

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Meet your  
Catholic Charities  
Staff | Page 4

Report: US shifts  
priorities from religious  
freedom | Page 7

The Diocese of Ogdensburg Volume 81 Number 17

# NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

AUGUST 19, 2026

## 'FOR FOUR YEARS, THIS WAS HOME'



PHOTO PROVIDED BY STEVE RONDEAU

Former students of Wadhams Hall Seminary in Ogdensburg gathered at the school July 21 to 23 for a reunion. The event included social opportunities, prayer services, meals and time to explore the former seminary building and share memories. The gathering was coordinated by former students Steve Rondeau, back row, far left, and Rich Fanning, back row, far right. In addition to former students who stayed at Wadhams for the event, other former students visited for shorter periods of time. Full story on Page 4.

## GOD & COUNTRY



Dave and Cathy Witkowski of Plattsburgh, pictured during their time in the U.S. Air Force, discuss their faith and service in this first installment of 'Heritage and Heroes,' a series highlighting stained-glass windows at St. Mary's Cathedral depicting American history and interviews with faithful veterans or active-duty military member.

FULL STORY, PAGE 3

## Pope: Mass attendance cannot be replaced

By Ishmael Adibuah  
EWTN News

VATICAN CITY — Pope Leo XIV has urged Catholics to prioritize attending Sunday Mass, warning that active participation in the Eucharist cannot be replaced by virtual gatherings.

"I urge everyone to seek the best possible conditions so that even those who are unable to take time off work on Sundays may take part in holy Mass," Leo said.

In his address during his general audience at the Vatican on Aug. 12, the pontiff continued his catechesis on the Second Vatican Council's constitution

on the liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium.

Leo explained the importance of the liturgical year, referencing his predecessor Venerable Pope Pius XII as well as Servant of God Abbot Prosper Guéranger, OSB, the first abbot of Solesmes Abbey in France and a key figure in the liturgical movement.

It is "important to note that this way of referring to the cycle of Christian feasts as the 'liturgical year' became widespread in ecclesiastical language thanks to the work of the Servant of God Abbot Prosper Guéranger," Leo said in his remarks.

The pope also stressed that the liturgical year is not merely a remembrance of past events but, as Pius XII wrote in his encyclical Mediator Dei, "Christ himself, who is ever living in his Church."

"The liturgical year should thus be understood as a constant renewal of the work of salvation which Christ accomplishes in history," the pope said. "As she journeys through this temporal cycle, the Church remains in contact with the Lord's redemptive action, so that all the faithful may be filled with his grace."

Leo also explained that the Church has always regarded

Sunday as a weekly celebration of Christ's resurrection: the "dies Domini" ("the Lord's day").

He urged Catholics to attend Sunday Mass and warned against using virtual gatherings to substitute for in-person attendance.

"To sanctify Sunday, it is essential to celebrate the Eucharist," Leo said. "This assembly cannot be substituted by a solely virtual presence, nor can it be reduced to a merely passive gathering."

"The liturgical assembly is in fact fulfilled through the active participation of brothers and sisters," Leo added.

NORTH  
COUNTRY  
CATHOLICPO Box 326  
Ogdensburg, NY 13669  
USPS 0039-3400**Bishop Terry****R. LaValley**

President

**Rev. Joseph A. Morgan**

Vice President

**James D. Crowley**

Secretary-Treasurer

**Darcy L. Fargo**

Editor &amp;

Communications Director



Publish

45 issues

per year:

Weekly except

skipping every

other week be-

ginning July through August

and skipping one week in

December by the

Diocese of Ogdensburg.

622 Washington Street,

Ogdensburg, N.Y. 13669.

**Editorial Office:**

622 Washington Street,

Ogdensburg, N.Y. 13669.

**Telephone:**

(315) 608-7556

**E-mail:**news@northcountry  
catholic.org**Entered at the****Post Office:**

Ogdensburg, NY

13669 and additional mailing

offices as

Periodical Postage.

**Subscription:****For one year:**

In-Diocese Rate: \$27

Outside of Diocese Rate: \$30

Matters for publication

should be addressed to

PO Box 326

Ogdensburg, NY 13669

and should be received by

Wednesday prior to

publication. Paper is

printed each Friday;

deadline is Wednesday.

Member, Catholic

Press Association.

**POSTMASTER:**

Send address changes to

North Country Catholic,

PO Box 326

Ogdensburg, NY

13669-0326

# One encounter after another

St. Augustine seems to keep popping up.

Five or six years ago, I attempted to read St. Augustine's famous book, "Confessions." It's heavy stuff, and I struggled to stay engaged with the text. To be honest, I found it to be a slog, or at least I found large sections of it to be slogs.

I gave up on the "book on dead trees," as I like to say – the paper/written text. I found it somewhat easier to consume "Confessions" as an au-

dio book, though even in that format, I can't say it consistently captured and held my attention.

I didn't give it much thought after that.

Enter Pope Leo XIV.

Our current Holy Father is a member of the Order of St. Augustine, and he regularly talks about and writes about St. Augustine, a doctor of the Church. While

I find a lot of beauty in those summaries of St. Augustine's writing, nothing Pope Leo said or wrote in-

trigue me enough to make me consider engaging with St. Augustine's text again.

Now, Father Bill Muench has jumped on the St. Augustine train, and he's reading and reflecting on "Confessions." He talks about the work in both this week's and last week's columns (on the page below and on our NCC website).

Then, on Thursday, a dear friend messaged me trying to peer pressure me into joining a program he's doing on the Catholic prayer app, Hallow. The theme of the program? You guessed it! St. Augustine's "Confessions."

I often say God beats me

over the head with messages because He knows I'm too dense to get them when He's subtle.

I feel like He's now beating me over the head with St. Augustine's "Confessions."

While I have no problem resisting my friend's peer pressure, I try not to resist when God is beating me over the head with something.

I'm doing the program with my friend.

Maybe it'll even convince me – and maybe some of you – to consider trying to read "Confessions" again.

Then maybe St. Augustine will stop popping up.

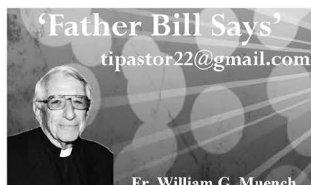


**Darcy L. Fargo**

## Listening to God

Today, I have decided to remind you, again, of how important it is for us all to be good listeners – to listen well during the reading of Scriptures at Mass and also to listen as part of our time of prayer. I know I have mentioned this to you before. I believe that when we turn in prayer to God, our God comes to us in support and love. I believe he has a message for us – every one of us. As good prayers, we must be aware, we must listen carefully. So, I have been thinking of listening today through my reading of St. Augustine and the story about Elijah that was read to us on a recent Sunday.

A little about St. Augustine: Augustine had such a profound influence on the formation of our Catholic Church. He wrote and taught during the 5th Century. He wrote on theology and also on the life of prayer that is part of Catholic life. He showed us how to live our interior spiritual life as we find God, His life and peace.



In his excellent book, "Confessions," St. Augustine writes the whole book as a prayer; it is a dialogue between himself and God. In "Confessions," Augustine writes that in his time of prayer to God that he found God by turning inward. Augustine has so many questions: What is happening in my heart? Where is God calling me? What do I truly love?

In his search for God, Augustine turns deeply into his own heart. And he discovers that God is already there. Augustine leads us to find God in our own heart. So, Augustine calls upon us to be open; he calls upon us to listen carefully for God always has a message for us. Augustine reminds us that prayer demands that we truly find God – the God who is within us – and

that we listen carefully to God. Our God is present to us as we pray and at Mass. He has so much to teach us.

And then Elijah: Elijah is a powerful Old Testament prophet. Elijah brought God to his people in joy and peace, a time long before Jesus. However, he suffered; he was persecuted by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. His very life was threatened. Elijah feels far from God, who he feels is far from him. So, he escapes to the desert – to a mountain cave – hoping to find God in prayer.

In this cave, Elijah has a spiritual experience. He experiences a powerful windstorm, but God is not in the wind. Then there is an earthquake, but God is not in the earthquake. Then there is a mighty fire, but God is not in the fire. Then Elijah experiences a small whispering sound. Elijah realizes that God is here present in this small whisper. Elijah knows that he must now listen carefully, when someone whispers; we

know we must stop and listen carefully no matter from whom the whisper comes.

