are like, 'I will do anything that's possible to have a baby,'" she said, though she added that, morally, this could become "a slippery slope." She also said, "[But] I hope that people don't look at their child and say, 'I should never have had this child because I did I.V.F.' I assume most people are thrilled. If a baby was born through some unideal means... you would never look at that baby differently."

Still, like Ms. McBride and her husband, Catholic couples struggling with infertility have a number of church-approved options they can pursue instead of I.V.F.

"Infertility is not a disease," according to Marguerite Duane, executive director of Facts About Fertility. "It's actually a symptom of other underlying diseases. And to effectively treat infertility, you really need to treat the underlying root causes to restore the reproductive system the way it's designed to function."

Dr. Duane named three modern approaches to restorative medicine treating fertility: natural procreative technology, or NaPro; fertility education and medical management, or FEMM; and NeoFertility.

These treatments fall under the umbrella of restorative reproductive medicine, or R.R.M., a medical discipline that

seeks to heal the causes of infertility and conceive naturally. Ongoing research suggests that R.R.M. can be as effective or sometimes even more effective than I.V.F.

Studies have reported a range of success, from 29 percent to 66 percent of couples using R.R.M. having a live birth. Researchers in Ireland, for example, found R.R.M. to be as effective as artificial reproductive technology, like I.V.F. One recent study, though not yet peer reviewed, found R.R.M. to be 40 percent effective, compared with 24 percent for couples using I.V.F.

"I.V.F. promises that they're going to make a baby. And they may be able to make an embryo in a test tube. But the reality is that the embryo has to be transferred into a woman's body where it can be able to grow," Dr. Duane said.

Women who cannot conceive naturally often suffer from underlying hormonal, autoimmune or inflammatory conditions that prevent them from getting pregnant, she said. Left untreated, those conditions may also prevent an I.V.F. pregnancy from continuing.

"To try to treat infertility by creating embryos is to fail to actually do what women deserve, and that is to actually get a diagnosis and treatment for those underlying causes," Dr. Duane said. She specifically noted endometriosis (which is often characterized by painful periods) and polycystic ovarian syndrome, or P.C.O.S. (which is often characterized by irregular periods), as leading causes of female infertility that can go untreated for over a decade.

Still, R.R.M. has not been as thoroughly studied as artificial reproductive technology. The R.R.M. process can be a heavy lift, and it generally takes longer than I.V.F. Ms. Allen worked with a NaPro doctor, but it took two years to get her complete diagnosis. Ms. Koshute and her husband also tried NaPro, watched their diets and began a specific approach to menstrual cycle charting, called the Creighton Model FertilityCare System. They went through surgeries, took tests and tried supplements.

"It's wonderful that science is going in that direction, toward ways of healing our bodies and attending to our natural bodily rhythms rather than frustrating or kind of manipulating them in ways that some of these artificial technologies do," Ms. Koshute said. "But there was another side to all of that: the physical toll that these treatments take, the emotional and spiritual toll on our marriage because you're having to plan out your intimacy."

Still, according to the people I interviewed, R.R.M. offers a better path forward. Dr. Turczynski, who is Catholic and based in Texas, left the fertility industry after being involved for years, citing the harm he believes it causes patients as the reason for his decision.

"In the I.V.F. industry, that whole diagnosis of what's causing infertility is becoming less and less defined," he said. "It doesn't matter if you have blocked tubes, or [there is a] male factor or endometriosis or uterine factor, or you're older and you're not ovulating. All of those will still be treated the same way"—that is, with I.V.F.

> **Infertility is a circumstance. It's not our identity.**

I.V.F. can cost from $15,000 to $150,000. The cost fluctuates depending on how many rounds of egg retrieval couples attempt, and on whether the process involves egg donation or surrogacy. In a few states, Medicaid helps pay for I.V.F. Some health insurance providers also cover it.

In addition to Springs in the Desert and Fruitful Hollow, Red Bird Ministries, which helps address couples mourning miscarriage and the loss of an infant, may also be helpful. Ms. McMahon got involved with Shiloh, a post-I.V.F. healing resource, after her experience.

"We have two living children that were conceived by I.V.F. now," Ms. McMahon said. "But we have 10 others that died in the process of I.V.F."

Diedre Wilson, a Catholic doctor who specializes in NaPro, expressed concern for the potential long-term impact on women who take strong drugs before undergoing egg retrieval. In some cases, women suffer from ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, a painful swelling of the ovaries, as a side effect of the process.

"We need a new evangelization in health care," she said. "I.V.F. took us backward because it has made it so that you don't have to look at and solve these underlying medical conditions. We can just bypass them, and that's darkened our medicine."

Dr. Wilson estimates that couples who try NaPro have a 50 percent chance of, as she put it, "bringing home a baby." I met one of them.

'A Lot That Is Not Told'

The Zorita family live in a single-story home with gravel, agave and a variety of cacti in the front yard. The desert plants take time to grow, but even in the brutal Arizona climate, they eventually bloom.

The temperature reached nearly 100 degrees outside when I met with the family. Their small dog, Daisy, greeted me at the door and accompanied me throughout the visit. Millán

CNS photo/Handout via The Evangelist

Lisa Fogarty holds baby Evangeline Margaret Mary, born with the help of Gianna of Albany, N.Y., an affiliate of the National Gianna Center for Women's Health and Fertility. The center and its affiliates provide natural and ethical options in reproductive and fertility care.

opened the door and offered me a cool glass of water.

Millán, a firefighter, has a firm handshake and a penchant for the classics. You will find Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy and Evelyn Waugh on his bookshelf. He also writes about Francisco Suárez, S.J., a 16th-century Spanish Jesuit theologian and philosopher whose thought profoundly influenced Western society. Millán presents papers on Suárez in English and Spanish, both in the United States and overseas.

I did not know any of this when I visited Millán and his wife, Lisa, in their Phoenix-area home. I met them in passing decades ago at All Saints Catholic Newman Center on Arizona State University's Tempe campus. We sometimes attended the same Mass.

I knew Lisa as a co-founder of Maggie's Place, a Phoenix-based organization that provides safe housing and a supportive community for homeless pregnant women. Lisa is involved in community development and has worked within the prison system. She and Millán are also respite foster parents and have welcomed a mother and baby into their home to support them in a challenging moment.

Lisa and Millán married in their mid-30s and struggled with fertility for a decade, including three miscarriages.

"There's a physicality to the miscarriage, and the connection," Lisa said, describing the bond between mother and unborn child. "It is difficult. It's a cross."

Lisa told me she and Millán "would have wanted a bushel of kids." But like others I spoke with, they never considered I.V.F. because of their beliefs.

"There's no judgment for folks who have chosen that route," Lisa told me, "except that there's just a lot that is not told. Heartache, medical challenges, ethical decisions of what you do with all of these embryos that are created."

While visiting the Zorita home, I also met Catalina. Lisa and Millán were not sure they would ever meet her. She is their 12-year-old daughter, who was born in part thanks to Dr. Wilson's help and treatments that sustained the pregnancy. The two lay Dominicans named their daughter after St. Catherine of Siena.

"I think what St. Catherine said is true, that if you do what you're meant to do you will set the world on fire," Lisa said. "And Catalina is a firecracker, that's for sure.... Faith does not mean everything works out as we planned. Faith is a light that lights up the way that ultimately opens a larger plan."

J.D. Long García *is a senior editor at* ***America.***

Pope Francis and the 942

What the saints he canonized tell us about his papacy

By Kathleen Sprows Cummings

It is both poignant and fitting that one of Pope Francis' last official acts was to advance the causes of seven candidates for canonization. Francis' prolificacy in naming saints outpaced even that of St. John Paul II, who canonized 482 people during his 27 years as pope, more than all of his predecessors combined. Pope Francis named almost double that number in just 12 years. Admittedly, that total—942—is skewed by the inclusion of the canonization of the 813 martyrs of Otranto. Even so, Francis' penchant for saint-making was impressive—and telling. A person's heroes often point to their values. In Francis' case, the people he singled out for their heroic virtues reveal a great deal about his papal priorities.

Francis did not necessarily have a special connection to everyone he raised to the honors of the altar; most causes simply happened to reach the final stages of a long process during his pontificate. St. John Paul II had beatified 1,341 people, creating a backlog of people on the road to canonization that his successors inherited. This list put Pope Benedict in an interesting position. In 1989, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he wondered whether John Paul II's assertiveness in canonization had led to "*troppi santi*" ("too many saints"); and not long after his election, he suggested he was going to be more selective on that front. Francis, by contrast, relished the power of saint-making and frequently harnessed it to express

CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Banners of new saints hang from the facade of St. Peter's Basilica during a Mass with Pope Francis for the canonization of 14 individuals on Oct. 20, 2024.

his vision for the Catholic Church.

The most common way popes accelerate causes for canonization is by granting dispensations from required miracles. The process for certifying intercessory miracles is complicated and time-consuming, and as medical advances continue to shrink the realm of the medically inexplicable, they are ever more elusive. In his 1983 apostolic constitution "Divinus Perfectionis Magister," the first comprehensive reform of the canonization process in centuries, John Paul II reduced the number of miracles required for canonization from two to one. Popes, of course, are entitled to grant additional exemptions, and Pope Francis did this early in his papacy in a powerfully symbolic gesture.

In 2005, crowds at John Paul II's funeral chanted "santo subito" ("sainthood immediately"), invoking an early church practice, long before formal procedures were in place, when saints were proclaimed by popular acclamation. Though Pope Benedict opted not to forgo the entire canonization process for the recently deceased pope, he and others made certain it proceeded exceptionally swiftly. John Paul II was beatified in 2011 and ready for canonization by early 2014.

In the lead-up to John Paul's canonization, Francis introduced a twist: He would canonize a second pope on the same day: Pope John XXIII, who died in the middle of the Second Vatican Council. John Paul II beatified him in 2000, but he was still awaiting a second miracle. Pope Francis' decision to waive that requirement resulted in an extraordinary pairing that was designed to reconcile competing factions in the church. In celebrating a joint canonization, Pope Francis was suggesting that the church was capacious enough to include progressives who felt a kinship with the Vatican II pope and conservatives who considered John Paul II as their hero.

The most efficient way to accelerate a cause for canonization is to bypass the process altogether and declare a saint through a papal decree, not in *santo subito* fashion but in fact its inverse, in recognition of a long and lasting devotion to a person. This is called equipollent canonization. Whereas Pope John Paul II had employed it in only one instance (for St. Kinga of Poland, canonized in 1999), Pope Francis named 23 new saints in this manner.

One of these was the Jesuit Peter Faber, an early companion of St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier. The latter two were canonized way back in 1622, but Faber was not even beatified until 1872, and there had not been much forward movement for his cause since then. In an interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J., in September 2013 (the English version of which was published in **America**), Pope Francis explained why Faber inspired him. The "reform priest" had an ability to "dialogue with all, even the most remote and even with his opponents." Francis admired Faber's simple piety, his ready availability, "his careful interior discernment," and his ability to make "great and strong decisions" while remaining "gentle and loving."

On Dec. 17, 2013, Francis' 77th birthday, he proclaimed Faber a saint. It was not so much a gift to himself but a present to the entire church, in that he was signaling the values that would guide his approach to leadership and reform. Quoting the Faber scholar Michel de Certeau, S.J., Father Spadaro realized that Pope Francis, like Faber, always sought to integrate "interior experience, dogmatic expression, and structural reform." In retrospect, it is clear this fusion animated the process and outcome of Francis' 2022 reorganization of the Roman Curia.

An Outward-Oriented Church

Francis provided another early indicator of his priorities on March 9, 2013, during his intervention at a general congregation of cardinals that preceded the conclave at which he was elected pope. Comparing a church that was internally focused and "self-referential" to the bent-over woman in Luke's Gospel, the then-cardinal from Argentina reimagined a passage from the Book of Revelation that refers to Jesus "standing at the door and knocking." Obviously, he said, it implies that Jesus is outside, seeking permission to enter. But suppose, he posited, Jesus is knocking from *inside* the church, urging to be let out? This speech captured the attention of many of his brother cardinals and played a decisive role in his election a few days later.

