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Sister Mary Elizabeth Gintling has been fighting poverty in and around Maryland for 60 years. She continues her work, even at 89 years old. For the story, click the picture.

Bishop releases figures on sexual abuse by priests

By Jane Harriman
Staff reporter

Since the 1950s, the Diocese of Wilmington has received 79 allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests. The allegations have been substantiated or found credible against 28 priests: 19 priests of this diocese, six religious-order priests, and three priests from other dioceses. All the priests are no longer functioning as priests.

[Read the full story.](#)

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Bishop releases figures on sexual abuse by priests in last 50 years

By Jane Harriman
Staff reporter

Since the 1950s, the Diocese of Wilmington has received 79 allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests. The allegations have been substantiated or found credible against 28 priests: 19 priests of this diocese, six religious-order priests, and three priests from other dioceses. All the priests are no longer functioning as priests.

Those are among the findings of a review of 50 years of diocesan records, results of which are released today in a letter from Bishop Saltarelli to the people of the diocese. The letter can be found on page 3.

The bishop does not name any of the 28 priests in his letter.

During the 50-year period, the diocese paid \$1,641,660 in settlements and victim assistance, of which \$950,000 was covered by insurance, the bishop writes in the letter; the remaining \$691,660, he writes, came from diocesan investment funds. No money came from "the donations of the faithful in the Sunday collection or from gifts to the Annual Catholic Appeal," according to the bishop. Legal fees amounted to just under \$198,000, while the cost of treating offending priests, \$186,854, came from the diocesan Priests' Retirement and Welfare Fund.

With the letter, the bishop is giving an advance look at what will be reported about the Diocese of Wilmington

in a nationwide survey of dioceses by John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. The survey's results are expected to be made public Feb. 27.

Since 1985, the bishop writes, the diocese has had a policy of removing from ministry any priest against whom a credible allegation was made. He did not say how many of the credible allegations have been received since then.

The 79 complaints in the past 50 years came from "60 individuals [who] either identified themselves as victims or were named by family or relatives as victims," the bishop writes.

According to the letter, of the 28 priests against whom allegations were substantiated or found credible:

■ 19 were priests of the Diocese of Wilmington. Of those, nine are deceased, and the others have been removed from active ministry. "The allegations against two of these priests related to abuse which occurred in another diocese, before the priest was ordained," the bishop writes. According to a recent independent audit of the diocese, five of the priests live outside the diocese.

■ Three were priests from other dioceses who were serving in the Diocese of Wilmington; they were removed from ministry here and their bishops informed of the action.

■ Complaints against six

In the last 50 years:

28 priests working in the diocese have had substantiated or credible allegations of sexual abuse involving minors.

19 substantiated or credible allegations involved diocesan priests, six involved religious-order priests, and three involved priests from other dioceses.

368 diocesan priests have served the diocese along with 347 religious-order priests.

\$1.64 million has been spent by the diocese in settlements and victim assistance.

religious-order priests serving in Wilmington were found to be credible. The allegations were reported to their superiors and they were removed from ministry.

The bishop writes that during the 50-year period, 368 diocesan priests (from Wilmington and other dioceses) and 347 religious-order priests have served the diocese.

Though the bishop's letter does not name any priests, the diocese identified three of the diocesan priests last January when, after a recommendation from the bishop's lay review board, two priests resigned and the third was removed from ministry.

The bishop alludes to one of those cases in his letter: "In only one case in the past 20 years, and based on circumstances and strong recommendations of a psychiatrist at the time, was a priest accused of sexual abuse allowed to return to ministry after treatment. But even in this

case, when many years later we applied the norms recently adopted by the United States bishops and approved by the Vatican, the priest was removed from ministry."

Three other priests have been previously identified in published reports about legal action against them.

The diocese has reported all the names to civil authorities, said spokesman Bob Krebs, but is not releasing any additional names to the public "in order to honor the privacy of those involved, including the victims."

The bishop writes that his letter is an effort to make good on the promise of the U.S. bishops "to be as open as possible with you, the faithful of the church, and with the public at large regarding any abuse which has occurred at the hands of clergy and/or other church personnel."

He apologizes "on behalf of the church" for the sexual abuse scandal and offers reassurance about the

future: "We continue to take all prudent and necessary steps to prevent even one more abuse case. ... We continue to reach out pastorally, spiritually and emotionally to those who have suffered the terrible crime of abuse. We are committed to healing and reconciliation in every possible way."

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Statement from Bishop Saltarelli on clergy sexual abuse in last 50 years

My Dear People:

For nearly two years now the media has been reporting the scandal of abuse of minors by Roman Catholic clergy. The abuse of children by priests and other clergy is shocking and reprehensible. Victims and their families have suffered devastating and, in many instances, long-lasting



From the bishop

the bishops of the United States adopted the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" in June of 2002. The Charter clearly states the church's commitment to deal appropriately and effectively with cases of sexual abuse of minors by priests and deacons and other church personnel. The American bishops promised to reach out to victims and their families and recommitted themselves to care for the pastoral, spiritual, and emotional well-being of those who have suffered in any way by the abuse of clergy.

As part of their response to the scandal, the bishops also promised to be as open as possible with you, the faithful of the church, and with the public at large, regarding any abuse which has occurred at the hands of clergy and/or other church personnel, and committed to a study "of the

damage. The loss of trust in the church is unprecedented.

In response to these terrible events, and to help victims and their families, and to prevent further abuse,

nature and the scope of the problem in the Church in the United States, including data and statistics on perpetrators and victims" ("Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," Article 9).

For the past several months this diocese, along with every other diocese in the country, has combed its records and compiled information on the numbers of priests who have been accused of sexual abuse of minors over the past 50 years. We have done this at the direction of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and in response to a survey conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, a survey commissioned by the United States bishops.

A report from the John Jay College study will be released in late February which will provide data about sexual abuse perpetrated by priests and other church personnel for the entire country over the last 50 years. In anticipation of that report and in keeping with my commitment to inform you and the public about data gathered in the Diocese of Wilmington on sexual abuse of minors, I want to share with you the results of our own findings.

Our findings cover all allegations we know of regarding sexual abuse by priests in this diocese, dating back to the 1950s. They are the product of months of careful study and research of our records and of painful interviews with victims and their families who have come forward to tell us of the tragic events which have so terribly impacted their lives.