So, I believe that as good prayers we must be good listeners. To recognize God's word for us, we must listen well. To recognize God's message, we must listen well. I believe that each time we participate at Mass, Christ's presence and message should come to us – through the Scriptures, through the Eucharist, through the inspirations of our God. So, we must be such good listeners.

I believe that when we pray, Christ wants to be a part of our prayer. He wants to be with us – every one of us. Our Lord comes to support us, to strengthen us to enliven our faith. Our God loves us, leads us, and I believe that God has a message for us. God loves us so much. So, it is important for us to be good listeners, to listen well to Christ's powerful whisper. Being a great pray-er means we know how to listen.

## HERITAGE AND HEROES

## ‘Commitment to God first and country’

By Mary Beth Bracy,  
consecrated virgin  
North Country Catholic

*This is our first story in the “Heritage and Heroes,” a series featuring the stained-glass windows at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Ogdensburg depicting American history and interviews with faithful veterans or active-duty military who serve God and country.*

For Dave and Cathy Witkowski, members of Holy Cross Parish in Plattsburgh, service runs in their blood. After decades in the Air Force, they actively volunteer in their parish, community, throughout the diocese and beyond.

Curiosity inspired Dave Witkowski to enlist in the Air Force. “I enrolled in college in 1969, another turbulent period in American history. The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program for college students was subjected to significant criticism on campuses and the media, and I wanted to understand what all the fuss was about.”

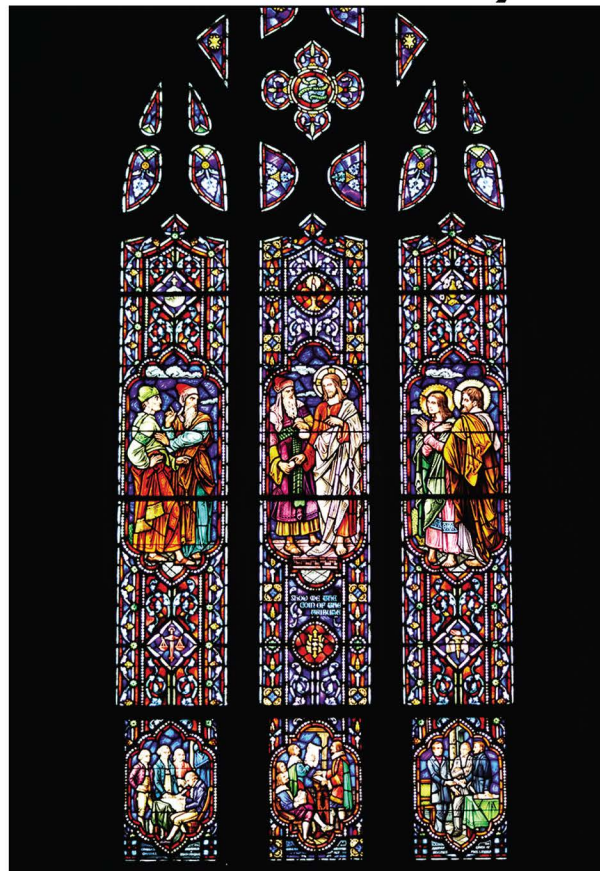
“So I joined,” explained Dave, “What better way to understand an organization than being part of it? After graduation and commissioning as a second lieutenant, I entered Air Force active duty intending to learn what I could about the military, serve my four-year commitment and then pursue postgraduate education with the GI Bill.”

His wife Cathy shared, “I joined the Air Force right out of high school, graduating in January of my senior year. I joined because I had an older sister who had joined two years prior, and she said she felt like she was on a continual vacation.”

Cathy served in several



(Left) Dave and Cathy Witkowski at Yosemite National Park in June 2026. Of the 27 documented parks they’ve seen, it’s the couple’s favorite so far. (Right) A stained glass window from St. Mary’s Cathedral in Ogdensburg depicting Jesus teaching about the relationship between Church and State in Matthew 22. When Jesus is asked about paying taxes, he takes the coin and asks what image is on it. Upon being told, He replies, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” It is accompanied by the Maryland Religious Toleration Act of 1649; Charles Carroll signing the Declaration of Independence (the only Catholic signer) in 1776, and Thomas Jefferson is also depicted; and Abraham Lincoln commissioning Archbishop John Hughes of New York to be his envoy to European powers in 1861. These are some examples of what will later be known as the relationship between Church and state.



different roles during her service.

“I began my enlisted Air Force career as a vehicle operator/dispatcher – bus driver/truck driver – and later cross-trained into the Personnel career field,” she said. “In my eighth year of enlistment, I got off active duty to finish a college degree and was commissioned as a second lieutenant two years later through the Air Force ROTC program, and became an Aircraft Maintenance officer, and a few years later a transportation/logistics officer.”

Dave added, “I didn’t

qualify to fly, but the Air Force, unlike the other military services, commissioned officers in non-operational careers. I served as a Human Resources officer for most of my 24-year career, with a few deviations along the way.”

Dave said being in the military impacted his faith journey.

“I was raised in a Catholic family and attended Catholic school from first grade through high school,” he said. “Like many young Catholics, I drifted away from practicing my faith for a number of years, but I found

fervent Catholics in the Air Force who helped guide me back for which I’m grateful. Contrary to what many who have never served in the military might think, senior military leaders do not advocate war, but they are committed to being prepared should diplomacy falter. I found that paradox eye opening but their faith strong.”

Cathy’s faith also remained central throughout her time in the service.

“Being raised a cradle Catholic, I continued to practice my faith throughout my military

career,” she said. “While stationed overseas in both Guam and Japan, the on-base Chapels provided an anchor for stability and familiarity in foreign places. Dave and I met while we were stationed in Spokane, Washington, but chose to come back to New York to be married in my childhood parish, St. Mary’s, in Washingtonville.”

Along their journey Dave and Cathy traveled “from sea to shining sea” and beyond.

“The most memorable assignment we had was our assignment at Yoko-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

# Meet the staff of your Catholic Charities



Joelle Lamica

*Editor's note: The following is the second installment of an ongoing series to introduce the staff and programs of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Ogdensburg.*

Joelle Lamica, Administrative Assistant for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Ogdensburg. Joelle joined the staff in January of 2009 working out of the Malone office located at St. André's Outreach Center, 12 Homestead Park, Malone.

In my first 15 years with the agency, I served as the Director of the Franklin County Catholic Charities of-

## Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Ogdensburg

To learn more about the programs of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Ogdensburg, or to make a donation, visit [www.cathcharities.org](http://www.cathcharities.org). Donations can also be mailed to Catholic Charities at 12 Homestead Park, Malone, NY 12953 or dropped off at any Catholic Charities office.

### Catholic Charities offices:

- Clinton County – 1349 Military Turnpike, Plattsburgh
- Franklin & Hamilton Counties – 80 Park Street, Suite 2 (PO Box 701), Tupper Lake
- Franklin County – 12 Homestead Park, Malone
- St. Lawrence County – Ogdensburg Seaway House, 212 Caroline Street
- Jefferson & Lewis Counties – 44 Public Square, Watertown

fice.

After agency restructuring, I now serve as Administrative Assistant. In my new role, I work under the strong leadership of Father Scott Seymour, executive director, and I assist with agency strategic planning and program development.

My duties also include Board meeting responsibilities; internal communication with all staff and programming; agency grant writing; daily invoicing and budget preparation, and I respond directly to all financial assistance requests for Clinton, Essex, Franklin,

Hamilton and Herkimer counties; reporting for special grants; coordination of the Franklin County Summer Youth program; community inter-agency networking; triaging the primary CC phone line; I am a member of the Board of EFSP; Salvation Army; Fran. County Community Housing Council, Franklin County Office of the Aging Advisory Board and a member of the Franklin County Elder Abuse Enhanced Multidisciplinary Team.

I can be reached at the Catholic Charities main office line, 518-651-2947 or [jlamica@cathcharities.org](mailto:jlamica@cathcharities.org).

## Former Wadhams students reunite

By Darcy Fargo  
Editor

An idea that grew out of a newsletter and an anniversary turned into a July gathering of former students from Wadhams Hall Seminary.

Richard Fanning, a member of the diocesan seminary's class of 1976, said the gathering, held July 21 to 23 at the former diocesan seminary in Ogdensburg, started with his desire to gather with classmates and grew with help from another former student's efforts to keep the students united by a newsletter.

