

# America

MAY 11, 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

## GREAT BOOKS IN *THE GREAT OUTDOORS*

Ashley McKinless

p18

**Could Catholics  
Form a Third Party?**

p28

**The Class of 2020  
Says an Early Farewell**

p36

**The Debate  
Over Women Deacons**

p42



# OF MANY THINGS

## *New Livestream Video Series*

Join Father Matt Malone, S.J., *America's* president and editor in chief, live each week for news analysis and a sense of community during the Covid-19 pandemic. An extension of Father Malone's magazine column, "Of Many Things," this accessible and timely video series will inform, inspire and nourish *America's* audience and viewers everywhere.

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## A Political Education

For the hour or so each day that I get out for a walk, I sometimes find it hard to believe that New York City is the center of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States.

Of course there are signs: the eerie quiet of a city that is said to never sleep; the shuttered storefronts along the sparsely populated sidewalks; and, more ominously, that refrigerated tractor-trailer functioning as a makeshift morgue just outside our neighborhood hospital.

And yet, strangely enough, it does not feel like a crisis. Perhaps that is because most of us think of a crisis as a quick burst of bad news or a sudden traumatic event, followed by frantic, chaotic activity that lasts a relatively brief time. On the contrary, the Covid-19 pandemic has crept up on us in such a way that many of us are only now beginning to grasp that what we have experienced during the last eight weeks is in fact a profound trauma—a trauma made worse because, to borrow a phrase from Evelyn Waugh, it is “a blow upon a bruise.”

It is easy to forget that many people in our communities were facing crises and challenges long before Covid-19. Take Catholic education, for example. According to the National Catholic Education Association, from 2009 to 2019 Catholic “elementary school enrollment declined by 27.5 percent in the 12 major urban dioceses and 19.4 percent in the rest of the U.S.”—one reason why innovation in Catholic schools has zeroed in on urban areas.

Yet those efforts for innovation and change—no small challenge in ordinary times—have been seriously impeded by the Covid-19 crisis, which

has disproportionately affected the populations directly served by Catholic schools.

Gail Richardson-Bassett, principal of Good Shepherd Catholic School in Garland, Tex., recently told **America**: “Many of our students come from low-income Hispanic families that sacrifice to send their children to a Catholic school. The pandemic meant many parents would not have any income.”

In New York, more than half the parents of students at St. Thomas Aquinas School in the Bronx have been laid off during the pandemic, J.D. Long-García reported for **America**. The Archdiocese of New York has come through with some funding, but dollars were short six weeks ago, let alone now.

So it makes sense to me that the Catholic bishops of the United States decided to focus on Catholic education during their recent conference call with President Trump and some 600 other participants. According to Crux, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York, spoke first and “focused on education, saying that it concerns ‘parental rights, educational justice, and civil rights of our kids’ and thanked the president for his ‘courageous insistence that the nonprofits, faith communities, and our schools be included’ in the recent stimulus package.”

Yet Cardinal Dolan also noted, according to an audio recording obtained by Crux, that current funding for schools is only guaranteed through this academic year and many Catholic schools are “really scared” about September.

Some Catholics have criticized the bishops for how they conducted this call: for not stressing immigration

and the administration’s xenophobia; for allowing Mr. Trump to over-stress abortion; for being too chummy with a president whose performance we have abundant cause to criticize. But I think the bishops got it right here. Yes, it is unfortunate that Mr. Trump chose to politicize the call, which is his wont, and some of the pleasantries sounded hyperbolic and tone-deaf, but the bishops made a good tactical choice.

They had 30 minutes with the man who, for better or for worse, is president of the United States. The bishops could have followed his lead and talked more about abortion, where Mr. Trump agrees with them, even if he once did not. They could have talked about immigration, where Mr. Trump strongly disagrees with them and always will. Or they could have talked about aid to Catholic education, where he is inclined to agree with them and might be willing to do something.

I have often heard it said that the U.S. bishops are “just a bunch of politicians.” If that is true, then they are pretty bad politicians, for they often make tactical choices that most politicians would not make. They are not politicians, of course; they are pastors who occasionally have to engage in politics. That is not an easy thing to do, and they often get it wrong. But here they tried to get something rather than settle for nothing. That was the smart choice. As Max Weber once wrote, “politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards.”

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Matt Malone, S.J.  
Twitter: @americaeditor.



# THE ISSUE

## GIVE AND TAKE

---

6  
YOUR TAKE  
Reader photos of home prayer spaces

8  
OUR TAKE  
Our churches need financial support; lift the sanctions on Iran

10  
SHORT TAKE  
Catholic schools versus the worship of individualism  
Kathleen Porter-Magee

## DISPATCHES

---

12  
AFTER COVID-19 CLOSURES, CATHOLIC EDUCATION GOES OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

Making sure everyone counts in the 2020 census

Latin American church steps up efforts to assist migrants

Italian economy staggered by coronavirus

GoodNews: Bringing food to pandemic's suddenly hungry

## FEATURES

---

18  
STUDYING THE GREAT BOOKS IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS  
A visit to a rural Catholic college in Wyoming  
Ashley McKinless

28  
THE PARTY'S OVER  
Many Catholics long for a third-party political option. Could it ever happen?  
Bill McCormick



A.P. Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi

Mohammad Maleklee of the National Orchestra of Iran and Tehran Symphony plays saxophone during mandatory self-isolation due to the new coronavirus disease outbreak, in Tehran, Iran, April 8.

Cover: A horse grazing in Lander, Wyo. (iStock)

## FAITH IN FOCUS

36  
**THE CLASS OF 2020**  
When the coronavirus shut down campus, college seniors gathered for a final goodbye  
Gus Hardy

## POEM

41  
**IN THE WAKE OF THE  
HEARTBEAT BILLS**  
Joe Hoover

## IDEAS IN REVIEW

38  
**A MERRY 'ST. FRANCIS' FROM  
ROBERTO ROSSELLINI**  
The delirious faith of "The Little  
Flowers of St. Francis"  
John Anderson

**BOOKS**  
*Women: Icons of Christ; Unwritten;  
Galileo and the Science Deniers; The  
Hermit King*

**CULTURE**  
"Never Rarely Sometimes Always"

## THE WORD

48  
**Trust that the Holy Spirit sustains all  
of us who love one another**

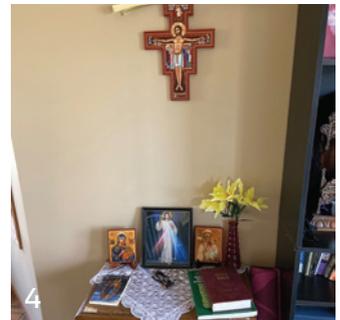
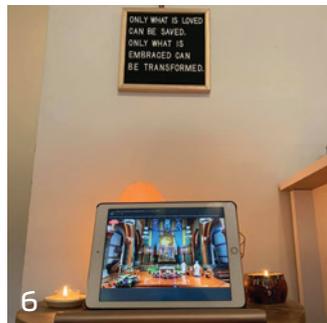
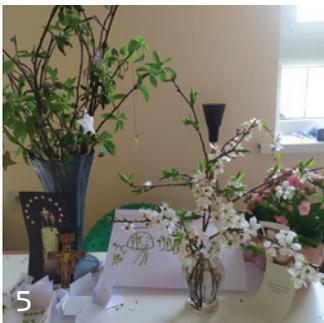
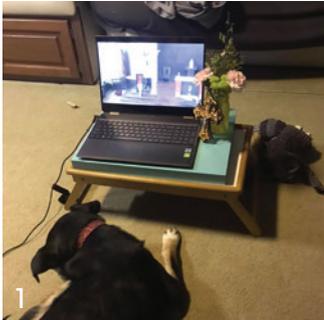
*Acts reveals the importance of prayer  
for sustaining a community in crisis*  
Jaime L. Waters

## LAST TAKE

50  
**JUAN VIDAL**  
Is God still good during a pandemic?

# What does your home worship space look like?

The coronavirus pandemic has transformed how Catholics around the world practice their faith. With parish doors closed, more attention has been paid to the domestic church. **America** asked listeners to its podcast, “Jesuitical,” to send us photos and descriptions of their home prayer spaces by way of Facebook. Here are some of them.



**1**  
 This was on Palm Sunday. We live in an R.V., so we don't have a mantle or anything we can use—have to get creative! (Also please excuse the pup and her toy—she insists on being where we are.)  
**Josie Weisenberger**

**2**  
 Easter season altar set on the windowsill: Mary Our Lady of Sorrows statue, a small St. Joseph, some small palm crosses from Palm Sunday, kiddo's cross drawing, kiddo's baptismal candle and baptismal water; holy cards of St. Anthony of the Desert, Dorothy Day, Augustus Tolton, St. Romero, Thea Bowman, St. Martin de Porres.  
**Daniel Regenscheit**

**3**  
 Easter Vigil at home: homemade paschal candle, water for blessing and renewing baptismal promises, and an empty chalice to remind us of what's missing....  
**Ryan Delaney**

**4**  
 General prayer space (we have two little ones, so we keep it simple).  
**Veronica Roltgen**

**5**  
 At this moment I am staying at my friend's flat, so my prayer place is improvised from what I had with me: cross from St. Damian church; picture of Loretto Mary (Black Madonna from our Jesuit church in Vilnius); picture of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, some branches from a garden and forest near home and my very schematic picture of Resurrection morning; also some prayer notes left from Good Friday that I placed at the feet of Jesus.  
**Monika Smalinskaite**

**6**  
 This is my home “altar”/designated spot to livestream Mass in my bedroom. The cross at the top is from my grandmother's apartment after she passed away in 2015. She encouraged me to find a faith community while she was alive, and it really made an impact on me. The quote on the letter billboard is from a homily Pope Francis gave at World Youth Day 2019. I was one of the pilgrims in attendance in Panama City, and that homily profoundly changed how I viewed my spiritual relationship with God. I livestream Mass from my parish (St. Paul the Apostle) in New York City, on my iPad, and light candles around it to help set a more contemplative mood.  
**Mary Kate Polanin**



# SUNDAY TO SUNDAY

“Sunday to Sunday with Fr. Mike Russo” is an online and cable TV program that explores the art, craft, and spirituality of preaching.

This month, join “Sunday to Sunday” as we visit with: **Father Ricky Manalo**, musician of first-rank and expert on Asian Pacific Catholics; **Father Bob Stagg**, the pastor of a “destination church” in Bergen County, N.J.; **Father Chris Walsh**, who ministers to a dynamic African-American community in Philadelphia, Pa.; and **Father Manuel De Jesus Rodrigues** who is on ministry’s front-lines in Astoria, N.Y.

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## Churches Need Generous Support to Survive Pandemic

Amid the death and suffering we see all around us during the coronavirus pandemic, many Catholics have experienced other painful disruptions to their lives as well: a sacramental famine, as most Catholics have been cut off from weekly Mass and the reception of Communion, but also a famine of physical fellowship, of the biblical notion of *koinonia*, as most are also separated by quarantine from the community we found in our parishes and church ministries.

Many of us assume that when the pandemic is finally contained, our liturgical and community life will return to normal or something approaching it. But there is an ominous and spreading threat to any restoration of vibrant community in many of our parishes, for one simple reason: a shortage of money.

In a recent interview with Crux, Andrew Robison, the president of Petrus Development, which helps Catholic ministries build financially stable programming, estimated that because of the near-universal cancellation of Masses around the country, most Catholic parishes are facing a 50 percent to 70 percent dropoff in weekly donations. Further, traditional fundraising events large and small—even the beloved Friday fish fry—have been canceled everywhere. Finally, pastors who relied on large and generous congregations on major holidays like Easter for a financial boost had to lock their doors instead and celebrate Mass facing empty pews.

Perhaps the most startling reminder of this painful reality came last week in an announcement from St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York that the iconic church "will not be able to sustain operations in the coming

weeks ahead" because the cathedral is facing "an expected shortfall of 6.5 million dollars." The announcement noted that St. Patrick's receives no outside support and has no endowment; it is dependent upon Mass collections, tourist donations, bookstore sales, event revenue and fundraising to finance its operations. One can imagine, then, the financial duress thousands of other parishes are under, particularly when the typical U.S. Catholic parish has a rainy-day fund that covers less than seven weeks of operating expenses. And many of these parishes, particularly those with schools, were already running a deficit.

Most Catholic parishes allow and encourage parishioners to give online, of course, but such mechanisms have never been as remunerative as in-person collections or donation envelopes. Further, the financial privation faced by those who have been laid off or furloughed from their jobs has forced a sobering realization upon many parishioners: One cannot give of one's time, talent and treasure when we are all quarantined—and when vast numbers of Americans have seen their treasure imperiled or significantly diminished.

Equally distressing is the plight of lay men and women who are employed by their parish. As **America** reported in March, across the country many parishes and dioceses have had to lay off employees, including liturgical musicians, rectory personnel, maintenance workers and more. While many parishes hope to rehire these employees once the pandemic is contained, the uncertain financial future will not permit that unless some financial windfall makes up for several months of losses. And as Thomas J. Reese, S.J., has noted, even when the coronavirus is

contained, necessary social distancing norms will restrict Mass attendance to a fraction of its pre-pandemic size, perhaps for up to 18 months.

It goes without saying that our primary focus should be on helping the victims of the coronavirus pandemic and cooperating to eradicate or contain it as soon as possible. At the same time, it is worth remembering that the parishes and church structures our parents and grandparents helped build with their financial contributions—oftentimes, as in the case of St. Patrick's and many other big-city cathedrals, with the nickels and dimes of men and women who struggled to give even that widow's mite—are desperately in need of our generosity. If we want to emerge from this calamity to find our church doors open and traditional pastoral care restored, our churches need our financial generosity as well as our prayers.

### Save Lives in Iran: Suspend Sanctions

On March 22, an Iranian Shiite leader, the Ayatollah Seyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad, delivered a letter to Pope Francis imploring his intervention to end economic sanctions against Iran as it endures one of the world's worst Covid-19 outbreaks.

The Iranian people, he wrote, "are struggling painfully with the loss of loved ones caused very often by the serious lack of medical resources due to the consequences of sanctions imposed by the United States."

Suspending the sanctions regime, he said, would be "a humanitarian action" proper to those who believe in Jesus, who "for the whole world is a universal symbol of peace and love."

Alas, Jesus does not make policy at the U.S. State Department, which has responded during this time of undoubted suffering in Iran by turning the economic screws even tighter. But the coronavirus crisis should not be viewed as a chance to press an advantage against an antagonist but as a rare opportunity to risk mercy.

The current sanctions policy does not prohibit the movement of humanitarian aid into Iran, but it does create logistical and financial barriers to commerce in much-needed medical supplies. Sanctions produce a haze of uncertainty that discourages most companies from trading even in permissible, life-saving goods with Iran.

Political realists argue that Iran's leaders have done little to alter their behavior during the crisis and thus have not "earned" a respite from sanctions. But the relief of Iran's people should not be held hostage to the deportment of Iran's leaders. That degree of indifference to human suffering is unworthy of a great power, especially one that has repeatedly insisted that it is no enemy of the Iranian people. Now might be a good time to act as if that were true.

In a letter shared with Fides, the Vatican news service, Elias Mallon, S.A., the external affairs officer for the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, reminds us that Christians do not seek the destruction of their enemies but reconciliation with them. If worst-case scenarios come to pass, as many as 3.5 million could die before Covid-19 completes its march across Iran. That is an intolerable and still, for now at least, preventable loss.

Carrying on through this crisis under the current sanctions regime may satisfy political hardliners, but it would be a pointless geopolitical cruelty and even strategically counter-productive. No country can be safe from the coronavirus as long as any nation is unable to resist it with all the resources it can muster or all the resources that, in mercy, can be shared with it.

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## A Catholic education remains an alternative to unchecked individualism

In 1976, Tom Wolfe wrote a piece for New York magazine called “The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening.” He explained that the social movements of the 1960s and ’70s prioritized the individual above all else, and the practices that resulted from these social movements involved “considerable narcissism.” This worship of individualism shows no signs of weakening nearly a half century later. Fortunately, Catholic schools still provide an alternative.

Through World War II, people’s desires had been constrained by a number of things—finances, for starters, but also social norms and the often-uncharitable public shame that came from bucking those norms. Then came increasing affluence and ultimately a society where tolerance was prioritized as the ultimate virtue, and where the idea that society should put any constraints on individual choices was largely rejected.

While tolerance and individualism have driven much good and much progress, particularly when it comes to treating all people equally before God and before the law, it has not been without downsides. Chief among them has been the impact that the erosion of social constraints has had on families living in poverty. The idea that people should delay sexual activity and parenthood until they are married and gainfully employed has fallen out of favor, and this is doubtlessly a factor in the dramatic increase in out-of-wedlock births.

