NEW CARDINALS — Pope Benedict XVI concelebrates Mass with the new cardinals in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican Nov. 29. The pope elevated 23 prelates from around the world to the rank of cardinal in a ceremony the previous day. (CNS photo/Alessandro Bianchi, Reuters)

**People need God to have hope, pope says in new encyclical**

By John Thavis

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — In an encyclical on Christian hope, Pope Benedict XVI said that, without faith in God, humanity lies at the mercy of ideologies that can lead to “the greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice.”

The pope warned that the modern age has replaced belief in eternal salvation with faith in progress and technology, which offer opportunities for good but also open up “appalling possibilities for evil.”

“Let us put it very simply: Man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope,” he said in the encyclical, “Spe Salvi (Saved in Hope, on Christian hope),” released Nov. 30.

The 76-page text explores the essential connection between faith and hope in early Christianity and addresses what it calls a “crisis of Christian hope” in modern times.

It critiques philosophical rationalism and Marxism, and offers brief but powerful profiles of Christian saints — ancient and modern — who embody hope, even in the face of suffering.

Diocese of Fort Worth passes audit assessing compliance with U.S. bishops’ Charter

By Nicki Prevou

Staff Writer

In a letter sent Nov. 9 to all pastors and pastoral administrators within the Diocese of Fort Worth, Bishop Kevin Vann announced that the diocese has passed the 2007 independent audit for compliance with the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,” a comprehensive set of guidelines developed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2002.

“During the week of October 15, 2007,” wrote Bishop Vann, “the Gavin Group thoroughly reviewed our Safe Environment records, procedures, and programs and found us to be in compliance with the Charter as required by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.”

Two representatives of the Gavin Group, based in Winthrop, Massachusetts, conducted the audit at The Catholic Center Oct. 15-20, said Ruth Smith, director of Child and Youth Protection for the Diocese of Fort Worth. “The two representatives met with Bishop Vann, with our chancellor, Father James Hart, and with our vicar general, Father Michael Olson, said Smith. “They also spoke with several of our school principals, members of our diocesan Review Board, and with members of our recently-established Safe Environment Advisory Council,” she added.

Pope elevates 23 cardinals from 14 nations

Group includes U.S. Cardinals Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston and John P. Foley, grand master of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre

By John Thavis

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — In a liturgy that emphasized the church’s cultural diversity and its unity of mission, Pope Benedict XVI created 23 new cardinals from 14 countries.


The pope, presiding over his second consistory, told the new cardinals that he had chosen them to be the “closest advisers and collaborators” of his ministry in Rome, the church’s traditional center.

At the same time, he said, the cardinals’ geographical variety reflects Catholicism’s global expansion and the fact that today the church “speaks every language of the world.”

International groups of pilgrims who packed St. Peter’s Basilica for the Nov. 24 consistory added emphasis to the pope’s words, applauding, cheering, ululating, and even waving national flags when the new cardinals’ names were announced.

The pope made a special appeal for peace in Iraq and said his naming of Cardinal Emmanuel-Karim Delly of Baghdad, the Chaldean patriarch, was a sign of his closeness to the country’s Christian population.

“They are experiencing in their own flesh the dramatic consequences of an enduring conflict and now live in a fragile and delicate political situation,” the pope said.

“Together we want to reaffirm the solidarity of the entire church with the Christians of that beloved land and ask prayers for the beginning of the hoped-for reconciliation for all the peoples.”

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UD STUDENTS IN ROME — Students from the University of Dallas, a Catholic university in Irving, applaud during Pope Benedict XVI’s general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Nov. 28. The pope acknowledged the students in his remarks to English-speaking pilgrims. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)
Bishop Vann invites us to contemplate the role of Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas

Dear Friends in the Diocese of Fort Worth,

As we begin the new liturgical year, through the various Advent celebrations and devotions, we can easily see how our Blessed Mother plays such a prominent role in the life of the Church.

Since Advent is the time in which we prepare for the birth of Christ it is only appropriate that we reflect on the life and mission of Mary because it is through her that we receive our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

On December 12 we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, patroness of the United States. Because she was conceived without the stain of original sin she was then the purest and most perfect vessel through which Christ our Lord could come into our world.

The following Wednesday we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas. Both last year and only a few weeks ago I had the opportunity to visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. These have been two of the most important devotional experiences in my life. I ask that all of us make an effort to celebrate this feast day of our Blessed Mother either by participating in one of the eucharistic celebrations and processions or by joining in the traditional prayers and songs of Las Mañanitas. This is truly a grace-filled celebration for us all.

Pope John Paul II requested that this celebration be one for the whole American continent, and not just for Mexico, through his Apostolic Exhortation Eclesia in America. Let me share this quote from the document:

I welcome with joy the proposal of the Synod Fathers that the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother and Evangelizer of America, be celebrated throughout the continent on December 12. It is my heartfelt hope that she, whose intercession was responsible for strengthening the faith of the first disciples, will by her maternal intercession guide the Church in America, obtaining the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as she once did for the early Church, so that the new evangelization may yield a splendid flowering of Christian life.

As we celebrate this day I wish to focus on the perspective brought to this feast by Pope John Paul II. Mary was present at the first evangelization in Jerusalem and through Mary’s maternal intercession the New Evangelization will become more fruitful and effective throughout our Diocese.

In this same apostolic exhortation Pope John Paul II also reminded us that:

The appearance of Mary to the native Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac in 1531 had a decisive effect on evangelization. Its influence greatly overshadows the boundaries of Mexico, spreading to the whole Continent. America … recognized in the mestiza face of the Virgin of Tepeyac, “in Blessed Mary of Guadalupe, an impressive example of a perfectly inculturated evangelization.” Consequently, not only in Central and South America, but in North America as well, the Virgin of Guadalupe is venerated as Queen of all America.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is key in our efforts to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world because she is, and always has been, a vessel sent from God to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. Throughout all of Texas, from the time of the first evangelization, the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, has been strongly felt and has been an important path to bring the Gospel to this land.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is a beautiful example of perfect evangelization because she represents the unity between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the culture of the people to whom the Gospel is proclaimed and to whom she appeared. True evangelization needs to penetrate and become part of the reality of those being evangelized. True evangelization occurs when the Good News of Jesus Christ penetrates culture without being watered down and without any reduction of the impact of the Gospel message.

We will know that our American culture is actually being evangelized when we as a nation begin to welcome the stranger among us, the immigrant who has come to our nation in search of a better life. When we as a nation welcome and celebrate the dignity of every human being, especially the unborn, then we can claim to truly be a nation where the Gospel has been inculturated.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the unborn, calls us to treat every human being with the same joy, love, and respect that we offer the Child in her womb. Next month, January, will offer us more opportunities to march for life with the portrait of Our Lady of Guadalupe accompanying us.

I invite you to join me in offering to our Lord Jesus the following prayer taken from the closing words of Pope John Paul II in Eclesia in America:

Teach us to love your Mother, Mary, as you loved her. Give us strength to proclaim your word with courage in the work of the new evangelization, so that the world may know new hope. Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America, pray for us!

Put your stamp on it! Holiday postage avoids seasonal sticking point

WASHINGTON (CNS) — During the Christmas season, when Christmas displays and the public outcry against them get almost equal billing, the tiny postage stamp dare to push the envelope, so to speak.

While some towns are battling over the use of Nativity scenes in parks, the tiny adhesive squares on billions of letters and packages this December will subtly remind postal workers and mail recipients about Christmas and other religious holidays.

This year the Postal Service has issued more than 2.6 billion holiday stamps. The majority of them are called “holiday knots” featuring Christmas images that look like hand-knit evergreens, snowmen, deer, and teddy bears. The rest of the seasonal stamps feature the Madonna and Child and commemorate Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, and Muslim festivals.

According to a 2007 press release by the Postal Service, the Madonna and Child stamp has been a U.S. tradition since 1978. What it doesn’t describe is the road it took to get there.

The series actually got its start in 1966, four years after the first Christmas stamp debuted with a wreath, two candles, and the words “Christmas 1962.”

The first religious Christmas stamp owes its origin in part to the lobbying efforts of the late Anthony Coviello, a parishioner at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Waterbury, Connecticut.

The 1966 stamp, “Madonna and Child With Angels,” started a trend of Christmas stamps featuring Renaissance paintings. These series was interrupted in 1977 when the Christmas stamp featured a praying George Washington.

The next year the Postal Service resumed the Madonna and Child stamp with a Victorian-era angel, a flurry of negative reaction from public interest groups and even then-President Bill Clinton, prompted an immediate reversal.

And in 2007, the Madonna and Child stamp is still sticking to its spot in the right corner of post office pieces of mail. This year’s “Madonna of the Carnation” is a detail of a Bernardino Luini painting of the same name from around 1515 and housed in Washington’s National Gallery of Art.
Continuing education grants available to those in active ministry

Deadline for applications is Jan. 17

Persons who have been actively involved in ministry within the Diocese of Fort Worth for two years or longer and who are planning study programs that are in service of that ministry are invited to apply to the diocese for educational grant assistance.

Made available through the generosity of the people of the diocese, a sum of $20,000 is allotted for distribution again this year. Applications must be submitted to Lucas Pollice, director of the Department of Catechesis for the Diocese of Fort Worth, and must be postmarked no later than Jan. 17.

Applicants will be asked to specify their intended course of study, its place and cost, and any other financial aid that they expect to obtain. A pastor’s or supervisor’s signature is required, as is information that will help establish financial need.

The applications will be processed through the diocesan Department of Catechesis by the Committee on Continuing Education Grant Disbursement. Determinations of aid will be made by late February. At that time, successful applicants will receive a grant agreement indicating subsequent steps of the process. That agreement must be returned by April 1, and checks will be sent out between May 1 and May 15.

To receive an application, contact The Catholic Center by calling (817) 560-3300 ext. 260, or e-mail to lpollice@fwdioc.org. Forms may also be downloaded from the diocesan Web site at www.fwdioc.org by clicking on Ministry Preparation link, and then choosing Continuing Education Grants.

U.S. province of Holy Cross Sisters drops age restrictions

MERRILL, Wisconsin (CNS) — Spurred on by the vitality of their elderly sisters and the congregation’s motto that “The need of the times is the will of God,” the Holy Cross Sisters have dropped the age restriction that prevented women over 50 from being considered for entrance to the congregation.