"Back in January or February, I was thinking about the fact that May 15 was my class's 50th graduation anniversary," said Fanning. "Our class had 25 people, and 19 are still alive, and I'm still in touch with a couple of the guys. I thought we should do something. A guy from the class of 1970, Steve Rondeau, does a monthly newsletter with a distribution list of around 300 people. I contacted Steve, and we discussed expanding the idea to make it an all-class reunion."

Fanning said he and Rondeau, working primarily through phone, email and online meetings, coordinated the event, which Rondeau promoted through the newsletter.

"We decided to do it in the middle of the week because some of the guys are clergy and have weekend commitments," Fanning said.

Fanning said returning to the school building, his home for four years, was emotional.

"When I drove up the driveway, I got teary-eyed," he said. "For four years, this was home."

Fanning said he and Rondeau didn't know what they'd get for a response to the event.

"I had no idea how it would go," he said. "But the response has been really good. Wadhams Hall closed in 1994, I believe. For those of us who didn't continue onto Theology studies, it's good that we could have this experience. When they recruited guys out of high school or other places back when we were students, one of the common themes was 'Come and See.' That's what I was doing. And it's what we're doing today."

While just over a dozen men planned to stay at the seminary throughout the event, other former students visited for meals, prayer services or social opportunities. Fanning said visiting the facility brought back a lot of old memories for him and the other participants.

"Just walking in the gym - it took my breath away," he said. "We used to have a good sports program. There was a faculty member who was director of athletics and a student director of athletics - that was me. I spent a lot of time in that gym."

As men arrived to the gathering, they immediately began exploring the former school and sharing stories.

"I'm really glad we could do this," Fanning said.

## Summer's Here!

Visit our website at [www.northcountrycatholic.org](http://www.northcountrycatholic.org)  
to pay by Credit Card for immediate delivery.

OR Send this coupon with payment to:

North Country Catholic

PO Box 106, Canajoharie, New York, 13317

**\*\*Please allow 3-4 weeks for delivery when mailing in your renewal\*\***

☐ Inside Diocese \$27 ☐ Outside Diocese \$30

I want to be a Patron: ☐ \$35 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250

☐ New Subscription ☐ Renewal

☐ Please send my  
subscription to my  
e-mail address:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Parish \_\_\_\_\_



Relax this summer with  
your subscription to the  
North Country Catholic,  
The newspaper for the  
Diocese of Ogdensburg

## A KNIGHT'S REFLECTION

# My Catholic faith: A mountain reflection

On this late July morning, the clear skies, calm winds and cool mountain chill gave way to thick fog as I drove through the hollows toward the work site. My destination was Mount.

Ascutney, a prominent, isolated peak rising above Vermont's Connecticut River Valley near the New Hampshire border. Three-quarters of the way up the 3.8-mile toll road, I pulled off at a scenic overlook to re-

view the day's scheduled work for a new cable construction project stretching from the base to the summit. I was reminded again that, by God's grace, working outdoors puts me in a place where faith speaks most clearly to me.

The view from the overlook was breathtaking. The rising sun revealed white billowing clouds flowing for miles beneath the mountain peaks, like riverbanks on either side. Nearby, perhaps from a Hermit Thrush - Vermont's state bird - a recurring song rose into the air. Though the mountain wildlife remained hidden from view, I knew the woods were stirring. As I soaked up my surroundings, I began to see how this challenging project reflected the deeper journey of my spiritual life.

I have come to realize the peace of these moments is rooted in my Catholic faith and my French-Canadian heritage. My ancestors were master mariners and laborers who crossed

the Atlantic from Normandy in the 17th century to help establish New France. No doubt this generational inheritance is why I was drawn to the trades. For generations, these an-

cestors carried their deep Catholic devotion across borders, eventually settling in Quebec before migrating south. The same faith that sustained them through their many challenges is the faith that sustains me to-

day.

My generation grew up in the 1970s; we were the independent, self-reliant Generation X. As a cradle Catholic, I attended parochial schools a decade after the Second Vatican Council sought to adapt to the modern world. In practice, many of us experienced a Church that had become less confident in teaching its own doctrines, devotions, rules and rich mysteries. We heard much about God's love, community and personal conscience, but too often we were not given a deeper faith formation. Many Gen X Catholics were taught to be "nice people" but not always formed to become mature disciples.

Yet, wanting to understand our faith more deeply is not limited to my generation. I see it clearly in the stories of men of all ages who attend our monthly Knights of Columbus Cor faith meetings in our parish. In the prayer, formation and fraternity of Cor, men share their



PHOTO BY MIKE LANGLOIS/NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

**A rugged and beautiful scene atop Mount Ascutney, where billowing clouds flow like a river through the surrounding peaks.**

faith struggles, and you can see a true longing for Christ. Likewise, I sense a hunger rising among the women of our parish who, with the guidance of a priest or deacon, could benefit from an exclusive women's program or a co-ed Bible study group. It has shown me that we all share a call to take our personal faith seriously and to dig deeper to understand the "Good News." For me, it is no longer enough to attend Mass each week and live a purely secular life the rest of the time. God has graced us with the gifts found in Holy Scripture and the sacraments, inviting us to expand our understanding of what it means to be true Catholics.

This journey requires us to embrace challenges, ask tough questions, and confront the reality of a Catholic Church that has stumbled but, despite its hardships,

always finds its footing. It demands a level of dedication, commitment and hard work that mirrors what I see in my labor crew every day. True spiritual understanding is formed through hard work and perseverance.

As I watch the crew on this harsh mountainside - slowly making their way through thick underbrush, sweating and breathing hard with each step to clear a safe path for those who follow - I am reminded of John the Baptist's call to "Make straight the Way of the Lord." Their grueling physical effort reflects our own call to break through the distractions of secular life to find a clear path to Christ. It is a rugged, beautiful, and sacred mission that belongs to each one of us.

When the day ends, and tools and trucks are packed up, I am the last member of the crew

still on the mountain. It is my responsibility to check the completed work and make sure every man is accounted for. In my spiritual life, I see a similar duty: to prepare my own soul for salvation and to labor, as faithfully as I can, for the salvation of others.

*Mike Langlois is the Faith Formation Director for St. Augustine Knights of Columbus Council 7273 in Peru, New York. He is also the Upstate Conference Coordinator for Evangelization and Faith Formation for the New York State Knights of Columbus, which encompasses the Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Ogdensburg dioceses. Local Knights of Columbus councils interested in fortifying the faith of their memberships, or offering column topic ideas, can contact him at [mjlang67@gmail.com](mailto:mjlang67@gmail.com)*

## Environmental Stewardship

## World Day of Prayer

As in previous years, the Church along with numerous other faith-based organizations and spiritually oriented individuals will unite in prayer Sept. 1 to celebrate the start of the Season of Creation. This five-week period, ending on Oct. 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, is dedicated to raising awareness to the declining environmental health of our planet.

It's hard for many people to recognize the seriousness of the damage that has been inflicted on the complex systems that sustain life on earth. Since climate devastation hasn't impacted the lives of many people directly in this region, it becomes easy to be oblivious to climate issues and develop an attitude of complacency.

It is essential to realize that record droughts, unprecedented wildfires, record heat, severe flooding and storms with unprecedented intensities have become common occurrences. Scientists have also noted changes in ocean currents that stabilize climate patterns and sustain ocean life.

As believers in God, we must start our mission to develop a more harmonious life style with nature by talking to God and asking for His guidance. We are the hands and feet of God here on earth, and we can accomplish great things if we follow His urges and accept His graces to target and then tackle problems. Participating in the World Day of Prayer for Creation on Sept. 1 with a family member, group of friends or those attending a special prayer service in your parish or the broader community is the perfect way to begin this campaign.

We must also pray for the millions of people who have had their lives torn apart by climate related catastrophes. And finally, we must pray for the strength to demonstrate to others that acts of kindness toward the earth can be a joyous endeavor. After speaking with God, your soul will know what to do.

## 'God first and country'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

ta AB Japan," reflected Cathy. "Dave was promoted to lieutenant colonel there, but more importantly we came back to the U.S. with a baby boy, who we adopted, and we gave him the middle name, Matthew, a gift from God. I was also five months pregnant with our second child when we returned."

"Thanks to the Air Force, Cathy and I traveled extensively," added Dave. "Seeing places that are significant to Western Civilization and the Catholic Church - Notre Dame in Paris, for example - were moving experiences. But I agree with Cathy, our assignment to Japan

was the most significant. I was able to observe firsthand and participate in the operation of a parish as parish council president. Eye-opening - what burdens your parish pastor and parochial vicars experience!"