As a society, we have not fully grappled with the replacement of traditional social norms by the “do what feels good” freedom of the Me Decade. To be sure, many conservative and religious leaders—Catholics among

them—have condemned the moral relativism of our time. Some may be nostalgic for an era when social constraints and shame provided an off-ramp for those who otherwise might choose vice over virtue. But that may be the wrong lesson.

After all, Catholics believe that each person is possessed of free will—that we are not simply fated by God or circumstances to behave a certain way, but rather that we have the freedom to act as we choose. While God could have chosen to compel us to choose good over evil, he did not. You might say that by reducing social constraints on our free will, the Me Decade has helped expand the real freedom God imagined for us.

If that is the case, then our real challenge is not the result of freedom from social constraints and shame, but rather the result of not doing the hard work of forming our children with the knowledge, habits of virtue and character that they need to freely choose to do good. Properly instructed in virtue, Catholics need not be led astray by the freedom of a world without constraints.

At Partnership Schools—the seven urban Catholic schools I have the privilege to run—we take seriously the job of forming students with the habits of virtue and with the knowledge they need to navigate the world. As at most Catholic schools, we hope that our graduates go on to college and avoid poverty, but we aim for something more than these worldly goals: that our students become good people who know, love and serve God. This happens through the steady, sometimes mundane, flow of habit formation. To that end, Catholic schools embrace the rituals and routine of prayer; they emphasize the importance of self-discipline; and they

prioritize the importance of serving others by serving the community.

But habits without values will not endure. For Catholic schools, habits are the vehicle through which we help the students we serve become who God meant them to be. And that is why Catholic education may be more critical today than ever before. It is why it is more important than ever for the church to redouble its efforts to reinvigorate urban Catholic education—so that all families can choose a values-driven education if that is how they wish to prepare their children to navigate this world of unfettered freedom.

In spite of the struggles Catholic schools have faced over the past several decades (which have been exacerbated by the financial challenges the coronavirus pandemic has wrought), they continue to graduate students who thrive in this world. Research has shown that students in religious schools are less likely to participate in risky behavior, including sexual activity and crime. It has also shown that Catholic school graduates are more likely to be civically engaged, to vote, to volunteer and to give to charitable causes.

Rather than worry about a world with fewer social constraints than we once had, we can embrace the increasing responsibility that falls to us to educate our children not just to survive but to choose the virtuous path. In this world, Catholic schools are perhaps the most vital investment we can make.

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*Kathleen Porter-Magee is the superintendent of Partnership Schools, a privately managed network of urban Catholic elementary schools in New York City. She is also the author of the Manhattan Institute report Catholic on the Inside: Putting Values Back at the Center of Education Reform.*



111  
YEARS  
1909-2020

**ON OUR ANNIVERSARY,  
WE CELEBRATED HOPE.**

*We couldn't do it without you. Thank You!*

America



# National shutdown sends Catholic education out of the classroom

By J.D. Long-García

As in thousands of other schools across the nation, the classrooms at Queen of Peace in Mesa, Ariz., are empty because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The parish school serves a largely immigrant community, with families tracing their roots to Mexico, El Salvador and Peru, among other Latin American countries.

Now Queen of Peace parents are struggling to balance their own work with their new role as homebound school administrators. Renée Baeza, the principal, said Queen of Peace is doing its best to ease the transition.

“Parents aren’t teachers,” she said. “They know that and we know that. We’re adjusting.”

Most students had been issued Chromebooks from the school even before the pandemic. Families who already had a computer at home have returned their school-issued devices so other families who do not have home computers can use them. Teachers and staff are also working individually with parents, who are mostly Spanish-speaking and may struggle with English-language learning materials.

“My teachers work so hard; I’m really proud of them,” Ms. Baeza said, adding that teachers make themselves available for one-on-one help from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. “They work even harder now because they’re learning as they go.”

Queen of Peace is not alone in this struggle. In New York City, the epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States, Catholic schools closed on March 13. Jessica Maldonado, principal of St. Thomas Aquinas School in the Bronx, started preparing for online learning well before the closure. They checked in with families, assessing needs according to internet access, technology and work schedules.

Around 85 percent of students at St. Thomas Aquinas are Latino, and others are African or African-American, Ms. Maldonado said. Most of the staff speaks Spanish and the families from Africa speak English, so language has not been an issue.

“Most of the time, it’s the kids helping the parents” with the technology, Ms. Maldonado said, adding that some of the students who had been less engaged before are now participating more often. “They have been super-excited to log on to Zoom every morning. They are in their space.”

Each day at 10 a.m., Ms. Maldonado leads prayer on Zoom for the entire school. Students, who wear their school polo shirts, take turns doing the reading and responsorial psalm. Teachers take attendance, and if a student is not logged in to the call, parents get a phone call.

“The children have been amazing. They have a good, positive attitude about all of this,” Ms. Maldonado said. “They’re



having fun with and loving it because it's new."

Many of the school's parents work in health care, and some have contracted Covid-19 and have had to send their children to stay with other families while they quarantine themselves. In those cases, Ms. Maldonado said, teachers worked with aunts and uncles or grandparents to explain the online learning process.

Unfortunately, more than half of the school's parents have been laid off during the pandemic. They have had a hard time keeping up with tuition, but the Archdiocese of New York has come through with funding to help make up the difference so far, Ms. Maldonado said.

The Diocese of Fresno is also learning to adapt. It covers more than 90,000 square miles in the Central Valley, Calif., one of the greatest agricultural producing regions in the world.

The 21 Catholic schools in the diocese began offering online learning on March 16, according to Mona Faulker, the superintendent of schools. Her office advised schools to begin preparing for digital classrooms and communication in mid-February.

As families came to pick up their children on the last day of school, March 13, teachers sent them home with the textbooks and technology they would need. The following Monday, teachers began class on Google Classroom and Zoom.

Schools have allowed parents to freeze tuition payments until the economy picks up, she said. "Our goal is to help families with every resource we can possibly afford," she said. Last week counselors began small support groups to help students with the emotional burden of the pandemic, Ms. Faulker said.

Schools in the Diocese of Dallas are allowing families to push back payments, according to Verónica Alonzo, associate superintendent for operations. "Even if they can't pay, we're still allowing them to finish out the school year," she said. Thus far, they have not seen any "mass exodus" of families leaving schools.

"Families are still here, but they need help," Ms. Alonzo said, adding that schools have learned a lot over the last several weeks. They began by addressing technological needs: Does a school need devices and, if so, how many? The schools pooled resources and funding from the diocese to assist families.

Connectivity was another issue, Ms. Alonzo said. Schools surveyed families about mobile hotspots and Wi-Fi availability. One family, for example, struggled to connect to the internet because they live in a rural area and had

to drive to a McDonald's parking lot to get online.

Some parents have mobile-phone hotspots but have to take their phones with them to work. The city of Dallas made resources available to connect students to the internet, but some families needed help accessing the instructions, so schools walked them through it.

"Some families have internet, but with a large number of people using it, it gets bogged down," Ms. Alonzo said. Teachers coordinated to spread classes over the day. Schools also used both real-time and pre-recorded methods, she said, which gave students both interaction and the ability to learn on their own time.

"The next school year could be a combination of what we're doing now and the more traditional classroom setting," she said. Schools are preparing for various scenarios.

Teachers at St. Mary of Carmel School in Dallas have been proactive in meeting the needs of families, according to Kaitlyn Aguilar, the school's principal. "Flexibility and compassion have been key tenets for our teachers at this time," she said in an email. "We are flexible with due dates and 'class' Zoom meetings, since we know students are sharing devices, working after parents are home, etc."

Every week, teachers have also incorporated family "meet ups" to facilitate communication with students and parents. The school is also managing food distribution and connects families in need with other nonprofit organizations that can help with food, utilities and other matters.

"Many of our students come from low-income Hispanic families that sacrifice to send their children to a Catholic school," Gail Richardson-Bassett, principal of Good Shepherd Catholic School in Garland, Tex., wrote in an email. "The most frequent request is for help with tuition. As the weeks progress with no pay, families are struggling to meet their basic needs and they are unable to make their tuition payments. We have waived those payments in order to provide some relief."

School staff are serving families in many ways, she said, including personally delivering forgotten school items to their homes, distributing food and facilitating Zoom meetings to continue the established sense of community.

"It's been an adjustment for all of us and we know our primary purpose is to offer comfort and hope to our school families while maintaining a sense of normalcy in the education we offer their children," Ms. Richardson-Bassett said. "In this unprecedented time, that changes every day."

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J.D. Long-García, *senior editor*.  
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## Who counts? The 2020 census faces a tough recovery from Covid-19

Long before the Covid-19 crisis threw the accuracy of the 2020 census into even deeper doubt, in a report last June the Urban Institute attempted to gauge the depth of the potential miscount in the constitutionally mandated, decennial national headcount—now extended four months because of the pandemic. It anticipated an undercount ranging from 0.3 percent to almost 2 percent of the U.S. population. While these percentages may seem small, they mean that anywhere from 900,000 to more than four million U.S. residents could be missed.

In 2000, the Census Bureau's own analysis found that children up to 4 years of age were especially likely to be undercounted. Why does it matter? The decennial census is used to reapportion congressional seats around the country, with each state crunching the numbers to redraw district maps, but it is also used to guide the disbursement of federal monies for social services.

“Child-focused programs like nutrition assistance, Head Start and the Children's Health Insurance Program rely on accurate data about where young children live to provide foundational services for children,” said Karen Deaver, who leads Census Bureau efforts to reduce the undercount of young children.

Catholic and other denominational community groups had been courted by Census Bureau officials as logical outreach partners to connect with hard-to-count communities, especially among immigrant families who may be concerned that filling out official paperwork could jeopardize their residency status or put them at risk of deportation.

Ann Scholz, S.S.N.D., is the associate director of social mission for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. “We've been spreading the word about the critical importance of the 2020 census count,” she told Catholic News Service in March, adding “we know that in past censuses, millions of people of color, children and immigrants have gone uncounted.”

“We believe this undercount,” she said, “has resulted in systemic injustice resulting in underfunding of resources that we all use, like schools, hospitals, critical infrastructure.” She added, “We think that it's even resulted in the underpreparation for critical health emergencies like Covid-19.

“We're each made in God's image and endowed with God's spirit,” Sister Scholz said. “No matter our creed, our race, our gender, our immigration status—we're worthy of being counted.”

Kevin Clarke, chief correspondent. Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.



### Who's likely to be among the missing in 2020?

Projected undercount for the 2020 Census—between 900,000 and more than 4 million people. Some states are more at risk. California has a projected undercount that could reach almost **2 percent**.

Miscounts disproportionately affect some groups. Black and Hispanic people could be undercounted nationally by as much as **3.7 percent** and **3.6 percent**, respectively, in 2020.

Children under age 5 are at risk of being undercounted by more than **6 percent**.

About 4.5 million kids live in places—from dense urban areas to rural expanses to tribal communities—where completing an accurate count is especially challenging.

In 2017, 316 federal spending programs relied on 2010 Census-derived data to distribute \$1.5 trillion to state and local governments, nonprofits, businesses and households across the nation.

Self-response by mail and internet: **67.4 percent** in 2000; **66.5 percent** in 2010; **51.8 percent** so far in 2020.

Sources: Census Bureau, GW Institute of Public Policy, Urban Institute, Anne E. Casey Foundation.



CNS photo/Sebastian Castaneda, Reuters

## Latin American church intensifies efforts for migrants as Covid-19 crisis escalates

Haitian and Venezuelan migrants receive food aid from church members in Lima, Peru, on March 30.

The Latin American church is building up its support for people still on the move in the region as the coronavirus crisis continues. Many of the people who set off from Haiti, Central America and Venezuela to escape conditions in their home countries are not even aware of how grave the crisis has become.

“The border with Guatemala has been closed, but there are at least 400 blind spots through which people can cross into Mexico without being monitored by the authorities,” Conrado Zepeda, S.J., told **America**.

Father Zepeda works at a Jesuit-run migrant shelter in the city of Huichapan, a town in the Mexican state of Hidalgo. People who find respite there come mostly from Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and Haiti. “They keep coming, unfortunately without enough information on the pandemic, given they’re not watching TV. As soon as we tell them the number of cases and deaths in different countries, they understand the seriousness of the situation,” Father Zepeda said.

Many of the Central American immigrants who pass through Huichapan are young and healthy. “But they have walked for weeks in the open air and with little food,” Father Zepeda said. “In their journey, they don’t have adequate access to hygiene products and facilities. They’re certainly vulnerable when it comes to the risk of infection.”

More than 80 percent of the migrant centers on the route to the United States are managed by the church, Father Zepeda said. “While many organizations decided to close their houses during the pandemic, we decided to keep working. We have to make people aware of prevention measures,” he said. “We can’t abandon these people in such hard times. It’s an evangelical decision.”

In South America, another migration crisis is an ongoing worry. According to Elvy Monzant, the executive

secretary of the Latin American and Caribbean Network on Migration, Refugees and Human Trafficking, the movement of people fleeing economic and political instability in Venezuela into Colombia continues.

“We don’t know how many Venezuelan immigrants are traveling and sleeping on the street,” he said. Many are already in overcrowded shelters. Others have become laborers in host states, where they are often exploited and “forced to work during the quarantine,” Mr. Monzant said. “In all cases, they’re very vulnerable in the pandemic.”

The Colombian city of Cucuta, on the border with Venezuela, has become a major destination for migrants. When the borders were closed because of the coronavirus, many decided to stay in the area. “They live in a rather fragile condition, working in the informal economy,” the local bishop, the Most Rev. Victor Ochoa, said.

“The government and the church are trying to help them out, but the situation is very complex,” he said. There have been 15 cases of Covid-19 in Cucuta, according to the bishops, but noncitizens, including undocumented ones, can receive medical treatment in Colombia.

One of the greatest risks in the context of the pandemic is the potential abuse of migrants’ human rights within the nations they pass through or that host them. “It’s reasonable that local governments are trying to prevent the spread of coronavirus,” said Sister Rosita Milesi, the director of the Scalabrini Sisters’ Institute of Migrations and Human Rights in Brazil, “but their [precautionary] measures can’t ignore the international protection conferred to all populations in situations of vulnerability, especially the ones who are seeking refuge.”

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Eduardo Campos-Lima contributes from São Paulo, Brazil.



## Coronavirus crisis has devastated the Italian economy

At the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, Italians took to their balconies at night to sing, “Andrà tutto bene” (“Everything will be all right”). Today many are no longer sure, even as encouraging signs have emerged suggesting that the crisis may have reached its peak.

In this nation of 60 million people, a country with the oldest population in the world after Japan (measured by the share of population that is over 65) and a negative birth rate, millions are no longer earning wages because almost all nonessential economic activity has been stopped. More than 178,000 companies had to lay off more than three million workers, who have had to line up for state assistance—*casa integrazione*—that will last for a limited period only.

A big concern is how many of Italy’s businesses will be able to reopen after the coronavirus emergency ends. Many Italian workers were dependent on the nation’s once flourishing tourism industry—6 percent of Italy’s gross domestic product. Now few expect tourists to visit Italy at all this year.

Some three million self-employed Italians are also in great financial difficulty. In an effort to relieve their plight, the government—as part of a 25-billion-euro rescue package—decided to provide a monthly benefit of 600 euros (\$650) to each self-employed person for three months. Apart from the thousands of homeless persons, the worst-

hit category in Italy has been its gig workers, many of whom are migrants, which the Italian National Institute of Statistics estimates to be around 3.7 million people.

Their situation is desperate. Workers in the gig economy had precarious positions even before the coronavirus struck. Most of them do not receive any kind of social security, health care or unemployment benefits. Many are now deeply troubled about paying for food, rent, utilities and other expenses for themselves and their families.

In response to this crisis, the Italian government decided to give “an emergency income” of between 200 and 500 euros each month (\$220–\$550) to some three million people (more than one million families) who now have no income whatsoever. There is no guarantee that this money will be enough to see most families through to the end of the crisis.

Palermo’s mayor, Leoluca Orlando, warned last week of the risk of “a social revolt” as thousands of families across the country no longer have enough money to buy food. Caritas Italiana and other charitable organizations, like the Sant’Egidio Community, have seen a significant rise in the number of people seeking help.