A review of the data reveals that during the last 50 years, 79 complaints or allegations of sexual abuse of minors were received by the diocese against clergy, involving 23 diocesan priests, three priests from other dioceses ministering here, and

six religious order priests serving in our diocese. Sixty individuals either identified themselves as victims or were named by family or relatives as victims.

Nineteen priests of our diocese were found to have substantiated or credible allegations of sexual abuse involving minors. None of these priests is in active ministry today. Nine of the accused priests are deceased. The allegations against two of these priests related to abuse which occurred in another diocese, before the priest was ordained.

In that same 50-year period, three priests from other dioceses ministering in our diocese were accused and found to have a substantiated or credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor against them. These priests were removed from ministry and our action was reported to their respective bishops. None of the abuses in these three cases occurred in the Diocese of Wilmington. Also in that same 50-year period our records indicate six complaints against religious-order priests were found to be credible. The allegations were reported to their superiors and the priests were also removed from ministry in our diocese.

Between 1950 and the end of 2003, a total of 368 diocesan priests served the people of this diocese, along with 92 permanent deacons. Three-hundred-forty seven religious order priests also served our diocese in parochial, educational, and other ministries during this period.

Since 1985 it has been the policy of this diocese to remove any priest or deacon from ministry against whom a credible allegation of child sexual abuse has been made. In only one case during the past 20 years, and based on the circumstances and strong psychiatric recommendations

at the time, was a priest accused of sexual abuse allowed to return to ministry after treatment. But even in this case, when many years later we applied the norms recently adopted by the United States bishops and approved by the Vatican, the priest was removed from ministry.

It is the policy of the diocese that any priest removed from ministry is not permitted to celebrate the sacraments, wear the Roman collar, or present himself as a priest. In keeping with the directives of the Charter we advise the Vatican of our removal of clergy and pursue dismissal from the ordained state when appropriate.

Financial impact

The review of our records for these past 50 years reveals that a total of \$1,641,660 has been spent in settlements and victim assistance, with \$950,000 of that amount paid by insurance. The difference between what insurance paid and the total outlay was paid out of diocesan investment funds. No monies from the donations of the faithful in the Sunday collection or from gifts to the Annual Catholic Appeal have been used to pay these expenses. Legal fees incurred by the diocese in connection with cases involving sexual abuse of minors have amounted to just under \$198,000. The diocese also has paid \$186,854 from its Priests' Retirement and Welfare Fund for treatment of offending priests.

The diocese investigates every allegation of clergy abuse of minors and has a policy to disclose to civil authority. And as you know from previous statements from me and from releases by the diocese to the media, we have had in place since the summer of 2002 a Diocesan Review Board which advises me in the assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors, and in my determination of suitability for ministry of accused priests. The Review Board also regularly reviews diocesan policies and procedures for dealing with sexual

abuse of minors. The Review Board is made up of highly respected individuals including retired judges, health-care professionals, an individual experienced in treating abused children, and other respected men and women from throughout the diocese.

The independent auditors retained by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recently completed their review of the diocese's compliance with the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" and commended us particularly on the work of our Review Board. I am grateful to the members of the board for the seriousness with which they have approached their responsibilities and for their commitment to help our local church to effectively address the scandal of abuse of children.

Prevention efforts

We continue to take all prudent and necessary steps to prevent even one more instance of abuse. Our priests, deacons, teachers, employees, and volunteers who are in contact with minors are required to submit to a criminal background check. Ethical standards of behavior for all church personnel and volunteers have been adopted, and education and training about appropriate behaviors with children and the signs of child molestation are conducted at both parish and diocesan levels. Over 9,500 individuals have had background checks. Every priest and deacon is required to carefully review and sign off on the ethical standards adopted by the diocese. Safe environment policies to protect our children must be adopted and enforced in all our parishes, schools, and other church institutions. Candidates for the seminary are carefully screened before admission to studies and there are ongoing educational and formational programs for seminarians, priests, and deacons.

Our commitment to protect our children and to prevent any further instances of abuse is firm. We continue to reach out pastorally, spiritual-

ly, and emotionally to those who have suffered the terrible crime of abuse. We are committed to work toward healing and reconciliation in every possible way.

My dear people, I am profoundly saddened to make this report to you. I am disturbed and ashamed by the number of priests who were found to have abused minors in the past 50 years. Abuse of a child is a crime and a grave sin. I am deeply distressed by the pain and the anguish suffered by victims and their families. I pray for them every day and I am resolved to help them as best I can. But I must also commend and hold up for your acknowledgement the vast majority of my brother priests who have not offended, and who every day seek to do the will of the Lord and to serve you. For them I also pray that they not be discouraged by these revelations, but that they may be resolute in living out their holy vocation.

And to you, God's faithful and holy people, I offer again, on behalf of the church, my apology for the scandal revealed these past couple of years. I know that you too face regularly the questions and perhaps sometimes ridicule from neighbors, friends, and even family. I am thankful for your steadfast love for the church. I am edified by your daily witness of strong faith. I am grateful for the wonderful affirmation and support you give to me and to your priests.

I commit myself again to do all in my power to honestly address the issues and to adopt whatever policies and procedures seem reasonable to prevent abuse happening again. I ask for your prayers for those who are doing their best to deal with this pain in their lives and for their families.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ *Michael A. Saltarelli*

Most Reverend Michael A. Saltarelli
Bishop of Wilmington

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Catechetical Weekend set for Jan. 23-25

OCEAN CITY, Md. — Religious educators and family-life leaders from across the diocese will receive tips on how to study, live and pray the Scriptures during an annual diocesan conference.

The Conference for Catechetical and Family Life Leaders will be held Jan. 23-25 at the Clarion Resort Fountainebleau Hotel in Ocean City.

Mercy Sister Judith

Schubert will speak the morning of Jan. 24 on how modern scholars try to improve their understanding of the Scriptures. Sister Schubert, professor of religious studies at Georgian Court College in Lakewood, N.J., has studied at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem and has a doctorate in New Testament studies from Fordham University.

That afternoon, Father Raymond Kemp will look at

the ethical demands that the Scriptures place on Christians. Father Kemp is a senior fellow at Woodstock Theological Center in Washington, D.C., and was pastor of two historic African-American parishes in Washington, D.C.: St. Augustine and Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian.