The evocative metaphor of an outward-oriented church also manifested itself in a number of the saints Francis elevated. On April 3, 2014, Francis announced the equipollent canonization of three Europeans who carried

Protests against Serra garnered at least as much attention as his canonization.

the Gospel to the church's outer edges in the 16th and 17th centuries: Marie of the Incarnation, a French-born Ursuline sister who served in Quebec between 1639 and 1672; her contemporary, Francois Laval, Quebec's first bishop; and José de Anchieta, S.J., a native of the Canary Islands and a poet considered to be one of the founders of São Paolo and Rio de Janeiro. All three causes had languished since the beatifications in 1980. Had the first pope from the Americas not intervened on their behalf, it is likely these early evangelizers of those continents would have remained permanent *beati*.

Pope Francis also emphasized his vision of an outward-facing church through his canonization, in January 2015, of Joseph Vaz, a native of Goa who served as a missionary to Sri Lanka. In his homily at the canonization Mass, Pope Francis praised Vaz as a saint who "teaches us how to go out to the peripheries, to make Jesus Christ everywhere known and loved." The venue underscored the message: Vaz's elevation took place not at the Vatican but in Sri Lanka, as part of Francis' travels to Asia. Francis was following a precedent set by John Paul II, who had presided at the first *fuori sede* ("outside the Holy See") canonization in 1983, during his pastoral visit to Seoul, when he canonized 104 Korean victims of anti-Christian persecution.

On the flight from Sri Lanka to the Philippines, the next stop on his Asian visit, Pope Francis announced his next *fuori sede* canonization—and it was a startling one. The following September, he told journalists, he would preside over the first canonization on U.S. soil. What was remarkable was not the locale (the United States was long overdue in this regard; John Paul II had hoped to canonize an American during his 1987 trip to the U.S. states, but plans fell through) but rather the honoree: Blessed Junípero Serra, a Spanish Franciscan who founded nine California missions between 1769 and 1782.

As it happened, I was writing a book about American saints, and had just finished a chapter in which I predicted—based on considerable evidence I found in the Franciscan provincial archives—that Serra would retain his blessed status in perpetuity. The Franciscans had launched Serra's cause in 1931, largely in response to the canonization of eight North American Jesuit martyrs the year before (competition among religious orders is often a fierce motivator in saint-making!) and it had gained traction in large part because Serra was well known throughout California. But by the time Serra was beatified in 1988, the European missionary enterprise in North America had become inextricably intertwined with the harsh legacy of colonization, and Serra's cause suffered as a result. The Franciscans weathered the protests that followed Serra's beatification, but by the early 2000s, the congregation stopped pursuing the cause actively, deciding not to comment on the negative stories that periodically surfaced. Francis' announcement also caught the Franciscans off guard. The friar in charge of Serra's cause went on record saying he "was the last to know."

I suspect geography was at play in Francis' decision to canonize Serra. Recall that in making his first and only visit to the United States, Pope Francis was fulfilling his predecessor's commitment to attend the 2015 World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. That promise locked him into an East Coast itinerary. Had Francis designed his own trip, it probably would have included cities closer to the southern border; Serra's elevation accomplished that, at least metaphorically. Still, it seems to have been a miscalculation on Francis' part, as Indigenous protests against Serra garnered at least as much attention as his canonization.

More consonant with Pope Francis' style was a historic canonization he presided at a few weeks after his return from the United States: that of Zelie and Louis Martin, the parents of Thérèse of Lisieux, also known as the Little Flower. The Catholic hierarchy had acknowledged the need for more lay saints, especially married couples, since the Second Vatican Council, but the practicalities of the canonization process worked against it. A couple's children, and perhaps even their grandchildren, might think them saints worthy of universal veneration, but momentum is hard to sustain, let alone finance, beyond the third generation.

Francis used the Martins' canonization to reinforce the beauty of family life, which he would extol the next year in his apostolic exhortation "Amoris Laetitia." In that text, he referred to three saints who were fervently devoted to the Holy Family: the Martins' daughter, Thérèse; his own namesake, Francis of Assisi; and Blessed Charles de Foucauld, a French-born missionary to Algeria who lived as a hermit until his assassination in 1916. Francis had also named Foucauld in "Laudato Sí'"; and in the last sentences of "Fratelli Tutti," he wrote that Blessed Charles had inspired the document. Here again he connected contemplation with action, praising Foucauld for drawing upon "his intense experience of God" to "make a journey of transformation towards feeling a brother to all." These frequent

Pope Francis looks at a portrait of Blessed Oscar Romero during a meeting with pilgrims from El Salvador in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on Oct. 30, 2015. The pope canonized Romero in 2018.

mentions of Foucauld surely helped nudge him to his canonization in 2022. A cause succeeds in part because of effective marketing, and papal invocations go a long way in that area.

Given the thousands of open causes at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, another indicator that a pope has put his finger on the scale occurs when a saint's beatification and canonization both occur during his pontificate. This was the case for Oscar Romero, the archbishop martyred in El Salvador at the hands of a military dictatorship—a cause that resonated with the pope, who lived through Argentina's so-called Dirty War. It was also true of María Antonia de Paz y Figueroa, a Catholic religious sister who became Argentina's first female canonized saint in February 2024. The Jesuit pope had another reason to love his compatriot; "Mama Antula" preserved and promoted the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius throughout Argentina after the Jesuits were expelled from that country in 1767.

Last summer, Pope Francis authorized the canonization of Carlo Acutis, the "gamer saint" whom he had beatified in 2020. Now his successor will preside over the ceremony, but devotion to the first millennial saint will reinforce the late pope's efforts to reach out to young people and his hope that new technology will be placed in the service of evangelization. Indeed, future canonizations, including many of the 1,500 people he beatified, will continue to shape the church long after the end of his pontificate.

Rest in peace, Francis, together with the saints you loved so much.

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Oscar Romero's Resurrection Spirituality

Pope Francis canonized Archbishop Oscar Romero on Oct 14, 2018. The theologian J. Matthew Ashley recently reflected on Romero's deep engagement with the spirituality of the resurrection. The full text can be found at americamagazine.org.

In his 1979 Easter homily, Romero preached that "as long as Christ had not risen, the minds of the disciples were missing a key."....We can say the same of Romero. "The resurrection" was not just a doctrine that he understood and taught.... It was a reality that he lived; it was at the core of his spirituality.

Without taking that conviction into account, we cannot fully understand his "ongoing conversion," which was not a sign of a faith inauthentically or incompletely lived, but of a faith, hope and love embraced with depth and intensity....

Without it, we cannot understand the presence in his psyche and affectivity of sometimes paralyzing anxiety and self-doubt (for which he sought psychological help); deep sorrow, not to mention prophetic anger, at the suffering of his people; and pain over the calumnies relentlessly lobbed at him, conjoined with serenity and joy, leading him to say to a friend, near the end of his life, "I don't want to die. At least not now. I've never had so much love for life."

Finally, we will be missing a full explanation of the freedom that led him to lay down that life freely, that life for which he had so much love.

The day before he was murdered at Sunday Mass in the Providencia Hospital chapel in San Salvador, Romero proclaimed in the cathedral: "No one can quench the life that Christ has resurrected. Neither death, nor all the banners of death and hatred raised against him and against his church can prevail. He is victorious!"

The facts of history prove that the life of Oscar Romero, one that Christ raised up, has not been quenched; but I suggest too that Romero made this claim as *already true for him,* before his assassination, because of the deep resurrection spirituality that animated his life, deeds and preaching.

Pope Francis greets newly married couples during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on Sept. 30, 2015.

Parenting With Pope Francis

What the Holy Father taught me as a new mother

By Kerry Weber

My children believe I was friends with Pope Francis. I have attempted to dissuade them from this, noting that I met him only once, for a few hours while participating in an interview for **America**.

"But you are laughing with him in that picture," my 6-year-old daughter argues. "And *I* laugh with *my* friends."

She is referring to the photo of me in Casa Santa Marta, where the wide-ranging interview took place in November 2022. I am doubled over in laughter, with Pope Francis beside me looking bemused. I am laughing at the pope's reply to my query about his favorite animal, a question I asked at the behest of my oldest son, who was 6 at the time. "A combination of all the animals," Francis had replied.

I am laughing too hard. But I always laugh too hard. And I had been nervous about this interview for days, and something about the absurdity of his answer reminded me that I need not have worried. That no matter what questions we posed, he would welcome them. That maybe even he did not have all the answers.

The prevalence of Pope Francis images in our home may also influence my children's belief that Francis and I are friends. His face appears on a mug, a bottle opener, a magnet; on rosary cases and magazine covers; his name frequently pops up in conversations; and of course we pray for him at Mass. If I'm honest, there is a part of me that is disinclined to convince my children that we are but a few of the billion or so "friends" of Pope Francis. I am under no illusion that the pope considered me a pal, but a part of me *does* see him as a friend. I do not think this because of the time spent in our interview, but because his journey as pope largely overlapped with my own journey as a parent. And somehow, incredibly, this celibate, elderly man often doled out some of the best and most valuable parenting advice I've received along the way.


CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano

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There is another photo of me with Pope Francis, taken on Aug. 26, 2015. In this photo I am wearing my wedding dress and standing beside my husband, who is wearing a tux. It is a few months after our wedding, and we are lined up on the steps of St. Peter's Basilica with dozens of other couples who are also dressed in wedding attire, all of us looking like we have joined a cult. I am pregnant with our first child, although my husband and I are the only ones who know.

We are at the pope's general audience for the Sposi Novelli, a tradition that allows newlywed couples to greet the pope. My husband and I have been sweltering since the early morning, when security started letting people into the square. For hours, people had been attempting to shade themselves from the sun using everything from umbrellas to strategically placed Kleenex. I am trying to drink enough water to avoid heat stroke but not so much that I will have to use the portable toilet while wearing my wedding dress. It is wildly unglamorous and nerve-wracking.

But then Francis arrives. Before the photo opportunities, the Holy Father offers a reflection. He asks families to pray together, suggesting we examine our motives for prayer, asking: "Do you love God even a little?... If love for God does not light the fire, the spirit of prayer will not warm time."

I do not yet know what it is like to raise a child. Already I worry I may not have what it takes. Already I wonder how my life will change, how I will handle that change. Francis' words offer a foretaste and some advice:

> We know well that family time is a complicated and crowded time, busy and preoccupied. There is always little, there is never enough, there are so many things to do. One who has a family soon learns to solve an equation that not even the great mathematicians know how to solve: Within 24 hours they make twice that many!....
>
> The spirit of prayer gives time back to God, it steps away from the obsession of a life that is always lacking time, it rediscovers the peace of necessary things, and discovers the joy of unexpected gifts.... In the prayer of the family, in its intense moments and in its difficult seasons, we are entrusted to one another, so that each one of us in the family may be protected by the love of God.

He entrusted himself to our family of believers.

I see now how Francis somehow worked that same magic with his papacy, finding time for more meetings, more phone calls: to Gaza, to transgender people, to the poor and marginalized, to his nurse and his friends. He was the Holy Father, but he also lived his life like a holy father. He entrusted himself to our family of believers and asked that we do the same.

The family atmosphere is not apparent at the Sposi Novelli, however. The rows the couples are placed in to meet Francis become mere suggestions; there is much jostling, which I try to avoid. Some of the couples linger after their turn to shake Francis' hand, blocking the paths of others. My husband and I are both wearing wraparound sunglasses on our heads, and by the time we are swept forward toward Francis we look like we have just completed an Ironman race in our wedding gear. I lean forward, reach out my hand and immediately start to tear up. The moment is captured by the Vatican photographer. I look like my face is melting as I barely whisper, "Thank you for your example of mercy."

...

A few months later I am on a riser at the back of Our Lady Queen of Angels school in Harlem, again awaiting the pope, this time joined by crowds of fellow journalists. Francis will be speaking to an auditorium full of immigrants and schoolchildren. I have been reporting all day long, and this encounter with Francis during his U.S. visit is another sort of endurance test, as I trek around the city talking to people on the street, in church basements, on buses. I am visibly pregnant now and can't help but marvel about the fact that this is the second time my unborn son will be present in the same space as the pope, can't help but wonder what else his future holds.