“With age and vitality and lifestyle of our elderly sisters — we know that for us retirement has a very different meaning because there is always something that draws us to bring the good news to others, even at the age of 90.” — Sister Celine Goessl

By Father Kyle Walterscheid

Responding to God’s Call

Vocation awareness
Texas Catholic roots: How did Christ arrive?

By Father Kyle Walterscheid

Christ arrived in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, but how did Christ arrive in Texas?

As Catholics poured into Texas from 1850 to 1900, I was always taught that they brought their own priests and sisters with them. Am I wrong?

As I mentioned in my previous column, the facts show that Catholics arrived from Europe and the Eastern United States in droves and often found their only support by bonding with others of their own ethnicity and language. Ironically, they came without their priests, searching for a better life. They likely assumed that their church, with her many priests and sisters, would already be here.

At the time, Texas was untamed and on the frontier. There were no highways, no easy or quick way to travel. Mother Nature was often harsh and relentless. Disease and death would come in cycles in the form of cholera and yellow fever. Yet, the people overwhelmingly pressed on as they saw God providing them with a land of their own and a land of opportunity.

It was the tireless godly labor of a few priests, sisters, and bishops that brought real consolation to the Texas Catholic souls. In 1840, Father Jean Marie Odin, a French Vincentian priest, was given the task of establishing a new diocese in Texas. When he arrived in Texas, he saw hundreds of Catholics flooding into the state and yet only five or six priests, who were spread out from Houston, Galveston, Nacogdoches, San Antonio, and down to Laredo and Brownsville, trying to shepherd the souls residing in the vast territories.

On March 6, 1842, Fr. Odin was ordained a bishop at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans and was appointed as the vicar apostolic (placed in charge) of Texas. Two years after returning to Texas, moving with great urgency, Bishop Odin journeyed to Europe to find religious orders who were interested in participating in the missionary work in Texas.

From Ireland, three priests volunteered; from Germany, two; and several priests, seminarians, and sisters of the Ursuline order in France joined too. By the time Texas joined the United States in 1846, Bishop Odin still had only 11 priests serving Texas, as several had died during epidemics while faithfully serving the people of God.

In 1853, however, Bishop Odin secured an agreement from a French order, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to supply the Brownsville area with priests, adding six priests that year. By 1861, when Bishop Odin became the archbishop of New Orleans, 40 priests were working in the diocese where Catholics had built 45 churches, five boys’ schools, three girls’ schools, two colleges, and one seminary. Bishop Claude Dubuis, Bishop Odin’s successor in 1861 and also a native of France, recruited an additional 30 priests and religious from Europe in 1866.

Thus, in those first decades of Texas, most religious priests and sisters were personally recruited in Europe by Texas (French) bishops, while some religious orders were recruited from Canada, Mexico, and other U.S. states.

By this measure, the French, the German, and the Irish of 19th century Europe were better in recruiting Catholic vocations than we are today, as they supported and supplied thousands of sisters and priests who volunteered to serve in foreign missions. May Texans in the 21st century be able to return the favor of missionaries, as Western Europe now struggles with religious vocations.

The real solution for us Texans today is for us to take charge in praying fervently for religious vocations while we vigorously promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life from within our communities and families. The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few.

Father Kyle Walterscheid, director of the Office of Vocations, is shown walking out of Sacred Heart Parish in Muenster following his ordination to the priesthood in May 2002. Even then, he appeared to be inviting people to ask if they were being called to a vocation.
Ministry Formation Day in Fort Worth will be held Jan. 5
“Encountering the Living Christ” is the theme for this year’s Ministry Formation Day, to be held Jan. 5 at Nolan Catholic High School, 4010 Bridger Drive in Fort Worth. This event is an opportunity for enrollment, fellowship, and development of programs and services for Ministry.

Ministry Formation Day will begin at 8 a.m. with registration and the viewing of exhibits. Bishop Kevin Vann will welcome the participants at 8:35 a.m. and a brief prayer service will follow. The English-language keynote address, to be offered at 9:30 a.m., will be presented by Mike Patin, a Catholic motivational speaker from Lafayette, Louisiana. The Spanish-language keynote, which will be offered at 10:45 a.m., will be presented by Father Nathan Stroz, S.J., from Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House.

During the English-language keynote address, a breakfast session with Spanish-language workshops will be offered, and will be held, while the Spanish keynote is offered. English-language workshops will take place as well. These will also be two more rounds of workshops offered in the afternoon, the first beginning at 12:45 p.m. and the second at 1:55 p.m. Participants will also be offered in the afternoon a language workshop.

Program on 'Defending the Church' to be presented by John Martignoni
Nationally recognized speaker John Martignoni, known for his numerous appearances as a keynote speaker at this event present “Defending the Church” at 9 St. Maria Goretti Church, 1200 S. Davis Drive in Arlington, Saturday, Jan. 6. The event will begin with check-in and continental breakfast between 8:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. and will conclude at 2:30 p.m. The keynote speaker’s session every year will begin with a keynote address. The day is described as an opportunity to gain skills in using apologetics and to learn how to defend the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church using Scripture as the primary reference. These tools can be used to go out and make people feel confident in sharing our Catholic faith with others.” The program is available for all Catholics of junior high age and older.

John Martignoni is founder and president of the Christian Society, a nonprofit Catholic apostolate based in Rockbridge, Virginia. He has been a guest on the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) and Catholic Radio. Also known as the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) and Catholic Radio, the EWTN Radio Open Line, which can be heard locally each Monday afternoon from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. at Catholic Radio KATH 910 AM.

In his keynote speech, Martignoni will discuss the changing demographics of the rapidly increasing young adult age group. Representative topics include today’s young adults, the state of the world today, the future of Christians in the New Millennium, and the impact of changing demographics on the future of the Church.

Calix support group meets monthly at Holy Family
Calix, a monthly support meeting for Catholics who are alcoholic and others who are struggling with addiction and seeking recovery, is offered the first Saturday of each month at Holy Family Church, 6595 Perdido Avenue in West Fort Worth. The next meeting will be held Jan. 5, beginning at 10 a.m. in the chapel.

Calix meetings focus on enlisting spiritual growth through sharing, listening, forgiveness, and fellowship. For more information, call Deacon Joe Billings at (817) 737-6768 ext. 105.

Faith and Fiction group to meet Dec. 13
“Faith and Fiction: Conversations on the Topic of Comprehension and Imagination,” a program of discussions and films with themes that shed light on the journey of faith, will meet Thursday, Dec. 13, at the Catholic Renewal Center, 4503 Bridge Street in Fort Worth. The topic of discussion will be the film “Joyeux Noel,” directed by Christian Carion.

The film is to be shown at 5 p.m. with a potluck supper to be served. The discussion session will begin at 7 p.m. and conclude at 8:30 p.m.

Future dates and topics include the following: Jan. 17, The Book Thief, by Markus Zusak; Feb. 21, 84 Charing Cross Road, by Helene Hanff; and March 17, Feathering Heights, by Emily Bronte.

To ensure good conversation, space will be limited. To reserve a spot or for more information, call the Catholic Renewal Center at (817) 429-7873 or e-mail to daniel@dioceseoffortworth.org.

Holly Family Advent celebration to include singer Jesse Manibusan
“Bells of Joyeux Noel” an Advent celebration for the whole family will be held Dec. 16, at Holy Family Church, 6595 Perdido Avenue in West Fort Worth. An internationally recognized musician, storyteller, and apostolic evangelist, Jesse Manibusan will be sharing an Advent message of hope through words and song. A “cookies and cocoa” reception will follow.

This is a family event to celebrate with the whole family. To encourage organization of your own Christmas customs, these charges are on a voluntary basis, and all are welcome. For more information, contact Giant Leyers at (817) 737-6787 ext. 103.

Retrouvaille weekend Jan. 18-20 to help for hurt- ing marriages
A Retrouvaille weekend, part of a program which offers help to married couples who are struggling in their relationship, will take place Jan. 18-20 at the Metroplex area. Offered through the Family Life Office of the Diocese of Fort Worth, Retrouvaille is a three-month process which combines a live-in workshop with a post-weekend follow-up sessions.

Through the Retrouvaille program, couples who are distance from each other in their relationship learn how to listen, to sacrifice, to be courageous, and communication is powerful aids for building a loving and lasting union. For more information, contact at (817) 500-4759 or visit their website at www.retrouvaillevt.org.

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North Texas Catholic deadlines for submission
The North Texas Catholic is published twice monthly, except during the months of June, July, and August when it is published monthly. The deadline to submit information is noon on the Wednesday of the week before the paper is published.

Items for the Dec. 21 issue must be received by noon on Wednesday, Dec. 12. Items for the Jan. 11 issue must be received by noon on Wednesday, Jan. 2.

Deaf Ministry Program announces Advent, Christmas activities
Members of the deaf and hearing-impaired community within the Diocese of Fort Worth will have the opportunity to participate in five special events during the Advent season, to be held Dec. 16 at 6:30 p.m. in the chapel at St. John the Apostle Church, located at 7341 Glenview Dr. in North Richland Hills. Father Ken Robinson, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Mansfield, will be available for one-on-one consultations in sign language (English and Spanish). Family members are also welcome to participate.

Additionally, members of the deaf and hearing-impaired community will gather Dec. 19, in the Formation Center at St. John the Apostle Church at 7 p.m. to assist in the preparation of Advent and Christmas cards with a holiday project. Parents, adults, and children are welcome to participate.

The 8 p.m. Dec. 24 Mass at St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Church, located at 143 Wildwood Lane in Grapevine, will be performed with the sign language spoken for the deaf and hearing-impaired will be reserved in the front of the church. Volunteers and friends are invited to join in the celebration of the Christmas Eve Mass.

For more information, contact Mary Maryl, director of the Deaf Ministry Program, at mcmillan@fwdioc.org or by calling (817) 284-3019. English and Spanish daily Masses may also be found on the diocesan website at www.fwdioc.org, by clicking on Deaf Ministry under the Pastoral Services icon.

Catholic Schools’ to be held Jan. 26 in downtown Fort Worth
The 21st annual diocesan “Catholic Schools Week” will be held Saturday, Jan. 26, at the AT&T Center, located at 400 E. Downtown Hallion in downtown Fort Worth. The event will begin with a social hour at 6 p.m., dinner will be served at 7 p.m.

Admission will be freed for all Las Posadas activities scheduled for Dec. 18-24 in downtown Fort Worth. The event is an opportunity to honor those people who have dedicated their lives in support of Catholic Schools. Twenty local honorees, each chosen by their representative diocesan Catholic school, will be recognized for the significant contributions which they have made in furthering the success of their school. This year’s Las Posadas Offering will be utilized to support the 2008 Diocesan Leadership award at the banquet, the Diocese of Fort Worth will seek to save the diocesan scholarship fund.