The morning of Jan. 25, Father Jim Clarke will focus on using the Scriptures as a source of prayer. Father

Clarke is director of spiritual formation and chairman of the Spiritual Theology Department at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, Calif.

The conference opens Jan. 23 with registration and a reception. Mass and a banquet are planned the evening of Jan. 24.

Registration costs \$120. For more information or to register, call 573-3130 or visit www.cdow.org/catecheticalwknd.html.

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Guatemalan bishop slated to speak at conference

By Jane Harriman
Staff reporter

Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini from Wilmington's sister Diocese of San Marcos in Guatemala will be the keynote speaker at the eighth annual Charity and Justice Conference sponsored by Catholic Charities' Office of Parish Social Ministry.

The conference will be held March 6 beginning at 9:30 a.m. at the Modern Maturity Center in Dover. Bishop Saltarelli and Bishop Ramazzini will celebrate Mass at 4:30 to end the day.

Bishop Ramazzini also will conduct discussion sessions in the morning and afternoon. Other sessions to be repeated in the morning and afternoon will focus on:

■ "Welcoming the Stranger" and "Strangers No Longer." Kevin Appleby,



Bishop Ramazzini

director of Migration and Refugee Policy at the U.S. bishops' Migration and Refugee Office, will discuss the bishops' statements on migration.

■ "Free Trade vs. Fair Trade." Karen Smith of Catholic Relief Services will

describe the difference between free and fair trade and explain CAFTA, the Central American Free Trade Agreement, and its impact on countries like Guatemala.

■ "Human Trafficking — Today's Slavery." Laurie Latuda of the bishops' office will discuss what can be done to help victims of one of the fastest growing international crimes

today.

In the morning only, Peggy Heins of Wilmington, author of "Becoming a Community of Salt and Light," will explain the principles of Catholic social teaching.

In the afternoon only, a panel of tenant advocates will discuss how families with one full-time minimum-wage earner struggle to afford housing in the United States.

Registration, \$25 for adults and \$15 for youth, covers lunch and must be made by Feb. 13. Checks, payable to Catholic Charities, should be sent to Catholic Charities: Parish Social Ministry, P.O. Box 2610, Wilmington, Del. 19805.

For scholarships, more information, or for special needs (dietary, signing, translation, wheelchair, etc.) call 655-9624.

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Salisbury sister wages own war on poverty: Sister Mary Elizabeth Gintling looks back on 60-year service

By John McCafferty

SALISBURY, Md. — Forty years ago last week, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a "war on

poverty." Since then, billions of dollars have been spent on programs in search of a solution, yet the cycle of poverty is as bad today as it was 40 years

ago.

In 2002, 34.8 million people in this country were living in poverty — that was 12.4 percent of the population and 1.4 million more

than the year before. Of the newly impoverished, nearly half were children.

There is no shortage of opinions and theories about why poverty persists in the

United States. As the late Mother Teresa once said, "it is very fashionable to talk about the poor. Unfortunately, it is not fashionable to talk with them."

Like Mother Teresa, another Catholic nun has spent much of her life helping victims of poverty. In 1966, two years after President Johnson's speech, Sister Mary Elizabeth Gintling founded the Joseph House, a ministry for the poor, in Baltimore; she later moved it to Salisbury. She established her own religious community, the Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary, after Mother Teresa herself advised her to get nuns to help with her mission.

To the poor along the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware and Virginia, Sister Elizabeth is a life-saver. That's why many people here call her the Mother Teresa of Salisbury.

On Dec. 31, the small, gray-haired nun turned 89. Like the four other sisters in her order who have taken vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, plus five sisters in training, she wears a distinctive blue habit and a carved wooden crucifix around her neck. In recent years she has survived a heart attack, stroke, severe arthritis, and a near-fatal fall.

Tethered to an oxygen tank as she battles emphysema, she walks slowly and with a cane, helped by Sister Marilyn Bouchard, who lives with her at their novitiate in Princess Anne, 15 miles south of Salisbury. Sister Marilyn drives Sister Elizabeth daily to the Joseph House convent and to Mass at St. Francis de Sales Church in Salisbury,



Photo by Dee Marvin

Sister Mary Elizabeth Gintling founded the Joseph House, a ministry for the poor in the Lower Shore areas of Maryland, Delaware and Virginia. She decided as a child in Baltimore that battling poverty would be her life's work.

the closest Catholic church.

She's "no expert" on the nation's poverty problem, Sister Elizabeth said, but after 60 years of working with the poor (the first 21 as a member of the Little Sisters of the Poor), she certainly has an opinion.

"I believe much of our poverty can be traced to greed," she says. "It's the name of the game today. Look at all the corporate scandals we've had lately. Many rich people inherit a fortune and did nothing to earn it. ... We can't eliminate poverty when a small percentage of people have most of the wealth. There's no way you can divide what's left and not have any poor."

Unlike those who get jobs with help from agencies like Joseph House, many poor people aren't so lucky, Sister Elizabeth said.

"Often, the poor don't know how to get a job. Many are born with little or no ambition and see none in their surroundings. When you describe it to them, they can't comprehend it. They're always going to depend on others. That's one thing you have to learn when you work with the poor."

An early vision

Sister Elizabeth, born Mae Gintling, got her first glimpse of poverty at age 6 while walking past decaying houses near her Baltimore home. She vowed to help the poor when she moved with her parents and four brothers to North Point, Md. After high school she studied at Mercy Hospital's Nursing School in Baltimore and worked as a public health nurse for the city.

In 1943 she joined the Little Sisters of the Poor, changing her name to Sister Armel de la Providence during her novitiate in France.

For the next 21 years she provided nursing care for the poor and elderly in Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, Louisville and New York City. Convinced she could do more if she lived with the poor and learned their problems, she left the Little Sisters in 1964 to begin a new life in Baltimore's inner city.

At first, she worked alone out of a church basement and raised funds by speaking at parish and club meetings about the people she met and the conditions she saw. She remembers sharing information about Baltimore's poor with a young city social worker who became U.S. Sen. Barbara Mikulski.

When a local businessman donated a Baltimore row house, Gintling turned it into the Joseph House, in honor of St. Joseph, provider of the Holy Family. It was to be the first of several Joseph House locations in Baltimore. Within a few years, her efforts had grown into a major operation that offered emergency aid, a soup kitchen, literacy training, home nursing care, marriage counseling, a program for ex-offenders, a Montessori school for underprivileged children, and a gift shop.