Referring to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Pope Francis addresses the children, saying: "Today we want to keep dreaming. We celebrate all the opportunities which enable you, and us adults, not to lose the hope of a better world with greater possibilities. I know that one of the dreams of

‘Your child deserves your happiness.’

your parents and teachers is that you can grow up and be happy.”

My son’s birth is still months away, but standing there in that Harlem gym, I already share that dream of growth and possibility and happiness for him. A dream that will persist through my own postpartum anxiety, through moving houses, through a pandemic and brutal politics, through my son’s stitches and hurt feelings, schoolyards and sports.

“Wherever there are dreams, there is joy, Jesus is always present,” said Pope Francis.

Ten years later, I have made my fair share of mistakes as a parent. Still, I try my best to hope for a better world, to do my part to create greater possibilities, to hold fast to that dream.

•••

Pope Francis is not a perfect messenger for family advice. In 2015, during his visit to Philadelphia, Francis quipped: “Families will quarrel, sometimes plates can fly. And children bring headaches. I won’t speak about mothers-in-law.” He had made a similarly stale joke about mothers-in-law the year before on Valentine’s Day, and the thought of spouses chucking plates has never made me laugh. But the fact that Francis wasn’t perfect and didn’t expect perfection from others was a comfort to me, too.

So much of the parenting advice I found as I prepared for the birth of my first child felt like ingredients for a recipe with two possible outcomes: the perfect dish or a total failure. Every book seemed to offer a seemingly simple solution to every parenting problem, whether sleep, feeding or discipline. Francis helped me to look beyond the headlines and the best sellers and more closely at the heart of the task ahead.

In “The Joy of Love” (“Amoris Laetitia”), Pope Francis wrote: “Keep happy and let nothing rob you of the interior joy of motherhood. Your child deserves your happiness. Don’t let fears, worries, other people’s comments or problems lessen your joy at being God’s means of bringing a new life to the world” (No. 171).

He does not say that you will not be fearful, that you will not worry, that people will not comment on your parenting methods, your life choices. He does not say that the books and the advice are good or bad; he is not weighing in on sleep training or breastfeeding. He simply says that in parenthood there is a joy that goes deeper than all that. It is not dependent on lamaze breathing or labor pains, preschool applications or prep-school ratings.

Motherhood often is framed in terms of suffering. We want to shield our children from it or feel compelled to take it on to make others happy. And indeed the job is rarely easy. But Francis reminds me that although there will be difficult days, my own happiness matters too, that in fact it is a gift. *Your child deserves your happiness.* These words offer, forgive, invite. They require me to think about the exterior factors—exercise, work, food, reading, hobbies, friends—but also about my interior life, to remain rooted in prayer, in Christ’s peace that knows no bounds.

Still, it is not easy to stay positive about the future. Wars, famine, polarization, deportation, inflation, environmental degradation.... The list goes on. I now have three children to worry about. I worry I am not doing enough. I worry I am trying to take on too much. I worry about my children’s worries. I try to lean into prayer and to lean on family and friends.

In such times, it helps to have people who support you, who remind you of who you are, who also want you to be happy and who understand you’re not perfect. At his school visit in Harlem, Pope Francis advised the children, many of whom came from immigrant families, that a new home offers a chance to “make new friends.” He described friends as “people who open doors for us, who are kind to us. They offer us friendship and understanding, and they try to help us not to feel like strangers. To feel at home.”

By that measure, Francis was a friend to all.

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Kerry Weber *is an executive editor of* ***America.***

CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis greets members of Mosaiko, a Rome organization for L.G.B.T. Christians, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on May 17, 2023.

Francis the Bridge Builder

How the pope's inclusive approach to L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics changed my ministry

By James Martin

It's not often you can pinpoint moments when your life changes. The most profound moment for me was seeing a documentary about the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, which eventually led me to leave a life in the corporate world and enter the Jesuits in 1988. But another was a moment at the Vatican, in 2019.

I was in Rome for my first meeting with the Dicastery for Communication as a consultor, a recent appointment by Pope Francis that had shocked me (and a few others). Previously, I had corresponded with the Holy Father through notes and emails, and I thought that would be the extent of our contact. After all—and this is not false humility—I am not a cardinal, bishop, provincial superior, university president or anything "official" in the church. I knew from notes—and, to my surprise, a phone call—from him that he had enjoyed some of my books, but there are plenty of Catholic authors who fit that bill.

A friend of the pope asked if I would like to meet him during my visit, and of course I said yes. He contacted Pope Francis, who said he would like to meet me. So, after the pope met with the staff of the dicastery, I lined up to shake his hand, along with 300 other people. When I introduced myself, he said words, in Spanish, that changed my life: "Ah! I'd like to have an audience with you!" My Spanish is poor, so I just blurted out, "Yo también!" ("Me too!") A Vatican photographer snapped a photo of that moment.

A week later we were in his library at the Apostolic Palace, along with a translator. The appointment was listed on his official calendar and a Vatican photographer was on hand, which meant he wanted our meeting to be known—a gesture that deeply moved me, since at the time I was enduring a few public protests after publishing a book on L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics.

Even though I had barely slept the night before, I wasn't nervous at all. His calm, kind, sunny demeanor instantly put me at ease. A cardinal suggested that since the pope had invited me, I should start the conversation by asking what

To begin with, Francis was the first pope ever to use the word *gay* publicly.

he wanted to talk about. When I did, he smiled, leaned back in his chair, spread his arms wide and said, "What do *you* want to talk about?"

You will probably not be surprised to learn that I wanted to talk about L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics, a group to whom I minister; I also assumed that this was why the pope wanted to meet with me.

Pope Francis did more for L.G.B.T.Q. people than all his predecessors combined. This is not a slight against, for example, St. John Paul II or Benedict XVI, who were both holy men. But perhaps because of his experience with L.G.B.T.Q. people as archbishop of Buenos Aires, perhaps because more people had been coming out over the last 10 years, or perhaps because he was, at heart, a pastor who wanted to reach out to "todos, todos, todos" ("everyone, everyone, everyone"), Francis revolutionized the church's approach to L.G.B.T.Q. people.

Now some may scoff or say, as often is the case, "Not enough!" And it's true that some of the reforms that many L.G.B.T.Q. people wanted—changing the catechism's reference to homosexuality as a "disorder" and even approving same-sex marriage—did not happen during Francis' pontificate. But it's important to consider what he did, which could scarcely have been imagined before he took office.

To begin with, Francis was the first pope ever to use the word *gay* publicly. His five most famous words, "Who am I to judge?," referred to a question posed to him about gay priests. He publicly opposed the criminalization of homosexuality, and when asked by Outreach what he would tell bishops who continued to support such a stance, he said simply that they were "wrong."

He appointed an openly gay man, his friend Juan Carlos Cruz, to a pontifical commission. He told parents that they should welcome their gay children. He met regularly with those who minister to L.G.B.T.Q. people, including me and Sister Jeannine Gramick and her colleagues at New Ways Ministry. He wrote letters of welcome to Outreach conferences for L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics. He approved the publication of "Fiducia Supplicans," a Vatican document that permitted priests to bless same-sex marriages under certain circumstances—and weathered blowback from some parts of the church. And, perhaps most surprisingly and least well known, he met regularly with transgender Catholics and spoke with them with warmth and welcome.

All these gestures, meetings and desires for encounter were themselves a form of teaching. Like Jesus, Francis taught not only in words but in deeds. And L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics and their families have told me repeatedly what a difference this change in approach has meant.

My own meetings with him, which often focused on that topic, were always warm, friendly and encouraging. He was blunt, honest and often very funny. Over the years, exchanges of notes (his responses sent as digital copies of notes written in his minuscule handwriting that his secretaries would sometimes transcribe) helped me enormously in my ministry, as he would encourage me in one area, for example, but counsel a more deliberate approach in another.

His emphasis was always on the pastoral, not the ideological or even theological, and he was always attentive to making sure his own outreach for L.G.B.T.Q. people would not rupture church unity, a theme he repeatedly stressed during the synod. In one note, he told me that he didn't want to opt for one path because it would provoke a "chain reaction" in other countries, making opposition to L.G.B.T.Q. people in some places even more severe. "I prefer to go step by step," he wrote in another note.

One meeting stands out. Last May, after it was reported that he had made some negative remarks about gay priests and used an Italian slur (*frociaggine*) in a meeting with Italian bishops, there was a firestorm of reaction. Even I wondered: How could this be? We had had so many conversations and notes back and forth about L.G.B.T.Q. issues. It seemed out of character.

A few weeks later I was scheduled to be in Rome after helping to arrange a papal audience for a group of professional comedians. The pope invited me to see him, along with two translators. I asked a cardinal friend how I could possibly bring up something so difficult—the question of gay priests and his use of language. My friend said, "Just say, 'Holy Father, these things have been much in the news. What thoughts do you have?'"

The very first thing Francis said, as if he had been waiting to say it, was that he knew many holy, faithful and celibate gay priests and seminarians. When I suggested that it might help to say so publicly, he said, "Oh, but I think I have. And in any event, you can say that!" I wanted to make sure I understood him, so said, "So you're saying I can say that you know many holy, faithful and celibate gay priests and seminarians?" He shrugged his shoulders and said, "Of course. Because I do!" For the next hour or so, we discussed the word he used, before moving on to other more general topics: the U.S. church, the political scene and so on. It

was a relaxed and friendly conversation, but initially about a tough topic.

A few days later, I saw him at the comedians' audience, when he gave a beautiful reflection on humor. We were in the Sala Clementina, where he had first invited me to that audience five years before. When everyone lined up to shake his hand, I lingered in the back, since I had just seen him. But then I figured I would go up anyway. When I reached his chair, he laughed and said, "Ah, so now you're a famous American comedian!" I laughed and started to move away, knowing he was probably busy and tired. But he pulled me back.

Then the pope said, "Thank you for our meeting the other day. It was helpful for me. I needed to hear that." He smiled and gave me a thumbs-up.

I thought: Who does this? Who thanks someone for a difficult meeting? Who thanks someone for being challenged? The answer: a person who is open to the Holy Spirit. A person who is not afraid to listen. A person who is truly humble. Something like that doesn't make you a holy person or a saint on its own, but it's an important part of holiness.

Toward the end of our first meeting in the Apostolic Palace, in 2019, I suddenly realized that we had spent the entire time talking about L.G.B.T.Q. people and our scheduled half hour was almost up. I thought that perhaps he might want to talk about something else. So I said, "Holy Father, is there anything I can do for you?"

He said, "Yes, you can continue your ministry—in peace."

I have tried to do that ever since, and will try to continue to do so, now with his prayers. Thank you, Pope Francis, for your kindness to me, for your kindness to our L.G.B.T.Q. brothers and sisters, and for your kindness to millions of people around the world. May you rest in peace with the Father who loved you into being; with Jesus, in whose Society you labored for so long; and with the Holy Spirit, whose voice you listened to in the lives of those who prayed for a pope who would finally listen to them.

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Beginning With Mercy

An excerpt from Pope Francis' reflection at the first time he led the Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square, on March 17, 2013:

On this Fifth Sunday of Lent, the Gospel presents to us the episode of the adulterous woman (Jn 8:1-11), whom Jesus saves from being condemned to death. Jesus' attitude is striking: We do not hear words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversion. "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (v. 11). Ah! Brothers and Sisters, God's face is the face of a merciful father who is always patient. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience he has with each one of us? That is his mercy....

In the past few days I have been reading a book by a Cardinal—Cardinal [Walter] Kasper, a clever theologian, a good theologian—on mercy.... Cardinal Kasper said that feeling mercy, that this word changes everything. This is the best thing we can feel: It changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God.... Let us remember the Prophet Isaiah, who says that even if our sins were scarlet, God's love would make them white as snow. This mercy is beautiful!