Tickets are available at a cost of $75 per person. Proceeds from the Las Posadas will be awarded to the Joseph School Fund. For more information, call Catholic Schools’ Las Posadas at (817) 560-2452 ext. 280.
Christ the King recently was named a parish partner of the Dallas Bowl Foundation, and will hold an adoption fair Dec. 12 in Dallas.

Adoption orientation will be offered Dec. 12 in Dallas
The Materinity and Adoption Services of Catholic Charities of Dallas is seeking Christian families to adopt children, ages newborn through 18. These children are currently in the custody of the Department of Family and Protective Services. To learn more about this opportunity, an informational session will be offered Wednesday, Dec. 12 at 7 p.m. in the first floor conference room at the Catholic Charities offices, located at 3727 Blalock in Dallas. For more information, contact Linda Christianson at (214) 520-2772, ext. 112.

ST. MARTIN OF TOURS FEAST — On Nov. 9, children of Notre Dame School in Winsted Falls joined with children of the Germantown School, a school for the children of the German pilots in the NTU training program at Drugrebil Air Base, to celebrate the feast of St. Martin of Tours. The German School, which has facilities on the Notre Dame campus, hosted a traditional lantern light parade, complete with St. Martin on horseback. A few of the Notre Dame students are shown displaying their handmade paper lanterns, as they wait for the parade to begin. “St. Martin is privileged to have the German School on their campus and is fortunate to join in many of their celebrations…” says Marilyn Putthoff, first grade teacher, adding that the German students are invited to many Notre Dame events, as well.

Catholic Life accepting scholar- application programs
Catholic Life Insurance has announced that applications are now being accepted for the 2008 All American Scholar Program. Thirty non-renewable college scholarships in the amount of $1,000 each, will be given to graduating senior high school students. Applicants must be members of the Catholic Life Insurance program.

Young adult women invited to learn about Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal
The Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal, a religious order of women based in New York, will serve as the featured presenters at a gathering to be held at the Campus Ministry Center for the University of Texas at Austin and Texas Woman’s University in Denton. The gathering will take place Dec. 11 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the center, located at 1305 Eagle Drive in Denton.

Beginning Experience Weekend to be held Feb. 22-24
The Beginning Experience is a ministry for those who have lost a spouse due to death, divorce, or separation. Beginning Experience weekendes are designed to allow participants to just close on the past, and to create a new beginning in the present.

For more information about the event, call Janet Wolf at (940) 352-2564.

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For more information, contact Michelle at (817) 575-6497 or e-mail to partyleader@newyearsevedance.com. Light snacks will be provided.

Everyone is invited to attend this dance in a “welcoming atmosphere,” according to organizers. A donation of $15 per person is requested. For more information, call George Mills at (817) 456-6709 or Voice Chasers at (817) 896-5728 or (817) 931-5251.

New Year’s Eve Dan...
Cardinal DiNardo calls on flock to be energetic disciples like Mary

By Cindy Wooden

ROME (CNS) — Celebrating a Mass of Thanksgiving in his “favorite church in Rome,” Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston asked his family, friends, and flock to be energetic disciples like Mary was.

The congregation burst into applause when Cardinal DiNardo told them that, when he greeted Pope Benedict XVI after a Nov. 26 audience at the Vatican, the pope said “Texas needs a cardinal.”

Joined by his brother and sister, friends from Pennsylvania and Ohio, and hundreds of pilgrims from Texas, the cardinal celebrated Mass Nov. 27 in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, which he said was “my favorite church in Rome since the day I walked in here in 1972 as a first-year student at the [Pontifical] North American College,” the U.S. seminary in Rome.

Cardinal DiNardo said the basilica is a place where one is overwhelmed by beauty and serenity, rather than by majesty and space. It is the beauty of the story of God becoming human in Jesus Christ when Mary said yes, he said.

In the Gospel of Luke, he said, “everyone is always on a journey and traveling,” beginning with Mary who goes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, almost immediately after the angel Gabriel proclaims she will give birth to Jesus. “Everything about the Virgin Mary in the Gospel of Luke is dynamic. There are people who have said that somehow the Virgin Mary is passive. You could never get that from the Gospel. There is always energetic acceptance” of God’s will in her life and her action, he said.

“Mary is our queen and our mother,” Cardinal DiNardo said. “She is the energy of the church. I beg you to stay close to her as she keeps pushing us in her Magnificat to magnify the Lord and to do his will.”

Cardinal DiNardo and his group were welcomed to the basilica by Cardinal Bernard F. Law, the former archbishop of Boston who serves as archpriest of St. Mary Major. In addition to offering his prayers for Cardinal DiNardo, he also asked the congregation to pray for the success of the Middle East peace conference taking place in Annapolis, Maryland.

Cardinal DiNardo says St. Sebastian is reminder of defending faith

By John Thavis

ROME (CNS) — Celebrating Mass where St. Sebastian was killed under Roman persecution, U.S. Cardinal John P. Foley said the third-century martyr should remind modern Christians of the importance of defending one’s faith.

St. Sebastian was executed because he refused to renounce his Christian beliefs to the Emperor Diocletian, Cardinal Foley said. Today his witness is a lesson in how pagan civilizations pass from the scene, he said.

“False religions will die. The true religion endures. No one can kill the true faith,” the cardinal said.

Cardinal Foley celebrated Mass Nov. 27 in the Church of St. Sebastian on the Palatine, which was symbolically placed under his pastoral care as part of his elevation to cardinal.

The church, whose foundations date back at least to the 10th century, stands amid the ruins of imperial Roman residences. It was built on the site of ancient Rome’s Temple of the Unconquered Sun.

The small interior was packed with pilgrims from Cardinal Foley’s native Philadelphia, including friends, relatives, and former classmates.

The cardinal greeted them all from the altar and said it amazed him to think that even his eighth-grade teacher, Sister Elizabeth Gorvin, a member of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, was in Rome to help him celebrate.

Sister Gorvin said afterward that she never thought her young student would become a cardinal, but that he really hadn’t changed much.

“He was the same then as he is now: a very simple, very nice person, with a great sense of humor,” she said.

Also in attendance were white-robed members of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, the chivalric order of which Cardinal Foley was made grand master earlier this year.

In his sermon, Cardinal Foley explained the story of St. Sebastian, who is usually depicted in paintings as pierced with arrows. But according to tradition, the saint recovered from those wounds — only to defy the emperor again when asked to repudiate Christianity.

Roman soldiers then clubbed him to death and threw his body in a ditch near the site of the church. His body was eventually moved to the catacombs, but the tradition of worshiping at the place of his martyrdom goes back at least 1,000 years.

“Isn’t impressive?” Cardinal Foley said. “May we remain as faithful to Jesus Christ as did St. Sebastian and those Christians who have worshipped here over the centuries.”

Among those who joined him for the Mass was Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia. The rector of the church, Father Alvaro Ciacciotti, warmly welcomed the new cardinal and told him he should feel at home.

The church, which is mainly used today for weddings and retreats, holds about 90 people. Cardinal Foley said lack of funds and Rome building restrictions prevent making it any bigger.

He invited those in attendance to come back and join him for liturgies, but “in groups of no more than 50.”
Twenty-three elevated to cardinal

From page 1 involved,” he said. 

During the consistory, each cardinal knelt as the pope placed his head on a red three-cornered hat, called a biretta. The pope told them the color was not only a sign of the cardinal’s dignity, but also a visible reminder of their readiness to act with courage “even to the point of shedding your blood” in order to help spread the Christian faith.

Cardinal Delly, 80, received the biggest applause when he approached the altar to receive his red hat; the pope gave him the classic round hat of a Chaldean patriarch instead of a biretta. 

Pope Benedict, wearing a gold cape and seated on a gilded throne, smiled as he watched the cardinals adjust their hats and receive the congratulations of the veteran cardinals, who filled the front of the basilica.

Cardinal Foley, a 72-year-old native of Philadelphia, spent many years as a Catholic journalist before being named to head the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in 1984. In June he was made head of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, a chivalric organization that responds to the needs of Catholics in the Holy Land.

Meeting reporters afterward, Cardinal Foley said he appreciated the great number of warm and positive articles about him in recent days.

“It’s nice to be canonized without the inconvenience of dying,” he quipped.

Cardinal DiNardo, 58, was the second-youngest of the new cardinals. He is the first cardinal from a Texas diocese, and his nomination was considered a sign of Pope Benedict’s attention to the growth of the Catholic Church in the U.S. Southwest.

“It’s an honor, a responsibility, and pretty humbling for this kid from Pittsburgh,” Cardinal DiNardo said of his elevation to the rank of cardinal.

Besides the U.S. and Iraq, other new cardinals came from Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, India, Northern Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Poland, Senegal, and Spain.

Of the 23 new cardinals, 18 were under the age of 80 and therefore eligible to vote in a conclave. Those over 80 included Francis Cardinal Umberto Betti, 85, who processed into the basilica in a wheelchair; when he was given his red hat by the pope, whom he has known for more than 40 years, he appeared to be overwhelmed with emotion.

The consistory left the College of Cardinals with 201 members, a new record. Of those, 120 are under age 80 and eligible to vote in a conclave.

In his sermon, the pope underlined that being a cardinal was not about power and success but a new form of service.

“True Christian greatness, in fact, lies not in dominating but in serving,” he said. This is the ideal that should guide the cardinals in their new role, he said.

Each of the new cardinals was assigned a church in Rome as a symbol that they were becoming members of the clergy of Rome and were more closely bound to the bishop of Rome, the pope.

Cardinal Foley was given the Church of St. Sebastian on the Esquiline Hill. Cardinal DiNardo received the Church of St. Eusebius, one of the city’s oldest churches, on the Esquiline Hill.

The consistory liturgy had been planned for St. Peter’s Square, but was moved inside the basilica when bad weather was forecast. The overflow of several thousand people had to watch the consistory on big TV screens in the square. The crowd included a visitor from Houston who held a U.S. flag on a long pole.

In the end, it did not rain during the consistory. The pope walked out to the steps of the basilica afterward and extemporized a talk to those who waited outside.

Among those in the square was a large contingent from Senegal — many of them now living in Italy — who came to cheer Cardinal Theodore-Adrien Sarr of Dakar. They wore T-shirts with the cardinal’s name and picture on the front and the phrase, “Where can we go, Lord?” written on the back in French.