At the same time, associations, city food stores and ordinary people have shown solidarity to families and individuals in difficulty. Nineteen associations and charitable



Shuttered fishmonger stalls at Rome's Piazza Vittorio market on March 25

CNS photo/Nancy McNally



Sandwich assembly line at the Franciscan Center of Baltimore

## GOODNEWS: Dioceses respond as hunger grows because of Covid-19

From one end of the country to the other, dioceses and Catholic charitable agencies are coming up with ingenious solutions to meet growing hunger in their communities because of the coronavirus crisis.

The Archdiocese of San Francisco started a grocery delivery service and hotline in early April. Within two weeks, 14 parishes had signed on, with parishioners committed to help deliver groceries to people in need. The “Love Your Neighbor Ministry” has a toll-free hotline.

In Los Angeles, the Knights of Columbus donated \$100,000 to five food banks in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles under the organization’s new national initiative “Leave No Neighbor Behind.”

“As an organization, we have provided vital support at key moments, including during the 1918 flu pandemic, during two world wars and after natural disasters,” said Carl Anderson, the supreme knight and chief executive officer of the Knights of Columbus, in a statement on April 21. “Our ‘Leave No Neighbor Behind’ initiative continues that tradition.”

In Paterson, N.J., diocesan food pantries have remained open to serve the needs of the hungry. Now, though, to minimize exposure to the virus, Catholic Charities volunteers have been pre-bagging food and taking the bags outside to those in need.

Neighborhoods in the Bronx, N.Y., have been hit hard by the pandemic. Catholic Charities Community Services/Alianza has adapted its service model to include food aid. Alianza has also responded by buying tablet computers for students, helping families get Wi-Fi hotspots in their homes and conducting daily wellness check-in calls to 3,500 students.

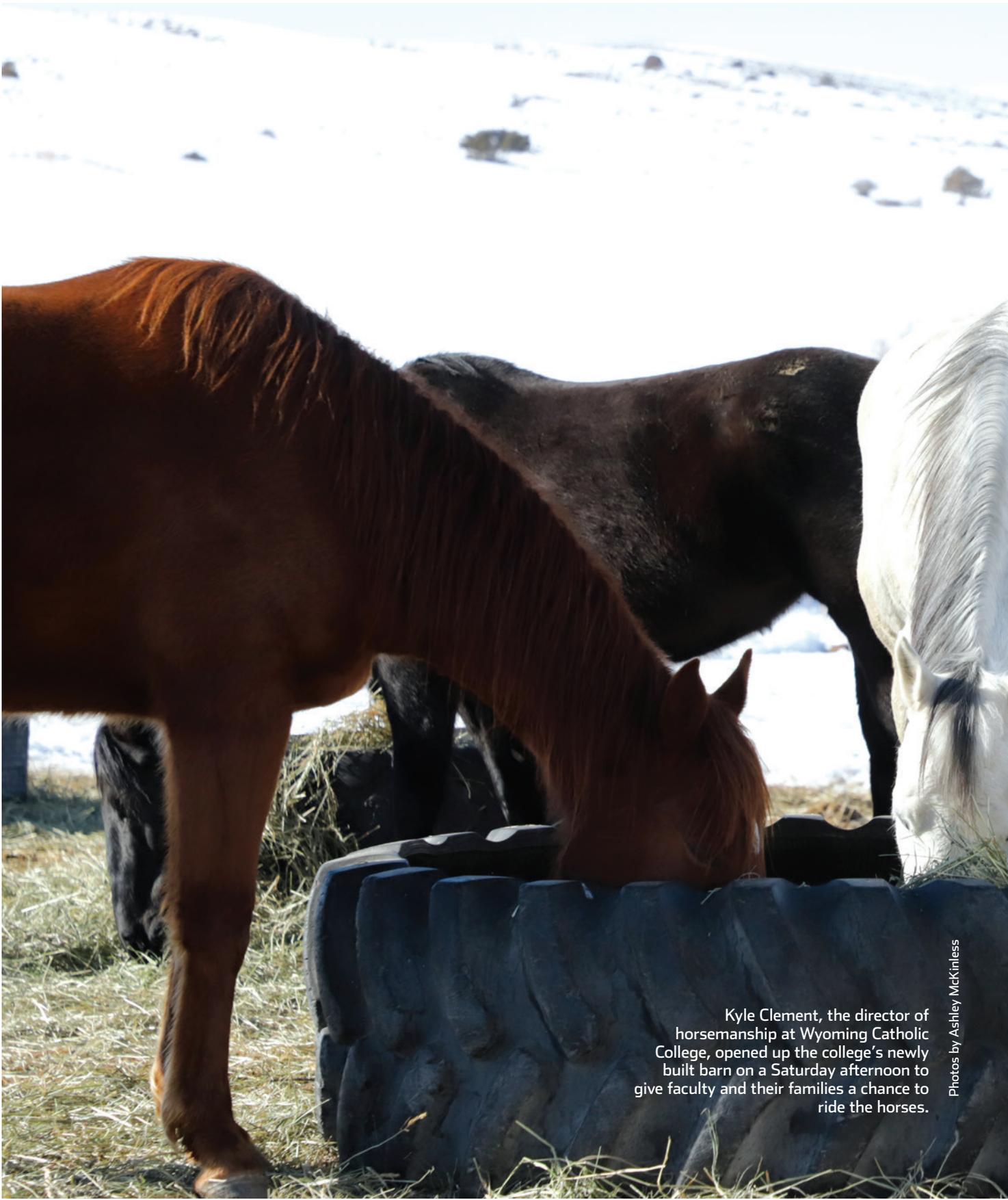
Catholic News Service

organizations in Rome now collect food from those willing to give and distribute it to those who have not. There is no lack of volunteers ready to assist those in need in whatever way they can.

The Italian government’s rescue package includes help to companies, homeowners with mortgage payments and people facing unemployment. But to overcome these grave problems and ensure the reconstruction of the economy after the coronavirus pandemic ends, Italian officials are considering broader, bolder measures.

Italian officials are currently busy trying to convince other European Union member states to create a new fund, something similar to the Marshall Plan after the Second World War, to enable a rebuilding of economies shattered by the coronavirus pandemic. For the European Union, not only for Italy, this is a decisive moment. A failure by E.U. leaders to address this crisis, the worst since World War II, in an adequate way risks undermining the union itself.

Gerard O’Connell, *Vatican correspondent.*  
Twitter: @gerryorome.



Kyle Clement, the director of horsemanship at Wyoming Catholic College, opened up the college's newly built barn on a Saturday afternoon to give faculty and their families a chance to ride the horses.

Photos by Ashley McKinless



# STUDYING THE GREAT BOOKS IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

*A visit to the rural  
Catholic college that  
has 171 students,  
12 horses and  
zero textbooks*

By Ashley McKinless

It is not easy to get to Wyoming Catholic College. And once you are there, it is not easy to get elsewhere. Located in Lander, a town of roughly 7,500 in the foothills of the Wind River Mountain Range, the closest Target is a two-and-a-half-hour drive away, and you will have to cross into Colorado to get to Costco. Walmart is only 35 minutes away, in Riverton, Wyo., along with the closest airport, where I was scheduled to land at 10 p.m. on a Tuesday in February.

But I am flying out of Newark Liberty International, which means my flight is delayed by two hours because of cloud cover over the New York metropolitan area. I miss my connection from Denver to Riverton, and the next available flight is not until Thursday afternoon. My best chance at arriving sooner is to spend the night at the AmericInn airport hotel and drive to the college first thing in the morning.

I start the six-hour trip before sunrise, easing into the moonlike landscape of winter in Wyoming at 80 miles per hour. The weather is blessedly calm, but gusts of wind sometimes

Students make the trek to downtown Lander from the campus of W.C.C. after Mass on Sunday morning.

cause long-ago-fallen snow to swirl upward from the road. This is where the Great Plains meet the Rockies, and while there are mountains in every direction (though I suspect only an East Coast native would call these relatively modest rock formations mountains), one never seems to gain elevation.

“It’s a bug,” Joseph Susanka, the college’s vice president for advancement, says of its remote location when I share my travel woes. “But it’s also a feature.”

The isolation, the raw landscape, the open sky—none of these are incidental to the education on offer at Wyoming Catholic College. They are a part of the curriculum.

They also make for a dramatic backdrop.

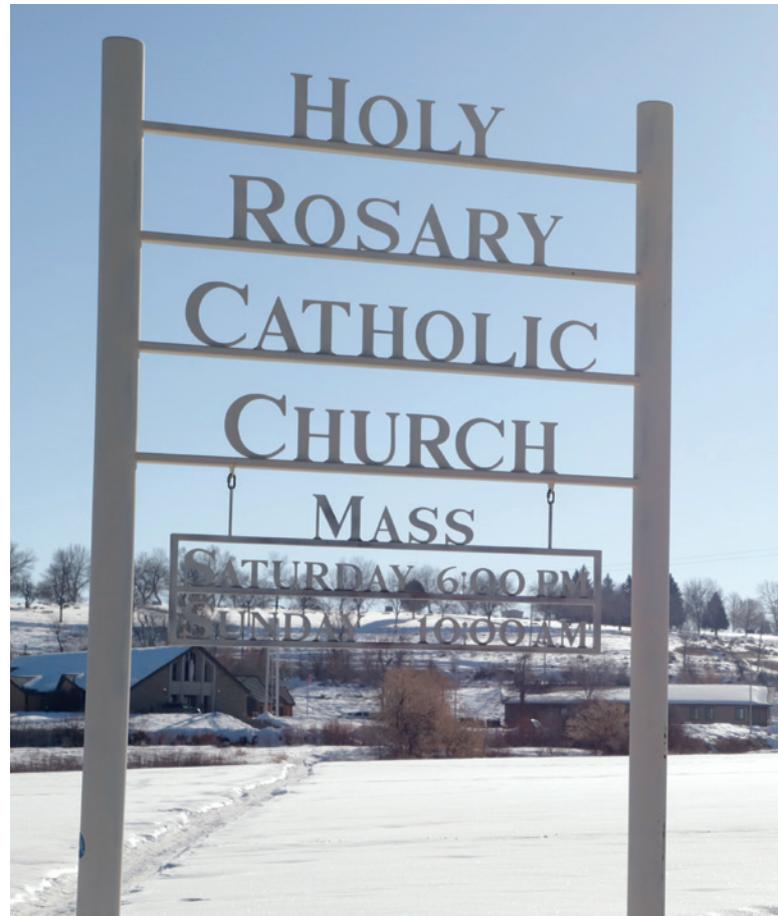
Two months before my trip to Lander, I sat in the back row for the sold-out final showing of “Heroes of the Last Turning,” a play by Will Arbery about the recent graduates of a small Catholic college in Wyoming, one that in many ways resembles W.C.C. Mr. Arbery did not attend Wyoming Catholic, but his father, Glenn Arbery, became the school’s third president in 2016, and his mother, Virginia Arbery, is an associate professor of humanities at the college. The production unfolds in the backyard of a professor, based loosely on Ms. Arbery, where four students debate faith, President Trump, abortion and other culture-war flash-points.

The niche play inspired by an equally niche school was a surprise hit among New York theatergoers, and its nuanced portrayal of the oft-caricatured world of religious conservatism earned it praise from Catholics across the political spectrum. I wanted to find out what attracted real-life students to Wyoming Catholic College and its unique offerings in the world of Catholic higher education.

### The Outdoors

The first class every student takes is an introduction to the Experiential Leadership Program, ELP 101. In the summer before the start of the new school year, freshmen take a wilderness first aid course, then embark on a 21-day backpacking trip in the Wyoming backcountry. Like most everything at W.C.C., the course is grounded in Western philosophy. “The term ‘gymnastic,’” the Philosophical Vision Statement of the college reads, “comes from the Greek *gymnos*, meaning ‘naked.’ Gymnastics, broadly speaking, refers to the naked or direct experience of reality.” Through their direct encounter with the grandeur of nature, the founders believed, students would grow in virtue.

The director of E.L.P., Thomas Zimmer, a former ski



patrol, raft guide and rock climbing instructor with a Ph.D. in parks, recreation and tourism, explains to me how the four cardinal virtues play out in more practical terms once students are responsible for their own survival in the mountains.

Temperance: “You can’t just eat all the cheese today because if you do, you’re not gonna have cheese tomorrow.” Fortitude: “How many kids who are 18 years old have ever slept on a hard surface other than a bed? Not very many.” Prudence: “You’re in a real environment where there are grizzly bears, and if you make good decisions, you’ll never see one, and they won’t bother you. But if you don’t make good decisions, they could come into your camp.” Finally, he says, dividing up labor is a lesson in justice: “Why don’t you go purify the water? Don’t make a mistake, because I don’t want to have diarrhea. And I’ll go set up the tent because it’s starting to rain.”

Catherine Stypa, a senior from Tucson, Ariz., describes that 21-day trip as the best three weeks of her life, though the first few days, she says, were “incredibly challenging.” Your body is adjusting to the elevation gain and the weight of your pack, while the group is trying to accommodate various levels of backpacking experience.

“I had no idea how much of a challenge it would be in terms of patience and getting along with your group and

**Through their direct encounter with the grandeur of nature, the founders believed, students would grow in virtue.**



[learning] how to become self-sufficient as a group,” she says. But, she adds, there is a steep growth curve. By day two, instructors are training students to be “leaders of the day”—mapping out a route, finding water sources. In week three, students who pass certain skills tests embark on independent travel.

Students continue their outdoor education all four years at W.C.C.: a week of winter camping after the first Christmas break; week-long hiking, rafting or rock-climbing excursions once a semester; and a required course in horsemanship. But it is the 21-day trip that forms the foundation of what will follow in and out of the classroom.

“There’s nothing more empowering than when those students can go backpacking in wolf country and grizzly bear country by themselves without an instructor,” Mr. Zimmer says. “And that allows them to know that [when they take] the final they’re going to have in humanities or Euclid or Latin, they’re going to be fine. Just like their 21-day trip, they have to put effort and energy and time into their training.”

Ms. Stypa agrees. “There are so many nights out there where you’re freezing or it’s raining, and your sleeping bag got wet and someone has a blister that needs to get taken care of. And it’s 11 p.m. and you’re supposed to get up at 6 a.m., and it’s just hard,” she says. “That toughness that it

gives you sticks with you when you come back into the semester when you’re slammed by paper after paper.”

She also described a more subtle connection to the classroom. “You’re just thrust into the wilderness, into the mountains and these mountain lakes, snow and wildlife and lightning storms. It’s terrifying, and it’s beautiful,” she says. “And then we come back, and we study poetry, and we talk about ancient Greece and ancient Rome. And I think you really draw on your experience and fill your imagination as you’re reading the Great Books.”

### **The Classroom**

Jason Baxter, an associate professor of fine arts and humanities, also finds a deep resonance between the freshmen expedition and the Great Books curriculum. “There’s something severely beautiful about ancient texts, which are not trying to accommodate us in any way,” he tells me over tea at Crux, the corner coffee shop staffed by students and frequented by faculty and local residents alike. “And there’s something fascinatingly analogous to the Wyoming landscape, which is severely beautiful but does not exist in order to accommodate human beings. Without railroads or now interstates, we would not be here.”

Despite its emphasis on the outdoors, most learning at

# You are much more likely to overhear students debating Plato's *Republic* than the state of the country under President Trump.

W.C.C. does not take place in the backcountry or on a ranch, as I had assumed after driving several hours on I-80 and seeing more cows than cars. The college is made up of two modest campuses. Two academic buildings, the coffee shop, a dining hall and the outdoor program offices are in downtown Lander; while student dorms and the parish church are about a 20-minute walk away, past the end of Main Street.

"At least we can tell our kids we walked a mile in the snow both ways to get to school," one student joked.

I, too, can say I made a 20-minute trek, from the Holiday Inn at the other end of Main Street to the downtown campus several times in 5-to-10-degree weather over icy sidewalks. On my first day, I arrived just in time to join the students for lunch. On the menu: hamburgers made from cows owned by the college and a modest salad bar.

Putting down my plate at a table of sophomores, I hear a student say something about Kierkegaard. I step away to grab a Diet Pepsi, and by the time I return to the table they have moved on to Thomistic philosophy. I assume my guide has warned them that a journalist is present, and they are trying to sound smart. But my introduction is met with what seems to be mild bemusement that someone would fly from New York City to eat at Frassati Hall, and the conversation continues apace.

I cannot help but think back to my college years at the University of Virginia, from which I graduated in 2012. Our dining halls had, among other options, a stir-fry station, a pasta station, a sandwich station, an omelet bar and all-you-can-eat soft-serve ice cream. Most days I sat by myself while finishing up class readings on my laptop or scrolling through the news on my phone.