I remember, when I had only just become a bishop in the year 1992, the statue of Our Lady of Fatima had just arrived in Buenos Aires and a big Mass was celebrated for the sick. I went to hear confessions at that Mass. And an elderly woman approached me, humble, very humble, and over 80 years old. I looked at her, and I said, "Grandmother"—because in our country that is how we address the elderly—do you want to make your confession?"

"Yes," she said to me.... "The Lord forgives all things," she said to me with conviction....

"But how do you know, Madam?"

"If the Lord did not forgive everything, the world would not exist."

I felt an urge to ask her: "Tell me, Madam, did you study at the Gregorian [University]?", because that is the wisdom which the Holy Spirit gives: inner wisdom focused on God's mercy. Let us not forget this word: God never ever tires of forgiving us! ... The problem is that we ourselves tire, we do not want to ask, we grow weary of asking for forgiveness.... Let us never tire, let us never tire! He is the loving Father who always pardons, who has that heart of mercy for us all. And let us too learn to be merciful to everyone. Let us invoke the intercession of Our Lady who held in her arms the Mercy of God made man.

What Makes a Movie Irish?

By Jake Martin

In the first episode of the Netflix series "Bodkin," set in the eponymous Irish village, a local criminal, Seamus Gallagher (David Wilmot), confronts one of the series' protagonists, Gilbert Power (Will Forte) at a pub and dismissively refers to him as the "American podcaster." As I watched this scene unfold, viewing it by myself on my laptop, I had a suspicion as to where it was headed. As my certainty of Gilbert's rebuttal began to grow, I could feel my shoulders rise, my back stiffen and my eyes squint, as he responded in a soft California accent, "Actually, I'm Irish."

With that, I shut my eyes, felt my shoulders hit my ears and pressed my lips tightly together, before exhaling deeply. I knew it. I know it. I know Gilbert. I have been Gilbert. The clueless American tourist in the motherland (while cluelessly referring to it as such—"the motherland") waxing on about my Irishness to the Irish in Ireland.

I would have the opportunity to live in Ireland many years after that first well-intentioned yet utterly oblivious "homecoming" tour, and it was only then that I came to recognize the supreme hubris of the American-Irish tourist let loose in Ireland for the first time. When family and friends would visit me at the Jesuit residence in Dublin where I resided, I would advise them to be sure to qualify their self-described "Irishness" with a hyphen and a fol-

"Calvary," starring Kelly Reilly and Brendan Gleeson, is easily the most significant film to address the decline of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

low-up word like *-American* or *-heritage*. It's not that the native Irish take offense at such claims so much as that they find them to be amusing confirmations of their own prejudices about overconfident American tourists.

Watching the scene from "Bodkin"—several years after my time in Ireland—evoked an initial jolt of secondhand embarrassment (the kind usually reserved for occasions such as accompanying an aging boomer parent to an Apple store). But it also caused me to consider once more the question of Irish identity. Who is Irish? What makes someone or something Irish? What does it mean to be Irish? And who gets to say who gets to be Irish? Defining Irish identity has long been a bone of contention for the Irish people—whoever they may be, according to whatever criteria you choose to use.

Exporting Culture

That this question arose out of a scene from a television series set in Ireland, created by a Brit (Jez Scharf) and produced by an American streaming platform (Netflix) speaks to the transnational reality that has always been the backdrop for Irish film and television. For an island inhabited by approximately seven million people (5.4 million in the Republic and 1.9 million in the six Northern Ireland counties), Ireland has had a disproportionate amount of influence on global culture relative to its size. Ireland's cultural legacy has been firmly rooted in music and literature—U2 and James Joyce are two of its most significant cultural exports of recent memory, and two of yours truly's personal favorites.

And since the emergence of Maureen O'Hara in the 1940s, whose flaming red locks led her to be crowned Hollywood's "Queen of Technicolor," Ireland has consistently made significant contributions to the English-speaking film and television industries as well. And it is Ireland's unstable and frequently peripheral relationship with the two dominant Anglophone film and television industries in Hollywood and Great Britain, as well as its own attempt to define an indigenous national cinema, that I would like to suggest can be mapped onto the perpetually fluctuating question of Irish identity itself.

This is to say that questions of Irish identity and "Irishness" are, and always have been, in a state of flux, which is also the case surrounding discourses around Irish film and television. What is an Irish film (or TV series for that matter)? What makes a film Irish? This has been the question since cinema began, or at least since Mary Kate Danaher (O'Hara) and Sean Thornton (John Wayne) first played "patty fingers" at the holy water font in Irish-American director John Ford's classic "The Quiet Man" (1952). Similarly, what makes anyone or anything Irish? Birthplace? Passport? Religion?

Though the question of Irish identity did not begin in the 20th century, its international significance certainly did with the establishment of an independent Irish state in

Questions of Irish identity and 'Irishness' are, and always have been, in a state of flux.

the 1920s, after centuries of rule by the British. Of course, Ireland's break with their British colonizer did not prove to be a clean one, as those six northern counties remain under British rule.

The understanding of the Irish people as fundamentally rural, Roman Catholic and culturally Gaelic was promulgated by many in positions of power—both civil and ecclesiastical—over the first half-century of the newly formed Irish state, and was ideologically fundamental to many of the problems that took root in the North.

The 1990s brought about two significant moments that altered conceptions of what it meant to be Irish: the Good Friday Agreement and the rise of the Celtic Tiger. The Good Friday Agreement took place in April 1998 and for the most part put an end to the sectarian violence in the North, as well as opening up the border between the two Irish states.

The Celtic Tiger is a name given to the period of remarkable economic growth that began in the mid-1990s and came to an end with the global recession at the end of the first decade of the 2000s. The Irish economy's rapid and expansive growth led to an equally accelerated demographic shift, with the Republic transitioning seemingly overnight from being a locus of emigration into a primary destination for immigrants, especially from Eastern Europe and South America.

These two revelatory moments in Ireland's recent history set the stage for the significant social and cultural shifts that have occurred since the beginning of the new millenium. These included the legalization of divorce, abortion and same-sex marriage and the general rise of secularism.

Modernization, both economic and cultural—something Ireland embraced later than its counterparts in Western Europe—played a role in the decline of religiosity in Ireland. However, the blame for the rapid rise of secularization in Ireland, particularly in the Republic, in large part falls squarely on the shoulders of the Catholic Church itself. This, of course, is primarily due to the revelations of abuse and its cover-ups that have been the order of the day in the Irish media since the mid-1990s and that were documented in multiple government reports within the past three years.

Another factor in the decline of religiosity was the theology that was—and still is, in many places—promulgated by the church, which the Irish sociologist Tom Inglis refers to as a "simple faith." It offered a duty-bound and unquestioning notion of God and church, wherein the laity remained placidly submissive to ecclesial authority and compliant in matters of practice and devotion.

Movies With Granny

As a little boy, every year on Paddy's Day, I would find myself seated beside my Granny, herself the daughter of immigrants from Counties Mayo and Galway respectively, in her house on Chicago's North Side, watching a local station's annual airing of "The Quiet Man." To many Irish immigrants and their children, Ford's film had at some point transformed from a fictional cinematic artifact to an authentic historical memory. Innisfree, the fictional rural village where "The Quiet Man" is set, with its fiery colleens, lush, green landscapes and thatch-roofed cottages, had become the romanticized reality of the Ireland they had left behind.

But ironically, even the question of the Irishness of this film is up for speculation. It was set and filmed in the west of Ireland, primarily in the village of Cong in County Mayo. Many of its actors were Irish-born nationals, including O'Hara, as well as perpetual scene-stealer and lovable imp Barry Fitzgerald, who portrayed the town bookmaker and busybody, Michaeleen Flynn. Other members of the cast could claim Irish heritage, including Wayne (born Marion Morrison). John Ford himself was part of the Irish diaspora, his parents having emigrated from Ireland in the latter part of the 19th century.

However, "The Quiet Man" is very much a product of Hollywood, financed by an American studio (Republic Pictures) and featuring a host of non-Irish performers. Perhaps most notable was the American actor Ward Bond as the village priest, Father Peter Lonergan. Bond, like many of the actors in the cast, including O'Hara and Wayne, was a part of Ford's informal "company" of actors that he regularly used in his films. This stock company of actors repeatedly proved to be just as comfortable in Ford's myriad films set in the American Old West as they were in the rural Irish setting of "The Quiet Man."

There was little in the way of indigenous film production in Ireland until the late 1970s. But the industry grew significantly in the '90s, thanks to the economic boom and


Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara in "The Quiet Man"

the re-creation of the Irish Film Board, now called Screen Ireland, in 1993. Screen Ireland began providing funding for the development, production and distribution of films and led to an extraordinary increase in films being made in and about Ireland by Irish natives.

What emerges when discussing Irish film, then, is a mélange of transnational cinematic projects that are considered more or less Irish. There is, for example, Element Pictures, an Irish production and distribution company that initially focused on Irish-based projects like the zombie/horror mishmash "Boy Eats Girl" (directed by Stephen Bradley, 2005) and the rising Irish auteur Lenny Abrahamson's debut feature, "Adam & Paul" (2004). Element has subsequently moved into backing more international products, most significantly the works of the Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos, whose films include the Oscar-winning "The Favourite" (2018) and "Poor Things" (2023).

This is not to say that Element has entirely abandoned its Irish roots, as it continues to finance Irish-based television series, perhaps most notably "Normal People" (2020), based on the novel of the same title by the Irish author Sally Rooney. "Normal People" received a significant amount of critical acclaim upon its release and catapulted its lead actor, Paul Mescal, to global stardom.

Indeed, if there is any area of the global film industry where Ireland has made a disproportionate contribution, it is in the realm of male actors. Mescal is only the most recent addition to a long list of Irish actors who have crossed the Atlantic and made a name for themselves in Hollywood. Among the most notable are Liam Neeson, Colin Farrell, Cillian Murphy, Pierce Brosnan, Peter O'Toole, Richard Harris, Stephen Boyd and the aforementioned Barry Fitzgerald.

Leading Ladies and Irish Auteurs

Ireland's track record with female actors is not nearly as robust, with O'Hara still holding pride of place as their most famous leading lady export. However, before the pandemic seemed to stall her career momentum, Saoirse Ronan was one of the most sought-after young actors in the industry and staked her claim as the biggest female name in cinema that Ireland has produced since O'Hara. Still, there are quite a few other talented Irish female actors with lower profiles than Ronan working regularly in high-profile projects, notably the Oscar-nominated Ruth Negga, the "Derry Girls" star Nicola Coughlan and the "Bodkin" star Siobhán Cullen.

In terms of filmmakers, Lenny Abrahamson was set to take the mantle of leading Irish auteur from Sheridan and Jordan after the 2015 success of "Room," based on the novel by the Irish-Canadian writer Emma Donoghue. "Room" received much critical acclaim and garnered an Academy Award for Best Actress for Brie Larson, the film's American star. Yet Abrahamson has made only two films in the decade since its release and has instead focused on television projects.

Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

Miranda Richardson in Neil Jordan's "The Crying Game"

Any conversation about Irish filmmakers must include mention of the London-born McDonagh brothers: Martin and John Michael. Martin, the more famous and younger of the two, is best known for writing and directing "In Bruges" (2008), "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" (2017) and "The Banshees of Inisherin" (2022). The elder brother, John Michael, wrote and directed "The Guard" (2011) and "Calvary" (2014).