Alphonse Mendy, a native of Dakar, said the nomination was especially important for the African country because it put the spotlight on the minority Catholic population in a country that is more than 90 percent Muslim.

After the consistory, the cardinals scattered to various receptions throughout the day, including a big open house held in the late afternoon in the Vatican’s Apostolic Palace.

The next day, the pope celebrated Mass with the new cardinals and gave them each a gold ring to symbolize their special bond of communion with Rome.

The day before the consistory, the pope presided over a meeting with cardinals and cardinals-designate for discussions that focused on the state of the church’s ecumenical dialogues.

Contributing to this story were Cindy Wooden and Carol Glatz.
Diocesan Latin Indult Mass
8:00 a.m. Sundays
St. Mary of the Assumption Church
833 W. Magnolia, Fort Worth
High Mass Second and Fourth Sundays
Low Mass First and Third Sundays

FROM PAGE 1
The auditors also spent time working with Smith and with diocesan Victims Assistance Coordinator Judy Locke, noted Smith. “We shared with the auditors the materials we use in our safe environment trainings and seminars; they examined the records for the background checks that are done on employees and volunteers within our parishes and schools, and they reviewed the extensive records that are kept to ensure the protection of young people and vulnerable adults in our parishes and schools,” said Smith.

The Diocese of Fort Worth’s original policies, which addressed the matter of sexual misconduct by clergy, religious, or lay leaders, were first adopted in 1993 and were further updated in 2002 to bring diocesan policies into accord with the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.” The Charter was created by the U.S. bishops with the goal of preventing the sexual abuse of minors within the church.

The previous audit was held 18 months ago, explained Judy Locke. “This is our fourth audit since the Charter was adopted in 2002,” she said, noting that the Diocese of Fort Worth has been found in compliance with the Charter during each audit.

“The first three audits were held every 12 months, but the 18-month period was planned by the bishops as a way of giving us a more long-range perspective. The auditors’ role is to see how we have been responding to victims and to examine the methods that we have put in place to protect all individuals within our faith communities, particularly our children.”

All audits in dioceses and eparchies across the United States will be completed by the middle of December, and the Office for Child and Youth Protection with the USCCB will then publish a comprehensive report of all audit results, said Locke.

Thanks to the hard work that is done by schools and parish staffs to keep comprehensive records and to comply with requirements for screening and for training programs, the auditors who met with Bishop Vann in October were “extremely complimentary about the Diocese of Fort Worth and our efforts to continue protecting God’s children,” said Bishop Vann. “The auditors were also very complimentary of all of our staff. The auditors reviewed our statistics, our record keeping process, and they spoke with many different individuals. I believe the audit results are a real sign to all members of our diocese that we are taking the work to protect our young people very seriously.”

— Bishop Kevin Vann

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TRIDENTINE MASS
Latin Indult Mass
5:30 p.m. SUNDAYS
St. Mary of the Assumption Church
509 W. Magnolia, Fort Worth
High Mass Second and Fourth Sundays
Low Mass First and Third Sundays

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Special Collection: Catholic Communications Campaign
Sr. Bonaventure Mangan, SHSp, co-founder of Cassata High School, dies at age 93

Sister Mary Bonaventure Mangan, SHSp, a former associate superintendent of Catholic schools and a co-founder of Cassata High School, died at age 93 at Holy Spirit Convent in San Antonio Nov. 29. The funeral Mass was celebrated Wednesday, Dec. 5, at Holy Spirit Convent in San Antonio. Interment was at the cemetery located at the Holy Spirit Convent in San Antonio.

Known as “Sr. Bonaventure,” the legendary educator was born in County Limerick, Ireland, Jan. 19, 1914, and joined the congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate in 1932. After receiving degrees from the University of Incarnate Word and St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, Sr. Bonaventure taught in various schools administered by her congregation in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. She served as principal of Our Lady of Mercy School in Fort Worth from 1962 to 1975 and as associate superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Fort Worth from 1974 to 1983. In 1975, working with Sister Mary Venard Fulbright, SSMMN, she co-founded Cassata Learning Center, an alternative school designed to meet the students’ needs through nontraditional, personalized education. She worked at the school — now known as Cassata High School — until her retirement in 1998.

Sr. Bonaventure “opened her arms and heart to all and inspired us to be better persons,” said longtime friend Jody Lancarte of Joe T. Garcia’s Mexican Restaurant in Fort Worth. “She was an amazing woman who was ahead of her time. She thought that working hard would answer every problem.”

Sr. Mary Fulbright called Sr. Bonaventure “an excellent educator who had a passion for inclusiveness.... [She] made every person whom she met feel special.”

Sr. Bonaventure and Sr. Fulbright were in Fort Worth in April 2005 at a special 30th anniversary celebration of Cassata High School, during which the two co-founders of the school were honored with a city proclamation. A multipurpose area of the school was also formally named the “Bonaventure-Fulbright” meeting room as part of the festivities.

Sr. Bonaventure richly deserved all the praise that she received, said Cassata High School President Sal Espino, who has served at Cassata for the past year. Espino and his wife visited Sr. Bonaventure at her convent in San Antonio this summer, he said.

“I have never met a more charismatic, a more spiritual person than Sr. Bonaventure,” said Espino. “Her mind was perfectly clear, and she recounted a great deal of her life story to us. She continued to be very proud of Cassata, and she definitely still had the same passion about the students. She wanted to know all about the school and about our young people.”

Calling his meeting with Sr. Bonaventure “one of the most wonderful experiences of my life,” Espino said that more than 3,500 youth have graduated from Cassata over the past 32 years, “and her spirit is still alive at the school, as each child is still treated with absolute dignity and respect. Back in 1975, there weren’t too many alternative high schools, as there are now. What she started was a pioneering effort to reach out to every young person in need of another option, another chance.”

Sister Miriam Mitchell, SHSp, superior general for the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate, agreed that Sr. Bonaventure had a profound impact on many lives, including her own, saying that Sr. Bonaventure was “an inspiration” to her during the years that the two nuns served together at Our Mother of Mercy School in Fort Worth. “She had such a commitment to education, and to providing opportunities for those that needed help,” said Sr. Mitchell.

“Sr. Bonaventure was very mentally alert until very recently,” explained Sr. Mitchell. “She was very fragile, but it was only in the last few weeks that she had become much more frail. Until just a few weeks ago, she was with us at Mass every single morning and at rosary and prayer every afternoon. She was, again, just such an inspiration until the very end.”

Sr. Bonaventure is survived by two sisters, Sister Rosaline Mangan of England, and Bridie Kiely of Ireland, and one brother, John Mangan of Washington state, as well as numerous relatives and friends.

Memorial contributions may be made to Cassata High School, 1400 Hemphill Street, Fort Worth 76104, or to the Ministries of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit, 301 Yucca Street, San Antonio 78203-2351.
Jesus Christ, Our True Compass

By Lucas Pollice

A s we enter into the season of Advent, we are reminded of the powerful words of St. John the Baptist, “Prepare the way of the Lord and make straight his paths” (Matthew 3:3). This passage expresses what is at the heart of this season of Advent: to make the path to Christ smooth and free of all obstacles that may keep us from loving, knowing, and serving him.

Advent is the time set aside by the Church that calls us to remember that Jesus Christ is our true compass, for he shows us the way to the Father and the way to eternal life. During Advent, we not only prepare our hearts for the celebration of the first coming of Christ in the Incarnation, but for Christ’s second coming for which we wait in great hope and anticipation. Thus, Advent calls us to examine our lives and to make an account of how we can grow to be more effective witnesses of hope and God’s love and presence in the world, and the reality of his kingdom already established and working in our time through Christ and his Church.

Last week, Pope Benedict XVI gifted the Church with his second encyclical letter entitled Spe Salvi or In Hope We are Saved. In this marvelous work, the pope stresses the importance that as Christians, we are a people of hope, and that hope in Christ is especially witnessed in our daily lives. Benedict stresses that Christians are unique witnesses of hope because through our victory in Christ, we know that through all times and circumstances Christ remains the compass that guides us to eternal life and a destiny in the kingdom to come, a kingdom that is beyond our greatest hopes and dreams.

The Holy Father also warns against the threats to hope in our world, especially atheism, which in many ways continues to have a growing impact in the secular humanist culture which is especially pervasive in the Western World. Thus, Pope Benedict stresses all the more the importance of Christians to be a living and compelling witness to the hope that Christ offers to the entire world. He states:

Here too we see as a distinguishing mark of Christians the fact that they have a future. It is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well. So now we can say: Christianity was not only “good news” — the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: The Christian message was not only “informative” but “performative.” That means: The Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known — it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life (In Hope We are Saved, 2).

With all this in mind, Bishop Vann has asked me to comment on the release of the movie “The Golden Compass” this weekend. No doubt there has been a lot of press lately about this movie and its supposed anti-Christian elements. But it does not take much research to find out quickly that this movie, and especially the series of the children’s books from which it is derived, does indeed pose a serious threat to the faith and values of our children and youth. In fact, The Golden Compass is the first in a trilogy of books for children entitled His Dark Matters by English author Philip Pullman, a professed atheist who openly admits that “My books are about killing God.” Pullman also admits that he despises C.S. Lewis’ classic Christian-based series The Chronicles of Narnia and offers his series as the “anti-Narnia” to give the atheist perspective of reality. The movie itself is a watered down version of the first book with the same title which is actually the least offensive of the three books. Pullman’s hopes are that the movie “The Golden Compass” will spark an interest in the books just in time for Christmas. The other two books in the series, entitled The Subtle Knife and The Amber Spyglass, contain even more explicit and serious attacks against the idea of God and the Church and feature a young girl in an epic struggle against an evil and controlling Church called the “Magisterium.” This struggle ultimately concludes with the death of the “Authority,” a very close depiction of the Christian God who is portrayed throughout the books as a weak, insecure, and ultimately ineffective character. Though I simply don’t have time here to get into the long list of other serious issues in these books that are clearly against Christian belief and morality, in a Nov. 14 interview with Zenit International, Pete Vere summarizes the disturbing elements featured throughout this series of books:

It’s not OK for children — impressionable as they are — to read stories in which the plot revolves around the supreme blasphemy, namely, that God is a liar and a mortal. It is not appropriate for children to read books in which the heroine is the product of adultery and murder; priests act as professional hit men; [and] torturers and authorize occult experimentation on young children; an ex- nun engages in occult practices and promiscuous behavior, and speaks of it openly with a 12-year-old couple; and the angels who rebel against God are good, while those who fight on God’s side are evil. This is wrong. And while it’s been softened in the movie — or at least that’s what Hollywood is telling us — it’s still there in the books.