Students are not allowed to have cellphones at Wyoming Catholic College—and not just in the classroom. Each semester when they arrive on campus, they hand over their iPhones and Androids to the faculty prefects assigned to each dorm. (Students are permitted to check their phones out when they travel out of town.) Laptops are not permitted in class, though students have them to write papers. Internet access in dorms is limited to school email and ap-

proved websites needed for classwork. That does not include Netflix.

No one I talked to missed having a cellphone. If they are not engrossed in a book, students are constantly looking up, out and at each other. As a visitor to this screen-free sanctuary, I find myself taking out my phone to check email or Twitter or Instagram between classes or interviews, only to become extremely self-conscious and stuff it back in my coat pocket.

It is a feeling I will have frequently during my five days at W.C.C.: indicted, not because I am being personally judged but because the school is genuinely countercultural, and the culture they are countering is in many ways mine.

The technology policy and the outdoors program are the most concrete manifestations of what Mr. Baxter calls "a thirst for the authentic, for the raw, for the real" among the students and faculty of W.C.C.

In the classroom, this looks like direct engagement with the original texts that have shaped the Western and Christian world. The curriculum is inherited, not chosen. It starts with Homer, Plato and Aristotle, the Old and New Testaments, then proceeds through Augustine and Aquinas, the Reformation and Renaissance to the scientific revolution and the modern novel. All students take the same classes, following an integrated eight-track curriculum consisting of humanities, theology, philosophy, fine arts, math and science, trivium (grammar, logic and rhetoric), Latin and experiential leadership. There are no majors or textbooks.

I ask Ms. Arbery if she worries about a lack of diversity of voices and experiences represented in the curriculum. During a conversation in her office that spills into brunch at The Middle Fork, where one of her former students waits tables, she tells me she is no stranger to the battles over representation in academia that have been raging since the '70s.

She points to the strong role of female characters like Antigone in Greek classics, to Flannery O'Connor, whose stories are read by all seniors, and poems by Emily Dickinson memorized by every student. And she insists there is diversity of thought in the classroom: "You can't have one





Most students attend the 8 a.m. Traditional Latin Mass, celebrated by one of the college's two chaplains, the Rev. Paul Ward, at Holy Rosary Church on Sunday.



opinion about a great work of literature.”

“Do we have a woman writer like Homer?” she asks, rhetorically. “Hell no. And there is no other man like Homer.”

“I am pretty feisty when it comes to women and the good ol’ boy network,” Ms. Arbery continues. “But, no, we’re not on the bandwagon for cutting up the Great Books for being male dominant.”

I sat in on Latin 102, taught by Eugene Hamilton, to see how one learns the language of many of these “dead white men,” as they are called by some in the academic discourse, without a textbook. It is an 8:30 a.m. Friday class, the sort I managed to avoid throughout my four years as an undergrad. Although a young man appeared to be sleeping on a couch in the back of the room when I arrived, by 8:31 the freshmen have recited the Pater Noster (Our Father) and are on their feet following orders from Mr. Hamilton, all in Latin. “*Ambulas*,” he says, and they walk around the room. “*Legis*,” and imaginary books appear in their hands. There is a word I don’t catch, and suddenly the 12 or so students are on the floor making snow angels.

Later in the day, I sit in on SCI 402, a seminar that looks at evolution through the lenses of science, philosophy and theology. Nalgene water bottles with the names of mountain peaks and pro-life stickers dot the black desks as students discuss two different accounts—one from an atheist biologist, another inclined to intelligent design—of the Cambrian explosion and the implications for evolutionary theory. The course is co-taught by a scientist and a theologian, J. Scott Olsson and Jeffrey Holmes, respectively, and encapsulates well the aims of the integrated liberal arts curriculum.

“The idea of the liberal arts,” Mr. Holmes says, “is not to become an expert in a given area but to become able to judge what the experts are saying in all the different areas.” Far from pushing a fundamentalist interpretation of evolution or any other contentious subject, professors encourage students to read the texts for themselves and learn

how to recognize a good philosophical or scientific argument. Doing so at times requires breaking down what he calls a “siege mentality” among students who see the world around them as out to undermine their faith. In the classroom, Mr. Holmes tries to create a space where students are willing “to entertain the notion that a bunch of atheistic scientists might actually have something good to say.”

“We’re going to discuss big ideas with the gloves off,” he tells me, “which is going to be really challenging. We’re going to discuss literature that isn’t Catholic—in the nude, so to speak. But at the same time, nobody here is going to finally doubt the church or challenge the pope’s authority.”

### A Catholic Community

The school’s obedience to the magisterium of the church, among other factors, has secured it a spot on the Cardinal Newman Society’s list of recommended colleges, a well-known fact among the students. When I asked students how they came upon Wyoming Catholic College, I received one of two replies: “the Newman guide” or “my sibling.” Most of the students come from large families and many were homeschooled. Ryan Milligan, a freshman, is one of 14 children and the eighth in his family to attend the college. “There has basically been a Milligan here every year since the college started,” he tells me.

I ask Glenn Arbery if he thinks it is helpful for the Cardinal Newman Society to label certain Catholic colleges as insufficiently faithful. He says he thinks that serves a purpose for parents looking for an authentic Catholic education for their children, but that I should talk to his wife.

Ms. Arbery previously served as the dean of admis-

Once a year, the W.C.C. cafeteria turns into life-sized board game for Quis Quid, a game of wisdom, wit, costumes and bribery.

sions at the University of Dallas, University of St. Thomas in Houston and Thomas More College and has thought a lot about the right and wrong reasons to attend Wyoming Catholic College.

“They have to have spunk,” she says, describing the typical W.C.C. student. “We have to make sure that they’re not coming because it is a safe place that mom and dad have designated as one of the two or three places that are safe.”

She argues that, in fact, W.C.C. might be the opposite. “It’s not safe because once you’ve seen something noble and beautiful, you have to either measure up to it or you will feel quite shameful the rest of your life,” she says. “We don’t say, ‘When you get out of here, you’re going to get a great job; you’re going to make a lot of money.’ It’s a heroic education, and it’s not for wimps.”

I am struck by that word, *heroic*. In one scene from “Heroes of the Last Turning,” the graduates debate the Benedict option, the idea, popularized by the writer Rod Dreher, that to survive in a culture increasingly hostile to traditional religious practice Christians must engage in a strategic withdrawal from public life.

I ask Ms. Arbery if she sees W.C.C. as a Benedict option college.

“I hope not,” she replies, with a laugh. “I love Rod, don’t get me wrong.” (The Arberys know Mr. Dreher from their time in Dallas.) “Maybe [it is] in this regard: the Benedict option understood as a place that, by forming young minds and souls in a well-established vibrant tradition, allows them to re-engage with the world in a fuller and more intelligent and loving way.”

But, she adds, “we’re not huddled down here waiting for Armageddon.”

Both Ms. Arbery and her husband acknowledge and worry that W.C.C. students are not particularly engaged in contemporary politics. You are much more likely to overhear students debating Plato’s *Republic* than the state of the country under President Trump.

Ms. Stypa says she finds the lack of political engagement frustrating. But she understands why, with only 24 hours in a day, students want to make the most of this “sacred time to study the Great Books and be in the wilderness...and take a monastic retreat from the world of politics.”

Kyle Washut, the acting academic dean, says “one of the constant worries” is that this type of “conservative Catholic college” could become a bubble for students. He thinks students at W.C.C. benefit from being embedded in the town of Lander and points to the eye-opening experience of week-long immersion trips to serve and be present



to people living on the streets of Denver. Every Sunday, a group of students also goes to the Wind River Indian Reservation, which has high rates of domestic violence, suicide and drug abuse, to teach religious education. “They do a little bit of catechism,” Ms. Stypa tells me. Then they play basketball with the kids.

But no one denies that the college offers the sort of thick, traditional, Christian community prescribed in the Benedict option. On top of the technology policy, there is a dress code for class and liturgical events, a curfew, a zero-tolerance drug and alcohol policy and a prohibition on opposite-sex visitation in dorms—punishable by expulsion. Mass, in both the ordinary and extraordinary form, eucharistic adoration and prayer groups are available (though not required) every day.

It can all sound deadly serious and pious, at least to this graduate of U.V.A., where the only required (or at least strongly encouraged) engagement with Homer is running, in the nude, so to speak, to his statue at the far end of Thomas Jefferson’s academical village and back to fulfill the right of passage known as “streaking the lawn.”

The students do, I am happy to report, have fun. On Friday morning, the seventh W.C.C. student of the Milligan family, Kevin, a junior, was already in the library at 8 a.m.



## FOUNDING AND FINANCES

Wyoming Catholic College was incorporated in 2005; its first class of 34 students matriculated in 2007; and in 2018 it received accreditation from the region's Higher Learning Commission. With accreditation came the opportunity to access federal loans, but the college has decided to forgo the federal funding available through Title IV.

"If you accept federal funds, you accept the mandates that go along with federal funds," says Glenn Arbery. "And if you're not willing to accept what that might do to your religious liberty, then it seems like the thing to do is to reject them." According to the website, the decision was made out of a desire to preserve "institutional integrity" in hiring and admissions practices, which "could be severely compromised by the regulatory power which accompanies the acceptance of federal funds." All Catholic teachers are required to make a public profession of faith and an oath of fidelity to the magisterium, and non-Catholic faculty "promise never to publicly reject or defy the teachings of the Catholic Church or the Pope's authority as head of the Church," according to the college catalog.

The college offers work-study programs and need-based scholarships and encourages potential students to apply for outside grants. To date, the school has acted as its own loan servicer, allowing students to pay back loans from the college after graduation. Only three students have defaulted in the college's history, but with little cash upfront to cover operating expenses, the arrangement meant W.C.C. was on precarious financial ground and dependent on the generosity of benefactors. Last year, however, the college reached an agreement with the Notre Dame Federal Credit Union (based in South Bend, Ind., though not affiliated with the university), which will take over the student loan program beginning in the 2020-21 academic year.

Today, there are 171 students from 41 states (along with two Canadian provinces and the Netherlands) at the college, which plans to max out enrollment at 400 in the next five to 10 years.

– Ashley McKinless

and kind enough to give me directions to Latin class. Afterward, still in the library, he asked me if I was planning on going to Quis Quid that night. Having left my first and only Latin class early, I assumed this was some sort of knock-off of Quidditch, the Harry Potter-inspired game popular among a certain set on college campuses, and said I would be there.

*Quis Quid*, I learn, means "Who What" and is not a game played on brooms. According to the website, it is an annual battle "of wits and intelligence." Mr. Milligan described it as "part Candy Land, part Latin class." Neither quite captures the experience. The entire school is divided into three teams: cowboys, philosophers and poets. Each team marches into Frassati Hall in full costume—hats and vests for the cowboys and gals, togas for the philosophers and red-and-black outfits (meant to signify love and death) for the poets. A panel of professors sits at a long table in front of colored board-game squares taped to the floor and a volleyball-sized die. The faculty's spouses and children, dozens of toddlers and teens, make up a raucous, highly mobile audience.

One by one, the professors ask questions and hand out tasks to the teams, such as: "Recite a poem from the curriculum in the voice of Sean Connery"; "According to Aristotle, in what sense of before is one sense of before before another sense of before?"; and "Is bribery always and everywhere wrong?" This last question is especially challenging because part of the game is plying the judges with food and drink. Throughout the evening, students are constantly running in and out of the kitchen with bottles of wine and margaritas, homemade guacamole and spicy shrimp and, a young man in a toga tells me, the Vatican's own recipe for raspberries and creme. (Full disclosure: As an audience

member, I gladly accepted these edible bribes.) The poets, I am told, always win, and this year was no different.

It was as joyous and goofy and wholesome as it sounds. These are students from large, Catholic families, taught by professors who have large, Catholic families. It is good, and it is beautiful.

Still, as one who has learned hard truths mostly through mistakes, I could not help but think about the ones who may get lost along the way. Of course, students know what they are signing up for when they enroll. But “you don’t deprive someone of freedom by having rules,” Mr. Abery tells me. “They have the freedom to break the rules.” What happens when they do? Where do frailty, suffering and sin fit into all this?

Parker Eidle, a senior, started at Wyoming Catholic six years ago. As a freshman, he fell in love with Homer in Mr. Arbery’s humanities class and says he would stay up until 3 a.m. talking about the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with his roommate. I attended his Senior Oration, a 30-minute capstone presentation required of all graduating students. His was titled “Faith of Our Father: Homer as Father of the West.” Though he at times played the class clown and had the audience on his side, it was also clear he was trying, almost desperately, to communicate something about Homer or God or himself that he could not quite put into words.

I ask what accounts for the two-year gap in his academic record. Mr. Eidle tells me he started drinking after things did not work out with a young woman he was dating his sophomore year. He was expelled.

I ask what it was like to be cut off from W.C.C. “I was really bitter at first,” he says. “I started resenting everything about the community, including anything to do with the faith. I stopped going to Mass.”

He worked for a year at an Amish construction company in Pennsylvania. He had some friends at the University of West Virginia, so he moved to Morgantown and worked in the school kitchen. When I ask him what brought him back to the school, Mr. Eidle gets quieter. “It’s a little melodramatic,” he warns, sheepishly. While working in Morgantown he was in a car accident with his girlfriend, who did not survive. In the hospital, barely able to speak, the first thing he said to his dad was the opening line of a poem he had read at school, “To an Athlete Dying Young.”

“I started thinking about that poem a lot more,” he says. “It made me realize there are so many poems in the curriculum that you can memorize but not really understand until you experience it.”

He re-applied to the college in 2018, was accepted and is set to graduate this spring. At a college-wide reception on

Feb. 22 marking the feast of the school’s patron, Our Lady Seat of Wisdom, Mr. Arbery gave a toast in honor of Mr. Eidle, calling him “the heart of the school, both in joy and in sorrow.”

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Three weeks after leaving Lander, I am in Washington, D.C., for the birth of my first niece when the World Health Organization declares the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. Across the country, Masses are canceled, store fronts are shuttered, and schools, colleges and universities send students home. I wonder how Wyoming Catholic College would adapt to the new reality of distance learning and virtual community. This is a school that does not allow laptops in the classroom, that eschews lectures and PowerPoints, that requires you to hop on the back of a horse once a week or spend a week canyoneering in Utah. How do you do *that* online?

“The genius of Wyoming Catholic College is its community,” Mr. Arbery told me over a video call on March 26, four days into the brave new world of Google classrooms and online discussion boards, about his concerns about the rest of the semester. Trying to recreate online the tight-knit, almost familial atmosphere of the school has been tough, he said. At that point, he had led “one and a half” classes over Zoom, with which he, along with the rest of the country, has become well acquainted. The “half” is because the internet at his house is spotty and cut off in the middle of the session. The students, however, “went on for another 45 minutes,” he says. “They’re pretty resourceful.”

The staff and faculty are as well. While not looking after his four home-bound children, Mr. Washut is trying to keep the W.C.C. community alive from his laundry room, the quietest space in his house. While the horsemanship and outdoor programs have been suspended, other courses and informal meet-ups are being held over a hodgepodge of online platforms.

He hosted his regular *cor ad cor* (heart-to-heart) meeting with the entire junior class via Zoom. Faculty prefects continue to have regular coffee dates with members of their dorms. The sophomores are keeping up their Lenten practice of reading *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* aloud over soup and bread on Fridays. A student started a handwritten letter campaign: If you receive a handwritten letter from a fellow student, you write back and send a handwritten letter to someone else at the school.

And while so much has moved online, the school’s technology policy is in some ways still being enforced—by students. “The main student complaints,” Mr. Washut says, “have been [about] the sort of disjunct, with me tell-



# The genius of Wyoming Catholic College is its community.

Glenn Arbery, the college's third president, at a school-wide celebration in honor of its patron, Our Lady Seat of Wisdom.

ing them, 'Make sure you check your emails regularly and make sure you log in for these conversations,' when they are used to me normally saying, 'Distance yourself as much as possible from this [technology] and focus on real interactions.'... When they're home, they just want to be present to the people around them, which seems to be a success of our technology policy."

To accommodate the diverse situations of students—whether that is taking care of five younger siblings or having to drive hours to get access to the internet or caring for grandparents who have been taken out of a nursing home—the school is seeking to balance “live” online classes with recordings of lectures and discussions that can be accessed by students on their own time.

“For some of them, it may look more like a written-correspondence course from decades ago than an online course,” Mr. Washut admits. “But we’re trying to work with them as we can.”