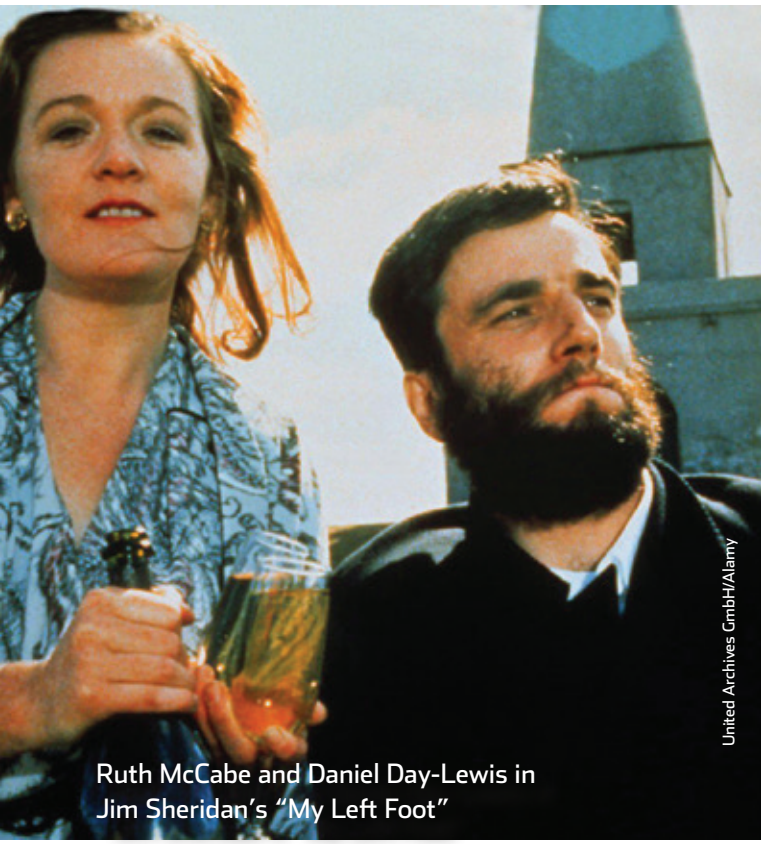
Martin rose to fame in the 1990s primarily due to the success of his plays, which are set in the west of Ireland and the islands just off its coast. While both brothers' work has generally been well received by global audiences and critics, there are those in Irish theater and film circles who aren't as fond of either of the McDonagh brothers' depictions of the Irish people, claiming that they frequently rely on negative and archaic stereotypes of the rural Irish.

I contend, however, that John Michael McDonagh's "Calvary" is easily the most significant film to address the decline of the Catholic Church in Ireland in the wake of the Celtic Tiger and the clerical abuse crisis. It stars Brendan Gleeson as Father James, the pastor of a parish in County Sligo, who is confronted in the confessional by an unseen clerical abuse survivor who informs him that he is giving the priest a week to get his affairs in order before he murders him. According to the prospective killer, the fact that Father James is a "good priest" will make his murder all the more satisfying, as "there's no point in killing a bad priest. But killing a good one? That'd be a shock, now. They wouldn't know what to make of it."

The film then follows the priest over the course of the week as he continues to minister to his wayward flock, a rural community coming to terms with the economic crash in 2008 that brought the Celtic Tiger to a screeching halt. "Calvary" very much places a cinematic punctuation mark on the end of an era in which Irish identity and Catholicism were synonymous terms.

Depictions of the Catholic Church in films set in Ireland, save for a few notable exceptions, have come forth only from the 1980s onward, and as such have typically been critical of the church's influence and interference in cultural and civil affairs. The abuse revelations that came to the fore in the 1990s provided a new area for cinematic interrogation, and a handful of films from the early 2000s, such as "The Magdalene Sisters" (Peter Mullan, 2002) and "Song for a Raggy Boy" (Aisling Walsh, 2003), used the melodramatic mode as a means of foregrounding the voices of abuse survivors in public discourses surrounding the Catholic Church.

Catholicism still frequently plays a background role in many Irish-based media projects, including "Bodkin" and the acclaimed TV series "Bad Sisters." But more often than not these days, Catholicism is featured primarily



Ruth McCabe and Daniel Day-Lewis in Jim Sheridan's "My Left Foot"

Catholicism still plays a background role in many Irish-based media projects.

in films and television series about the past, such as the hugely popular "Derry Girls" and the film "Small Things Like These" (Tim Mielants, 2024), starring Cillian Murphy and based on the novella of the same name by the Irish author Claire Keegan. "Small Things Like These," which is set in the Irish town of New Ross in 1985, exemplifies the transnational nature of Irish cinema with its Irish setting and primarily Irish cast (the British actor Emily Watson being a notable exception in the role of the "bad nun"). Its Belgian director and Irish, Belgian and American (Matt Damon and Ben Affleck's Artist's Equity) financing make it a truly international product.

Where does the Catholic Church find itself in this new Irish cinema? Sadly, a new spate of film and television projects featuring Catholicism negatively can be anticipated in light of a recent wave of abuse revelations coming forward, notably from the high-profile Blackrock College in South Dublin, run by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, or Spiritans. This leaves the Irish church in the double bind of being culturally referred to as either a relic of the past or the locus of abuse. All the while, Irish society continues to be transformed from an insular, homogenous, developing outback to a cosmopolitan, diverse, pluralistic member of the greater European community.

These rapid societal shifts are allowing for new stories and storytellers to come to the fore in the Irish cinematic universe, particularly women and the "new Irish"—i.e., immigrants from Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa. But for the Catholic Church in Ireland, its role both socially and culturally seems to diminish more and more.

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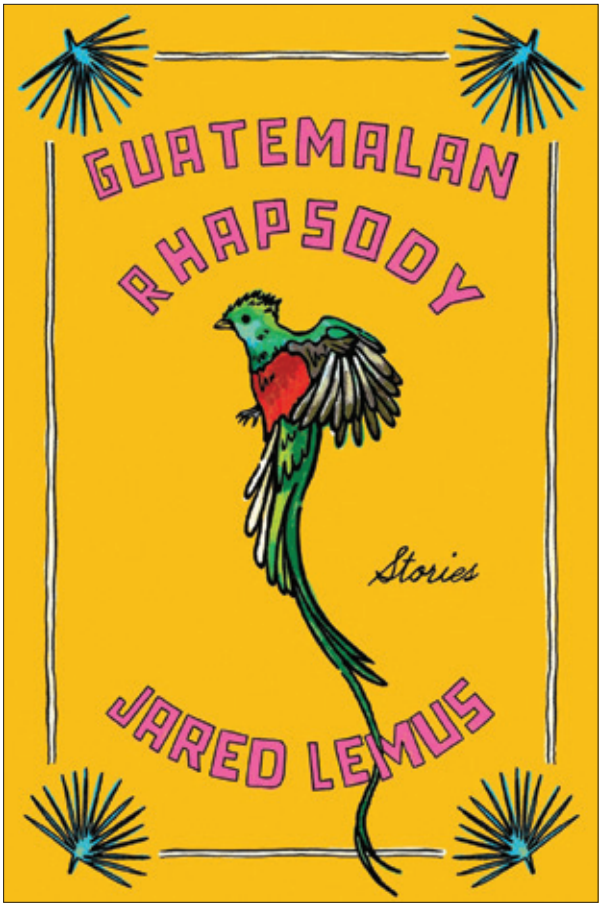
SURVIVING ON THE MARGINS



Ecco / 240p $29

In Jared Lemus's robust, melancholy debut short story collection *Guatemalan Rhapsody*, the narrator of the story "Heart Sleeves" is in a representative predicament: going nowhere fast. He's stuck, having lost his job at a pizza place for smoking weed and remaining defiant when a customer falsely accuses him of pocketing her change.

"Back in Guatemala, where my parents are," he confesses, "people had also treated me like that. My eyes were always wandering, and people thought I looked shifty." At home, he gets high and pines for his roommate Teyo's girlfriend, barely pursuing his aspiration to become a tattoo artist until Teyo brings home a flier for a tattoo shop offering a chance to win an apprenticeship in a portfolio contest. Teyo, the lesser artist of the two, is eager to practice designs on the narrator's skin, while the narrator is reluctant, even as he explains, "I was a good artist. I had sketchbooks, though I rarely draw anymore, opting for weed and heartbreak instead. But maybe that was just who I was—someone with unfulfilled potential, which looks a lot like standing still."

The sting of unfulfilled potential unifies the characters in *Guatemalan Rhapsody*, many of whom strive for love, respect or mere survival in tales that unfold in Guatemalan towns or among immigrant communities in the United States. The characters often work low-paying jobs that keep them mostly out of sight—graveyard shift janitor, laundryman, night bus driver, long-haul trucker, rental cabin manager. These characters eke out lives at the edge of society, regretting their pasts and yearning for better futures, while addictions or mistakes drag them lower.

At the root of the characters' marginality often lies a familial fracturing—they are orphans, kids left on their own in the United States in the wake of parental deportation, parents who have lost children or exes abandoned after one too many betrayals. Many of the stories begin when a breeze of glamour or possibility enters the character's lives and stirs it up—a Hollywood film crew arrives to shoot a movie in a Guatemalan village, a once-great soccer pro is hired to coach a mediocre middle school team, a van taxi driver tries to earn a bit more cash by ferrying drugs.

The stories are remarkable for their authenticity, grit and for the kinds of often-overlooked lives Lemus pays keen attention to. Lemus graces even the most knucklehead addicts, thieves and cheaters he depicts with the benefit of the doubt and human dignity.

In many of the stories, we join the characters after some calamity has disrupted their lives and they are trying to survive the rupture, such as in "Saint Dismas," titled after the penitent thief crucified next to Jesus. We meet the narrator during a robbery he attempts along with a pack of other homeless teenagers. Their scam is to stretch a rope across a Guatemalan road to force passing cars to stop, and when the driver complies, to take their money. But they're teenagers, amateur bandits, and their unarmed stickups often go awry, such as when a car accelerates through the cord, leaving them with rope-burned hands. As the story unfolds, we learn how they ended up here, trying to steal enough funds for food and a motel room.

The teenagers had fled their village when a gang claimed it as a hub between two cities. "The *mareros* were all business, all gold teeth and tattoos," the narrator explains about the ferocity of the gang members, "the last thing our parents ever saw." The kids rushed to the jungle for safety, but then what? Orphaned and penniless, they turn to this scheme to survive. "The government ignored us," the narrator explains. "The cops ignored us. Said we should have been prepared."

One day their rope entraps the car of Leslie, a girl from their village who escaped with her father when the gangs first arrived. They haven't fared much better than the kids

in the jungle. For a time Leslie joins the others in a scheme to steal even more money, but then she betrays them. Still, the narrator forgives her. "I don't think she did it out of spite or anger but out of necessity," he explains. "I think she was desperate, just like us, just like that thief they crucified with Jesus. He stole because he had to, our mother had said. And God forgave him. I thought about that a lot: how Jesus said the thief would dine with him in heaven that night. Sometimes I picture it...sitting at the right hand of God. Sometimes I can almost taste the wine."

It's hard to begrudge the bad behavior of another person as desperate for survival as you, many of the stories suggest. When a man sleeps with his friend's girlfriend, a group of janitors conspires to get a security guard fired so they won't lose their own jobs during budget cuts, and a drunk man catches the family's rental cabin business on fire, Lemus depicts no rage and rarely even an expression of hard feelings. Forgiveness is implicit in the connection between these characters, in their solidarity at the bottom rung. I've been there, as hard up as you, the clemency of these characters suggests.

In "Bus Stop Baby," the narrator Moises works as a "busboy/dishwasher" and rents the only bed he can afford after he's kicked out of his prior accommodation for drug use: a damp mattress in an unheated garage in a house full of carousing coke addicts, miles from the restaurant where he works. After he's late to work, his manager advises him to apply for reduced transit fare. When the bus pass arrives, he wakes up freezing one night and decides to ride the bus all night for warmth.