Military life also prepared Cathy and Dave for their active roles in our diocese today.

"My military service was service to our nation, where attention to details, promptness, loyalty, courage, was needed, along with empathy, compassion and leadership to those who I supervised," said Cathy. "All of which contributes to my lay service to the church and dioceses, when I serve as a Eucharist minister, lec-



PHOTO BY MARIKA DONNERS/  
FOR THE NORTH COUNTRY CATHOLIC

**The signing of the Declaration of Independence as featured in a stained glass window at St. Mary's Cathedral, Ogdensburg.**

tor, altar server, assistant sacristan and coordinator of the Eastern Area Commissioned Lay Ministry."

"The military encourages active participation in unit off-duty activities as leaders and followers; successful organizations need both," noted Dave. "That sense of service and commitment carried over to post Air Force activities. Currently I'm an active member of the Knights of Columbus, with its emphasis on

charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism. I serve as a lector and Eucharistic minister. In the community, I volunteer with AARP Foundation, Tax-Aide and as a docent at the Plattsburgh Air Force Base Museum."

Dave and Cathy commented on the significance of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" line which says "As He died to make men holy, let us die to make them free."

"Jesus died on the cross to save us all," emphasized Cathy. "As a member of the military service, I had to have the faith that our political leaders were putting us into military conflicts that were helping to eradicate or at least reduce oppression in our country and other nations that are democratic, free nations, saving us all free of tyranny and oppression. I was blessed during my 21 years of service to never have been directly placed in harm's way, though several of the enlisted personnel I supervised were deployed to Kuwait, during the First Gulf War."

"Seeking salvation in the afterlife, like democracy and freedom on Earth, isn't a spectator sport," advised Dave. "Both require faith, study, discipline and commitment to God first and country."

## Rest in Peace

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

**Aug. 19** - Rev. J. N. Emery, O.M.I., 1933; Rev. Richard A. Maher, O.S.A., 1959

**Aug. 20** - Rev. J. McCarthy, O.S.A., 1931; Msgr. Griffith J. Billmeyer, 1988

**Aug. 21** - Rev. Remigius Clotarius Decarie, 1920; Rev. Albert G. Salmon, 1997

**Aug. 22** - Rev. James W. M. Rensing, 1936

**Aug. 24** - Rev. Louis Lewis, O.M.I., 1938; Msgr. Paul George Brunet, 1991

**Aug. 25** - Rev. Damas Guibault, 1919; Msgr. Hugh P.R. O'Reilly, 1948; George W. Tobin, 2010

## Bishop's Public Schedule

**Aug. 19** - 5 p.m. - Bishop's Fund Appeal Reception at St. Mary's Parish Center in Clayton

**Aug. 20** - 5 p.m. - Bishop's Fund Appeal Reception at Martin's Clubhouse (formerly the Knights of Columbus) in Ogdensburg

**Aug. 22** - 11 a.m. - Mass for Family Camp at Camp Guggenheim in Saranac Lake

**Aug. 23** - 9 a.m. - Installation Mass of Reverend Jude Nnadib-uagha as Pastor of St. Mary's and St. Paul's Parish in Indian Lake and St. Joseph's Church in Olmstedville

**Aug. 24** - noon - Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral

**Aug. 26** - 9 a.m. - Superintendent's Day at the Cambria Hotel in Lake Placid

## To Report Abuse

**If you have a complaint** of suspected misconduct involving diocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers, contact Victim Assistance Coordinator, Terrianne Yanulavich, Ph.D., LMHC, 5050 Route 374, Merrill, NY 12955; terrianneyanulavich@yahoo.com; Phone: 518-569-0612; or Father Christopher Carrara, the Episcopal Vicar for Clergy; ccarrara@rcdony.org Phone: 315-393-2920 ext. 1340.

**If you have a complaint** of suspected sexual abuse or related misconduct by the bishops, contact the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service at 800-276-1562 or www.ReportBishopAbuse.org

## Protecting God's Children

**The Diocese of Ogdensburg** is able to schedule sessions of the training, Protecting God's Children for Adults. This required training addresses child abuse, the methods and means by which abusers commit abuse, and the five steps to prevent abuse from occurring and stop it from continuing. To arrange for training, call 315-393-2920 or email lshoen@rcdony.org

**MONASTERY CARD SHOP**

**Cards for All Occasions**

*Mass Enrollments for your living & deceased loved ones.*

**Precious Blood Monastery**

OPEN: 9 AM - 5 PM  
SATURDAY 9 AM - 12 PM

400 PRATT ST., WATERTOWN

315-788-1669

[www.sisterspreciousblood.org](http://www.sisterspreciousblood.org)

# Report: US shifts priorities away from international religious freedom

By Tyler Arnold  
EWTN News

A report published by Dallas Baptist University's Center for Global Religious Freedom detailed concerns that the United States and some other Western nations have shifted diplomatic priorities away from international religious freedom advocacy.

The report, published July 27, alleged "a retreat of Western nations from human rights" like religious freedom, which has "contributed to widespread religious persecution affecting Christians and other faith communities worldwide."

According to the authors, the U.S. and many European nations are prioritizing "hard interests," which they called a shift "reverting to the historical norms of foreign affairs." The report notes some specific changes seen in President Donald Trump's second administration, which began in January 2025.

Authors cited elements of the administration's foreign policy, including reductions to "funding and staffing" for agencies that support international religious freedom, the lack of an ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, and "weak congressional and executive prioritization."

According to the report, this coincided with a foreign policy centered on "military force, economic power, and territorial security" and de-emphasizing "alliances, values, and soft-power tools."

Specifically, they note Trump's cuts to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which included international religious freedom initiatives, and the suspension of the refugee resettlement program, to which victims of religious persecution had access.

It states that USAID's functions and its staff have been reduced "to the minimum level required by statute" and the Department of State's human rights initiatives were shifted to its regional bureaus, "which lacked relevant expertise and typically prioritized relationship-maintenance over rights concerns." It states the International Religious Freedom Office was "demoted" and incorporated into the State Department's broader human rights bureau and faced staffing cuts.

The report notes the administration has not disclosed how many interna-

tional religious freedom programs were cut. However, it cited the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) 2026 annual report that concluded "a significant portion" had been terminated.

According to the Dallas Baptist University report, cuts included programs that "counter restrictive laws, support early warning systems for religious violence, promote interfaith dialogue, document violations, provide emergency assistance to religious freedom activists, and provide humanitarian aid to persecuted communities."

The report notes European states followed the U.S. lead by cutting foreign assistance, which included initiatives that promote international religious freedom.

It also expresses concern that the position for U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom has remained vacant throughout Trump's second term after his nominee did not secure a Senate confirmation. The State Department also has not released its annual International Religious Freedom report in 2025, which is required by law.

Alternatively, the report gives the Trump administration credit for designating Nigeria a country of particular concern (CPC) for religious freedom violations, which prompted its government to engage with the U.S. to address problems. It also cited a visa policy that bans individuals who have directed, authorized, supported, or participated in violations of religious freedom.

In a statement provided to EWTN News, a State Department spokesperson said the U.S., under Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, is focused on international religious freedom and has "re-established the United States as a global leader" in defending the right domestically and abroad.

"Under this Administration, the Department of State has made unprecedented advances in accountability by revoking visas from violators of religious freedom and pushing action to defend people of faith around the world," the spokesperson said. "From our global visa actions, to our public defense of Christians targeted for silent prayer in the United Kingdom, to our designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern, we are once again standing up for people of faith in no uncertain terms."

## CATHOLIC WORLD AT A GLANCE

### Bishops urge compassion, access to care in Medicaid rule

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is calling for "compassion, simplicity, and access to care" to be reflected in the final rule that enforces work requirements for people who receive Medicaid benefits. The USCCB — along with the Catholic Health Association and Catholic Charities USA — sent a joint letter to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on July 31 to highlight shared concerns about the rule before it is fully implemented on Jan. 1, 2027. The bishops warned the Medicaid work-requirement rule could strip coverage from medically frail patients, add burdensome documentation standards, and create an unrealistic timeline that states and providers cannot meet. Although the rule has already been adopted, USCCB is urging CMS to delay implementation and make changes that broaden the medical frailty and short-term hardship exceptions, ease verification requirements for patients, and better educate patients on rules to prevent any losses in coverage for eligible people. "We are profoundly concerned that [the] requirements ... will result in coverage loss for eligible individuals who rely on Medicaid to address their health care needs and to achieve their highest possible degree of self-sufficiency," the joint letter states.