And because everything at W.C.C. eventually comes back to Homer, Mr. Washut has set up a Google classroom for movie-watch parties, group readings of Shakespeare and optional lectures, which they are calling “Alcinous,” after a banquet attended by Odysseus on his way home to

Ithaca, where there is feasting and games and storytelling. Asked to give a toast, Mr. Washut tells me, Odysseus says, “This, in my mind, is something like perfection.”

The world at this moment feels very far from perfection. Government officials are having to make life-and-death decisions with limited data. Some workers feel they must choose between their livelihood and protecting their health and that of their community.

But on op-ed pages and in private conversations across the country, people are also talking with new urgency about the big questions: What is the value of a human life? How do we choose between two goods or, more often these days, two equally bad outcomes?

It is the focus on higher goods cultivated by the liberal arts and the Catholic faith that lead to the “heroic virtue that we hear about being manifested in the pandemic,” Mr. Washut tells me. “Spending time thinking about these questions and praying in the quiet of our hearts—it’s only when you have that commitment to preserving a space for that, that you’re going to be able to survive in a situation like the coronavirus.”

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Ashley McKinless is an associate editor of *America*.

# THE PARTY'S OVER



# Disillusioned with both the Republicans and Democrats, many Catholics long for a third-party option. Could it ever happen?

By Bill McCormick

Charles Camosy felt duped. Every four years, the major parties told him this is the “most important election of our lifetimes.” But “every time we fall for the ‘You may be not like us, but if the other party gains power it will be the end of the world, so you have to vote for us’ strategy we insure that things will basically stay the same,” he said. So, after years as a dedicated Democrat, he joined the American Solidarity Party, which attempts to incorporate Catholic social teaching more fully.

Camosy’s story reflects two seemingly opposed realities that condition Catholics’ participation in U.S. politics. First, Catholic social teaching does not fully coincide with the platform of either of the two major parties. Second, most U.S. Catholics nevertheless participate in our two-party system.

It is a truism that the Democrats and Republicans divide many tenets of Catholic social teaching between them, although many Catholics argue that their party better captures these teachings. But many voters who are socially moderate-to-conservative and economically moderate-to-liberal are not represented well by either party. They may occupy the ideal space where the power of Catholic social teaching can shine.

Given the failure of either major party to embody Catholic social teaching, one

might expect many Catholics to opt out of both, yet only 7 percent of Americans (and about the same number of Catholics) do not at least “lean toward” a political party, according to a Pew Research Center survey from 2019. Moreover, third parties fared poorly in the 2016 elections, a year of widespread dissatisfaction with the two parties. Insurgents like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders still channeled their candidacies through the established party system.

U.S. Catholics themselves are deeply committed to the two parties and are almost equally divided into Democrats and Republicans—although race and ethnicity complicates this picture, as we will see. This is in sharp contrast to white evangelical Protestants, Mormons and Jews.

Moreover, as Pew finds, “Catholic partisans often express opinions that are much more in line with the positions of their political parties than with the teachings of their church.”

As the theologian Steven P. Millies argues: “We have integrated too much of a politically partisan spirit with what many Americans associate with being Catholic. We talk a little bit too freely about being conservative Catholics or liberal Catholics.”

But do we have any other option? Is

# U.S. Catholics are deeply committed to the two parties and are almost equally divided into Democrats and Republicans.

there any chance for a third party that more fully represents the breadth of Catholic social teaching?

## Why Parties?

Understanding the possibility of a Catholic third party requires understanding political parties in general. At their simplest, political parties are institutions that help politicians to win elections and govern. They do this by mobilizing large numbers of voters, simplifying voting choices for citizens, regulating competition among ambitious office-seekers and forming coalitions of elected officials.

The U.S. political scientist V. O. Key offered the following taxonomy of political parties with the amusing acronyms PIG, PIE and PO. PIG stands for party-in-government and refers to the elected officials and candidates associated with a party; the PIG links officials both horizontally (across the branches of government) and vertically in a federal system (between the national and state governments). PIE means party-in-electorate: the voters who identify with a party. Finally, PO is the party organization: the staff, officials and activists who operate the party as an institution. All of these people together form the complex network that is a U.S. political party.

In terms of PIG, parties can organize around all sorts of things that give people common political interests. In the United States, political ideology has become an important way parties distinguish themselves and mobilize their voters. Sometime between the 1960s and the '90s, the parties sorted themselves, especially in the South, such that now almost all liberals are Democrats and almost all conservatives are Republicans.

Some political scientists view U.S. political parties as umbrellas over diverse coalitions of interest groups and voting blocs. An obvious example is Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal coalition in the 1930s and early '40s, which

Former Vice President Joe Biden, left, and Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, right, greet one another before they participate in a Democratic presidential primary debate in Washington on March 15. Senator Sanders has since suspended his campaign and said that it would be "irresponsible" for his loyalists not to support Mr. Biden as the Democratic nominee.

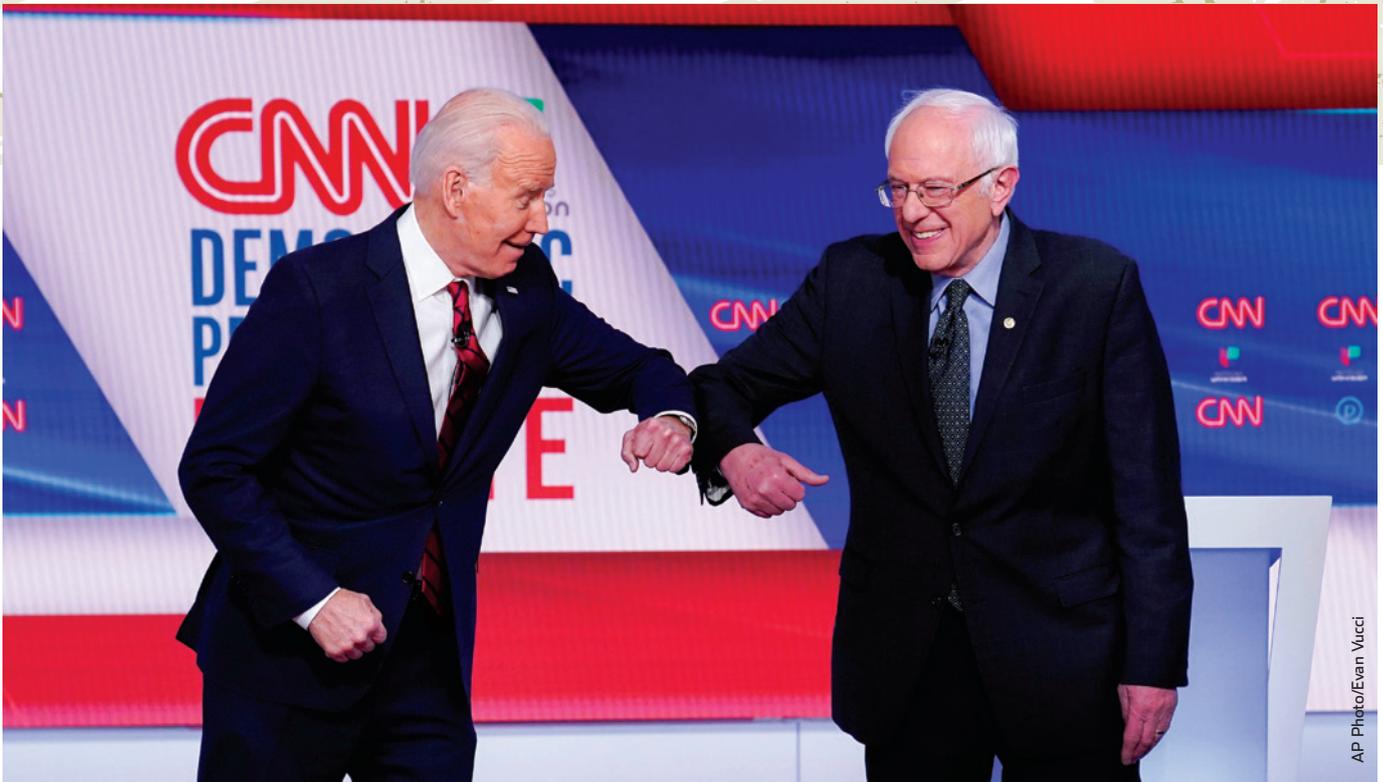
had as members many Northern Catholics but also most Southern Protestants. This view of political parties implies that an interest group itself is not a political party but in coalition with other interest groups can move beyond mere advocacy to electoral competition and power.

The PIE of the United States is structured by our two-party system. The United States has had a largely two-party system since 1792, and the Republicans and Democrats have been trading control of the government since 1854. Theories abound as to why the United States has a two-party system. One is so persuasive that it has been called a "law": Duverger's Law, which holds that two-party systems tend to arise in winner-take-all or "first past the post" election systems with single-member districts. There are not simply two parties in the United States, but a duopoly, a durable framework in which two parties have successfully excluded competitors. Any party outside that duopoly is merely a "third party."

The U.S. two-party system has fended off outsiders well. A third party might begin promisingly by influencing the national debate, but the two major parties usually co-opt its ideas, reducing both its chances of electoral success and the incentives of citizens to allocate resources to it. Meanwhile, many would-be third-party candidates are lured by the advantages of competing within the two-party system. Mr. Sanders, for instance, was a member of the Liberty Union Party in the 1970s and has since served in the House and Senate as an independent, but he ran for president as a Democrat.

Moreover, with reference to PO, political parties operate in environments that have multiplied in complexity since Key's time. This has only made it harder for new parties to endure. Parties interact not only with interest groups but also with the media and government agencies and in the context of complex legal, regulatory and financial environments. Parties provide critical legal, technical and financial support to candidates.

The challenge for U.S. third parties, then, is to offer durable solutions to the problems all political actors face in winning elections and governing, and to do so at all three levels: PIG, PIE and PO. Third parties in the United States have so far failed to meet that challenge. As the political scientist John Aldrich notes in his book *Why Parties?*, "While a third party or candidate occasionally is a strategic



actor in presidential politics (Ralph Nader in 2000 but not in 2008, for instance), no third party or candidate is so over time.” In the U.S. political imagination, third-party candidates play the role of “spoiler.” They help one major party win by siphoning votes from the other, as Ross Perot did in 1992 (although technically he was an independent candidate) and as happened with Teddy Roosevelt’s 1912 “Bull Moose” Progressive Party candidacy.

Yes, the U.S. two-party system is a contingent, historical creation. But history is not always easily reversed, and a powerful, durable political establishment has arisen around the decisions that formed the two-party system. Proposals to break it up have a certain cachet among sophisticated commentators, but they face tremendous hurdles.

Of course, a third party could have goals besides election and capturing government. It might try to educate citizens or advance policy issues. But if that party is not competing meaningfully for elected office, then it is merely an interest group, not a party. As the Democratic strategist James Carville recently told Vox, “The purpose of a political party is to acquire power. All right? Without power, nothing matters.”

### **A Catholic Third Party?**

A new Catholic party would have to make some hard decisions about PIG, PIE and PO. Who would be its candidates? Who would be its voters? Who would organize and pay for the party infrastructure? And the pressing question behind all of those questions: How would the

party compete in a two-party political system?

For PIG, third-party candidates are sometimes famous or wealthy or both, but a real party would have to outlast vanity campaigns. Who could serve as a durable leader? One answer might be a current elected official who has a strong personal following. But such a person would be precisely the sort of candidate who would have the most incentives to work within the two-party system.

And what would be the platform? How do you translate the broad principles of Catholic social teaching into a political platform for the here and now? Current partisans are wont to claim obvious connections between church teaching and their political preferences. But few policy areas admit of such simplicity, and not all issues are equally salient in a given election cycle. One proposal for addressing such questions has been to reach out to voters who are socially moderate-to-conservative and economically moderate-to-liberal, an ideological space often argued to align with Catholic social teaching. This is a promising approach, but prudential questions remain: how to select and frame principles so as to draw support away from the two major parties, when so many of these issues are precisely what the parties are fighting over.

The demographics of a Catholic-oriented PIE bear mention. Forming a Catholic-influenced third party at a time when the number of Catholics and other Christians in the United States is in decline and aging seems inauspicious. Perhaps the new authentic witness of a Catholic third party could be a way to bring millennials back to the

# The U.S. two-party system has fended off outsiders well.

President Donald Trump answers questions during a coronavirus task force briefing at the White House in Washington on April 10. Presidential politics are a long way from normal, but the steps that Mr. Trump takes in response to the Covid-19 pandemic could define his re-election campaign.

church, but its reach must be more than an evangelization tool to be effective politically.

Catholics are also diverse and sometimes divide on important issues along ethnic or racial lines. Hispanic Catholics, for example, are more likely to be Democrats than are non-Hispanic white Catholics, a majority of whom lean Republican. Would a Catholic third party be dominated by either group? Or would Catholics be able to unite across this divide to promote a common policy agenda? The latter would likely require a reconciling of policy issues that often divide Catholics, including immigration.

Bearing in mind the view of political parties as coalitions, perhaps such a party could find common ground with lapsed Catholics or non-Catholics. The latter group might include younger evangelical Protestants breaking from the Republican Party, or the religious left parting ways with the Democrats.

As for PO, it costs a great deal of money to organize a party that can regularly contest elections. A durable party would need donors committed to the long haul, benefactors who would not lose interest after failed election cycles. The party, meanwhile, would have to steward its resources carefully to build an infrastructure that would allow it to compete across election cycles. This is the kind of work that needs to happen between elections, precisely when interest in third parties ebbs for most people. The two major parties attract billions of dollars from political action committees, mega-donors, “dark money” groups and more generally by special interest groups because donors trust they are making a long-term investment. A third party could compete only by showing it was staying in the game.

The American Solidarity Party has attracted attention, for instance, but thus far has not met with electoral success, less because it fared poorly in elections than because it has not put many candidates on the ballot in the first place. As the prominent A.S.P. member and theologian Charles Camosy told me by e-mail, “Those of us who want to see the A.S.P. win national elections are playing the long game.”

Mr. Camosy’s path to the American Solidarity Party is a rich text for those looking for insights into how to attract

defectors from the party duopoly. Despite his years of affiliation with the Democratic Party and his leadership role in the advocacy group Democrats for Life of America, Mr. Camosy eventually came to feel like an outsider: “They were trying to make sure people like me were not welcome in the party,” he told *The Washington Post*. A Catholic third party would have to replicate Mr. Camosy’s journey in others and move voters from dissatisfaction with their party to a positive commitment to a new one.

But Mr. Camosy’s story reveals a further difficulty: He left the Democrats after repeatedly seeing the futility of his efforts to reform the party. In other words, he came to see the limits of his association with the Democratic Party precisely because he was an engaged member of the party. But one might wonder how many voters are engaged enough with their party to reach limits like those, to be forced by circumstances to make the difficult decision to leave. For that matter, how many voters would remain committed enough, despite such an experience, to particular policy objectives to seek new avenues of political participation?

Indeed, it is precisely because of the energy he devoted to the Democrats that Mr. Camosy had the faith in institutions and the imagination to envision something else. Perhaps people are not leaving and forming new parties precisely because they are not only dissatisfied with their parties, but also disaffected from them. They are not engaged with either major party to the point that they seek its reform, and so they are not running into the concrete limits of that effort at reform. Perhaps they have the vague notion that someone, somewhere, will be able to fix a party that may not in fact be fixable.

## A Hopeful Example?

U.S. Catholics hoping for a party based on Catholic social teaching might look to the example of Christian Democrats in Europe. That history is instructive, if not altogether hopeful.

Christian Democrats formed successful post-war parties in Europe that had origins in the “confessional parties” of the 19th century in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. The most notable such party today is Germany’s CDU/CSU, whose leader is Chancellor Angela Merkel.



AP Photo/Evan Vucci

Like all parties, Christian Democratic parties arose as a solution to a problem—in this case, widespread and politically powerful campaigns against religious faith, like the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s Kulturkampf, his oppressive attempt to win Catholic loyalty to the state over the church.

This is a simple but important point: While Christian democracy is often associated with specific policies in line with church teaching, its origin was less about Catholic social teaching than about the basic rights and privileges of the Catholic Church. Christian Democratic parties were also able to cooperate with parties that were not concerned with its social teaching.

They found willing partners in conservative political elites, who shared their opposition to secular liberalism, and conservative parties were eager to make use of the church’s membership and organization to remedy their lackluster efforts to mobilize voters.

Christian Democrats were met with further propitious fortunes in the postwar period. As Europe emerged from the wreckage of World War II, Christian Democrats became the face of the rebuilding effort, with anti-communism and Catholicism united in the heady period leading toward the Second Vatican Council.