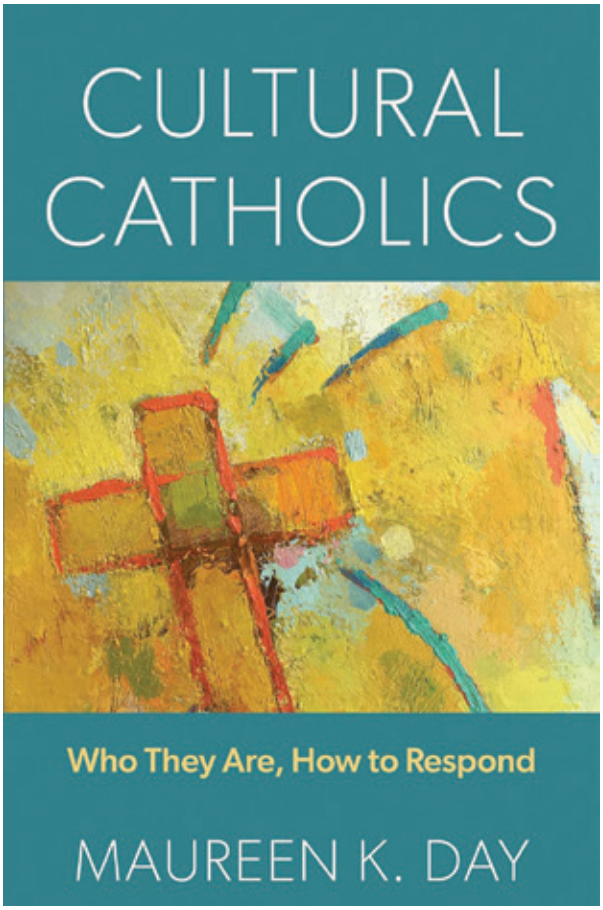
As he rides, he meets a man named Al, who shares whiskey and explains, "Got nowhere to go, nowhere to be. A pure bus stop baby." Al offers his story and Moises gives his, which began in Guatemala City: "I told him about how I was a disappointment to my parents. They'd moved to the States to give me a better future, but with the time they spent worrying about my future, they'd neglected the present, and I'd found something else in the meantime."

"People are quick to give up on you," Al observes, "And I don't mean you, I mean us." The kind night bus driver, however, offers Moises a way out. She tells him the bus company is hiring, paying a good wage with benefits. "Course, you'd have to drop the habit," she explains. The story ends with a choose-your-own-adventure delivered in two columns, "Option A" and "Option B," one where Moises gives in to the undertow of his situation, and another where he struggles free from his addiction and becomes a bus driver. However, even the happier ending proves tenuous as Moises recalls Al's belief that "no matter what he did, he was destined to become a bus stop baby. And I felt the same—a kind of calling to the bus stop benches."

Lemus's stories are remarkable for their authenticity and grit.

Lemus uses upside-down exclamation points and question marks at the beginning of English sentences, following the rules of proper Spanish grammar. In this gesture and in the compassionate humanity of Lemus's stories, this collection marks the debut of a voice for the in-between, of people caught between one place and another, looking for a place to rest.

Jenny Shank's story collection Mixed Company *won the Colorado Book Award, and her novel* The Ringer *won the High Plains Book Award. She teaches creative writing at Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver.*



Liturgical Press / 168p $22

Over half of self-identifying Catholics do not attend Mass on Sunday on a regular basis. For some, this reality is shocking, maybe even horrifying. For others, this data only verifies a growing assumption. Whether this situation is a revelation or a confirmation, learning who these individuals are and what actually led them here is likely to surprise.

In attempting to understand what keeps many people from coming to Mass more often, the church frequently operates on a misdiagnosis. There is often a disconnect between how voices in the church describe "secularity" or religious disaffiliation and what the most recent research reveals. What we find is that the situation is more complex than we give it credit for, and this is, in part, why our misdiagnosis has led to a mistreatment.

The growing corpus of literature on evangelization and catechesis is frequently isolated to the philosophical and theological realm, typically responding to ideological currents. Appealing to these disciplines is not the issue; the problem lies in not grounding these claims or putting them in conversation with actual data. While, in one sense, this disconnect makes it hard to develop practical, pastoral responses to these individuals, it ultimately reveals a more fundamental issue: We don't know or understand who they actually are.

Cultural Catholics seeks to fill this gap. Author Maureen K. Day works to answer the question of who "cultural Catholics" really are—and how to connect with them. As a sociologist and professor of religion, Day offers a refreshing and insightful exploration in her contribution to this pressing issue. Her treatment of the data is rigorous but accessible, and her presentation of pathways forward is thoughtful and discerning.

Day describes a "cultural Catholic" as one who identifies as Catholic while reporting that they attend Mass less than once per month. While varying definitions exist, she explains that cultural Catholics are ultimately understood as individuals "more loosely tethered to Catholicism."

Presenting her book as a starting point, Day exhorts readers to "go beyond pure understanding" and use it as a resource that leads readers to engage cultural Catholics within their orbit. She reasserts that she does not intend to give the illusion of having all the answers but instead promotes an approach of genuine accompaniment. Day further fosters this spirit and demonstrates its potential by embodying it herself throughout the work.

Along with demonstrating academic rigor and careful thought in her presentation, Day exhibits genuine compassion and respect for the subjects of her research. In defining the population that makes up cultural Catholics based on the data, she clarifies that the term *cultural* is neither an evaluative judgment nor a stand-in for "less" Catholic.

Rather than taking a reactionary stance toward the Catholics she is writing about, Day assumes the position of both a serious scholar and a fellow Catholic. She takes them seriously and explicitly rejects the notion that these individuals are in any way inferior. She sincerely attempts to understand what fostered the distance between these individuals and the church, exploring what sources of tethering remain and how they might be nurtured and encouraged.

The structure of *Cultural Catholics* is one of its greatest strengths, making the book a resource that is as meditative as it is practical and applicable. While each chapter focuses on a specific topic arising from the data, it begins with a brief vignette that Day draws from interviews she conducted. These stories ultimately serve to give voice to the complex situations of cultural Catholics, priming the reader to identify these individuals within the data they are about to receive.

The man who married a woman of another faith and struggles with her inability to participate in Communion; the college student whose home parish is often silent on

critical social issues; the husband and wife who felt increasingly ostracized by their faith community after their son came out as gay: These are but a few of the stories that capture the experience of cultural Catholics.

Day in no way diminishes the importance of attending Mass. She reiterates that Mass embeds people into parishes, enables them to build relationships, helps them develop a Catholic worldview and is ultimately important in the formation of a Catholic identity. What does it mean then, that some cultural Catholics maintain a Catholic identity less rooted in parish life and the church? Taking both the importance of the Eucharist and the faith of cultural Catholics seriously, Day identifies potential pathways forward.

For Day, there is a need to rethink and refocus not only on how we are reaching out to these individuals but also on what we actually hope to accomplish in doing so. She contends that if our goal is simply to increase Mass attendance, we will ultimately fail. Enlivening the faith of cultural Catholics and rekindling a sense of belonging in the church is the deeper work we must take on.

Recovering an understanding of this deeper work will help us simplify the ways we go about accomplishing it. Day explains that we often operate on an "add fuel" mindset, believing that more energy and excitement will reinvigorate engagement in our parish communities. Rather than looking at possible additions, she suggests that we identify existing barriers and consider how to "reduce friction" instead. For example, if a parish invites parents to a fellowship event, offering free babysitting with confirmation teens in need of service hours will likely make the opportunity more possible for irregular attendees.

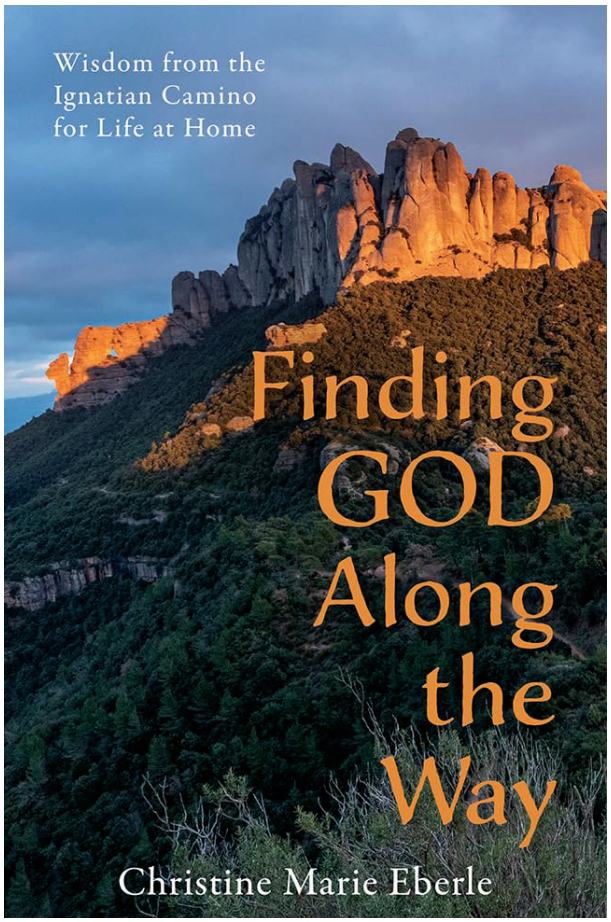
Being practical and creative in this way will enable parishes to foster a more welcoming environment and build more likely pathways for engagement with cultural Catholics. Day hopes that in identifying ways of responding to the broad needs and struggles of these individuals, from mental health to financial challenges, deeper emotional ties will be made, encouraging more engaged participation in the life of the church.

Recognizing that no one parish can single-handedly respond to each of these needs, Day suggests that dioceses must discern how best to pool and coordinate efforts to better respond to the cultural Catholics in their care. She suggests recognizing the collective strengths and weaknesses can enable parishes to "specialize" while still fostering a more collaborative, communal approach.

As a scholar who researches evangelization and seeks to identify how the church can better reach those beyond our pews, I struggle to find thinkers who propose pathways forward that are both practically sound and spiritually rich. *Cultural Catholics* embodies both of these needs and is a resource from which any diocese, campus ministry or scholar engaged in this work would benefit. Day is neither blindly optimistic nor despairing; rather, she charts a way ahead fitting for this Jubilee Year, undergirded by authentic, ambitious hope.

Day assumes the position of both a serious scholar and a fellow Catholic.

Noah Banasiewicz, S.J., *is an editorial intern at* ***America*** *and is pursuing a master's degree in public media at Fordham University in the Bronx.*



Paraclete Press / 192p $19

As Christine Marie Eberle details her experiences leading up to and eventually walking the Camino Ignaciano with the Ignatian Volunteer Corps in *Finding God Along the Way*, she masterfully weaves together Scripture, poetry and Ignatian spirituality. Eberle's new book is an accessible, uplifting read for anyone who sees their faith as a journey. Her deep connection with, and awareness of, her humanity makes this book relatable to the reader, regardless of whether they have undertaken a pilgrimage like the one to which she is called. Her book is an invitation to us all to recognize our own lives as pilgrimages toward God.

From the beginning, *Finding God Along the Way* itself is like any journey. You don't have to be a pilgrim on the Camino Ignaciano to understand the very human anxieties Eberle describes. Before heading to Spain from the United States, Eberle worries about details on behalf of her group, painstakingly considering things like how many nights in a hotel the group will need before they meet up with their host—yet she doesn't manage to find hiking shoes that would prevent the blisters that eventually plague her journey. The feelings of frustration at preparing for the wrong things are recognizable to anyone who has set out on a big endeavor thinking they have it all planned out—and then painfully realized that planning didn't pan out quite right.

The concept of pilgrimage has long fascinated me. While in graduate school for theology in 2011, I received a grant that allowed me to spend a summer visiting Ignatian sites in Spain, including Loyola, Montserrat and Manresa, before walking the Camino de Santiago. Even though Eberle and I were in different life spaces—I was in my 20s, working as a graduate assistant in Berkeley, nose piercing and hippie skirt my normal attire, while she was heading into what she refers to as the autumn of her life after a fruitful career in campus ministry—so much of what she experienced mirrored my own memories of the Camino. In fact, we even stayed at the same hostel in a town where the Camino Ignaciano crosses the Camino de Santiago.

While Eberle was part of a group, I undertook my pilgrimage alone. Eberle astutely claims, "We really never know what others are carrying." Before I set out from Roncesvalles on my own trip, I worried that I would find myself feeling lonely, but instead I found myself in a community unlike any other. It turns out that walking for hours on end each day allows for a lot of space for conversations! One day, I learned about the untimely death of my new companion's mother; on another, I heard about the loss of a job and general direction in a fellow pilgrim's life.