### Medicaid ends funds for 'sex-rejecting procedures' for minors

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced it has implemented a final rule that formally bans using funds for "sex-rejecting procedures" for minors, which are drugs and surgeries used to facilitate "gender transitions." According to a CMS news release, this includes puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and surgical operations. It states these medical procedures cause irreversible damage, including infertility, impaired sexual function, diminished bone density, altered brain development, and other physiological effects. The move formalizes a policy of President Donald Trump's administration to prevent minors from accessing these drugs and surgeries. In January 2025, Trump signed an executive order that instructed agencies to adopt rules to "end the chemical and surgical mutilation of children." The final rule includes a tapering-off period of up to six months for children who are receiving cross-sex hormones, which allows them to be gradually weaned off the medicine. It does not affect mental health services. "Children deserve our protection, not experimental interventions that pose serious risks and convey no proven benefits," CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz said in a statement.

Visit our website

[www.northcountrycatholic.org](http://www.northcountrycatholic.org)

- Read local stories and commentaries
- Search archived papers
- View diocesan events and much more



Find us on Facebook!



## ADIRONDACK MOUNTAIN

## TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOP

Tupper Lake - Mercy Care for the Adirondacks will host a Technology Assistance Workshop open to all older adults.

**Date:** Aug. 20

**Time:** 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.

**Place:** Adirondack Adult Center

**Features:** Invited Guest Presenter, Basel Farhat, President & CEO of the Adirondack Federal Credit Union in Tupper Lake, will be presenting on the upcoming technology upgrades at the Credit Union. He will discuss common fraud and scams targeting older adults and provide practical guidance to help avoid them. The event is provided free of charge. Refreshments will be served. On a first-come, first-served basis, Mercy Care will provide elders with a permanently loaned iPad and one-on-one technology assistance with cell phones and tablets.

**Contact:** Registration is required by contacting Lexi Bevilacqua, Mercy Care's Director of Programs & Mission Integration, at [abevilacqua@adkmercy.org](mailto:abevilacqua@adkmercy.org) or by calling her at 518-523-5446.

## ALPHA

Lake Placid - Alpha program to be held.

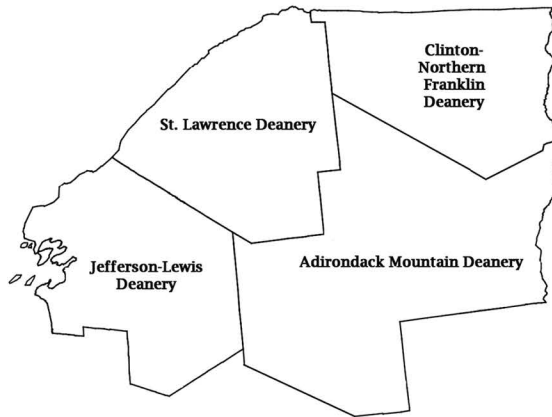
**Date:** Sundays, Sept. 20 to Dec. 6

**Time:** 11:15 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

**Place:** St. Agnes Church

**Features:** Are you longing to deepen your faith, reconnect with the Church, or simply create space to ask life's important questions? Alpha offers a welcoming place to gather with others for conversation, friendship, and discovery. Each session includes a shared meal, an engaging video, and honest, respectful discussion in a relaxed and hospitable environment. Whether your faith is strong, you're returning after time away, or you're simply seeking more, you'll find that every question and every person is welcome.

**Contact:** Deb Lennon for more information: [lennondebra26@gmail.com](mailto:lennondebra26@gmail.com) or 518-524-4388



The North Country Catholic welcomes contributions to "Around the Diocese."

Parishioners are invited to send information about activities to:

North Country Catholic, PO Box 326,

Ogdensburg, NY 13669

e-mail [news@northcountrycatholic.org](mailto:news@northcountrycatholic.org).

Items must be received in the NCC office by the Wednesday before publication.

## CLINTON NORTHERN FRANKLIN

## HOUSE OF PRAYER

Ellenburg Center - Our Lady of the Adirondacks House of Prayer summer hours and events.

**Schedule:** 2nd Tuesday of August, September, October Open from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. with Linda and Cheryl C., Volunteers; 1st, 3rd, and 4th Thursdays of July, August, September, October Open from noon-4 p.m. with Cheryl L. and Richard V., Volunteers

**Events:** Aug. 22, Day of Reflection with Marika Donders, Light luncheon provided.

**Contact:** By appointment anytime: Please call 518-534-9976 (Sarah) or 518-416-9495 (Cheryl) to make arrangements to visit. Whether for an hour or an overnight or several nights, you are always welcome!

## FIRST FRIDAY

Champlain - St. Mary's to have Mass, Exposition and Benediction every first Friday of the month.

**Date:** Sept. 4

**Schedule:** 9 a.m. Mass followed by Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. 11 a.m. Benediction

## CHICKEN BBQ

AuSable Forks - The Holy Name Church is bringing back its chicken barbecue, which was featured

for many years in the town's Labor Day celebration. The event is sponsored by the Au Sable Forks Knights of Columbus and The Holy Name Church.

**Date:** Sept. 5

**Time:** 4:30 p.m. to 6:30

**Place:** Holy Name Parish Center

**Cost:** \$15 includes 1/2 BBQ chicken, cole slaw, potatoes, roll, dessert, and bottled water. And for the children, for \$10 we are serving hot dogs, chips or sides, dessert, and bottled water.

## CLM ANNUAL DINNER

Brushton - The St. Lawrence, Franklin, and Adirondack Commissioned Lay Ministers Association are invited to the CLM Annual Dinner.

**Date:** Sept. 9

**Time:** Mass at 5 p.m. with Bishop LaValley followed by dinner at 6 p.m.

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

**Cost:** \$15 per person

**Contact:** To register go to: <https://www.rcdony.org/clm-event>

## TURKEY DINNER

Lyon Mountain - St. Bernard's and St. Edmund's Parish to have a turkey dinner to benefit the fuel fund.

**Date:** Sept. 13

**Time:** 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Place:** Lyon Mountain Ameri-

can Legion

**Cost:** Adults, \$15, Children 6-12, \$7; Under 5, Free

## RIP TO "SIGHTS AND SOUNDS"

Lancaster, Pa. - St. Mary's and St. Augustine's Altar and Rosary Society of North Bangor and Brushton are doing a trip to see Sights and Sounds "Joshua."

**Date:** Sept. 14 - 16

**Cost:** \$605 Double, \$575 Triple, \$804 single. All rates are per person.

**Features:** Package includes: lodging, two breakfasts, two dinners, performance of Joshua at Sight and Sound Theatre, Chalk Talk, Bird in Hand Farmers Market, Bass Pro Shop and Outlets, Souvenir gift, Motorcoach Transportation, taxes and gratuities. Pickups in Brushton, Potsdam, Canton, Watertown

**Contact:** Gayla LePage 518-569-3612 or email [luer913@hotmail.com](mailto:luer913@hotmail.com)

## APPLEFEST

Peru - Join your family and friends at the 48th Annual St. Augustine's Applefest.

**Date:** Sept. 19

**Place:** St. Augustine's Parish Center

**Schedule:** Activities at St. Augustine's Parish Center begin at 10:30 a.m. At 11 a.m., the community parade begins its route down Main Street, from Peru Elementary to St. Augustine's Parish. People look forward to the apple fritters, chicken BBQ, fried dough, caramelized apples, michigans, sweet sausages, burgers, games, train ride, face painting, bounce house, Pipes and Drums of Plattsburgh, and the On Three Band. Roger's House and St. Vincent DePaul have sales throughout the day. The Grand Raffle drawing takes place at 4 p.m. People from near and far enjoy the community parade, craft fair, thrift store sales, food treats, live music, chicken BBQ, games, and raffles. Rev. Alan Shnob is Parade Grand Marshal.

## HARVEST DINNER

Altona - St. Ann's and Holy Angels

invite you to St. Ann's Harvest Dinner.

**Date:** Sept. 20

**Time:** 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Place:** Holy Angel's Hall

**Cost:** Adults, \$18; Children 6-12, \$10; 5 and under, \$Free

**Features:** Turkey and all the trimmings, Apple and Pumpkin desserts. There will be a bake sale, themed basket raffles and a Lottery Ticket Raffle.