In 1974 Gintling obtained her church's blessing to re-enter religious life and form the Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary with another woman, Patricia Guidera. She also took her new name, Sister Mary Elizabeth.

In 1978 she opened a

religious book and gift shop in Ocean City to raise money, and discovered many poor people living in nearby rural areas. Deciding to help them, she moved to Salisbury. In 1988 she reopened a smaller mission in Baltimore until it closed three years ago.

"At first, we were not welcome in Salisbury," she said. "People told us there were no poor people here and we should go elsewhere. We decided to ignore them and do what we could for the poor. Gradually, as people learned what we were doing, they treated us more kindly."

Sister Elizabeth now has many friends and admirers in the area. "She's an amazing lady who enjoys life, has a tremendous sense of humor and is always ahead of everyone else's thinking," said Virginia B. Layfield, former president and CEO of Peninsula Regional Medical Center.

Adds David Pogge, president of Mountaire Farms, a poultry production and distribution firm: "Sister Elizabeth is a woman with a common-sense approach to life that I find refreshing. She's very hard to turn down."

Today, Sister Elizabeth said she feels "totally at home" in Salisbury. Most Joseph House volunteers live in the area and many local organizations help with donations and annual fund-raising events.

"Our biggest accomplishment," she said, "is the community spirit that pervades Salisbury through the work of our volunteers.

People tell me they're proud of what we do even though they themselves are not directly involved with our mission."

Help from others

Unlike most agencies for the needy, Joseph House does not accept government funds. It succeeds, Sister Elizabeth said, because of the generosity of its volunteers and contributors. Some of Joseph House's hundreds of volunteers visit the homebound to help them with prescriptions, errands, bathing and household tasks. Contributions come mainly from readers of a monthly newsletter that Sister Elizabeth started in the 1960s. It's mailed to donors and posted on the Joseph House website (www.the-josephhouse.org).

The heart of the Joseph House mission is its Crisis Center, a refurbished warehouse donated by Campbell Soup Co. The center, which serves the entire Lower Shore area of Maryland, Delaware and Virginia, is usually the last resort for those who have nowhere else to go for help.

Men and women show up three days a week for hot meals, groceries, financial assistance, and help finding jobs and places to stay. A hospitality room is open for the homeless Mondays through Fridays. Many "clients," as the poor are called, cannot read or write, have mental problems, are victims of spousal or substance abuse, are underemployed or unemployed, or were released from prison.

The center disburses

about \$5,000 a week to 35-40 families and refers those who need special help to other agencies.

"We don't just give away money or food rations," Sister Elizabeth said. "People have to convince us that they need it."

An offshoot of the Joseph House, developed with the help of the Little Sisters, is the Village of Hope, which operates independently and accepts government and United Way funds. It provides transitional housing and a medical clinic to area residents who are economically disadvantaged.

Several years ago, Mountaire Farms donated a vacant building, equipment and engineering help in support of Sister Elizabeth's latest project, the Joseph House Workshop.

Local citizens put together a three-week job-readiness program to help the homeless, unemployed and underemployed. The program provides personal counseling and mentoring and covers 14 values needed for employment readiness, such as honesty, teamwork, courtesy, self-discipline, and personal hygiene. Classes have been held in an old trailer, but the former Mountaire building is being refurbished to accommodate future students with live-in quarters.

If progress for this project has been slow, Sister Elizabeth said, it's because donations to Joseph House have been down the past two years because of the poor economy.

That's just one challenge Sister Elizabeth faces.

Since she started Joseph House 40 years ago, she has seen the pool of Catholic nuns available to help the poor decline sharply. In 1965 there were nearly 180,000 sisters in the U.S. Today, there are less than 64,000 and 55 percent of them are over 70.

Another challenge is the increasing cost of running the organization. "In Baltimore, we used to be able to visit the poor by walking or taking a bus," she said. "Many poor people here live in rural areas and we need cars to reach them. We also used to get free medical help. Today, we pay thousands of dollars each year for medical and car insurance."

Still, Sister Elizabeth doesn't really worry about money.

"The really difficult part of my job has been working with a silent partner. God provides — not if we need it but if he thinks we should have it."

Crisis Center director David Heininger has heard that philosophy more than once. "Her answer to all our needs is, 'Don't worry. God will provide' and he does. She has taught me that happiness comes not from working for worldly profit but for love."

Sister Elizabeth officially retired as Superior General of the Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary in December 2002, but her successor, Sister Connie Ladd, doubts she'll ever really retire. "She's irreplaceable. She'll die with her boots on helping the poor."

John McCafferty is a freelance correspondent.

After health trials, teen eyes bright future: Kasey Milliski carries positive attitude to college

By John Knebels
Special to The Dialog

If it were not for her mom occasionally asking how she felt, no one would have known whether or not Kasey Milliski was in a state of discomfort.

But Coleen Milliski relied on her maternal instincts to know when to ask her daughter for a health update.

"She's never been a complainer," Coleen said. "She (suffered) in silence. She would rather deal with things on her own instead of mentioning something about feeling lousy."

Kasey Milliski, a 19-year-old from Hockessin, has a rare blood disorder called Blue Rubber Bleb Nevus Syndrome, in which groups of abnormal blood vessels affect the skin and gastrointestinal tract. Unless researchers can discover a way to eradicate the internal vein clots, or "blebs," she will have to endure the malady for the rest of her life.

Such a prospect doesn't seem to faze Milliski, a parishioner at St. Mary's of the Assumption and a 2003 graduate of Ursuline Academy, where she played field hockey and lacrosse. Today, despite a bout or two with pain and the occasional struggle with endurance, she's feeling healthier than ever. She recently completed her first semester at Virginia Tech, where she majors in accounting and management.

"When I compare today to before, it's almost night and day," she said. "I always tried to stay positive, especially when it really got bad. But now I'm feeling so much better."

"Things 'really got bad' during her freshman year at Ursuline, when it became a chore for Milliski even to attend classes. She was receiving occasional blood transfusions, which often left her weak and vulnerable to infection.

"That was brutal," said her mother. "Kasey is the one who got us through that. The doctors at the hospital were amazed with her attitude."