Some days included intense conversations about faith and religion, while others were full of lighthearted laughter after a hearty lunch with plenty of Spanish wine. I myself was trying to sort out how I had found myself in theology school in a faith tradition that often left me disappointed. With seemingly endless hours of walking each day and very few distractions, pilgrims opened up to one another and shared our stories, allowing ourselves to go beneath the surface and share the burdens that others were carrying. Eberle's pilgrim community was no different, and her group benefited greatly from prayer suggestions from their host, Father José, and regular Masses and reflections together.

Eberle learned in her experience that pilgrimage strips all of the superfluous things in our life away. Even though she brought more than she needed in her suitcase, the Camino helped Eberle to challenge herself to let go of those things both internally and externally that just don't matter. The bigger challenge, though, was to consider how to transfer this type of detachment to daily life after the Camino Ignaciano.

Just as St. Ignatius offered his sword to Our Lady of

> Pilgrimage strips all of the superfluous things in our life away.

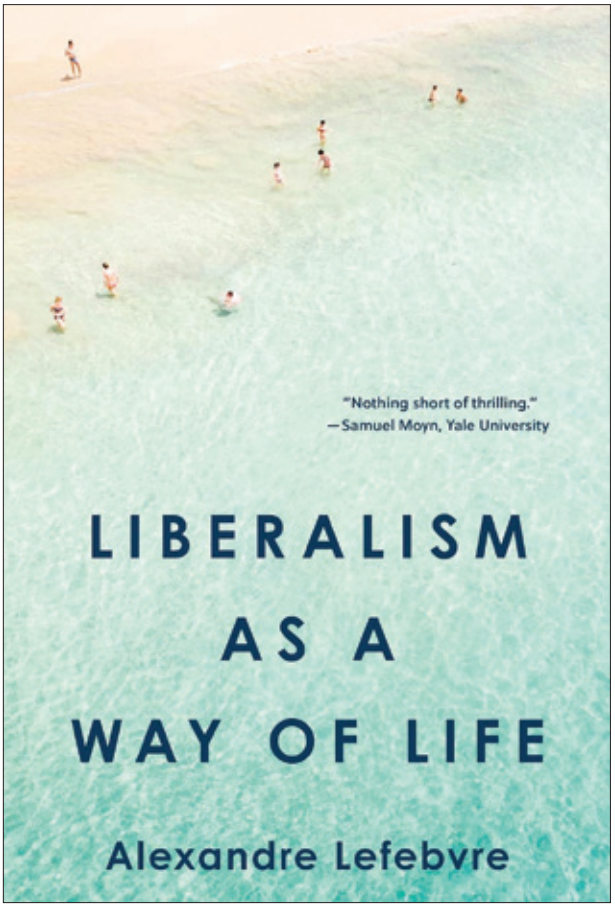
Montserrat centuries before, Father José encouraged Eberle's group to offer a symbol of their conversion during their vigil in Montserrat near the end of their pilgrimage. The members of Eberle's group each left something before Our Lady, much like pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago do at the Cruz de Ferro, which is the highest point on the Camino Francés. Even the least religious people I met on the Camino looked forward to the moment in which they could leave the stone (or, in my case, a shell from the Pacific Ocean) they had carried from home, symbolic of something that they needed to release.

While I enjoyed reminiscing about my own Camino as I read, what made this book especially life-giving for me at this point in my life is that Eberle pushes the reader to slow down and pay attention in attainable ways. Eberle admits she is the kind of person who is always on the go, regularly taking on more projects, even when she tells herself she is going to do otherwise. She writes, "I'd always considered myself a multitasker, pridefully cramming efficient action into every nook and cranny of my calendar."

Like the author, I have always prided myself on being a multi-tasker who can handle it all. As a mother of two active young girls, a wife, a Catholic high school administrator and a graduate student again, I find that getting myself to slow down is no easy task. Yet I forced myself to stop at the end of each chapter of *Finding God Along the Way* to sit with the questions posed. What would it look like if I allowed myself even just a few minutes each day to slow down and pay attention to where God might be showing up? It turns out that it makes a great deal of difference.

Ultimately, Eberle calls us to notice the small moments of grace all around us through her reflections on her Camino. My tween nephew playing a game with my preschool daughter, both of them belly laughing. The elderly woman complimenting my daughters' eccentric clothing after an especially fidgety Sunday Mass. Neighbors from Hindu, Christian and atheist backgrounds enthusiastically introducing each other's holidays and celebrations to one another's children. If I hadn't read this book in the midst of this busy season of my life, I might have missed these grace-filled moments. I'm grateful I took the time to pause. As Eberle reminds us: "There is power in the pause. Whether for a moment or an hour, a day or a week, a well-timed pause can reconnect us to ourselves, giving us fresh energy and perspective." *Finding God Along the Way* gave me the encouragement to do just this.

Kristy Savage *is the director of faculty professional growth at Archbishop Mitty High School in San Jose, Calif. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in educational leadership at Creighton University.*



Princeton University Press / 304p $30

If you've ever felt that your everyday life seems to be little more than never-ending chores, a growing to-do list, and endless Zoom meetings, you might be able to relate to the philosopher John Rawls's observation that ordinary life needs to be "graced by something to be worthwhile." Rawls is the patron saint of Alexandre Lefebvre's new book, *Liberalism as a Way of Life*.

As a secular humanist, Lefebvre aims to do nothing less than re-moralize and add a sense of enchantment to liberalism. He acknowledges that exclusive humanists are often missing a connection with something bigger than themselves. He argues that for secular people, liberalism, if practiced intentionally, can be the grace they are seeking in their ordinary lives.

By *liberals*, Lefebvre does not mean only those on the political left, as the word is often used in the United States, but classical liberals of all stripes: libertarians, free market liberals, conservatives and social democrats—that is, supporters of modern liberal democratic regimes. But what does he mean by *liberalism*, a notoriously difficult word to define?

At one point, Lefebvre says *liberalism* means "everyone is free to lead the kind of life that they want." But in discussing liberalism's origins in the 19th century, he suggests that liberalism was created as a response to the rise of democracy. Liberalism redeployed tools, originally developed to limit royal absolutism, to rein in the excesses of democracy. In his telling, much of what many critics find troubling about society today—individualism, materialism, conformity—actually stems from democracy, while liberalism's purpose is to moderate those tendencies.

To build the moral character that Lefebvre says secular liberals need, he develops three spiritual exercises to help them become both better and happier people. Lefebvre's first spiritual exercise is Rawls's thought experiment for how to create a fair society: Imagine that a "veil of ignorance" prevents you from knowing your own or anyone else's gender, race, class, etc. Because you don't know your own identity, Rawls argued, you would want a society that is fair for everyone and even helps those most disadvantaged to have an equal opportunity, rather than a society that favored your own group.

Rawls says that the veil of ignorance allows us to choose principles to organize our common life *sub specie aeternitatis*—that is, with a God's-eye view. Lefebvre argues that, even though the original position is a thought experiment with only one right answer, it can also be a spiritual exercise that lifts us into a universal or disinterested point of view. It can help us see beyond our narrow self-interest.

Lefebvre's second spiritual exercise is reflective equilibrium. In this exercise, one tries to balance and revise one's judgments according to one's principles. It is a form of rational reflection and assumes that humans are rational beings who can reason their way to right action. The purpose is to become a more coherent and authentic person, whose actions and beliefs are aligned.

His third spiritual exercise is public reason. This means explaining one's political position reasonably and without reference to any conception of the good life, such as religion. However, Lefebvre proposes public reason not only as a way of speaking, but also as a form of listening. He hopes this will lessen our current political polarization. This spiritual exercise can be practiced when one hears an unfamiliar point of view. Lefebvre says we should translate that point of view into political values that the person to whom we are talking can be presumed to share. He gives an example: If a liberal hears the parable of the good Samaritan, he or she can pull two principles from it: "moral concern and social provision."

Lefebvre was inspired by the historian Helena Rosenblatt's recent book on the history of liberalism. Liberalism, according to Rosenblatt, was not always atomistic or based on enlightened self-interest; rather, during the 19th centu-

ry, it emphasized generosity and moral goodness in addition to freedom.

What Lefebvre fails to mention is that historically almost all liberals believed that religion, by making citizens moral, was necessary to make liberalism work. Most liberals eventually came to believe that some kind of liberal Protestantism would be best. Even Rawls assumed that modern liberals would also hold what he called comprehensive doctrines—that is, a religion or spirituality of some kind. But Lefebvre, relying on the history of the meaning of the word *liberal* as not only free but generous, pitches his book specifically to secular humanists because he believes liberalism has the spiritual resources to be its own comprehensive doctrine. In fact, he thinks liberalism is a spiritual practice that can transform lives.

Yet Lefebvre never explains how generosity and morality became so little associated with liberalism today. I would suggest that *laissez-faire* capitalism, one of the original strands of liberalism, came to dominate all others, especially among ordinary people, now imagined as consumers rather than as citizens. Liberalism may have no conception of the good, but capitalism's god is profit. Liberal generosity and morality in such a schema tends to dissolve before consumer choice and the notion that pursuing your own self-interest will benefit everyone eventually.

Because Lefebvre is trying something new in adapting Rawlsian political philosophy as spiritual exercises, it is not easy for him to show us how these exercises work in the lives of actual people. However, he could have shared with his readers how these spiritual practices have transformed his own life, or, failing that, how they help him resolve dilemmas in his life. As with religious transformation, proof is never possible, but a reader might be persuaded by exemplars, heroes and saints.

Instead, Lefebvre provides fictional and hypothetical examples. If, while waiting in the endless line at the D.M.V., we ponder how everyone around us is a free and equal citizen, we will "lessen frustration and rage at our society." As we wait, Lefebvre says, we might note the "dignity of equals recognizing equals." This exercise will remind readers of St. Ignatius' dictum to find God in all things, even the D.M.V.

Lefebvre has taken a monumental leap by admitting that liberalism is its own conception of the good and not a reasonable and neutral arbiter among competing visions of the good, as liberals like Rawls insisted. He doesn't mention the more than 200-year-old Catholic critique of liberalism—that freedom not ordered to the good is no freedom at all—yet he implicitly accepts that critique by expanding liberalism's moral concern beyond freedom, and by supplying a conception of the good for his fellow secular humanists.

But are liberalism's goods of impartiality, generosity and fairness enough to grace ordinary lives and to help liberals grace others' lives? Is there enough spiritual sustenance in secular liberalism to support this project? Through these exercises, liberals will find out.

Lefebvre never explains how generosity and morality became so little associated with liberalism today.

Joseph P. Creamer *is a lecturer at the University at Albany, State University of New York.*

LYRIC QUESTIONS ABOUT LONGING, DEATH AND THE CURE FOR GRIEF

Poetry and Pope Francis

On a recent Friday afternoon, I joined Joe Hoover, S.J., our poetry editor, and James Davis May, the winner of last year's contest, in a spirited debate to choose the winning poem for the 2025 Foley Poetry prize.

"Catalog of Cures in Ordinary Time," our unanimous winner, features a grief-stricken speaker who draws the reader into a garden that is both real and metaphorical. There, she tends to memory as much as to soil. The poem is elegant in its restraint, exploring the speaker's grief over her father's death through the sensory language of a garden. Tonally assured and environmentally attuned, it stands as a quiet monument to how grief endures through motifs the deceased leave behind. We hope that in your celebration of our Foley winner, you also allow this poem to gently guide you through the loss of our Holy Father, Pope Francis.

Runners-up, to be published in subsequent issues, include "Question," a shimmering and spare nine-line poem, modest in length but intricate in design. I found myself repeating it to others—from memory—long after our deliberations ended. Another runner-up, "The Half Life of Longing," takes a different approach to absence, tracing the emotional territory of longing for someone still alive. Finally, "Designer Death" stood out for its lyricism and control. Ornate yet unsettling, the poem imagines death with both hypothetical precision and vivid concreteness.

A great poem makes an argument, makes me wonder about the world and makes a bit of sense, even if the ultimate conclusion reached in the poem is that nothing ever makes sense. And yet, after reading the submissions with Joe and Jim, I have revised my definition of a great poem. Like "Catalogue of Cures in Ordinary Time," it should grip your heart, stretch your mind and startle your soul awake.