It was not inevitable that these parties would form. The church might have decided to respond to the issues of the moment with temporary solutions or ad hoc responses. Conservative parties might have sought other means of

confronting liberalism. Voters might have been unmoved by the plight of the church. But parties formed, voters responded and elections were won.

What lessons can we take from these parties? First, the Christian Democrats were not “third parties” in the American sense. They became major parties within multi-party systems that regularly held power. They are thus not directly analogous to a Catholic third party in the U.S. system, although they might have lessons for a Catholic party seeking to become one of the two major parties in the United States.

Second, these parties arose through the coalition of Catholic and conservative parties, thus allowing the Catholic parties to take advantage of the institutional capacities of previously existing parties and expand their base beyond Catholics. It is not clear how a Catholic third party today would find substantial support from a major party. But this strategy highlights the nature of political parties as coalitions. The Christian Democrats took an umbrella approach that made them bigger and more effective than a single interest group.

Third, these parties arose because the Catholic party was able to mobilize voters. Again, that mobilization was based less on ideological policies than on resistance against anticlerical campaigns against the church. The Christian Democratic parties were able to present those campaigns as an existential threat to the church.

This mobilization strategy makes the Christian Dem-

# U.S. Catholics hoping for a party based on Catholic social teaching might look to the example of Christian democrats in Europe.

ocrats a bad analogue for today. Catholics are divided on whether contemporary American culture and politics represents a threat to the church, and on what the church's response ought to be. Indeed, one of the most contentious issues among Catholics is the alleged political weaponization of religion and religious liberty.

Fourth, the Christian Democratic parties arose at critical junctures, at points in history when epochal political change became both possible and desirable. This was also true of the formation of the current two-party system, which formed in the run-up to the U.S. Civil War. Perhaps we are at such a critical juncture in the United States in 2020. But there is no question that building new political parties requires overcoming tremendous inertia.

Fifth, the Christian Democratic parties arose through close cooperation between the hierarchy and laity, although eventually the parties became quite independent of the church. This raises a question: If formed today in the United States, would such a party be associated with the church? Would its political missteps, foibles and even scandals tarnish the reputation of the church? And would a party's association with a church still embroiled in clerical sex abuse and cover-up scandals harm it irreparably?

## The Art of the Possible

Clearly, we are a long way off from a Catholic party that could replace one of the major political parties, or even achieve the unthinkable and become a viable third party. In the meantime, how might Catholics meaningfully participate in our two-party system?

Thomas Reese, S.J., has a suggestion: "The Catholic Church is the only major religious group that contains an almost equal number of Republicans and Democrats. The church needs to get these folks talking and listening to one another."

How can Catholics cultivate the conditions for good partisan politics? Christians are well placed to advocate against some of our political woes, which so often seem to be the result of channeling displaced spiritual energies in ways that only make our politics worse: messianic ideals of politics as the art of converting opponents to your side through epiphanies, or alternately, as an apocalyptic battle or a continual series of "Flight 93" moments that will make or break American democracy. Ultimately, such intra-eclesial conversations could remind us of the insufficiency of any political party for the fullness of life.

This effort would take a lesson from Charles Camosy: Get involved in party politics, but do not allow the party politics to define the terms of engagement. Strive for meaningful change and invest the time and energy required for such change, but do not confuse the party with your deepest principles.

To be sure, the effort required to get Catholics to talk across the aisle is daunting. The church, after all, is a microcosm of the diversity in the United States that often appears more as disarray than as harmony. We are used to antagonizing each other, performing to score points with outside audiences, not talking to one another. The church would have to reclaim spaces within its interior life where members could learn from each other and share with each other, admitting to anxieties, fears, prejudices and ignorance. It would have to exercise fraternal correction that would be truly loving rather than part of the politics of outrage.

Some will question the credibility of the church to renew civil society, dismissing it as just another rotten institution. In a world where the credibility of the church has suffered, we might first need to learn how to be institutional again.

Ultimately, the way for the church to have its best political effects may be not by starting a new party, but simply by being the church. Russell Hittinger, a scholar of law, religion and philosophy and a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, has argued that the church does not have a social teaching; it is a social teaching. Might the church model for the world the vibrant internal life of a community united by common ends and animated by a desire to love and serve both insiders and outsiders? One hopes at least that it has a surer foundation for unity than has been evidenced by our fractured republic.

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# LAST CALL

*Their time as college students was cut short. But before returning home, these seniors gathered strength from their community.*

By Gus Hardy

Every year during housing selection at Boston College, rising seniors fight tooth and nail for a space in the school's modular housing—which the students call “mods”—a clutch of 38 barn-like structures. The B.C. mods are filled with a deep sense of tradition and belonging that cut across the entire senior class, making them the hub for senior events throughout the year—especially when the time comes to say goodbye.

As a graduate student at Boston College, I was present as the school ramped up its response to the dangers of the coronavirus. And I had the opportunity to witness over the course of five days the ways in which the students at Boston College—especially the seniors—learned firsthand how strong that camaraderie is, even as the time to enjoy it was cut short.

Ariel Lynch, a member of the undergraduate class of 2020 from Orlando, Fla., was sitting in a senior seminar for applied psychology when she received word that she and every other student living on campus had five days to return home in the face of the coronavirus's spread. Calling her mother to notify her of the situation on the way back to the mods, Ariel returned to what she described as an “anti-tailgate.” Seniors fell into each other's arms crying—whether

in groups of two or six, saying how much they loved one another. Students smashed broken televisions in catharsis. The air was full of the smell of beer and the smoke of impromptu cookouts as the soon-to-be graduates choked out a last hurrah while they still could.

Many saw this coming. Harvard University and Boston University had recently decided to send their students away, and it was only a matter of time until B.C. would do the same. Some assumed that students might be forced to stay in the residence halls but would remain on campus. Regardless, every senior when asked about that moment remembers a “collective sorrow” falling upon the school. Though the situation was uncertain for all, the younger classes at least had a sense that they would return. For the seniors, this felt like a tragic if necessary end.

Over the next few days, that grief gave way to action and resourcefulness among the students. Students booked flights home, storage was secured with the help of the administration, who also granted extensions for housing, and goodbyes were shared. Marissa Papula, the campus minister for Kairos, a young-adult retreat program, was amazed by the ways in which the students took the time to write notes in

longhand to those to whom they wished to say goodbye. As she tended to students in the midst of exhaustion (hers and theirs), she saw not only gratitude in the students for their education, formation and friendships; there was also a deep desire for closure, a desire that students were swift to sate.

As parents returned to help their children move back home or store their belongings, they were treated to impromptu shows by a capella groups who gathered to sing for one last time. These groups would later face each other in an informal version of their traditional end-of-year competition. Seniors carried on their beloved tradition of “mod weddings”—a Christmas light-adorned, guitar-accompanied, tear-streaked event, during which graduates pretend to marry in an uproarious ceremony—with only a couple of hours’ notice.

Massive banquets among roommates were held where gnocchi, quiche, burgers, broccoli and whatever else was in the freezer was cooked and eaten. Seniors who had never had a chance to go on a Kairos retreat received an unexpected email inviting them to attend an informal “mini Kairos” by their friends who had attended and wanted them to belong to the community of those who had experienced it. The dance teams’ annual competition took place on the lawn of a residence hall, thronged with onlookers. Students who were training to run the now-postponed Boston Marathon ran a section of the course that runs alongside the B.C. campus, with students cheering them along the way holding makeshift signs.

I asked some of the students why they had bothered to throw together these activities, and they replied that their strongest weapon in fighting any kind of grief and loneliness was each other. As Rohan Dixit, a graduating senior, said: “Everyone came together in an empowering and awe-inspiring way. The sense of love and community that we had gave us a deeper appreciation and gratitude for one another in our last few days.”

Returning home from school for the last time would not be easy for many. But the recognition that the world was suffering along with them helped to dull that pain for some. As Ariel recalled: “At B.C., I found something that I wouldn’t have otherwise: the Jesuit ethos. It trained me to be reflective, to sit, think and process this, see it with depth and clarity.”

Everyone I spoke to had a sense that the B.C. community was celebrating, grieving and in solidarity with students around the world experiencing similar disruption. But many also understood that the changes they endured were not only about them. So they would return home to be alone, to slow the spread of this virus, but first they would gather from their community the strength that they needed to do so.

As students weighed the difficult decisions over which

belongings to part with, how to arrange travel in the midst of a decimated airline schedule and how best to say goodbye, they received plenty of help from B.C.’s staff and administration. Resident assistants helped them pack up gear, ministers and counselors were around to listen and give presence, and faculty supplied everything from airport transportation to a dozen pizzas as a token of farewell to the departing seniors.

At last, Sunday morning came. Some students had spent the night building pillow forts, having sleepovers, fueling themselves on a last cup from Dunkin’, and now the time had come for the end. Hundreds of seniors made the trek from the mods to the edge of the nearby Chestnut Hill Reservoir to watch the sunrise over the cloud-streaked skyline of Boston for one last time as undergraduates. Social distancing was not yet understood or strictly enforced in the Boston area, though it would be soon. They felt they needed a last moment, a last time together to fill the place of a rite of passage that they would not experience.

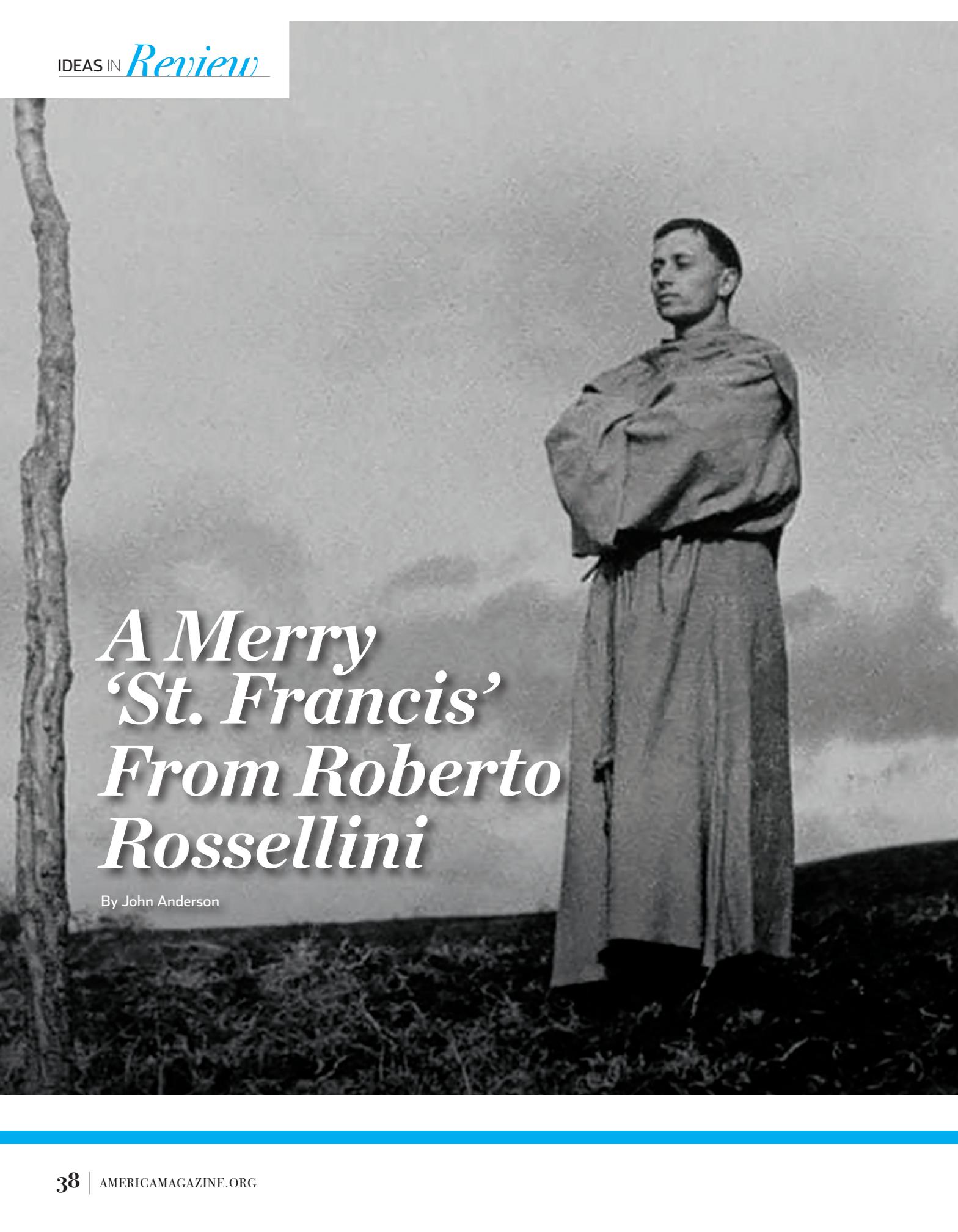
Students held each other, chatted, sobbed and wrapped themselves in maroon and gold blankets and quilts. The sky turned pink, then gold, and the fiery white sun rose over the whooping and hollering class of 2020. As the hundreds of students solemnly marched back to the mods and their waiting transport, Rohan said goodbye to a friend who told him that “it almost feels like the end of the world, but it’s reshaped how we’re leaving in a positive way.”

Most of these students are now home, adapting. Classes have moved online, group text messages are thriving, and the B.C. spirit is fainter now but alive. As one of my friends, a senior named Caleigh Wozniak, told me: “Every day is a new challenge. We’re in a larger world, and we created these memories because we need them to sustain us.”

The students’ departure came during Lent, and one might consider this time a Holy Saturday of sorts for students. They hope for something better soon, yet my friend’s words also remind us of the larger world of which we are a part, one that may not yet have reached the full sorrow of Good Friday. We are still waiting together to endure the worst, even if that “together” is six feet apart. We ask how we can say goodbye to what we knew, prepare for what is to come, take strength and reflect for the hard times ahead with a sense of hope and resilience. The seniors at Boston College found communion in ways that they would not have been envisioned otherwise. We can as well.

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*A Merry  
'St. Francis'  
From Roberto  
Rossellini*

By John Anderson

“The Flowers of St. Francis” is a film teeming with images both somber and exhilarating, but one of the more memorable ones comes early on, as St. Francis and his “flowers”—the 12 monks who share a stone hut near St. Mary of the Angels in Assisi—scamper through a downpour of biblical proportions. Free of shoes, free of doubt, giddy with their devotion to Jesus, they are totally soaked and entitled to be miserable. But Francis is joyful when they are thrown out of that same hut by a farmer with a donkey because, “It’s the first time Providence has made us useful to others.” One can almost taste the mud. The sense of delirious faith is equally palpable.

One of the complaints lodged against “The Flowers of St. Francis” when it first appeared was that it “lacked realism,” which is true—you can hardly believe the monks live through the downpour, or up to the standards they set for themselves. Other reviews were even harsher—the French critic Marcel Oms famously called “Flowers” a “monument to stupidity,” and the film made significantly less than \$20,000 when it was released in Italy in 1950 (it arrived in the United States in 1952).

But both critics and consumers might have given the director the benefit of the doubt, given that he was that giant of Italian neorealism, Roberto Rossellini—a filmmaker who reimagined cinema itself in the aftermath of World War II, often enough using the ruins of war-ravaged Italy as his backdrop. If the film seemed fanciful, it was hardly a directorial error. And clearer heads leveled their own judgments: Pier Paolo Pasolini, a self-described “Catholic Marxist,” said the film was “among the most beautiful in Italian

cinema”; Francois Truffaut called it “the most beautiful film in the world”; Martin Scorsese, in his 1999 documentary “My Voyage to Italy” (a title that echoes Rossellini’s own “Journey to Italy”), devotes an enormous amount of time to both Rossellini and “Flowers.” In 1995, the film was included in a survey of “some important films” that has since become known as “the Vatican’s best-of list.”

That said, encountering “The Flowers of St. Francis,” which turns 70 this year, will be an odd experience for most first-timers. Based on the 14th century *Little Flowers of St. Francis* and *The Life of Brother Juniper*, the film has only one professional actor, Aldo Fabrizi, who plays Nicolaio, a warlord laying siege to nearby Viterbo. (In an extended set piece, Nicolaio, who seems to be channeling the early film comedian Edgar “Slow Burn” Kennedy, tries—and fails—to work up enough outrage to have the doe-eyed Brother Juniper executed.) In keeping with the neorealist ethic, the rest of the cast (uncredited) were not only nonprofessionals but members of the monastery at Nocere Inferiore, including Nazario Gerardi, who plays Francis as straight man to a group of monks whose mischief is usually inadvertent and occasionally bizarre. Juniper, or Ginepro (Severino Pisacane), in an attempt to satisfy a brother who is coming off a fast and craves pigs’ feet, chases a live pig and amputates its leg. “Listen!” Juniper says of the screaming pig. “He’s thanking the Lord, too!” The swineherd is not amused. But in the face of Juniper’s innocence, he donates the rest of the pig to the apostles-to-be.