What should our Catholic response to this be? For one, we should make our voices heard in the marketplace and not support this kind of attack against our faith. And certainly these books have no business being in the hands of our children.

This attack on Christian faith also points to the importance of catechesis, especially in the family, so that we and our children are not swept away by such winds that attempt to blow us to and fro in our culture today.

But ultimately, I think it challenges us, especially in this season of Advent. It challenges us to be witnesses of hope. It challenges us to demonstrate hope active and visible in our daily lives and examples, that we become like Christ, true compasses who point our world to the reality that God is real and present, working in the world every day.

Our hope is always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too. As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: How can I save myself? We should also ask: What can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I will have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well (In Hope We are Saved, 48).

Thus, as we follow the true compass, Jesus Christ, we are led and lead others toward that fulfillment for which all humanity hopes — found only in the joy of eternal life!

Lucas Pollice is director of Catechesis and Adult Faith Formation and RCIA for the diocese. Lucas holds a degree in theology from the Franciscan University of Steubenville and has a master’s degree in theological studies from the Institute for Pastoral Theology of Ave Maria University. He is an adjunct professor of theology with the Cardinal Newman Institute in Fort Worth. Lucas and his wife, Mary, have four children, Cecilia, Nicholas, Timothy, and Christian.
Stem cells from skin cells
The Holy Grail of reprogramming

By Fr. Tadeusz Pacholczyk

The recent discovery that regular old garden-variety skin cells can be converted into highly flexible (pluripotent) stem cells has rocked the scientific world.

Two papers, one by a Japanese group, and another by an American group, have announced a genetic technique that produces stem cells without destroying (or using) any human embryos. In other words, the kind of stem cell usually obtained by destroying embryos appears to be available another way.

All that is required is to transfer four genes into the skin cells, triggering them to convert into pluripotent stem cells. It has been called “biological alchemy,” something like turning lead into gold. Many are hailng it a breakthrough of epic proportions, the stuff that Nobel prizes are made of, and now this nice ending.

Whether this nice ending will actually play out remains to be seen, but a discovery of this magnitude, coupled with a strong ethical vision, certainly has the potential to move us beyond the contentious moral quagmire of destroying human embryos.

Change never comes easily, however, and before we can really change, we need to see the reasons why we should change. Each of us is, incredibly, an embryo who has grown up. This biological fact stares researchers in the face every time they choose to “disaggregate” a human embryo with their own bare hands. It makes many researchers edgy, touching them on some deeper level of their being. It makes many Americans queasy and eager to find alternatives.

Dr. Thomson, whose 1998 work ignited the controversy, and who also published one of the new breakthrough papers) acknowledged just such a possibility in comments to reporters: “Ten years of turmoil and now this nice ending.”

Reprogramming provides patient-specific stem cells as well, but without using women’s eggs, without killing embryos, and without crossing moral lines.

By Kathy Cribari Hamer

During Advent, scriptural readings remind us to awake, prepare, and be ready. Ironically for us, who plan for Christmas in secular as well as spiritual ways, it is the preparation that keeps us awake.

In the hours sometimes reserved for slumber, we find ourselves unpacking decorations, reading recipes, and typing holiday letters, usually written from the All-Knowing Narrator point of view, light-heartedly or sentimentally telling our friends and families what we have achieved all year.

Thank God there is no All-Knowing Narrator writing letters in our house. My choice for writer would be an Almost-Truth-Telling, Relatively-Unaware Narrator. He might write: “Kathy continued her busy schedule of quietly performing charitable outreach to the community, visiting shut-ins and reading to small, neglected children, while still managing to study oil-painting, the Russian language, and jazz dancing. She volunteered four days a week at a food bank, worked full time in a university that named her ‘most indispensable person EVER,’ and she never arrived anywhere late.”

The All-Knowing Narrator, on the other hand, would be compelled to write: “Kathy lived contentedly with a small, overly energetic dog, whose unrelenting yip brought them a certain notoriety in the neighborhood. Kathy always washed the kitchen floor whenever the bottom of her white socks became the same color as her breakfast toast, and was thrilled to realize her house hadn’t burned down, that time she accidentally left a scented candle burning all night. She also was thrilled she had scraped her car on the carport only three times all year.”

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After holiday letters comes another pre-Christmas task, unpacking decorations. I acknowledge this would not take place if we were living in a liturgically correct household, where we would decorate at the end of Advent. Modern cultural folkways, however, bring most of us to tree lots and discount stores early, as we ready our homes for the holidays, and the parties and family visits that accompany them.

This year, while staying awake and preparing, I opened a dozen tree ornaments and nativity scene pieces that had been carefully wrapped in a bag labeled: “Bro-
A ‘PILGRIMAGE’ TO THE EARLIEST CHRISTIAN ART

It’s a visual and intellectual treat for all Christians, but especially for Catholics: “Picturing the Bible,” the exhibit of the earliest Christian art that opened Nov. 18 at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth.

Religious art from the 1st to the 4th centuries, the earliest Christian art, is rarely seen in the U.S. and this show offers a spiritual jewel box.

The Curators

By Nora Hamerman

The Trustees

The Kimbell Art Museum is located at 3533 Camp Bowie Blvd, in Fort Worth. For more information on times of open- ing, admission and special events, call (817) 332-8431 or visit www.kimbellart.org.
Prayer is ‘school of hope,’ pope says in new encyclical

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope Benedict XVI began Advent by summarizing his latest encyclical on Christian hope and encouraging people to read it.

The time before Christmas is a good period to rediscover the hope that Christ brought to human history, which can “change one’s life,” the pope said Dec. 2, the first Sunday of Advent.

He said the wrote his second encyclical, Spe Salvi (Saved in Hope, on Christian hope), for the entire church and for all people of good will. The 76-page text was released at the Vatican Nov. 30.

Addressing pilgrims at his noon blessing, the pope said the essence of Christian hope was an awareness of God and “the discovery that he has a heart of a good and merciful father. Christ’s life and death gave God’s love a human face,” he said.

Emphasizing a point he made in his encyclical, the pope said modern science holds out much that is good, but “cannot redeem humanity.”

“The development of modern science has increasingly confined faith and hope to a private and individual sphere, in such a way that today it is clear, sometimes dramatically clear, that man and the world need God — the real God — and otherwise remain without hope,” he said.

On Dec. 1, presiding over an evening prayer service in St. Peter’s Basilica, the pope said Advent was the time to understand that Christian hope is not “vague and illogical” but is embodied in Jesus Christ.

The days leading up to Christmas can be a time of spiritual reawakening, a reminder that Christ “does not stop knocking at our door,” he said.

The pope said he tried to make clear in his encyclical that Christianity brought something new to the pagan societies of old, but he added that it also spoke to the “paganism of our days.”

Contemporary paganism, the pope said, is a “nihilism that corrodes hope in the human heart, leading the person to think that nothingness reigns inside and outside of himself: nothing before birth, nothing after death.”

“The Christian perspective, on the contrary, is that hope makes sense as the human response to a loving God, he said.

“What else moves the world forward, if not the trust that God has the last word?” he said.

“This trust is reflected in the hearts of little ones, of the humble, when despite everyday problems and trials they try to do their best and accomplish that little bit of good which, however, in the eyes of God is a great deal: in the family, the workplace, in school, and in various sectors of society,” he said.

Advent is a good time to rediscover hope, read the encyclical, says pope

Pope Benedict XVI signs his encyclical, Spe Salvi (Saved in Hope, on Christian hope), at the Vatican Nov. 30. Archbishop Fernando Filoni, Vatican assistant secretary of state, is at right. (CNS photo/L’OSSERVATORE ROMANO via Reuters)
South Texas community gives immigrant cemetery a touch of dignity

By Paula Goldapp  
Editor, South Texas Catholic

SARITA, Texas (CNS) — There is little evidence of dignity in the deaths of the undocumented men, women, and children found among the South Texas cactus and brush over the past few decades.

Despite the circumstances that prompted them to cross the U.S.-Mexico border and regardless of their legal status in the eyes of the government, Father Piotr Koziel said lending dignity to their final resting place is “the right thing to do.”

Seven years ago the priest made his first trip to Sarita Cemetery, located off a dirt road on the Kenedy Ranch. The site, overgrown with grass and weeds, impacted him in such a way that he recruited others to return and remember those who died in the area but were never identified.

Now each year in preparation for the Nov. 2 feast of All Souls’ Day, a blessing of the graves, a tradition for the Nov. 2 feast of All Saints’ Day, involves a group of students from St. Gertrude School in Kingsville, which is off a dirt road on the Kenedy Ranch in South Texas. (CNS photo/ Paula Goldapp, South Texas Catholic)

Father Piotr Koziel, pastor of St. Gertrude Parish in Kingsville, leads a Nov. 2 blessing of the graves of unidentified undocumented immigrants who died in South Texas after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Members of the Kingsville community cleared brush from Sarita Cemetery, which is off a dirt road on the Kenedy Ranch in South Texas.

Meanwhile, a handful of parishioners made wooden forms in the shape of crosses and then poured concrete to make sturdy headstones to replace wooden ones. The elementary school students from St. Gertrude put a white coat of paint on each new cross.

On Nov. 2, many who had helped with the cleanup attended the blessing. After Scripture readings and a moment of silent prayer, Fr. Koziel blessed each grave with holy water. St. Gertrude students followed him, placing rosaries and flowers on the headstones.

“These are our brothers and sisters,” said Armando Castellano, a junior at Texas A&M and a member of the Catholic student organization and Baptist student union at Texas A&M University in Kingsville.

“Lourdes — conversion and penance — is needed every day,” Bishop Perrier told CNS. He said people can change their behavior, have a conversion of heart and internal reconciliation with the past or with family, and strengthen their relationship with God.

Noting the millions of people who have experienced conversion and cures at Lourdes, he said someone might think, “If all these people experienced that before me, maybe I can experience that myself.”

For those who cannot travel to Lourdes, Bishop Perrier said people can experience the celebrations by linking to the images and live pictures on the jubilee Web site — www.lourdes2008.com.

He added that a novena, which will be available online in English, will be offered especially for those who cannot visit Lourdes. Through the novena, all people around the world can experience the story of Lourdes, said the bishop.