Desperate for immediate relief and



Chuck McGowen photo

Kasey Milliski of Hockessin suffers from a rare blood disorder. After several transfusions plus surgery in 2000, she said, the difference in her health is "almost night and day."

a prospect for a brighter future, Milliski had surgery at Boston Children's Hospital in June of 2000. The multiple-hour procedure removed internal clots that had formed in her veins. When she came home, Milliski gradually felt stronger.

She accepted a job at the Ronald McDonald House across the street from A.I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington. While she answered phones and handed out literature, Milliski became close to many of the young temporary residents. The Ronald McDonald Foundation, which provides a temporary respite for out-of-town families from all over the world whose children are in and out of local hospitals, was more than a secretarial experience for Milliski. She particularly enjoyed spending time with the young children who would come and go.

"I could relate to what they were going through," she said.

She continued to persevere for the rest of her time at Ursuline. By the time she was a senior, she was a

starter on the field hockey team. Milliski thrived in field hockey despite numerous malformations inside her left elbow that forced her to wear a cast.

"It wasn't ideal, but it wasn't like I was going in and out of hospitals to receive transfusions," she said. "At that point, my life had changed so much for the better. Always needing transfusions was not the life I wanted to live."

Last September was a big month for Milliski. She began her college career, confident that her co-majors eventually would help her pursue work on the business end at a children's hospital or a nonprofit organization such as Ronald McDonald House. "I want to give something back," she said.

Then in the Sept. 15 issue of Sports Illustrated magazine, Milliski was profiled as Delaware's "Starter All-American Teen". The magazine had been featuring athletes from every state, all of whom were nominated by someone who knew their trials and triumphs.

Milliski was flabbergasted when she received news that she had been selected. After the piece was published, she immediately became a pseudo-celebrity at Virginia Tech, and in the months since, she said, she has received dozens of emails and phone calls from old friends and total strangers who were inspired by her witness to keeping the faith.

Milliski admits that there have been times when she could not help but ask, "Why me?" But she focuses more on the joy than the suffering. Her experiences at the Ronald McDonald House, the support of her family (including her father, John, brother Jason, 21, and sister Jamie, 13), along with the "amazing help" from many of her caregivers has helped shape her positive attitude.

"So many times, I've been fortunate to have been around great mentors," she said. "You can't help but realize how much a smile means."

Salesianum to host annual adult religious-ed day

WILMINGTON — Salesianum School will hold its fourth annual Day of Adult Religious Education on Saturday, Feb. 21, from 8:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. More than 20 courses will be offered and will count toward the Diocese of Wilmington's elementary catechist certification if accompanied by a reflection paper.

Local Briefs

Courses, taught by Salesianum faculty members and others, include "A Busy Person's Guide to Meditation and Prayer," "Basics of Lay Ministry," "The Papacy: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," "Helping Your Children Become People of Faith" and "Traditional Marian Devotions."

The deadline for registration is Feb. 13. Forms are available at the Salesianum School office, 1801 N. Broom St., Wilmington, or at www.salesianum.org. The \$25 donation covers costs and benefits Oblate ministries. Coffee and doughnuts, as well as lunch, will be provided.

For more information, call Tom Vresics at 654-2495 ext. 214.

Notre Dame sisters to mark 200 years

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, who have 14 sisters serving in the Diocese of Wilmington, will celebrate the bicentennial of their founding Feb. 1 at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, North Charles Street, Baltimore. Archbishop W. Francis Malooly of Baltimore will preside.

The Mass, which begins at 3 p.m., is open to family, friends and former students of the sisters.

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were founded in 1804 by Julie Billiart, a peasant in revolutionary France. She moved her sisters to Namur, Belgium, in 1809 to continue her work.

According to Sister Maureen Anne Turlish of New Castle, the congregation was invited to the Diocese of Wilmington in 1969 to staff the newly opened St. Mark's High School. Today, the sisters' ministries include education at Holy Spirit School in New Castle; Christian formation at St. Margaret of Scotland Parish in Newark; the Ministry of Caring in Wilmington; community service; and various congregational duties.

College aid help available Feb. 8

DOVER — College-bound high school students may receive free professional assistance in completing a form used to qualify for scholarships, grants and loans during the third annual College Goal Sunday on Feb. 8.

The form is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, frequently referred to as FAFSA.

The Delaware-District of Columbia-Maryland Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Inc. will sponsor College Goal Sunday at 13 sites, including Delaware State University here and Wor-Wic Community College in Salisbury, Md.

Students will need proof of 2003 income and benefits information, such as completed federal income tax returns and W-2 forms, or proof of untaxed income, for themselves and their parents.

For more information, call (866) GO2GOAL (462-4625) or visit www.GO2GOAL.org.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Evangelization requires a less exclusionary church

With all its corruption, bureaucracy, judgment and exclusionary practices, Jesus would hardly recognize his church if he should come back today. Does not the rigid structure of the church today resemble the Sadducees and Pharisees more than the simple and uncomplicated ministry of our Lord?

It amazes me that we do not question the closed Communion we practice as Catholics. Divorced Catholics who do not want to go through the

emotional pain and red tape of an annulment and who truly need and hunger for our Lord and his sacraments are told by the church to wait in the pews, do not come to the Lord's Supper. Yet Jesus told us that his body and blood are for sinners, not just saints. He regularly ate with sinners. Even his betrayer, Judas, was at the table when Christ instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion at the Last Supper.

Did anyone invite non-Catholic Christians to Mass during Christmas? Wasn't it fun to tell them to stay seated during Communion?

A better relationship and balance are needed between church structure

and compassionate practices. We must not remain exclusionary and restrictive in our practices if we are to evangelize the world with our one true faith.

**Tom Sapala
Newark**

Take God's will into account when dealing with illness

I was very sympathetic to the family health problems of a letter writer last week ("Must Catholics choose medicine or religion?"). But I don't think she understood the church's

role in the matter.

I'm a diabetic but I don't want to be cured if the medicine would come from experimentation using fetal tissues or embryonic cells. The church is not against medicine and cures but it is very careful about morality and ethics.

The letter writer is forgetting something: God's will. We should take the opportunity to learn what he wants from us during hard times.

Marta M. Pelypec
Newark

Bishops have a moral duty to warn against abortion

Regarding the letter of Dec. 18, "Decisions about voting best left to individuals," I would point out that the

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Sports

Basketball teams join forces to battle cancer

Kids vs. Cancer.