Grace Lenahan

A Message to the World

I have always been fond of Edward Hirsch's idea that a poem is a message in a bottle. That message has to be written. It's urgent! And it has to be shared; otherwise it could just stay with the poet. But the chances that the poem will find the right reader seem so steep—it is such a huge world, after all. Still, the poet sends the message out into the world, which is an act of faith, one that is realized the moment the reader picks up the poem and starts to read.

Aileen Cassinetto's "Catalog of Cures in Ordinary Time" establishes that necessary urgency in the first line and maintains it throughout the remaining 27. As the speaker works through her grief—the loss of her father—the readers work through their own past, present and future griefs.

James Davis May

Always About Beauty

I am always moved by the people who reveal the depths of their longing, sorrow, sadness and hurt for anyone to read. (So much of poetry is about the shadows, no? Every story requires a conflict and has to have a bad guy, I suppose.)

The contest winner and runners-up this year all dealt in one way or another with loss—loss of a father, of a relationship, of innocence. "Designer Death" examined the topic of loss itself. Perhaps poetry can better capture the poignant lyricism of human loss than prose can. Or even the loss of something less poignant but still challenging: Kobe Bryant, after all, gave the world a poem about basketball when he retired from the sport.

The topic of a poem may be grief or death, but, in a way, the topic is beauty. It always is. After reading a poem, if we end up remembering only that the poet had a sad thing happen to them, then maybe we have simply heard a confession, have taken a moment or two to feel bad for the author and then moved on.

But if we come away with a sense of the beauty of the poem, if it takes our breath away, if it moves us, if the style and structure do something to us, even if we simply *enjoy it*, the poem has widened out from mere confession of another's experience to a universal experience in which we can share.

Because when we experience beautiful poetry about the shadow moments of life, they touch our own griefs, large or small. "Catalog of Cures in Ordinary Time" and our three runners-up give each of our losses and endings the sacred dignity they deserve.

Joe Hoover

Joe Hoover, S.J., *is* ***America****'s poetry editor.* Grace Lenahan is an O'Hare fellow at America Media. *James Davis May is the author of two poetry collections, most recently* Unusually Grand Ideas *(Louisiana State University Press, 2023).*

CATALOG OF CURES IN ORDINARY TIME

By Aileen Cassinetto

There's a prayer for every malady
in ordinary time if you know where to look,
said my father, and though he kept his daily
devotions and entreaties to himself, I found
a psalter in his pocket the final summer
he rescued clusters of sungold tomatoes
from early blight. Like little sunsets, like a song
of ascents, I wish to remember my father.
Not my recollections of blossoms and blossom-end rot
which are fading evenly, but the whole
inventory of days when my father picked
early corn in late August, milk stage of kernels,
brown silks for corn silk tea that was meant to be
anti-inflammatory. In the end,
it was fast and metastatic, and I've learned
that what grows from seed to seed is a lesson

in acceptance. What was fallow ground, for instance,
has been broken up. Here lie the barkflies and the dead moths
and aphids, repelled by my summer savory—
beloved of honeybees, peppery
and a good remedy for too salty
recipes—also sweet costmary, green
and silvery (but remember to use
sparingly). Lemon balm, in remembrance of my father,
is the hardiest and longest-lived of them
all, growing back each year with a resolve
that is rigid and almost a respite
from the grief that is lodged in the split between my heartbeats.

Aileen Cassinetto *was a laureate fellow of the Academy of American Poets in 2021 and co-editor of* The Nature of Our Times: Poems on America's Lands, Waters, Wildlife, and Other Natural Wonders.

What Does Paul Have to Say to Peter?

The last Sunday of June celebrates the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles. Every Sunday in June the readings center around a special solemnity that carries with it some theological weight. In light of the present moment in the church, with the new successor of Peter on the minds of the faithful, the readings for the month of June help us to reflect on what criteria may be useful for the pontiff who comes after Pope Francis. What might Paul have to say to Peter? It turns out, the apostle has more than enough wisdom to share with the next occupant of the chair of Peter.

On Pentecost, celebrated this year on the second Sunday of June, the Letter to the Romans speaks about the *telos* of the Spirit. What Paul might say to the next Peter of the church is a reminder to pray in light of one's fragility. Though we may not know how to pray, the Spirit prays through us regardless. "The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness... but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings" (Rom 8:26). There remains a unique spiritual strength hidden in places of weakness, where the Spirit leads the way unbothered by a limited capacity for prayer.

On the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, the second reading returns to Romans. Paul's advice for the next Peter might be to anchor one's hope in the love of God. This, says Paul, carries a person through trials and gives birth to proven character. "We even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope" (Rom 5:3-5). Perhaps the best advice from Paul is found in the second reading for the last Sunday in June. The Pastoral Epistles include First and Second Timothy followed by Titus, and scholars generally agree that Second Timothy contains traces of the oldest writings from Paul among these three texts. Here the apostle mentions feeling abandoned by his friends and having to face fierce opposition from someone named Alexander. "The Lord," however, "stood by me and gave me strength" (2 Tm 4:17). For what purpose? The risen Christ's aid to Paul was not for himself alone, but for the proclamation to reach all the Gentiles.

May the next successor of Peter, through every adversity, also reach out to all those inside and outside the church in the manner that his predecessor strived for daily. Paul has much to say for the next Peter. May the whole church listen through the solemn readings in June.

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD (C), JUNE 1, 2025
For the new pope: Keep your feet on the ground

PENTECOST SUNDAY (C), VIGIL MASS, JUNE 8, 2025
The Spirit groans for love of God

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY (C), JUNE 15, 2025
Hope does not disappoint

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST (C), JUNE 22, 2025
Remember the priesthood of Melchizedek

SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL (C), APOSTLES, JUNE 29, 2025
The Lord will give you strength

Victor M. Cancino, S.J., *lives on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana and is the pastor of St. Ignatius Mission. He received his licentiate in sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.*

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Pope Francis Our Ancestor

He renewed the face of the church

By Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator

On the night of March 13, 2013, when news broke that Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio had just been elected the next pope, I was sitting in the recreation room of the Jesuit community in Nairobi, Kenya. The cardinal entrusted with making this historic proclamation carefully stuttered out the words in Latin, almost rendering it unintelligible. It took a while for what was traditionally dubbed an "announcement with great joy" to sink in: We have a pope!

A Jesuit from South America? I recall the incredulity mixed with the excitement of witnessing history in the making. That night, Pope Francis entered the global consciousness with humility, as he bowed his head supplicantly for a blessing from the jubilant crowd in St. Peter's Square and the millions who were following on television and on the internet. Pope Francis exited with similar humility, but not before showing himself to be one of the finest specimens of humanity to have graced the 21st century.

I was privileged to meet Francis on several occasions. In 2019, he convened the leaders of the factions of war-ravaged South Sudan for an unprecedented spiritual retreat that I co-facilitated at his residence in Rome, the Casa Santa Marta. He commissioned them to go forth and make peace, falling on his knees to kiss the feet—some would say stained by blood—of the South Sudanese belligerents. Everybody in the room was stunned into silence, and tears streamed down the cheeks of some. To those who tried to resist his humble but potent gesture, Francis pleaded: "Please, allow me." That was the man whom God missioned to renew the face of the church and to witness to the power of reconciliation, justice and peace.

Francis' pontificate was an instructive and fascinating chapter on how to be a church. He called for the church to become a "field hospital" for the wounded of heart, soul and body; a purveyor of joy for those whose joy had been robbed by despair; a channel of mercy for those relegated to the margins of orthodoxy and society; and a bruised community journeying in the streets with the homeless and aimless, the hopeless and friendless. These people were his regular guests at the Vatican and on his numerous apostolic journeys.

I recall the turbulent years of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the world seemed like a rudderless ship destined to capsize under the dereliction of bad leadership. Francis stepped into the breach like a beacon of light and an anchor of hope. His words acted like a soothing balm on the soul of every human being caught in the throes of the pandemic. We are in a storm-tossed boat, he declared, but hold on, Jesus is with us: "We have an anchor: By his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: By his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: By his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love."

Pope Francis neither feigned infallibility nor mimicked perfection. "I am a sinner," Francis said. "This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner." Francis was also not afraid to admit his mistakes and errors and to ask for forgiveness.

With prophetic insistence, he called the world to correct course and learn to care for our common home, the Earth. With passion and compassion, he channeled our gaze to the plight of displaced people, refugees and migrants looking for a cool place to lay their heads. With unrelenting energy, he opened our eyes to the shame and callousness of war and violence which defeat our humanity. And with the ebullience and humility of a good shepherd, he led the church to existential and geographical peripheries to embrace, honor and defend the dignity of the poor, oppressed and marginalized. With characteristic audacity and conviction, he declared that "the journey of synodality is the journey that God wants from his church in the third millennium."

In Africa, a person of Francis' moral caliber and spiritual substance holds the coveted designation of "ancestor," whose role includes everlasting solicitude for the community he or she leaves behind. The church and the world can rejoice to have a good disciple, a faithful servant and a beloved ancestor praying and interceding for us in the presence of God.

Rest in peace, dear Francis.

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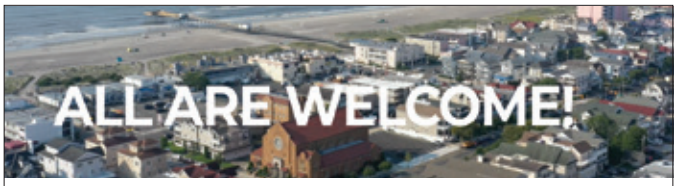

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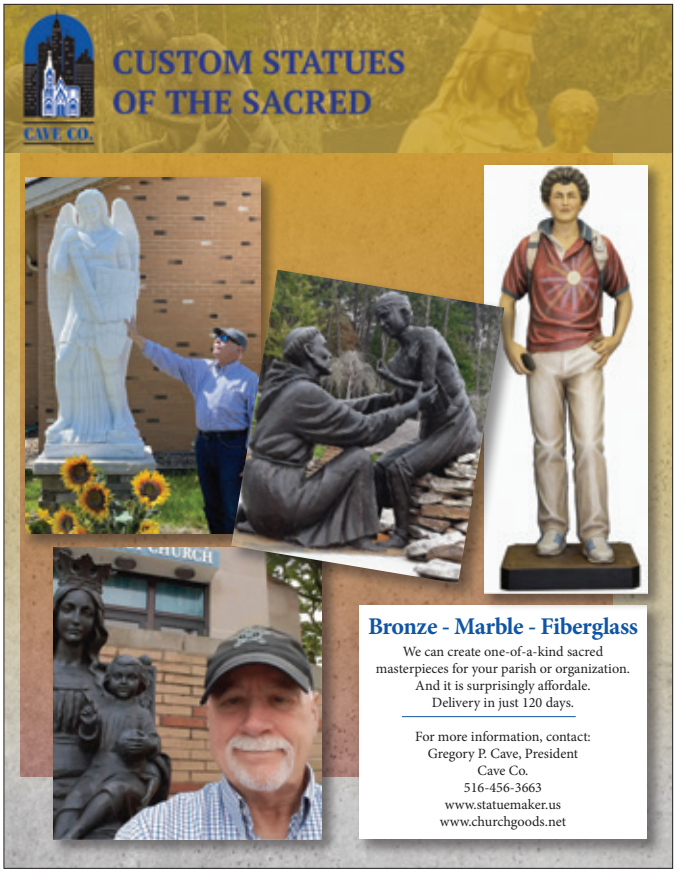

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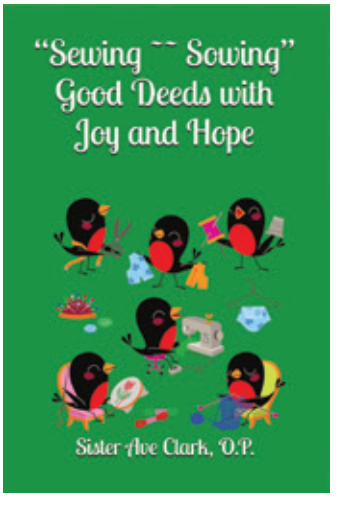

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