More than 500,000 American Catholics are estimated to visit the sanctuaries at Lourdes annually.

French bishop says people today can identify with St. Bernadette

By Regina Linsky  
WASHINGTON (CNS) — People today can identify with the weaknesses of St. Bernadette Soubirous and the message of her Marian apparitions, said a French bishop whose diocese includes Lourdes.

Everyone has limitations and flaws, Bishop Jacques Perrier of Tarbes and Lourdes said Nov. 27. The eldest of nine children, St. Bernadette was illiterate, and her family was so poor that they lived in a former prison, he said.

But St. Bernadette had a “kind of wisdom” and was “strong in the head,” and Mary chose her, he said.

When the 14-year-old girl was with Mary, she always was confident, Bishop Perrier told Catholic News Service through a translator.

Noting that today people are expected to be successful and make money off of their own experiences, he said St. Bernadette “made a choice to remain poor, and she was always very humble.” St. Bernadette entered religious life in 1862 and remained hidden from the world.

Bishop Perrier was in Washington to discuss the yearlong celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Marian apparitions at Lourdes. The jubilee year opened on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8, and will be celebrated with pilgrimages, missions, conferences, and a papal visit to Lourdes. The events will involve places throughout the world associated with the name of Lourdes and St. Bernadette, including several hundred places in the United States.

On Feb. 11, 1858, St. Bernadette, her sister, and a friend went looking for wood and bones. As she was taking off her stockings and shoes to get ready to cross a canal, she heard a gust of wind and saw a young woman dressed in white. That was the first of 18 apparitions.

The message from Mary at Lourdes — conversion and penance — is needed every day, Bishop Perrier told CNS. He said people can change their behavior, have a conversion of heart and internal reconciliation with the past or with family, and strengthen their relationship with God.

Noting the millions of people who have experienced conversion and cures at Lourdes, he said someone might think, “If all these people experienced that before me, maybe I can experience that myself.”

For those who cannot travel to Lourdes, Bishop Perrier said people can experience the celebrations by linking to the images and live pictures on the jubilee Web site — www.lourdes2008.com.

He added that a novena, which will be available online in French, will be offered especially for those who cannot visit Lourdes.
Imitating Christ’s humility is essential for Christians, pope says

By Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Imitating Christ in his humility is essential for Christian living, Pope Benedict XVI said at his weekly general audience.

It is by staying humble that “the Christian can enter into a relationship with the Lord,” he said.

During his Nov. 21 general audience in St. Peter’s Square, the pope focused his catechism on Aphraates, “an outstanding figure of fourth-century Syriac Christianity.”

This early Christian theologian said “Christian life is centered on imitating Christ, taking up his yoke and following him on the path of the Gospel,” the pope said.

The most essential virtue for a disciple of Christ is the virtue of humility, he said.

He said Aphraates wrote that “if a person’s roots are planted in the earth, his fruits rise up before the Lord.” While the humble person remains grounded, his heart soars toward heaven, he said.

Pope Benedict quoted the fourth-century sage: “God comes close to the person who loves, and it is right to love humility and stay in a condition of humility.”

Those who are humble are “patient, loved, whole, righteous, experts in the good, prudent, serene, knowledgeable, tranquil, peaceful, merciful, open to conversion, benevolent, profound, thoughtful, beautiful and desirable,” the pope said, quoting Aphraates.

Aphraates often depicted Christ as a doctor and sin as a wound that could be healed only through penance, the pope said.

A person who sins and is in need of forgiveness should not hesitate to seek help, the pope said.

A strong faith in God creates in the individual “a temple where Christ himself lives,” he added.

“Therefore, faith makes sincerity possible that one expresses through love toward God and toward one’s neighbor,” he said.

True prayer happens “when Christ is living in the heart of a Christian” who is invited to dedicate himself toward helping those in need, Pope Benedict said.

Aphraates taught that prayer is also visiting the sick and offering comfort to the distraught, he said.

“Let us strive to show charity and forgiveness to all so that our prayers may be strong with the strength of God,” the pope said.
The greatest gift: Christmas Presence

By Jeff Hedglen

I spent part of Thanksgiving weekend standing in a cold rain for nearly five hours. Even though there was a fire going, I was totally drenched. The strange part to this story is that it was a high-light of a weekend.

What made this experience so wonderful is that I was surrounded by an eclectic gathering of family connections: my dad and siblings, along with my stepmother and her children, their spouses and their spouse’s families. All of us were loosely related, but tightly bonded by the shared experience of standing around a campfire on a rain-soaked Thanksgiving Day.

Time together with family is so great, but sometimes we have a tendency to take family for granted. It is experiences like this one that help us remember that the time we spend together is so valuable. But, sometimes the value of time together is highlighted when circumstances don’t allow it. This happened to me when my sister’s new job made it very difficult to get together with her, even during the holidays. This went on for almost two years. In that time I realized how much I had taken our family get-togethers for granted.

On the other hand, sometimes not having what we think we want, helps us realize what we want most. Take for instance the story of my wife’s favorite Christmas. That particular year was a lean one for her family. The five children were told that there would not be very many gifts because of unexpected bills. Instead, she and her siblings were going to put on a Christmas play.

So all during Advent they busied themselves rehearsing and making costumes. They worked hard, spent a lot of time together, and shared a lot of laughs, and a few stressful times as well. When the big day came and they performed, they gave the gift of Christmas to each other by living the story.

My wife says that the biggest gift that year was all the time they got to spend with their mother. Usually her time was taken up with the family business, and as a result there was not a lot of leisure time with the kids. But this particular year, she took time away from the business to write and direct the family production.

The gifts under the tree were meager. Each child got their own hook in the bathroom with a matching towel, wash cloth, and tooth brush in their favorite color; that is all they unwrapped. As my wife was telling me the story, she realized that these were the only Christmas gifts from her childhood that she could remember after all these years. Even though in other years the gifts were more lavish, this year the gifts were more personal, for they were gifts of time, laughter, and being together as a family.

I think we all know that materialism has taken over the celebration of Christ’s birth in our society. But this does not have to be the case in our homes. We can make Christmas be about God becoming a part of an earthly family, and we can celebrate the holiday gathered with the people we love, be they family or friends.

The Scriptures tell us that the first Christmas was very similar to this. An eclectic group of family, friends, and barnyard animals gathered around Jesus. Some people brought him gifts, but the most important gift brought that first Christmas was the gift of presence.

Jesus’ presence in the world and the people present to him reveal the most perfect way to celebrate the holiday: Be present to each other and focus on the presence of Jesus in your life. Doing so makes every Christmas awesome — no matter what is under the tree.

Jeff Hedglen, youth minister at St. Bartholomew Parish in Southwest Fort Worth, is the principal organizer of Camp Fort Worth each summer. Readers with questions can contact Jeff at jeff@stbartsfw.org.
El obispo Vann nos invita ver cuán prominente es el papel que desempeña Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

Queridos Amigos en la Diócesis de Fort Worth,

A comienzar el nuevo año litúrgico, a través de las diversas celebraciones de Adviento, es fácil ver cuán prominente es el papel que desempeña nuestra Madre espiritual la Bienaventurada Virgen María en la vida de la Iglesia. Ya que el Adviento es el tiempo para prepararnos para el nacimiento de Cristo, es muy apropiado que reflexionemos sobre la vida y misión de María, pues es a través de ella que recibimos a nuestro Señor y Salvador Jesucristo.

El 8 de diciembre celebramos la Solemnidad de la Inmaculada Concepción de la Bienaventurada Virgen María, patrona de los Estados Unidos de Norte América. Ella fue concebida sin mancha de pecado original y por eso es el más puro y perfecto vehículo a través del cual nuestro Señor Jesucristo podría venir a nuestro mundo. El miércoles siguiente celebraremos la Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, patrona de todas las Américas. El año pasado, e incluso hace tan solo unas semanas, tuve la oportunidad de visitar la Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en Ciudad de México. Esas han sido las dos experiencias piadosas más importantes de mi vida. Invito a todos a que hagan un esfuerzo por celebrar este día de Fiesta de Nuestra Santísima Madre, participando en una de las celebraciones eucarísticas, procesiones o uniéndose a las oraciones y cantos tradicionales de Las Mañanitas. Esta es en verdad una celebración llena de gracias para todos nosotros.

El Papa Juan Pablo II invitó a que esta celebración sea una para todo el continente americano, y no solo para México, con su Exhortación Apostólica Ecclesia in America. Déjeme compartir esta cita del documento:

Acojo gozosamente la propuesta de los Padres sinnuales de que el día 12 de diciembre se celebre en todo el Continente la fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Madre y Evangelizadora de América. Abribo en mi corazón la firme esperanza de que ella, a cuya intercesión se debe el fortalecimiento de la fe de los primeros discípulos, guíe con su intercesión maternal a la Iglesia en este Continente, alcanzándole la efusión del Espíritu Santo como en la Iglesia naciente, para que la nueva evangelización produzca un espíritu florecimiento de vida cristiana.

Al celebrar este día me deseo que nos enfoquemos en la perspectiva traída a esta fiesta por el Papa Juan Pablo II. María estuvo presente en la primera evangelización en Jerusalén y a través de la intercesión maternal de María, la Nueva Evangelización llegaría a ser más fructífera y eficaz a través de nuestra diócesis.

En esta misma Exhortación Apostólica el Papa Juan Pablo II también nos recordó que:

La aparición de María al indio Juan Diego en la colina del Tepeyac, en el año 1531, tuvo una repercusión decisiva para la evangelización. Este infierno va más allá de los confines de la nación mexicana, alcanzando todo el Continente. Y América… ha reconocido en el rostro mestizo de la Virgen del Tepeyac, en Santa María de Guadalupe, un gran ejemplo de evangelización perfectamente inculcada. Por eso, no sólo en el Centro y en el Sur, sino también en el Norte del Continente, la Virgen de Guadalupe es venerada como Reina de toda América.

La Bienaventurada Virgen María es clave en nuestros esfuerzos por traer el evangelio de Jesucristo al mundo porque ella es, y siempre ha sido, un camino seguro para hacia Jesucristo, el Verbo Encarnado de Dios. A través de todo Texas, desde la época de la primera evangelización, la presencia de la Bienaventurada Virgen María, especialmente bajo el título de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, se ha sentido fuerte y ha sido un camino importante para traer el Evangelio a esta tierra. Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe es un ejemplo hermoso de la perfecta evangelización porque ella representa la unidad entre el evangelio de Jesucristo y la cultura del pueblo a quien el evangelio se proclama, y a quien ella se apareció. La evangelización verdadera necesita penetrar y convertirse en parte de la realidad de aquellos que son evangelizados. La evangelización verdadera ocurre cuando la Buena Nueva de Jesucristo penetra la cultura sin ser aguada, disminuida, y sin reducción alguna del impacto del mensaje del evangelio.