## JEFFERSON-LEWIS

## SUMMER CONCERT

Alexandria Bay - St. Cyril's Church proudly presents "Raising 16 years of a Joyful Noise," their free summer concert for the community.

**Date:** Aug. 30

**Time:** 4 p.m.

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

**Features:** Please join the world traveled St. Cyril's Choir, under the direction of Rebecca Rose. The choir will be performing a program of religious and inspirational music with a theme of Hope, Love, and Family. We are excited to present this inspirational program of joy, peace, hope, and love.

## HOUR AND DIVINE MERCY

Houseville - Exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament and the Divine Mercy Chaplet will be observed the first Sunday of the month.

**Date:** Sept. 6

**Time:** Following 11 a.m. Mass

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

**Contact:** 315-348-6260

## SPAGHETTI AND MEATBALL DINNER

Evans Mills - The Indian River Council 7471 Knights of Columbus will be having a spaghetti & meatball dinner.

**Date:** Sept. 12

**Time:** 4 p.m. to 7

**Place:** St. Mary's Parish Center

**Cost:** Adults, \$12; Seniors, \$10; Children 12 and under, \$5; under 5, Free; Sauce or meatballs available for \$6 per quart

**Contact:** For more information call 315-629-4678

# The Hillbilly Thomists release new album

By Alyssa Murphy  
EWTN News

Between ministering to their communities and traveling down the southern interstate from Macon, Georgia, to Birmingham, Alabama, the Dominican friars of The Hillbilly Thomists are balancing religious life with the demands of a regional tour.

The music group's latest project, "Strange Land," was released as a surprise drop just a couple of days into their summer tour, offering listeners a blend of deep theological reflection and traditional Americana music. The tour ended Aug. 8.

The surprise drop decision was driven largely by their demanding schedules. After writing and recording the tracks a year prior, the postproduction process had to fit around their primary duties as "hounds of the Lord."

"The postproduction process just takes a while because we are all full-time preachers and teachers and chaplains and pastors," said Dominican Father Justin Bolger, who spoke with the *National Catholic Register*, the sister news partner of EWTN News, along with his band

brothers while on the road. "After this kind of two-week stint that we do in the summer, the music takes a backseat to that ... So it kind of came out when it came out."

Musically, "Strange Land" ranges from spiritual anthems like "In-A-My Soul" and "Gloria" to playfully titled tracks like "Garrigou" and "Good Old Elvis."

Dominican Father Thomas Joseph White, one of the founding members of the band, noted that the variety reflects the band's distinct personalities while remaining grounded in shared themes.

"There are some themes that show up, like pilgrimage and hope and struggle, that are in all the songs," he explained. "It's very consistent with what we've done on other albums, and it just comes out organically or naturally from our songwriting."

White described the album as representing a "slightly higher echelon of musical sophistication," aided by tighter harmonies and complex arrangements. Unlike previous albums where the friars handled all engineering themselves in retreat houses, they hired a professional recording engineer for

"Strange Land."

"It frees up more of the band to just focus on the music and to collaborate and just have that be the focus," Bolger added.

That spirit of collaboration is rooted deeply in their shared Dominican vocation. "We've known each other for years, and we're all united in the Dominican order, so it just makes for a real atmosphere of ease," said Dominican Father Jonah Teller, describing the mutual trust involved when bringing personal songs to the group.

As the band's popularity grows, so does a devoted grassroots fan base. Enthusiasm has even spilled over into unofficial merchandise crafted by fans. At recent shows, custom fan art has begun to emerge, including T-shirts designed by a college student featuring torch-bearing dogs alongside the caption "I'm a dog for my Lord," as well as custom "Good Tree" hats.

"You do see some kind of fan art emerge at these shows, which is charming," Bolger noted.

The group's reach has extended all the way to the Vatican.

Recalling a past meeting with Pope Leo XIV, White shared that while most gifts were set aside,

the pontiff asked to keep The Hillbilly Thomists' CDs close by.

"So I don't know if he listens to them, but I do know he made the point of keeping them," White said.

When asked about playing traditional American folk and bluegrass music, especially as the nation celebrates 250 years of independence, singer and mandolin player Dominican Father Austin Litke pointed out the unique place the band occupies within the genre.

"The Christian part of American culture has not always been predominantly Catholic," Litke noted. "To be able to take up that form of music and infuse it with Catholic doctrine, Catholic culture, and certainly Thomistic culture ... we hope is part of the genius of the creativity that's come out of our fraternal work."

As for how fans can support the new release, Bolger kept his message simple: "Let all the old people and the young people know that they can find it on Spotify."

*This story was first published by the National Catholic Register, the sister partner of EWTN News, and has been adapted by EWTN News.*

## Retreat opportunities for women

### RACHEL'S VINEYARD

Are you or a friend suffering after abortion? You aren't alone. Join others for a weekend of hope and healing.

Rachel's Vineyard weekend will be held Oct. 9 to 11 at the Gugenheim Lodge in Saranac Lake.

Cost is \$150 and includes lodging, food and all retreat materials. Scholarships are available for those who need them.

Confidential online registration at [www.rcdony.org/pro-life/rv-retreat](http://www.rcdony.org/pro-life/rv-retreat)

For more information: Colleen Miner Email:

[cminer@rcdony.org](mailto:cminer@rcdony.org)  
Phone Number: 518-524-0774

### HEALING RETREAT

This year's Annual Our Lady of the Rosary Healing Retreat will have the theme of Love Heals.

The retreat runs from Oct. 8 to 11 at Wadhams Hall in Ogdensburg.

The Presenter will be

Sonja Corbitt. Do not waste another day. Stop the pain. Love heals. John Paul the Great said, "Suffering unleashes love," because we only ever find Jesus and His love in our wounds.

Sonja Corbitt has been

teaching people how to acknowledge and open their woundedness to God's love for over 17 years as a leader in the Catholic Church and Scripture teaching space.

You may know her as the Catholic Evangelista

through her speaking, writing, and podcasting.

Space is limited. Register today: <https://www.rcdony.org/ourlady>. For more information contact Kathleen Nichols [kmsnichols1163@gmail.com](mailto:kmsnichols1163@gmail.com)



### Diocese of Ogdensburg Vocations Society Raffle

Drawing Date: Sept. 16, 2026

**First Prize: \$500**

**Second Prize:**  
2-27" Bronze Painted LED Candle Lanterns

**Third Prize:**  
Framed Painting by Local Artist Steven C. Cobb

**Fourth Prize:**  
6'5" Pre-lit Christmas Tree

Tickets are \$5 each or 5 for \$20

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Tickets: \_\_\_\_\_

**Make checks payable to:**  
**Diocese of Ogdensburg Vocations Society**  
Cut and return this ticket with payment and mail to:  
**Connie Randall**  
125 Lenny Rd., Potsdam, NY 13676

## SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE

## 'Who do you say that I am?'

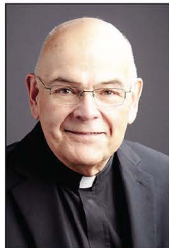
What's in a name? We like name brands. Name that tune. Name the 12 apostles. At the very beginning of a baptism ceremony, we ask: "What name have you given to your child?"

Even in church, we see the same people week after week and wonder who those people are that I see every week. Just to know the names of people, even if we don't know much about them, provides satisfaction. Knowing someone's name opens doors to another person's life. "You're so and so, aren't you? I think I went to school with you or I knew your

sister or I worked for your father."

Knowing someone's name provides a path into another person's life. The anonymous "hey, you" can put us ill at ease. The use of a name means a connection exists.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks that question: "Who do people say that I am?" Jesus did not ask: "What do people say that I am?" The apostles respond with John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Elijah or another. But the quiz goes on and Jesus asks again, not "people," but rather "you," "who do you say that I



Msgr. Robert H. Aucoin

August 23

Twenty-first Sunday  
in Ordinary Time

READINGS

Isaiah 22:19-23

Romans 11:33-36

Matthew 16:13-20

am."

This scene takes place after Jesus had been with his apostles for several years. He knew them by name. He chose them. So, Christ really wanted to know what they thought.

Peter responds on behalf of the twelve. He didn't say: "You're Jesus, the one who does miracles, the one who says some amazing things, the one who annoys people every now and then."

Rather, he says: "You are the Christ (the anointed one), the Son of God." Peter acknowledges the other side of Jesus, the very divine side, the side that no one expected, in fact a new identity. Peter named Jesus with a new name: the Christ, meaning the chosen one.