Sounds like a lopsided match-up. Kids can only do so much, being little and all. But cancer? Just about everyone knows someone who is, or was, affected by the dreaded disease.

Those who are involved in this weekend's sixth annual Kids vs. Cancer basketball marathon at the Hockessin Police Athletic League (PAL) Center know that stopping the formidable foe won't happen overnight. But they are doing all they can to make a difference.

Of course, there are more than just kids — most ages 10 to 14 — who have been raising money for the American Cancer Society while preparing for the overnight event, which starts at 4 p.m. Saturday and ends about 9 a.m. Sunday. Adult coaches and volunteers have also been raising funds and will brave the

issue of "abortion" goes way beyond the realm of mere "politics." The slaughter of the innocent unborn is the great moral crisis of our times. Morality is certainly within the Lord's realm. Anyone who claims to be Catholic and "pro-choice" has a serious moral problem. Our church leaders, the bishops, have a grave moral duty to address this issue publicly and individually.

Pat Gallagher
Dover

Cathedral of St. Peter deserves larger attendance

I recently had the joy of revisiting Wilmington, having taught at St. Peter's Cathedral School and St. Mark's High School many years ago.

I attended the liturgy at St. Peter's at 11 a.m. on Sunday and it was truly delightful. The church was beautifully decorated, immaculately clean, the choir (although not too many in number) filled the church with wonderful voices, and the liturgy and the homily were very prayerful. The pastor is to be commended for the excellent work he has done with the church.

The only sad thing was that there were so few in attendance. I wish that anyone who wants an inspirational liturgy and homily would attend St. Peter's just once. I believe that after the first experience many would come again and again.

Please let the people of Wilmington know what a great treasure they have.

Sister Paula Slama
Daughters of Charity
Pottsville, Pa.

John Knebels



The Dialog/Don Blake

Mark Brindle, at a recent girls' basketball practice at Holy Angels, will join players, coaches, and volunteers Saturday for the annual Kids vs. Cancer marathon in Hockessin. The event has taken in more than \$109,000 since its inception. The action starts at 4 p.m. Saturday.

no-sleep approach into and through the wee hours of the morning.

But it's the kids who will be doing all the playing.

"An event like this is rare in that it really emphasizes that so much can be accomplished in a non-competitive environment," said Mark Brindle, who attends Holy Angels Church in Newark and is a five-year "KVC" volunteer. "You have kids from other parishes and other schools who not only gather with their own friends but get to meet and know new kids who are here for the same reason."

A 1977 graduate of Salesianum School and a father of three, Brindle, 44, has been helping with the public relations part of the event. He became aware of KVC thanks to a friend and former Holy Angels basketball coach, Tom Feely; the two now coach the Holy Angels co-ed cross-country team.

According to Brindle, the event's word-of-mouth popularity is the primary reason KVC has raised, according to event chairman Chris Noga, more than \$109,000 in its five-year history, including \$28,000 last year.

"I would say it's been a pleasure," said Brindle. "The PAL Center is a beautiful and spacious facility. When they aren't playing, there are rooms where kids can go and relax, or bleachers to sit down and watch."

Of the 42 teams in this year's marathon, 37 are from the Catholic

Youth Ministry. In all, 14 parishes have at least one team playing.

The event begins with foul and three-point shooting contests, followed by a creative and somewhat elaborate opening ceremony. Games start at 7 p.m., and three are played simultaneously with a 30-minute running clock. About the only "competition" is that each participating team is assigned to either a "Blue" or "Gold" squad. After the final game, tentatively scheduled for 8:15 a.m. Sunday, the scores are added up to determine a mock "winner."

However, Brindle says there is no such thing as a loser at KVC, and the participants know that going in.

"It's fun playing and watching basketball, but more importantly, it helps everyone involved discover that they can make a difference in their community."

A group effort

Kids vs. Cancer was founded in 1999 by Dr. Jack Hocutt and the Delaware Wildcats girls' AAU basketball program. Hocutt, a family physician from Wilmington who is also state-certified in sports medicine, coached the Wildcats back then and credited them for the idea.

"They said, 'Why not have a marathon? We could raise so much money,'" said Hocutt, 54. "It took off from there, and the response from everyone has been amazing. It's just

a great, great thing. Who knows what the long-term benefits will be years from now for the hundreds of kids who get involved in something like this."

Like Brindle, whose mother succumbed to cancer, Hocutt has experienced huge losses because of the disease.

"Both of my parents died of cancer," said Hocutt. "I promised them that I was going to do something about it."

Before participating, each player is asked to raise at least \$35, but many are able to collect significantly more than that. One player once raised more than \$1,200 on her own, Hocutt said. At the end of the event, prizes are awarded based on various levels of fundraising.

Hocutt and Brindle lauded the efforts of, among others, CYM coordinator of athletics Joe McNesby and American Cancer Society employee Rosemarie LeNoir. Several well-known benefactors of the event wish to remain anonymous.

"Everyone does his or her part," said Hocutt. "That's what's great about it. There is nothing too big, nothing too small. You buy into that philosophy and great things can happen."

Kids vs. Cancer?
Kids win.

Freelance writer John Knebels covers high school sports each week. Send email to jknebels@aol.com.

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Wright wins DeLucia Award

Joey Wright, the senior quarterback who led St. Mark's High School to the 2003 Delaware Division I football championship game, has been named the recipient of the 32nd annual Michael DeLucia Memorial Sportsmanship Award.

The award is presented to a senior player or players in Catholic high schools who demonstrate outstand-

ing performance, attitude and character on and off the field.

Wright, who lives in Wilmington, is the son of Charles "Butch" and Ann Wright. His brother Louis won the award



Joey Wright

in 1999 while at St. Mark's. The Wrights are the second set of brothers to accomplish this. Mike Udovich of Archmere won in 1982, followed two years later by his brother Pat, who also played at Archmere.

The award was established in 1972 by Tom DeLucia of Wilmington and his family in honor of his son, Michael, who died on June 8, 1971.

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Montreal cardinal says HIV testing required for priesthood candidates

By Catholic News Service

MONTREAL — The head of the Montreal Archdiocese has made HIV testing mandatory for priesthood candidates.

Montreal Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte told reporters Jan. 12 that he made the HIV test a requirement because of the “grave consequences on the lifelong commitment of a candidate to the priesthood,” said an archdiocesan statement.