Sabemos que nuestra cultura americana se está evangelizando realmente cuando nosotros como nación comenzamos a darle la bienvenida al extranjero que se encuentra entre nosotros; al migrante que ha venido a nuestra nación en búsqueda de una vida mejor. Cuando nosotros como nación le demos la bienvenida y celebremos la dignidad de cada ser humano, especialmente el no nacido, es entonces cuando podemos proclamar que somos una nación donde el Evangelio ha sido penetrado por la cultura.

Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, patrona de los no nacidos, nos llama a tratar a cada ser humano con la misma alegría, amor y respeto que le ofrecemos al Niño en su vientre. El próximo mes, enero, nos ofrecerá más oportunidades para marchar por la vida con el cuadro de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe acompañándonos. Les invito a que me acompañen en ofrecerle a nuestro Señor Jesús la siguiente oración tomada de las palabras finales del Papa Juan Pablo II en Ecclesia in America:

"Enseñanos a amar a tu Madre, María, como la amaste Tú. Danos fuerza para anunciar con valentía tu Palabra en la tarea de la nueva evangelización, para corroborar la esperanza en el mundo. ¡Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Madre de América, ruega por nosotros!"
Los pueblos necesitan a Dios para tener esperanza, dice el Papa en una nueva encíclica

**CIUDAD DEL VATICANO** (CNS) — En una encíclica sobre la esperanza cristiana, el Papa Benedicto XVI dijo que, sin la fe en Dios, la humanidad queda a merced de las ideologías que pueden conducir a “las formas más grandes de crueldad y violaciones en contra de la justicia”.

El Papa advirtió que en la era moderna se ha reemplazado la creencia en la eterna salvación con un enfoque tecnológico que ofrece oportunidades de bien pero que también abre “posibilidades espantosas para el mal”.

“Pongámoslo de una manera sencilla: El hombre necesita a Dios; de otra manera, se queda sin esperanza”, dijo en su encíclica *Spe Salvi* (sobre la esperanza cristiana), dada a conocer el 30 de noviembre.

En el texto que consta de 76 páginas, se exploró la conexión esencial entre fe y esperanza, a principios del cristianismo, y se enfocó en lo que se llama “crisis de la esperanza cristiana” en tiempos modernos.

En la encíclica se criticó el racionalismo filosófico y el marxismo y se ofreció un perfil breve pero enérgico de santos cristianos, de la antigüedad y de la época moderna, que personificaron la esperanza, incluso cuando se enfrentaron al sufrimiento.

En el Papa también se incluyó una crítica del cristianismo contemporáneo, afirmando que se ha limitado la atención a la salvación individual en lugar de la de todo el mundo, y reduciendo como consecuencia “el horizonte de su esperanza”.

“Como cristianos que somos, nunca debemos limitarnos a preguntar: ¿Cómo puedo salvarme? Lo que debemos preguntar es: ¿Qué puedo hacer para que mis semejantes se salven?”, dijo el Papa.

Ésta es la segunda encíclica del Papa y le sigue a la del año 2006 que es una meditación sobre el amor cristiano.

“Los cristianos que somos, nunca debemos limitarnos a preguntar: ¿Cómo puedo salvarme? Lo que debemos preguntar es: ¿Qué puedo hacer para que mis semejantes se salven?”, dijo el Papa.

La encíclica se examinó cómo mediante el énfasis de la razón y la libertad, representadas en la Revolución Francesa y en la aparición del comunismo, se buscaba estresar la esperanza cristiana.

La redención se veía posible por medio de la ciencia y de programas políticos, y la fe religiosa se descartó como irrelevante y se relegó a la esfera privada.

Al tiempo que abalaba a Karl Marx por su gran habilidad de analizar, el Papa dijo que Marx cometió un error fundamental al olvidar que la libertad humana siempre incluye “la libertad par/ para el mal”, que no se neutraliza con estructuras sociales.

De la misma manera, dijo el Papa, los que creen que el hombre puede ser “redimido” por medio de la ciencia y los avances tecnológicos están equivocados.

“La ciencia puede contribuir enormemente para hacer que el mundo y el género humano sea más humano. Y sin embargo, puede también destruir al género humano y al mundo, menos que sea impulsada por fuerzas que yacen fuera de ella”, dijo el Papa.

El Papa dijo que a pesar de que los cristianos tienen la responsabilidad de trabajar por la justicia, la esperanza de edificar un mundo perfecto aquí y ahora es una ilusión. Las esperanzas por este mundo no pueden por ellas mismas sostener la fe de uno, dijo.

En la segunda parte de la encíclica, se estudió cómo la esperanza cristiana se puede aprender y practicar, particularmente mediante la oración, la aceptación del sufrimiento y la anticipación del juicio divino.

El Papa le llamo a la oración “una escuela de esperanza”, y como ejemplo, destacó al pasar al cardenal vietnamés François Nguyen Van Thuan, que pasó 13 años en prisión, nueve de ellos en encierro solitario.

En “esta situación de aparente y completa falta de esperanza”, el hecho de que podía todavía escuchar a Dios y hablar con él le dio una fuerza creciente de esperanza, dijo el Papa.

Y enfatizó que la oración no debería aislarse y no se debería enfocar en objetivos superficiales; ni tampoco, la gente puede orar en contra de otros, dijo.

“El orar no significa salir de las presentes circunstancias, sino que se debe orar con ellas, dice el Papa. En lugar de eso, los cristianos han sido llamados a sufrir con otros y por otros, y su capacidad de hacerlo depende de la fortaleza de su esperanza interna, dijo.

El Papa dijo que la idea de juicio, específicamente el Juicio Final de vivos y muertos, se relaciona fuertemente con la esperanza cristiana debido a que es una promesa de justicia.

“Yo estoy convencido de que la cuestión de justicia constituye el argumento esencial; o en cualquier caso, el argumento más fuerte a favor de la fe en la vida eterna”, dijo el Papa.

Es imposible que los cristianos crean que las injusticias de la historia sean la última palabra, dijo el Papa.

Sin embargo, el Juicio Final no debe de evocar terror, sino un sentido de responsabilidad, dijo el Papa. Es un momento de esperanza, porque combina la justicia de Dios y la gracia de Dios; pero “la gracia no cancela la justicia”, dijo.

“(La gracia) no es como una esclava lo que limpiaba todo, de tal manera que nada estaba hecho, pero alguien haya hecho en la tierra el tiempo y la eternidad; es una ilusión”, dijo el Papa.

Los malvados, al final, no se sentirán a la mesa del banquete eterno al lado de sus víctimas sin distinción ninguna, como si nada hubiera pasado”, dijo el Papa.

**Por Pedro A. Moreno, OPL**
Director, Instituto Luz de Cristo

**Pedro Moreno es director diocesano del Instituto Luz de Cristo. Sus escritos espirituales han recibido múltiples premios de la Asociación de Periodismo Católico de los Estados Unidos y Canadá. Vive en el norte de Fort Worth con su esposa María Mirta y sus tres hijas María, Patricia y Minagela. Pedro es Laico Dominico.**
Para estadounidenses convertirse en cardenales estuvo ‘al borde’ de ser día más feliz

CIUDAD DEL VATICANO (CNS) — Arrodillarse ante el Papa Benedicto XVI y convertirse en cardenal estuvo “al borde” de ser el día más feliz en la vida de los dos nuevos cardenales estadounidenses. El cardenal Daniel N. DiNardo, de Galveston-Houston, usó la frase “al borde” el 24 de noviembre, pero dijo que tenía que ser honesto: “El día más feliz de mi vida fue el día que, como obispo, ordené a mi primer sacerdote. Ningún día jamás probablemente iguale eso”.

El cardenal John P. Foley, gran maestro de los Caballeros del Santo Sepulcro, también usó la frase “al borde”, pero dijo: “El día más feliz fue el día en que tuve la ordenación como sacerdote. Eso es. Sigo diciendo que nunca he tenido un día infeliz como sacerdote y lo digo en serio”.

Los dos nuevos cardenales estadounidenses hablaron con reporteros inmediatamente después de asistir a una recepción en su honor en el Pontificio Colegio Norteamericano en Roma. El ambiente era alegre; el cardenal DiNardo explicó que él había tenido la esperanza de estar “muy compuesto” al arrodillarse ante el papa, pero que su nuevo maestro de los Caballeros del Santo Sepulcro, gran maestro John P. Foley, dijo que estaba “al borde”.

La recepción en el Colegio Norteamericano el 24 de noviembre, seminariales estadounidenses sirvieron como mujeres, camareros y entretenedores mientras miles de peregrinos estadounidenses estaban parados en línea para felicitar a los nuevos cardenales.

“Yo le envié un mensaje de correo electrónico a mi esposa en el trabajo y dijo: ‘No creas que estoy loca, pero necesitamos ir a Roma’, dijo ella sobre cuando el viaje estaba siendo organizado. “Estamos viendo la historia y es emocionante ser parte de ella. Algún día nuestro arzobispo podría ser papa”.

El papa pidió a los peregrinos que continuaran ofreciendo a los nuevos cardenales “amistad, cariño y oraciones, ayudándoles a continuar fielmente sirviéndole a la iglesia y ofreciendo un creciente testimonio abundante de amor”.

“Según los nuevos cardenales aceptan la carga de este puesto, estoy confiado que ellos serán apoyados por sus oraciones constantes y la cooperación en sus esfuerzos para edificar el cuerpo de Cristo en la unidad, la santidad y la paz”, dijo el Papa.

Avances científicos, éticos vistos en nuevos estudios de células madre

Por Nancy Frazier O’Brien

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Tanto científicos como éticos elogian como avances dos estudios que demuestran que las células humanas de piel pueden ser reprogramadas para funcionar tan eficazmente como las células madre embrionarias, negando así la necesidad de destruir embriones en nombre de la ciencia.

Estudios separados de equipos dirigidos por Shinya Yamanaka, de la Universidad de Kyoto, en Japón, y Junying Yu y James Thomson, de la Universidad de Wisconsin en Madison, fueron publicados respectivamente en la Internet el 20 de noviembre por las publicaciones Cell y Science.