But then Jesus changes Simon's name, gives him a new identity. He is now Peter. With that new name, Peter takes on, eventually, a new identity, the chief shepherd of what becomes the Church of Christ.

This passage was an extraordinary moment in the life of Jesus because Peter speaks about Jesus' true identity. Likewise, an extraordinary moment in Peter's

life and the life of the Church, the continuing presence of Christ in the world.

So, we, too, can ask about ourselves: Who am I? What do I believe? What do I stand for? If I had to choose an image that represented me and what I believe and stand for, what would that image be? If someone spoke your name to another what images, what emotions, what thoughts would be conjured up?

What's in a name? Well, we should appreciate the depth of the name of Jesus, and we had better know the fullness of our names. Hopefully, a part of our name is son or daughter of the Father, brother or sister of Jesus Christ.

## CALLED TO SERVE

## It's time to do a SWOT

News item: *September's third weekend is one of the highest church-attendance days outside of Easter and Christmas. As your community resets their fall routines and looks for a church, give them a reason to choose yours.*

I will apply that to Catholic Churches although I think the news item referred to various communities of faith.

The first thing that occurs to me is "who sits around thinking about stuff like that?"

"I do" is my answer, and people who think off the wall like me. Our editor comes to mind.

The second thing I think about are the two assertions included in the item.

*September's third weekend is one of the*

*highest church-attendance days outside of Easter and Christmas.*

Families have returned from summer vacation, so if there is a cottage or boat or travel in the family history coming home to a "regular" church makes sense. Elementary and high schools are back in session. That could contribute to attendance at church. Sunday faith formation and sacramental preparation are underway. Your parish OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation) has started the process for converts.

The parish events, a harvest dinner, a school raffle, and fall sports schedules have started or are in the planning stage.

I can't argue the point

that *September's third weekend is one of the highest church-attendance days.* It may very well be true. I'll count the attendance and look at the collection totals for the weekend of September 15 and 16 in my little corner of the world.

The other point of the news item really drew my attention. *As your community resets their fall routines and looks for a church, give them a reason to choose yours.*

How's that for evangelization?

If you live in a community with just one Catholic Church, how does your church compare with the other denominations? In

larger communities, the comparison is to other churches be they Catholic or not.

Mass is the "principal sacramental celebration" the Catechism tells us. That should be enough. But is it what attracts folks to your door?



Deacon Kevin Mastellon

The sentence challenges the pastor and the parish council to do a kind of examination of conscience. I recommend a SWOT analysis of your church.

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This framework helps organizations, like parishes, assess their internal and external en-

vironments to make informed strategic decisions. I like SWOTs.

SWOT can consider things like the condition of the church building and grounds. If I was new to town, would my church attract my interest? Are our liturgies the best, week after week? Do we have a statement of purpose and a mission statement and are we addressing them in practice? The applications are endless.

The Catholic Church is to proclaim the Gospel and serve humanity, reflecting Christ's teachings. How are you doing?

*Deacon Kevin Mastellon ministers in Watertown. He is the director of Permanent Deacons for the Diocese of Ogdensburg.*

# Lots of vocations, not enough resources

Every year, bishops across Nigeria sit across from young men who want to give their lives to God and the Church in the Catholic priesthood. They are young men whose pastors have watched grow in faith for years before recommending them for holy orders. The bishops listen carefully. And then, more often than the bishops can bear, they have to look a man in the eyes and say: I believe your calling is real, but I cannot accept you. There is not enough room, there are not enough funds, you will have to wait...

It is not that the young men have been found wanting. It is that the dioceses do not have the money to send them to the seminary, to feed them and to house them through the years of formation that the priesthood requires.

Father Augustine Ikwu, a priest from Nigeria involved in priestly seminary formation, said, "In many dioceses



## The Pontifical Mission Societies of the Diocese of Ogdensburg, Inc.

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith  
Sister Mary Ellen Brett, SSJ, Director

622 Washington St., Ogdensburg, NY 13669  
(315) 393-2920; fax 1-866-314-7296  
info@rcdony.org

es of the world, the Church prays for more vocations. In Nigeria, we pray for the resources to welcome the vocations God has already sent."

The Nigerian bishops suffer watching the need in their dioceses for priests grow greater every year, seeing communities go without the sacraments, and knowing that the men who could serve them are out there, willing, eager and unable to move forward to answer God's call. This is the quiet crisis hiding inside one of the most Catholic countries in the world today: only about 5% of the young men who knock on the doors of the seminaries can be accepted due to limited resources.

Father Ikwu adds,

"One of the saddest responsibilities we face in Nigeria is telling a young man with an authentic vocation that we cannot admit him; not because he lacks faith, character or ability, but because we simply do not have the space or resources to form him."

Nigeria is, by nearly every measure, one of the most vibrant Catholic nations on earth. Some 94% of Nigerian Catholics attend Sunday Mass. In the Diocese of Nsukka alone, the number of priests more than doubled in 10 years, surpassing 400 priests in 2024. And yet, for all this abundance of faith, the seminaries can only house and train a fraction of the men who discern that Christ is calling them. And while

this crisis unfolds quietly inside seminary walls, outside those walls, the situation is anything but quiet.

To become a Catholic priest in Nigeria's missionary dioceses is not a path toward comfort or security. Priests across Nigeria have to be prepared to defend the faith even unto death. Seminarians are reminded that kidnapping, persecution and killing are not hypothetical ideas. They are realities. Five Catholic priests were abducted and killed in the early months of 2026 alone.

This is the context in which young men discern their vocations. They are not fleeing poverty by seeking the seminary. Rather, they are walking toward danger and making of their lives a true sacrificial offering. The priesthood in Nigeria is on the front lines. And the young men still come, in numbers that far exceed what the Church can receive.

Father Ikwu, speak-

ing about the impact of [The Pontifical Mission Societies], said, "When Catholics across the world support the missions, they are not merely funding buildings or institutions. They are helping to form future priests who will preach the Gospel, celebrate the sacraments, educate children, comfort the suffering, and bring hope to countless communities."

Every Catholic who sits in a comfortable pew, in a country where churches are not burned, and where priests are not abducted, is invited to a simple two-fold invitation: pray for the missions and support them financially if you can.

*Article by Michael Mitchell, TPMS-USA World Mission Sunday director.*

*Please remember the Pontifical Mission Societies of the Diocese of Ogdensburg INC. when writing or changing your will.*

## OBITUARIES

**Alexandria Bay** – Patricia (Hart) Welsh, 84; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 13, 2026 at St. Cyril's Church.

**Black River** – Mary A. (Koegel) Kiechle, 74; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 10, 2026 at St. Paul's Church; burial in Sanford Corners Cemetery, Calcium.

**Cape Vincent** – John True Tucker, 88; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 22, 2026 at St. Vincent of Paul Church; burial in Glenwood Cemetery, Watertown.

**Lowville** – Harold F. O'Brien, Jr., 93; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 11, 2026 at St. Peter's Church;

burial in Lowville Rural Cemetery.

**Lowville** – Ryan Planty, 41; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 14, 2026 at St. Peter's Church.

**Massena** – Susan Marie Romeo, 66; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 15, 2026 at Sacred Heart Church.

**Mooers** – David T. Lambert, 66; Funeral Services Aug. 11, 2026 at the Hamilton Funeral Home.

**Morrisonville** – Barbara J. (Lefebvre) Seymour, 81; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 28, 2026 at St. Alexander's Church; burial in St. Joseph's Cemetery, West Chazy.

**Ogdensburg** – Ellen M. (Seymour) Bova, 93; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 13, 2026 at St. Mary's Cathedral; burial in St. Mary's Cemetery.

**Ogdensburg** – Timothy Paul Davis, 73; Funeral Services Aug. 14, 2026 at Frary Funeral Home.

**Ogdensburg** – Frank LeMay, 87; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 14, 2026 at St. Mary's Cathedral.

**Ogdensburg** – Stuart Jefferson Richards, 94; Funeral Services Aug. 13, 2026 at Fox & Murray Funeral Home; burial in Oswegatchie Mausoleum.

**Plattsburgh** – Irene A. (Kling) Mehling, 90; Mass of Christian Burial Aug. 10, 2026 at Our Lady of Victory Church; burial in Queens.

**St. Regis Falls** – Denis A. Ploof, 75; Memorial Mass Sept. 19, 2026

at St. Ann's Church; burial in St. Ann's Cemetery.