“It is also well known that the priesthood requires a permanent commitment to celibacy. One should not be surprised, therefore, that the Catholic Church wants its future priests to be psycho-sexually well-integrated so that they may live happy and fulfilled celibate lives and ministries,” the statement said.

It said the medical history of candidates was essential in determining whether to accept a man into the priesthood.

“Transparency by the future priest with regard to both his present and past life” was essential in determining the applicant’s candidacy, it said.

The archdioceses of Edmonton, in Alberta, and Vancouver, in British Columbia, are the only other Canadian dioceses that require HIV testing for priesthood candidates.

Eric Durocher, Montreal archdiocesan spokesman, said HIV testing will be required for all priesthood candidates in the fall and is not retroactive.

A candidate would not be rejected because of an HIV-positive test result, Durocher told Catholic News Service.

Sulpician Father Marcel Demers, rector of Montreal’s major seminary, told The Gazette in Montreal that if an applicant is found to be HIV-positive, he will be asked how he contracted the virus. If it came through a gay relationship, “we will try to see what really is the person’s calling,” he said.

“It’s not that Jesus wanted homophobia,” he said. “But we also realize that this profile doesn’t lend itself as well to what we require of a priest.”

The statement said the applicant would not be judged on his sexual orientation, but by “his capacity to maintain, with God’s help, significant interpersonal relationships within his celibate commitment.”

At a Jan. 12 press conference, Cardinal Turcotte said the ability to remain celibate, not sexual orientation, was the major factor in determining an applicant’s candidacy, The Gazette reported.

“This is not a profession one will engage in for five or 10 years. It’s a decision on a way of life,” the cardinal said.

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Pastoral councils should offer advice, not orders, pope says

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Parish councils and diocesan pastoral councils are to offer advice, not orders, to the pastor and bishop, Pope John Paul II said.

“A balanced relationship between the role of the laity and that which properly belongs to the diocesan ordinary or pastor must be safeguarded,” the pope told members of the Congregation for Clergy.

Meeting the congregation members Jan. 10, the pope said that lay people must “take an active part in the mission of the church,” offering their input and expertise, but without confusing their role with the role of the bishop or pastor.

“In exercising their office, legitimate pastors never are to be considered simply executors of decisions deriving from the majority opinions” of the parish or diocesan pastoral council, he said.

The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church was willed by Christ, the pope said. While all members of the church have an equal dignity and a role to play, the roles are not the same for everyone.

The congregation held its plenary meeting Jan. 8-10 at the Vatican; the meeting focused on collaboration with lay people through parish and pastoral councils and on the ministry of priests at Catholic shrines and sanctuaries.

Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, prefect of the congregation, told the pope the members had examined various aspects of the functioning of the councils, “some of them very worrying, and proposed indications to present to Your Holiness.”

The cardinal said the congregation’s proposals for the correct functioning of the councils underline the “diverse and specific participation of each of the faithful in the edification of the church.”

The proposals, he said, would help local church structures “recognize, defend and distinguish with greater clarity the particular gift of each member of the church and heal or remove the possible confusion of roles, functions or theological and canonical conditions.”

Cardinal Adam J. Maida of Detroit, a congregation member, said the discussion was based on the vision of the church as a communion of people in Christ.

“We all have a responsibility to contribute to the life of the church,” he said, but the roles people play are distinct based on whether they are lay or ordained.

Cardinal Maida said the plenary was an opportunity to share with cardinals from other countries and from the Vatican the overwhelmingly positive experience of parish councils and diocesan pastoral councils in the United States.

Problems arise, however, when people think in political terms and feel that a consultative role is meaningless unless they have decision-making powers, the cardinal said.

But in the church, he said, “a pastor cannot delegate his role to the lay faithful. He must lead, but he must also listen to advice.”

“People have a right and obligation to speak and pastors have an obligation and right to listen,” the cardinal said.

“The plenary session was in many ways an affirmation of the system in most dioceses of the United States,” he said.

Turning to the discussion on pastoral ministry at shrines, sanctuaries and other places of pilgrimage, Pope John Paul said, “These sacred places attract numerous faithful searching for God and, therefore, open to a more incisive proclamation of the Good News and to the call to conversion.”

The pope said it is important that the priests assigned to work in the shrines have a well-developed pastoral sensitivity, a “paternal sense of welcome,” and are gifted preachers and catechists.

Shrines often are places where Catholic faithful seek the sacrament of reconciliation, he said.

“The confessor, especially in a shrine, is called to reflect in his every gesture and word the merciful love of Christ,” he said.

Cardinal Maida said the congregation members wanted to acknowledge the importance of priestly ministry in shrines.

The cardinal said the plenary meetings of Vatican congregations “are very important in the life of the church.”

The meetings bring together cardinals, bishops and experts from around the world and provide time for “a real dialogue,” he said.

“I always leave these meetings energized,” he said. “You see that the church really is the living body of Christ.”

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Bush stresses importance of vouchers in remarks to Catholic educators

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — In a Jan. 9 address to more than 250 Catholic educators, President Bush stressed the importance of voucher programs and urged the Senate to pass a bill to “make school choice in Washington, D.C., a reality.”

The president made his remarks in the East Room of the White House to educators attending a Jan. 8-11 symposium in Washington celebrating the centennial of the National Catholic Educational Association.

Although he did not specifically use the word “voucher,” Bush spoke highly of the need to provide scholarships for low-income families for children in failing schools, particularly in Washington, where a choice initiative already passed in a House bill and is up for a vote as part of a Senate omnibus measure.

“I suspect that this program would have a lot of takers when we can get it funded,” he said.

The president added that parents who think that their child’s school is not meeting his or her needs would naturally want another option, and to that end, he said, Washington’s Catholic schools would provide “a really good alternative” that the federal government is willing to help fund.

Bush stressed that the Senate needs to pass the scholarship funding for Washington’s schools not just to help “begin a change in education around the country” but to help local Catholic schools “fulfill their mission, meet their obligation and to continue doing the excellent work they’re doing.”

He also said he plans to ask Congress to provide \$50 million in this year’s budget for a national choice incentive fund that would award federal grants to communities and

organizations that help students in low-income families and in underperforming schools. The funds could be used as seed money for additional programs.