“Los métodos esbozados en estos documentos conforman completamente lo que hemos tenido la esperanza de ver durante algún tiempo”, dice una declaración del Centro Nacional Católico de Bioética en Philadelphia.

“Tales estrategias deben continuar siendo seguidas y promovidas fuertemente, ya que deben ayudar a dirigir el campo completo de la investigación usando células madre hacia una dirección ética más explícita al evadir el atolladero moral asociado con destruir embriones humanos”, añade. Añadiendo cuatro genes a las células de piel, los científicos pudieron crear células madre que aparean genéticamente el donante y tienen la capacidad de convertirse en cualquiera de los 220 tipos de células del cuerpo humano.

“Las células inducidas hacen todo lo que hacen las células madre embrionarias”, dijo Thomson en un comunicado de prensa de la universidad. El aisló las primeras células madre embrionarias en 1998. “Eso cambiará totalmente el campo”.

Thomson hizo un llamado a los científicos a continuar la investigación involucrando la destrucción de embriones humanos. Más estudios necesarios para asegurar que las células recién hechas “no se diferencien de las células madre embrionarias de una manera significativa clínicamente o inesperada”, dijo, “por lo que veo tiempo de continuar la investigación usando células madre embrionarias”.

Por el regalo de sus sotanas rojas nuevas y preguntó: “A propósito, ¿me veo bien?”.

El Papa Benedicto se reunió el 26 de noviembre con los nuevos cardenales, los miembros de sus familias y los peregrinos que vinieron a Roma para las celebraciones.
Vatican official says stem-cell studies show science can be ethical

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Recent studies showing that human skin cells can be reprogrammed to function as stem cells demonstrate that scientific progress can be achieved without violating basic ethical norms, said Bishop Elio Sgreccia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

“If this technique is validated, it would be a historic discovery,” the bishop told Vatican Radio in late November.

Separate studies from teams in Japan and in the United States demonstrating success in creating stem cells without using and destroying human embryos were published online Nov. 20 by two scientific journals.

By adding four genes to human skin cells, the scientists were able to create stem cells that genetically match the donor and have the ability to become any of the 202 types of cells in the human body.

The church was “not happy when there’s some kind of negotiation going on in the Middle East,” said Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar for the archdiocese. Bishop Madden previously served as associate secretary general of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and director of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine office in Jerusalem. He said the lack of strong leadership from the United States in recent years has been a contributing reason the peace process has stalled. He was hopeful the U.S.-led Annapolis conference would change that. The conference and related meetings in Jerusalem. He said the lack of strong leadership from the United States in recent years has been a contributing reason the peace process has stalled. He was hopeful the U.S.-led Annapolis conference would change that.

Pope offers prayers for families of AIDS victims

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY(CNS) — Pope Benedict XVI offered his prayers for the families of the estimated 2.1 million people who have died of AIDS this year, and he asked all people to work to end discrimination against those living with AIDS and HIV.

At the end of his Nov. 28 general audience, the pope spoke about the Dec. 1 commemoration of World AIDS Day.

“I am spiritually close to those who suffer because of this terrible disease and their families, especially those who have lost a relative,” the pope said. “I assure all of them of my prayers.

“In addition, I want to exhort all people of good will to multiply their efforts to stop the spread of the HIV virus, to oppose the scorn which often strikes those who are afflicted with it and to take care of the sick, especially when they are still youngsters,” he said.

According to figures released Nov. 20 by UNAIDS, “global HIV prevalence — the percentage of people living with HIV — has leveled off” and the number of new infections each year has fallen.

UNAIDS estimated that in 2007 about 33.2 million people were living with HIV, 2.5 million became infected, and 2.1 million died of AIDS.
Fr. Ted explains why some rationales may not yield to the new discoveries

Several astute commentators have noted recently how the whole field of embryonic stem-cell research seems to serve as a kind of “hedge” for abortion. In the same way that a garden gets a hedge placed around it in order to protect it, embryonic stem cells are becoming a place holder for abortion.

Scientists who advocate the destruction of human embryos have never really taken the moral concerns very seriously because the creed they subscribe to is the so-called “scientific imperative.” Namely, that science must go forward, as if it were the highest good. It must be able to do whatever it wants, wherever it wants, whenever it wants, and nobody should be pushing ethical viewpoints to limit what researchers do.

That, of course, is a completely untenable position because we regulate what scientists do all the time. The very mechanism by which we disperse federal money puts all kinds of checks and balances on what researchers can do, and there are certain types of research like germ warfare studies or nuclear bomb development that the government strictly regulates already.

Other kinds of research are criminal, such as performing medical experiments on patients who don’t give their consent.

The idea that we have to allow science to do whatever it wants is little more than “pie-in-the-sky” wishful thinking.

The third reason embryo-destructive research will likely be promoted has to do with abortion.

Several astute commentators have noted recently how the whole field of embryonic stem-cell research seems to serve as a kind of “hedge” for abortion. In the same way that a garden gets a hedge placed around it in order to protect it, embryonic stem cells are becoming a place holder for abortion.

If embryo killing becomes incorporated into the way we cure illnesses and maintain our health as a society, then abortion on demand will be more likely to curry favor in our culture as well. If those trying to protect embryos carry the day, pro-abortionists fear that the same ethical arguments will prevail against abortion.

Several factors will therefore influence how this major new stem-cell discovery plays out in the future. One thing is clear, however: Those renegade researchers, law-makers, and Hollywood personalities who have long dismissed ethical concerns and advocated human embryo destruction now find themselves at an important juncture because of this breakthrough.

We can only hope that in the wake of this discovery, the siren call of harvesting human embryos will cease ringing in their ears and allow for a new era of ethical science in our society.

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the Diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts, and serves as the Director of Education at the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia.

By Jean Denton
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Rwandan woman says God saved her from genocide to be a Witness to Forgiveness

Editor's note: Readers should be aware that the following story contains descriptions of horrible violence.

By Beth Griffin
Catholic News Service
Marykoll, New York

D ativa Nyangezi Ngaboysonga, 34, believes that she survived the 1994 killings in Rwanda that claimed the lives of 800,000 of her countrymen because God wanted her to be a living witness to the power of forgiveness.

"Death skipped over me five separate times during the genocide. I thought my time was up, but here I am doing what God has spared me for," she said Nov. 13.

She is now superintendent of Rwanda’s Kigali Central Prison, where one-third of the inmates are serving time for participating in the genocide.

Ngaboysonga spoke at Marykoll headquarters during a 10-day trip to visit prisons in New York.

Joining her at Marykoll were Father Ron Lemmert, a New York archdiocesan priest and a chaplain at Sing Sing state prison in Ossining, who was one of three prison chaplains who visited Rwanda in July, and the Rev. Petero Sabune, an Episcopal chaplain at Sing Sing.

Ngaboysonga said that when the government-encouraged genocide began in April 1994, she took refuge in a crowded church. "It was packed," she said. "Everyone was fighting to get in. The priests and nuns came and helped us prepare for death, but I didn’t think we would die."

There was not enough room in the church, so Ngaboysonga gave her space to her aunt and young nephew. After she left, she said, "the killers came, shooting and throwing grenades. The place we thought was a sanctuary is where they were killed."'

Chased by the gunmen, she ran with four boys, but could not keep up with them. "I fell. The killers passed me and killed the boys. I thought they would hunt me and kill me." Ngaboysonga said that she prayed to God: "If you spare me, I’ll do whatever you want. I will serve you and even try to serve these people.”

After hiding for five days in a forest and escaping a snake attack, she met up with other survivors, including members of her family. But they were captured by soldiers, who took whatever possessions they had and made them strip naked.

Ngaboysonga described a daylong horror in which her father and aunt were among those tortured, killed and mutilated in front of her. Others were subjected to random amputations, rape, and grenade detonations, she said.

"They said they wanted to see what a Tutsi baby looked like, so they cut a baby from a pregnant woman next to me and threw it on the ground. The mother bled to death," she said.

Ngaboysonga said that each time it seemed to be her turn to be attacked, a gun-toting soldier told the others, "She’s mine. I’ll kill her later." She said, "I prayed to be killed quickly.”

When that soldier removed her from the group, she managed to escape and fled in a downpour to neighboring Burundi. She was eventually helped by international relief groups.

After the killing ended, she returned to Rwanda, where a Canadian religious sister who was a former teacher of hers asked her to help as an interpreter for the child soldiers who had been captured and imprisoned.

She was reluctant, but she remembered the promise she had made to God and agreed to do so. She took care of 448 child soldiers.

"I’m here to show you the love I’ve found since God spared me," she said she told them.

The children eventually began to call her “Mama.” "I started to teach them that they had to start to ask for forgiveness," she said. All of the children were released and returned to their families.

Ngaboysonga took a job in the Kigali Central Prison and progressed to superintendent, despite her age and gender.

She said some people do not understand how she can work for people who tried to kill her.

"It’s possible to change their hearts," she said. "We have to build a society and try to rise above [the violence]. The Hutus and Tutsis lived together for centuries before colonial times. Now we need to find the love that cuts across all the differences."

Part of the solution is the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, established by the Rwandan government that came to power after the genocide. The process includes perpetrators confessing to their crimes and seeking forgiveness from survivors and victims’ families.

"You start teaching it in prison, and everyone in the prison takes part," she said.

Her experience gives her credibility with the inmates, she said. "I am a walking epistle. People see what I do, and they are curious, and it gives me an opportunity to talk about forgiveness. When I leave, they continue to discuss it — and sometimes you see prisoners crying for the first time in a long time. It must be God, because I can’t do what I do by myself."

Fr. Lemmert described visiting a reconciliation village in Rwanda where the “killers are building houses for the families of victims and living side by side with them.”

He said, "They could not keep the participants in the genocide locked up forever, so they have placed great emphasis on getting them to accept responsibility for their actions, so they can be rehabilitated.”

Ngaboysonga’s message and method had particular resonance for Rev. Sabune. He is a Ugandan whose brother was killed by that country’s dictator, Idi Amin. In introducing her, and translating Ngaboysonga’s comments from their native Kinyarwanda, he said it had taken him 20 years to forgive Amin.

"Talking about forgiveness is part and parcel of what we do at Sing Sing, but if we don’t forgive and get reconciled, we don’t get anywhere," he said.

Lucas Police comments on the release of the movie “The Golden Compass” and the series of books by atheist author Philip Pullman, which seek to draw children away from God.

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