**West Leyden** – Nancy A. Nellenback, 69; Funeral Services Aug. 15, 2026 at Trainor Funeral Home, Inc.; burial in St. Mary's Cemetery.

# BARSTOW

AN AMERICAN REVOLUTION BUICK PONTIAC GMC SUBARU  
WE ARE PROFESSIONAL GRADE  
"Family owned dealership serving the North Country for over 56 years!"  
For more information, visit our Website at: [www.barstowmotors.com](http://www.barstowmotors.com)  
**MARKET ST., POTSDAM, NY • (315) 265-8800**

# Around the diocese

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

## ST. LAWRENCE

### ROSARY WITH DEVOTIONS

Ogdensburg — The Legion of Mary will pray the rosary with devotions for First Saturday.

**Date:** Sept. 5

**Time:** 8 a.m.

**Place:** Notre Dame Church, Ogdensburg

**Features:** Rosary with devotions

### FIRST SATURDAY ROSARY

Massena - Sacred Heart Church to have first Saturday Rosary Devotion.

**Date:** Sept. 5

**Time:** 3:15 p.m.

**Features:** First Saturday Rosary Devotion to OUR Lady of Fatima. Confessions will be available. Saturday Vigil Mass at 4 p.m.

### MENS GROUP

Massena — Men's group to meet the first Saturday of every month.

**Date:** Sept. 5

**Time:** 9 a.m. Mass with meeting to follow

**Place:** Sacred Heart Church

### MONTHLY BRUNCH

Norfolk — Parish of the Visitation and St. Raymond's will have their monthly Knights of Columbus Brunch.

**Date:** Sept. 13 (Second Sunday of each month)

**Time:** 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Place:** Father Amyot Parish Center

**Cost:** Adults, \$10; under 12, \$5; under 5, Free; Omelets, add \$3; Take-outs available

**Contact:** For more information contact Grand Knight Gil Gonthier 315-212-5166.

### ALPHA

Gouverneur — You are invited to Alpha.

**Date:** Mon. Sept 14 to Nov. 22

**Place:** St. James School

**Time:** 5:30 p.m.

**Features:** Are you longing to deepen your faith, reconnect with the Church, or simply create

space to ask life's important questions? Alpha offers a welcoming place to gather with others for conversation, friendship, and discovery. Each session includes a shared meal, an engaging video, and honest, respectful discussion in a relaxed and hospitable environment. Whether your faith is strong, you're returning after time away, or you're simply seeking more, you'll find that every question and every person is welcome. It's completely FREE and includes a delicious home cooked dinner each week.

**Contact:** For more information call 315-287-0114

## DIOCESAN EVENTS

### YOUTH MINISTRY SUMMIT

Saranac Lake — First Annual Youth Ministry Summit to be held. Open to all adults who work with MS/HS aged young people in the diocese.

**Date:** Aug. 28-30

**Place:** Camp Guggenheim

**Cost:** \$25 to help defray the cost of food. Includes all lodging, food, and events.

**Features:** We have Camp Guggenheim booked for the whole weekend, so you can come for a day or retreat the whole time! It will be a time of collaboration, problem-solving, resource sharing, prayer, and strategizing for the year and, of course, some well-deserved relaxation. Catechists, Confirmation Teachers, Youth Group Leaders, Religion Teachers...if you work with young people, you are invited!

**Contact:** To register go to forms.cloud.microsoft/r/7FNXDb-FmVP

### SSJ LAY ASSOCIATE PROGRAM

The Sisters of St. Joseph invite you to a meeting being held around the diocese if you are interested in learning about our Lay Associate Program.

**Schedule:** Sept. 12 at St. Patrick's Church, Colton at 1 p.m.; Sept. 13 at John XXIII Newman Center, Plattsburgh at 2 p.m.; Sept. 20 at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart,

Dostie Hall, Watertown from 2 to 4 p.m.

**Features:** Associates meet once a month to learn about the spirituality, the charism and mission and history of the Sisters of St. Joseph, pray together, and discuss ways to deepen one's spiritual life. This group is open to men and women.

**Contact:** If you are interested, please contact Sister Mary Eamon (smelyngssj@yahoo.com) or call 315-393-6511 or Sister Bethany srbethssj@gmail.com or call 315-405-4058.

### FREE THEOLOGY SERIES

Canton - This free professional-development opportunity is open to all who work with middle school or high school youth, including catechists, Catholic school teachers, youth group volunteers, parish youth ministers, and core-team members.

**Date:** Sept. 12

**Time:** 9 a.m. to noon

**Place:** St. Mary's Parish Center

**Features:** How do we know God exists? Why does evil happen if God is good? What about evolution, the Big Bang, or the multiverse? The first session of the Ready to Give an Answer series will help Catholics respond to these questions with clarity, confidence, and charity while exploring the relationship between faith and science. A continental breakfast will be provided, and participants may receive credit toward certification in Youth Ministry.

**Contact:** Although the event is free, registration is required so that we can prepare for food and communicate any changes. Register at or email Patrick Looby at plooby@rcdony.org.

### MARRIAGE CELEBRATION MASS

Ogdensburg - We invite all married couples and their families to join us at the annual Celebration of Love and Marriage Mass.

**Date:** Sept. 20

**Time:** 2:30 p.m.

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

**Features:** Bishop LaValley will be presiding. Whether you have been married for less than 1 year, over 50 years or anywhere in between, we want to acknowledge your commitment and celebrate with you. Married couples that wish to receive a certificate signed by Bishop LaValley and have their names appear in the program should register no later than September 11th at <https://www.rcdony.org/jubilee>. There will be a gathering with refreshments after the Mass.

**Contact:** For more information please contact Steve Tartaglia at 315-393-2920 or [startaglia@rcdony.org](mailto:startaglia@rcdony.org).

### LEADERSHIP WEEKEND

Saranac Lake — High school Leadership weekend to be held for teens entering 9th to 12th grade.

**Date:** Sept. 25 – 27

**Place:** Camp Guggenheim

**Cost:** \$150, Financial Aid available

**Features:** Spend an unforgettable weekend growing in faith, building friendships, enjoying outdoor adventure, and learning from inspiring Catholic leaders.

**Contact:** To register and find out more information go to [www.rcdony.org/leadership](http://www.rcdony.org/leadership)

### BLUE MASS

Black River — Bishop Terry R. LaValley cordially invites all Police, Corrections, Fire and EMS Personnel to the Diocese of Ogdensburg Blue Mass.

**Date:** Sept. 27

**Time:** 2:30 p.m.

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

**Features:** The Blue Mass is the Church's way to offer thanksgiving to God for the dedication and sacrifices made by the men and women of Fire, EMS, Corrections, Law Enforcement and Communications. First Responders, their families and all the faithful are invited to attend this Sunday celebration. Uniforms are encouraged but not required.

**Contact:** Questions can be ad-

ressed to Father Chris Carrara, Blue Mass Committee Chair at [info@rcdony.org](mailto:info@rcdony.org) or by phone at 315-393-2920.

### DYING WITH CHRIST, LIVING WITH HOPE

Plattsburgh - When we make a commitment to die with Christ, we can truly live with hope. Learn about the new Physician Assisted Suicide law and how MAID has progressed throughout Canada.

**Date:** Sept. 29

**Time:** 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

**Place:** St. Peter's Emmaus Room

**Cost:** \$10 donation, includes lunch

**Features:** Discussions feature theologians and healthcare professionals giving perspectives on suffering, grief, dying and our Christian duty to care. The day will include guest speaker Jessica Rodgers, coalition director of Patients Rights Action Fund.

**Contact:** Registration online at: <https://www.rcdony.org.living-withhope> For more information contact [cminer@rcdony.org](mailto:cminer@rcdony.org)

### MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEKEND

Saranac Lake - Join us for an exciting weekend at Camp Guggenheim designed just for middle school students, entering 6th to 8th grade.

**Date:** Oct. 2 to 4

**Place:** Camp Guggenheim

**Cost:** \$100, Financial Aid Available

**Features:** Experience fun outdoor activities, high-energy games, inspiring talks, praise and worship, prayer, and new friendships—all while discovering how much God loves you. Whether you're coming with friends or meeting new ones, Middle School Impact Weekend is the perfect opportunity to grow in faith, have an amazing time, and make memories that will last long after the weekend ends.

**Contact:** To register and find out more information go to [www.rcdony.org/msleadership](http://www.rcdony.org/msleadership)