This is not realism, neo or otherwise. But while neither Rossellini nor

Encountering “The Flowers of St. Francis,” which turns 70 this year, will be an odd experience for most first-timers.



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# The director Roberto Rossellini said he wanted to capture ‘the perfume of the most primitive Franciscanism.’

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his screenwriter—Federico Fellini—were conventionally Catholic, both incorporated Catholic themes and morality in their work. Rossellini made some sobering films (“Rome, Open City,” “Paisan,” “Germany Year Zero”); but “Flowers,” he said, was to focus on “the merrier aspect of the Franciscan experience,” on “the playfulness,” the “freedom that the spirit finds in poverty” and in an “absolute detachment from material things.” Rossellini said he wanted to capture “the perfume of the most primitive Franciscanism” as portrayed in *The Little Flowers* book, which was “the most accomplished form of the Christian ideal.”

Unlike *The Little Flowers*, which consisted of 78 chapters, “The Flowers of St. Francis” is made up of nine, plus a prologue (the mud and rain episode), which is included in the current Criterion Collection version but was deleted in some earlier renditions. (The film is also available to stream on the Criterion Channel.) This seems unthinkable, but so does St. Francis’ encounter with a leper, which is a chapter fraught with horror, mercy, faith and charity, and is easily the most disorienting episode in the film.

In that soggy opening, Francis is asked, “Why do men follow you?” His answer: Because God could find no creature more humble, no sinner more vile, and his mission would ensure that “men would see that every virtue and good comes from him.” It may be a film nerd’s projection, but Gerardi bears a striking resemblance to Maria Falconetti, who played the title saint in Carl Th. Dreyer’s 1928 silent film “The Passion of Joan of Arc,” another film on that 1995 Vatican list celebrating the centenary of cinema. But it might just be the similar way both actors cast their eyes toward heaven.

Juniper is the impish member of the clan (recall the mutilated pig); he’s a bit mad rather than feeble-minded like Brother Giovanni the Simpleton, who leaves his wife and family to follow Francis (who frowns on it). Juniper is so devoted to the ideals of Francis and Christ that he keeps giving away his tunic (the subject of an entire chapter), returning naked, and finally has to be commanded by Francis to remain clothed. In another episode, he decides to make enough food for two weeks so the brothers can go out and preach. He is not Julia Child, or even Guy Fieri; the

food prep owes a lot to the era of silent comedy. But Juniper does embody the joy Rossellini wanted to convey in his portrayal of the religious; Francis, by contrast, represents self-sacrifice and contradictions.

In an episode about “perfect happiness,” Francis and a brother approach a well-to-do home to preach, are rejected, rejected again, cursed and finally beaten into the outdoors, where Francis concludes that perfect happiness lies in the fact “that we have done all this for the love of Christ.” It’s a sentiment echoed in the film’s closing moments, when the brothers—about to be dispatched in 12 different directions to preach the Gospel throughout a land that would eventually become Italy—prepare to leave Assisi. En route to the future, they are gifted by the townsfolk with food and supplies—which they promptly give away to those more needy, and go on their way held aloft by faith and the spirit of God. They are humble. And we, as Rossellini intended, are humbled.

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John Anderson is a television critic for *The Wall Street Journal* and a contributor to *The New York Times*.

# In the Wake of the Heartbeat Bills

By Joe Hoover

*Then there was the one about  
the preacher's daughter  
who after telling him what  
she intended by him was told,  
exact words we only suppose,  
why what was there needed  
to stay where  
it was growing ongoing already there  
or at least the deep hunch of  
hunch enough to fabricate soul and such  
in short consider—maybe he said—Jeremiah  
before I formed you etc.  
and who in their right mind wants  
to tangle with Jeremiah he's mad  
thus what's formed by  
Form itself ought to stay that way my child  
and when she didn't budge  
conform heart  
to Form or formed  
evidently abandoned Jeremiah  
the preacher did  
tore down the gates of the mind  
drove her to the place of unforming  
why exactly it did not say  
maybe because he was her father  
had a car.*

That's the story she told forty years on  
in a Midwestern paper as  
backdrop for her hard-earned position  
on the matter.

And it spins your head to wondering  
if in the worst moment of her life your own  
image and likeness about to remove likeness  
and image twice removed of you having  
desperately tried to salvage heartbeat  
(thinkest thou quickens there what, my  
child, a duck?)  
and heart rent having none of it  
asks just a ride nothing more,  
because there's no one else around dad  
not in the least my co-conspirator  
in this matter  
and I'd rather not ride in a cab like going to  
the airport or something and where am I  
really going  
would you thus realign your heartbeat  
to hers  
take your daughter there  
the unholyest there you guess you could go  
because you cannot let her alone  
no matter the moral cost to your moral soul  
quickenings morals more and more  
(though moral never quickens fully so  
because of living moral  
what do we really fully know?)  
and if you decide to do it  
heart melted into what the hell  
would you stay silent  
and pretty much  
just drive?

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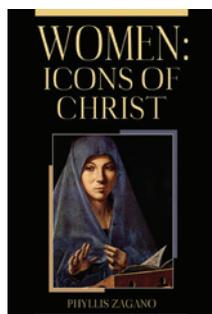
Joe Hoover S.J., is *America's* poetry editor.



CNS photo/Paul Haring

## A woman's place is in the church

By Brianne Jacobs



**Women: Icons of Christ**

By Phyllis Zagano  
Paulist Press  
121p \$14.95

“You’re a theologian,” my priest said to me in his old-world Irish brogue. He pulled an article out from a drawer and plopped it between us on his desk. I had come to talk about my upcoming wedding, but we were also chatting about my questions about salvation and the Second Vatican Council. I had no idea what a theologian was or what he wanted to show me.

After the conversation, he asked me to join the team that led our parish’s conversations for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and he gave me the article. It was an essay by Phyllis Zagano.

For the past 25 years, Zagano has shaped the discourse on gender and the history of leadership in the Roman Catholic Church with multiple award-winning articles and books. In particular, she is one of the world’s foremost experts on the history of the diaconate. She has written on how the meaning of this role has shifted over the last two millennia. More provocatively, she has written about who has filled this role in different circumstances and times in church history. Zagano’s thorough historical scholarship has shown that we must count women in that number.

While Zagano thoughtfully draws out the theological implications of her research, her main point is historical: There is simply no precedent on which to base the exclusion of women from the diaconate in the Catholic Church. Further, Zagano argues that there can be an ordination of women to the diaconate without any implica-

tion that women could be ordained to the priesthood. The formal sacramental anointings of a person into the diaconate and priesthood are different enough in kind that the ordination of women deacons does not imply the possibility of the ordination of women priests.

The question of women in the diaconate became relevant after Vatican II, when a permanent diaconate was established for the first time in centuries. Between the councils of Trent and Vatican II, there was no permanent diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church. The order of deacon was instead part of Holy Orders (one of the seven formally proclaimed sacraments), which has three levels: deacon, priest and bishop. In this understanding, all deacons were priests-to-be. No one was *permanently* a deacon.

After Vatican II, the permanent diaconate, modeled on a role found in the early church, was reinstated. To-

day deacons are ordained; they must be over 35; and they can be married. Deacons can baptize, witness marriages, perform funerals and burial services outside of Mass, distribute holy Communion, proclaim the Gospel and preach the homily. Married deacons, who wear a sash diagonally across the chest rather than a stole, are a familiar sight in many U.S. parishes. A deacon cannot, however, administer the sacrament of confirmation, hear confessions, anoint the sick or consecrate the eucharistic gifts.

Could there be a place for women in the permanent diaconate?

Zagano has addressed this question throughout her career, arguing for a single sacramental permanent diaconate for men and women. Her latest book, *Women: Icons of Christ*, provides an excellent and accessible summation of her research for a lay audience. Each chapter examines ways women have participated and been acknowledged as deacons in the body of Christ. These include: baptism, catechesis and preaching, altar service, spiritual direction, and anointing and healing. Zagano's copious research allows her to explore examples throughout history.

The most famous example of a woman deacon comes from Scripture. In fact, the only person in Scripture called "deacon" is named in Paul's Letter to the Romans, where he addresses the deacon—the woman deacon—Phoebe. And in the sixth century, the German princess Radegund, for whom many churches in Western Europe are named, was consecrated with laying on of hands as a deacon. Around this same time, many women performed sacred tasks such as baptizing and anointing for other women

precisely because it was seen as improper for a man to touch or see women in this context.

Zagano shows that it was the medieval church that put explicit strictures on the sacramental acknowledgment of women's ministries. This was done by using notions of uncleanness and misogyny that most priests today would find abhorrent on their face. Today, of course, Catholic women perform many ministerial tasks, such as spiritual direction, hospital chaplaincy, roles on parish councils and catechesis. Zagano shows that this kind of participation is not new and that it was recognized as sacramental from the early church until late in the first millennium of the church's existence.

The context in which this book is published is of particular note. In 2016, Zagano was appointed by Pope Francis to a 12-person study commission on the women's diaconate. The goal of this study was not to advise the pope on what to do going forward, but to provide reliable information about the history and theology of the early church on the status of women in the diaconate and then for the pope to discern the issue himself. Zagano recounted her experience in an interview with *America* last year. That commission was disbanded in 2018, with Pope Francis noting the group was divided on what conclusions to draw.

A new 10-member commission was announced on April 8. The purpose of this commission is similar; but unlike its predecessor, it is also explicitly tasked with making recommendations. Jamie Manson of *The National Catholic Reporter* has written that a number of members on the new commission are ideologically aligned against the movement toward a women's diaconate. None of the

previous members are on the current commission, and it seems a real loss not to have Zagano's specific expertise available there.

This new book describes the fruits of Zagano's many labors, both before the 2016 commission and during it. *Women: Icons of Christ* is not only informative; it may also be a helpful guide for discerning the nature and purpose of recommendations that may be made by the new commission.

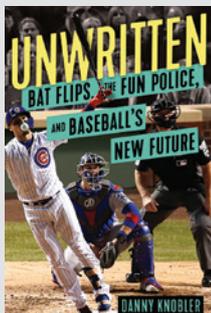
Zagano informs us that one theory of the etymology of the word *diakonia* is "that it comes from the meaning 'through the dust' [and that] the deacon ministers, serves, and brings the message, literally, 'through the dust' of the world and its afflictions. As icons of Christ, ordained women deacons served thusly."

Zagano's call is not just practical and historically grounded. It is a prophetic call to recognize women's participation in the body of Christ, a call that not only denounces harm to women but to the church that deserves our gifts.

A year after that first conversation with my priest, I began work toward a master's degree in theology. I am not a deacon. But I am grateful to Zagano for showing me what kind of place women have had and can have in the church, both through her research and her powerful example as a theologian. I recommend *Women: Icons of Christ* to any person who wants to learn more about the history and importance of women in the Roman Catholic tradition and to women who want to reflect on their own value in it today.

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Brianne Jacobs is an assistant professor of theology and religious studies at Emmanuel College in Boston.



**Unwritten**  
Bat Flips, the Fun  
Police, and  
Baseball's New  
Future  
By Danny Knobler  
Triumph Books  
352p \$26.95

### Ever ancient, ever new

One of my childhood baseball heroes, the catcher Mike Scioscia, spent much of the 1980s crouching directly in the third-base line on throws to home, clearly blocking the plate. The umpires never warned him publicly—because they knew that *he* knew that they would also not punish a runner who absolutely cleaned Scioscia's clock. (Many did. Scioscia usually held on.)

It was one of baseball's many unwritten rules, an arcane and ever-changing palimpsest of customs and self-policing actions not always obvious to fans. While technology—particularly social media, analytics and instant replay—have had a significant impact on the way the game is played, many of these unwritten rules remain in place today.

In national baseball reporter Danny Knobler's *Unwritten: Bat Flips, the Fun Police, and Baseball's New Future*, he addresses both the ancient customs (when to drill an opposing batter in the ribs) and the modern ("starting pitcher" now sometimes means someone who pitches the first inning and then heads for the showers). "[M]y goal was to bring you up to date on how the modern game is played and what is expected," Knobler writes. "I looked into how the growing in-

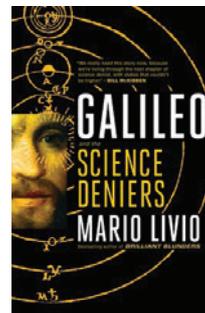
ternationalization of the game has affected what is accepted and what isn't, and I went back in history to show that the players of yesteryear sometimes did the same things they might well be criticizing players for doing today."

It is a rollicking good read, full of colorful anecdotes and revelations of unwritten rules I had never heard. You can flip your bat, but only if you're a superstar. Never run across the mound on your way out to the field. Latin Americans often have different rules about showing emotion than U.S.-born players. Context—and team culture—matters. "You can walk around your own house in your underwear," one player is quoted, "but you can't do that in your neighbor's house."

One cringeworthy moment of Knobler's book occurs when he praises the World Series-winning Houston Astros of 2017 as a team that "still believed in playing the game hard and playing it right, in respecting the game and respecting their opponents." The revelations of the last year have made it clear that the Astros were nothing of the sort. They used hidden video cameras and other forms of subterfuge to alert batters as to what pitch was coming. In another era, the players involved would have been banned from baseball for life. Instead, when baseball returns, I have no doubt that certain Astros will receive a more primitive and yet time-honored form of justice.

Clayton Kershaw can still throw a fastball to the ribs as good as anyone.

James Keane, senior editor.  
Twitter: @jamestkeane.



**Galileo and the  
Science Deniers**  
By Mario Livio  
Simon & Schuster  
304p \$28

### 'And yet it moves'

In *Galileo and the Science Deniers*, Mario Livio portrays the 17th-century polymath as a rebel and a genius, often stubborn and outspoken, and nearly as devoted to the arts and humanities as he was to science. He also shows the relevance of Galileo's famous political and religious struggles to today's problems.

Livio, an astrophysicist, is able to portray science in a way that laypersons can understand. His writing in *Galileo* is straightforward and conversational, and he is at home in storytelling mode, especially when he relates some of Galileo's exuberant disagreements with other scientists and some Jesuit mathematicians and astronomers.

Livio depicts Galileo as a genius and the father of modern astronomy and astrophysics. His observations about falling objects contributed to Newton's and Einstein's ideas about gravity. He was also a great proponent of Copernicus's idea that the Sun was the center of the solar system, not the Earth, which caused him great difficulty with other scientists and the Catholic Church, which believed in a geocentric system.

After his publication of the *Dialogue*, which, among other things, promoted Copernicanism, Galileo

found his support from Pope Urban VIII withdrawn. In 1633, during an outbreak of the plague, Galileo was “pronounced a suspected heretic, forced to recant his Copernican ideas, and eventually placed under house arrest.” He died nine years later in Florence.

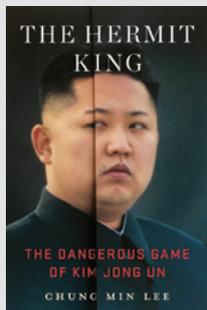
In comparing the culture that condemned Galileo to our own, Livio writes that the mindset that leads to nonscientific decrees also prevails in the United States to this day. Livio points out policies that encourage the teaching of a thinly veiled creationism as ‘intelligent design,’ to steer students’ minds away from Darwin’s theory of evolution, and he sees President Trump’s continued promotion of fossil fuels as “nothing short of shocking.”

Disputes about the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic offer another parallel. In an email interview with **America**, Livio was frank:

There is no question that the initial dismissive response of the administration to the scientists’ warnings concerning the coronavirus has had disastrous consequences.... One of the most important lessons from the Galileo affair has been: Believe in science!

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Joseph Peschel is a freelance writer and critic in South Dakota. He blogs at [josephpeschel.com/HaveWords](http://josephpeschel.com/HaveWords).



**The Hermit King**  
The Dangerous  
Game of Kim  
Jong Un  
By Chung Min Lee  
All Points Books  
304p \$28.99

### Ruthless, not deranged

Chung Min Lee puts it succinctly: The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is the world’s largest jail, with 25 million inmates. And in “Earth’s Paradise” existence is bleak: Precious resources are spent maintaining autocratic ruler Kim Jong Un’s power by accruing nuclear power while neglecting basic needs. People literally starve while they lavish public adulation upon “The Dear Leader,” who is a scion of a criminal dynasty that has cowed the Hermit Kingdom for 75 years. Life in the upper half of the peninsula is literally “blacked out”; space satellites reveal that there are no signs of life—or light—at night, marking a stark contrast with the vibrant, democratic lower half.

Lee, the author of *The Hermit King: The Dangerous Game of Kim Jong Un*, is South Korea’s former ambassador for national security affairs. Thus, he is well-equipped to provide Westerners with an insider’s view of Kim, and he analyzes the “dangerous game” Kim Jong Un is playing in order to simultaneously cement his control on power and modernize his society. Kim does this while craving international legitimacy as a player on the world stage, as seen with his engagements with leaders from China, Russia, South

Korea and especially the United States. Lee reveals Kim Jong Un for what he is: “ruthless and sharp,” an operator who is far from being “deranged.”

Like all dictators, Kim employs the traditional terrorizing methods to make sure he stays on top. Wild speculation recently in the international media about his supposed ill health (or whether or not he was even still alive) showed that, like his father and grandfather, he is dedicated to maintaining strict control over North Korean media. Kim easily dispatches those whom he sees as a threat to his power, including those in his entourage, be it a relative (like his half-brother or his father’s brother) or some governmental personage, like a general. He will do whatever it takes to achieve his aims, whether it is utilizing public relations techniques, personal chemistry, his Western education and even using his sister as a roving ambassador.

Whatever course Kim Jong Un embarks upon will have major implications for the Korean peninsula, Asia and the wider world. Kim dreams of turning North Korea into something like China and Vietnam, former socialist countries that have used modern markets to raise their economic output and standard of living. But Lee identifies the major conundrum Kim Jong Un faces: In order to do this, he has to lessen his grip on power to the extent that needed economic reforms can happen—and that is one risk he is unwilling to take.

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Joseph McAuley, *assistant editor*.

## A searing but incomplete look at abortion

By Simcha Fisher

In “Never Rarely Sometimes Always,” Autumn (Sidney Flanigan) travels to New York City, where she can get an abortion without parental consent.

I suppose **America** asked me to review “Never Rarely Sometimes Always” because I am pro-life but critical of the mainstream pro-life movement. I especially reject proliferators who demonize women and make excuses for men, and who refuse to understand why abortion feels like the only choice for some women. Things are slowly changing, but much of pro-life culture is still propaganda. I abhor propaganda, even when I agree with the message it delivers. If I’m watching a movie, I want a work of art, not a wheelbarrow for dumping a message at my feet.

“Never Rarely Sometimes Always,” written and directed by Eliza Hittman, is no wheelbarrow. It is a deft, delicate and sometimes searingly painful and realistic portrayal of two teenage cousins, Autumn (Sidney Flanigan) and Skylar (Talia Ryder), who travel from their rural Pennsyl-

vania town to New York City, where Autumn can get an abortion without parental consent. For a longish film, it is short on plot and dialogue, relying heavily and successfully on glances, murmurs and laconic comments. The script and acting are superb, flawless. This film never tells, only shows, and it does it so well.

Maybe too well.

The movie astonished me over and over with its avid eye for revelatory details. I’ve been to that crisis pregnancy center, with its shabby, donated furniture and dreary floral motifs, and I’ve seen that unprofessional volunteer secretary who smiles and wipes her nose. The counselor who meets with Autumn is so kind but so clueless. “Are you abortion-minded?” she earnestly asks. I have heard that phrase before, and I know how clunkily it lands on the ears of a teenage girl in need of real help.

But the realistic details aren’t all damning. The throng of protesters outside the clinic aren’t aggressive fanatics screaming threats and waving bloody posters; they are normal folk, including a few Franciscan friars wearing puffer jackets over their grey robes, carrying a banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe as they sing and pray the rosary. The film even briefly shows a live sonogram of a second-trimester baby, and it gives you a good, long listen to a healthy fetal heartbeat—two things I never expected to see in a pro-abortion movie.

But yes, I call it a pro-abortion movie. It does have an agenda, and it deliberately uses its sophisticated, hyper-realistic style to disarm the viewer, making us believe Hittman is simply recording facts as they are in real life. But the facts are carefully curated here. Hittman may not deliver her message with a wheelbarrow, but she does de-

liver it, mainly through the specific details she chooses not to showcase.

What does “Never Rarely Sometimes Always” show? A world where every single man is some kind of predator. The girls work for a tyrant and a fetishistic pervert; the stepdad is a beer-swilling lout who insults even the dog for being “easy.” A businessman on the subway exposes himself, and the one helpful boy they meet is nakedly hoping to be repaid with sex. This is a man’s world indeed; and the girls, at their tender age, are fully resigned to it.

This world is real for some women. I’m not saying it’s not. But in real life, facts do not all neatly line up and point to a single idea. In this movie, they do. But Hittman does it so subtly, we don’t immediately realize what we are being shown.

In one poignant scene, Autumn comes upon her not-unwilling cousin making out with that helpful boy against a pillar. Autumn, hidden, grasps Skylar’s hand, echoing a previous scene where the clinic worker grasps Autumn’s hand as she prepares for the abortion. Women must help each other, as men do what men do. In the excruciating moments that give the film its title, we watch Autumn’s face slowly change, redden and crumple as a routine questionnaire finally reveals some information about the boy who impregnated her. This is the reality that brings Autumn to the clinic. Of course she’s “abortion minded.” What other choice is there?

Up until the point when Autumn actually undergoes the abortion, Hit-

tman shows us everything, even incidental, world-building details like a stray extension cord dragged across the dingy bedroom carpet. We witness Autumn icing her nose and then forcing a safety pin through it, then stanching the welling blood. The camera blandly watches Autumn reach between her thighs to urinate into a cup. It lingers over a bloody pad as her cervix begins to open. We even see forceps grasping the laminaria stick they will insert in her. We see details, details, details, unflinchingly, throughout. But the one detail at the center of the plot, the abortion itself, we do not see.

This is ostensibly because Autumn is unconscious, and we only see what she sees, but the real reason is that abortion is not actually the center of the film. It is not truly ever questioned as a choice.

The clinic worker gently, insistently asks Autumn if she is there by her own free choice. But the film itself never allows the viewer a choice about what to think. For all its deft crafting of real-life detail, it never admits any reality besides abortion as saving grace. It does not take the risk of showing pro-lifers as competent or helpful, and it does not take the risk of showing abortion providers as anything else. They are uniformly professional, compassionate and honest, and abortion is silent, painless and streamlined.

In this world, Autumn’s true suffering stems from two sources: men and bureaucracy. The film seems to shrug at the problem of men. What can one do? But girls like Autumn (and eventually Skylar, who is heartbreakingly impervious to learning anything from their trip) will always need abortion to be cheaper, faster, easier and closer to home. That is what they need. This message lands neatly at our feet.

After a 10-minute procedure, Autumn sips some water and rests, and

then she is done. She tells her curious cousin the abortionists were “nice enough,” and as they eat fries together, she smiles for the first time in the movie. They head for home, relieved, and the movie ends.

It all looks and feels so real, until you start to think about what they did not show.

I found myself wondering what would happen when their bus reaches Pennsylvania. Will her stepfather beat her for running off? Probably. Will she find a boyfriend who agrees to wear condoms more than “sometimes”? Doubtful. What will she do? Just keep going to New York for abortions until she is old enough to sign the forms herself? Are we supposed to imagine the taciturn and self-reliant Autumn will keep her follow-up appointment and phone a stranger for help in discerning safe relationships for the future? Having been trained by the film to insist on *verité*, I rejected this possibility.

I loved the style of this movie. I loved how Autumn is a wounded girl, not a murderer or a selfish wench or a slut. But I hated the dishonesty that unflinchingly told the truth about every ordeal except the one it all hinges on.

In the end, I felt as if I had sat through a one hour and 40-minute-long public service announcement: realistic enough to make us understand it is about real people just like us, pointed enough to drive home a single answer to our problem. Call this number and get help. Watch this movie and see why we need better abortion access.

And that, dear readers, is not a real film. That’s propaganda.

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# Trust in the Holy Spirit

Readings: Acts 8:5-17; Ps 66; 1 Pt 3:15-18; Jn 14:15-21

In a time when the world has been dramatically transformed, many people feel disconnected and abandoned by God. Today's readings reveal that we are not alone, for the Holy Spirit is with us. As we near the feast of Pentecost, we are reminded of the power of the Spirit in the world.

In the Gospel, Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit as an advocate for his followers. The Spirit will offer them support by being within the community after Jesus' death and resurrection. Recognizing the distress of his friends, Jesus reveals that although he would physically leave the earth, the Holy Spirit would sustain them.

Jesus' promise is both comforting and instructive. While foretelling the role of the Spirit, Jesus proclaims the importance of love within the community: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15). In the previous chapter of John, Jesus offers a new command, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34)—a modified version of "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lv 19:18). By loving one another, we come to receive the Spirit.

Similarly, in Acts, we hear about the role of the Spirit in early Christian communities. The first reading builds on the readings from the past two weeks. On the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we heard about Peter baptizing converts so that they would repent and receive the Holy Spirit. On the Fifth Sunday of Easter, we heard of the selection of leaders who were filled with the Holy Spirit. Today, these ideas emerge again when one of the selected members, Phillip, preaches to Samaritans who are converted and believe in Christ. Peter and John pray for these new converts, baptize them and lay hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit, ritual actions that inspire the sacraments of initiation, baptism and confirmation.

In a time of social distancing, the reception of sacraments has been limited or delayed. Because physical, sacramental rituals are an important way to express faith and connection with God and one another, the absence of them can lead to a feeling of abandonment, similar to that of the apostles in the Gospel. How can people receive the Spirit

*I will not leave you; I will come to you. (Jn 14:18)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How does Scripture help you during moments of crisis?

What can you do to stay connected to God and your community?

How can you show love for your community?

without baptism and confirmation? How can we have God within us without regularly receiving the Eucharist?

Fortunately, the Holy Spirit is not constrained in the same ways we are. Sacraments connect us to God's grace in concrete and visible ways, but they are not the only vehicles for grace. Remember that when Jesus promises the Spirit, he does not limit it to baptism or laying on hands. The Spirit is promised freely as an advocate (Gk. *paraclete*), a defender and a comforter, who resides within the community whose members love one another.

Over the past months, there have been countless stories of love: health care workers caring for the sick, delivery people ensuring the arrival of goods, agricultural workers producing food, people and organizations creating and donating masks and protective gear, anyone in an essential service, anyone who stayed home to save lives. All of these are examples of love. So, in the absence of physical connections and sacramental actions, trust that the Holy Spirit sustains all of us who love one another.

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# The Power of Prayer

Readings: Acts 1:12-14; Ps 27; 1 Pt 4:13-16; Jn 17:1-11

Forty days after Jesus' resurrection, during the sixth week of Easter, we celebrate his ascension. This Sunday's readings address how Jesus' departure from earth and the severing of his physical connection to his followers can be understood. As many people still have limited physical contact with their communities, today's readings remind us of the power of prayer to help us cope and connect at a distance.

The Gospel reading from John depicts Jesus praying to his Father in heaven before the crucifixion. In his prayer, Jesus confesses that his hour has come, affirming that his death was imminent and would lead to eternal life. He says that his work on earth has been meant to glorify the Father. Importantly, Jesus prays for his followers, recognizing that his departure would greatly affect them. Jesus proclaims that he would still remain with his followers even when he is physically gone. Jesus' prayer is timely, both within the Gospel narrative and today. It demonstrates the importance of speaking feelings aloud, making requests of God and praying for others, especially in times of need.

The first reading from Acts reveals the importance of prayer for sustaining a community in crisis. At the beginning of Acts, Jesus' followers, both named and unnamed,

*All these [apostles] devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary. (Acts 1:14)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How can your time alone nurture your prayer life?

What can you do to foster community at a distance?

How can you serve people who are most in need?

pray together after his ascension. Luke does not reveal their emotional reaction to the ascension, but it is likely they felt an extreme loss. The disciples had already experienced the turmoil of Jesus' death followed by the confusion and joy of the resurrection. Again, this community contends with another abrupt loss as Jesus ascends into heaven. As a reaction to this loss, they unite together in prayer. As so many people are feeling the loss of physical contact and interaction, this reading offers prayer as a way to cope and connect.

Just as Jesus' followers had to adjust to life without his physical presence, Covid-19 has required us to adjust how we interact with one another. Fortunately, we have saints whose lives and teachings are examples especially during moments of crisis. St. Jane Frances de Chantal comes to mind as a model for care and advocate for prayer.

St. Jane Frances endured many personal losses, including the death of her mother when she was only 18 months old, and in adulthood the deaths of her husband, three of her children and her spiritual director, St. Francis de Sales. She lived in France during a severe plague in the 17th century. Inspired to serve her community, St. Jane Frances co-founded the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary. She advocated for care of the sick and vulnerable, making her convent's resources available to those most in need.

Because of her life, she is a patron saint to people who are forgotten, widows, people suffering from loss of parents and people separated from their children. On the importance of prayer, St. Jane Frances is credited with saying, "Enter into your prayer by faith, remain in it in hope and do not abandon it except for that charity which serves and endures." As we endure personal and collective struggles, we can look to Scripture and examples like St. Jane Frances to help us remain prayerful and hopeful during times of uncertainty.

**A** Many dioceses transfer the Feast of the Ascension from Thursday to this Sunday; an essay for those readings is available at [www.americamagazine.org/sections/word](http://www.americamagazine.org/sections/word).

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# A Question from Quarantine

*Is God still good during the pandemic?*

By Juan Vidal



First, the brute truth: The coronavirus pandemic is sweeping the world. People are uncertain and afraid. Many are dying and more will die.

Many of us are asking: Why is this happening? Where is God in all of this? Thankfully, I hear the soft and steady voice of my Colombian mother echo in my head, recalling those times when she would remind me that God is always there, that “Dios siempre está en control.”

I am not a theologian or licensed minister. I am simply someone trying to make sense of the suffering caused by Covid-19 in hopes of better understanding how and why tragedy plays out the way it does in the human story. In the meantime, I am finding solace in the bursts of joy that have helped to fill these days of social distancing—cooking, sharing memes, and watching live D.J. sets and beat battles on Instagram.

I also remember some of the experiences that not only helped shape my worldview but also convinced me of God’s inherent goodness even in uncertain times. I remember being a missionary in my mid-20s, a college drop-out who left everything I knew to answer “the call.” For more than two years, I traveled the world with a nondenominational missionary organization, holding packed events everywhere from remote villages in Russia to squatter camps in South Africa. I watched sickness ravage communi-

ties, and I witnessed every manner of abuse rip apart families. But I also saw signs of hope: I saw people find peace in the midst of suffering, and I saw crippled people remain faithful to God and become able to walk again.

In essence, I traded the prospect of a college degree for the knowledge that God is good, that God can make a way when it seems like there is no path forward. I am not the same person I was back then, but my hope is still anchored in these truths.

I have weathered seasons of doubt. And I can understand that, for some atheists, a fast-moving and deadly pandemic only serves to confirm their disbelief in any higher power. This is not unreasonable. It is human nature to wonder: What the hell is happening?

In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin sheds some light on his journey of faith, from his days as a young preacher extolled for his oratorical gifts to his eventual disengagement from Christianity. He writes, “There is still, for me, no pathos quite like the pathos of those multi-colored, worn, somehow triumphant and transfigured faces, speaking from the depths of a visible, tangible, continuing despair of the goodness of God.”

I count myself among those “somehow triumphant”—those “speaking from the depths.” I believe that harboring doubt, even considering the bleakness of our current state, can be a silent

killer. So I pray instead, and sometimes I drink. On some nights, after a full day of working and home-schooling our kids, my wife and I take to the patio with a bottle of whiskey, mourning the day’s loss and trying to remember the goodness of God. Somehow, we know it is at work.

I believe the picture is larger than what we can see with our eyes. The picture of God at work amid great pain.

And so I ask the wavering believers, the cynics and backsliders; the weary and the heavy-laden; the single mothers making do by a thread; the poets and the out-of-work bartenders standing by as past-due bills pile on like a bully’s insults; those who lay it all down, tired and spent and hanging by a moment; and anyone searching for some small sign of tangible hope or even spiritual relief in this time: What if God is still good? What if, despite how things may look or feel, God is bringing purpose and determination to the bent and broken among us, even if we do not see it with our eyes or on our social feeds?

On darker days, I ask myself—a believer and cynic wrestling with an avalanche of contradicting emotions—the same question: What if God is still good?

And then I remember.

**Juan Vidal is the author of *Rap Dad: A Story of Family and the Subculture That Shaped a Generation*.**



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