The president’s 25-minute address was punctuated with applause from the educators, who were praised throughout his remarks for their good work. Bush started off by describing Catholic education as “a noble calling” and noting that Catholic schools’ insistence on high standards and academic achievement are “models for all schools around the country.” He also commended them for their low operating costs.

“Catholic schools have a proven record of bringing out the best in every child, regardless of their background. And every school in America should live up to that standard,” he said. “We want our public schools to live up to the standard you have set in Catholic schools.”

He also noted that much of the wording behind the educational reform in the 2-year-old No Child Left Behind Act stems from the examples set by Catholic schools.

In the back row of the East Room, Sister Edwin Quinn, a Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who trains teachers in the Philadelphia Archdiocese, couldn’t have been happier.

Sister Quinn, who has been a Catholic educator for more than 40 years and is one of a family of 15, all of whom attended Catholic school, said it was “an exciting experience just to be here” at the White House and the four-day symposium where the educators were discussing the future of Catholic education.

Even though her order no longer runs nearly as many Catholic schools as it once did, she said she was extremely hopeful about the future.

“It’s a wonderful time to be in Catholic education,” she told Catholic News Service. “There is so much forging ahead to do.”

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Lawmakers who back abortion, euthanasia told not to receive Communion

By Dan Rossini
Catholic News Service

LA CROSSE, Wis. — Archbishop Raymond L. Burke has formally notified Catholic lawmakers in the La Crosse Diocese that they cannot receive Communion if they continue to support procured abortion or euthanasia.

The four-paragraph canonical notification, published in the Jan. 8 edition of *The Catholic Times*, the La Crosse diocesan newspaper, called upon Catholic legislators in the diocese “to uphold the natural and divine law regarding the inviolable dignity of all human life.”

“To fail to do so is a grave public sin and gives scandal to all the faithful,” it said.

Archbishop Burke, who is to be installed Jan. 26 as St. Louis’ new archbishop, released the canonical notification along with a 10-page pastoral letter to Catholics in the La Crosse Diocese about their political responsibility to uphold the value of human life.

He noted that the documents were issued while he is serving as diocesan administrator of La Crosse following his Dec. 2 appointment as archbishop of St. Louis. However, he said, the pastoral letter and the notification carry the full weight of his authority as bishop of La Crosse because both were signed Nov. 23, the feast of Christ the King.

“Catholic legislators who are members of the faithful of the Diocese of La Crosse and who continue to support procured abortion or euthanasia may not present themselves to receive holy Communion,” the notification said. “They are not to be admitted to holy Communion, should they present themselves, until such time as they publicly renounce their support of these most unjust practices.”

The two documents followed reports in the secular press in December that Archbishop Burke had sent private letters to three Catholic legislators in the diocese, warning them of the spiritual dangers of their votes against human life.

According to Archbishop Burke, the notification became necessary as an outcome of his correspondence with Catholic legislators. None of the three lawmakers to whom he wrote accepted his invitation for a private meeting to discuss their voting records, and in letters to the bishop indicated they were not open to changing their positions.

“After several exchanges of letters, it became clear in all three cases that there was no willingness to conform to the teaching of the church,” he said. “So the notification became a necessity in order that the faithful in the diocese not be scandalized, thinking that it is acceptable for a devout Catholic to also be pro-abortion.”

Archbishop Burke has declined to name the three politicians but secular news reports have identified two of them as state Sen. Julie Lassa and U.S. Rep. David R. Obey, D-Wis.

The archbishop said the simultaneous release of the two documents was a coincidence, since the pastoral letter had been in the works for months. “I’d been thinking about it for a long time, and working on it with the help of others, and we finally got it into its (final) form,” he said.

“I’ve come to understand as bishop that there is a real confusion on the part of many people in the diocese with regard to the relationship of the moral law to our civil laws,” he added. “So I wanted to write a letter to clarify this.”

In the letter, titled “On the Dignity of Human Life and Civic Responsibility,” Archbishop Burke said many Catholics misunderstand the concept of “separation of church and state,” taking it to mean that church teachings have no application to political life.

The letter affirms, on the contrary, that Catholics have the obligation to form their political judgments from church teachings, “especially in what pertains to the natural moral law, that is, the order established by God in creation.”

“If the Catholic Church insisted to legislators that they vote for laws that punish people who steal, no one would find anything objectionable in that,” said the archbishop in the document. “People all recognize that to take someone else’s property is a crime. The natural law teaches us that. So also it teaches that human life is inviolable.”

The letter also addresses the position of some Catholic politicians who say their efforts to help the poor and marginalized make up for the fact they do not vote consistently in favor of protecting life, and that in a democracy legislators are bound to vote according to the will of the majority of their constituents.

The archbishop’s notification on reception of Communion cites a passage from the “Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life,” issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in January 2003.

That document reiterates the pope’s teaching that Catholics involved directly in lawmaking bodies have a “grave and clear obligation to oppose” any measure that is an attack on human life. “For them, as for every Catholic, it is impossible to promote such laws or to vote for them,” it says.

The pastoral letter and the notification are posted on the Web site of the Diocese of La Crosse, www.diocese-of-lacrosse.com.

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Former MTV star urges college students to let faith shine

By Julie Greene
Catholic News Service

ORLANDO, Fla. — At times energetic, slightly irreverent and comical and other times serious and contemplative, Matt Smith of “The Real World New Orleans” fame shared the highs and lows of keeping the faith as the closing keynote speaker at the National Catholic Student Coalition’s 20th annual leadership conference in Orlando.

In front of about 400 Catholic college students, alumni and campus ministers, the former cast member of MTV’s hit reality show “Real World” and recent Georgia Tech graduate focused on the conference’s theme of “Ask Me Why I’m Catholic!”

“I come from a big Catholic family. My dad was a convert. He was baptized Episcopal and met my hot Catholic mama at a Newman Center dance. Then they got married and had six kids,” said Smith, who is also a national spokesman for Life Teen.

He described his family as Catholic hippie-types who helped launch a foster home community in North Carolina.

His parents and later he and his siblings were heavily involved in a local parish. “We were the family who always stayed after the church breakfast and put up the tables and chairs,” he said.

He recalled awkward times at public school where few people knew he was Catholic. Even so, he maintained his faith.

Smith looks up to “Catholic heroes” and the “communion of saints” who have not been afraid to stand up for what they believe in, people like his campus minister at Georgia Tech, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and St. Francis of Assisi.

He recalled visiting Assisi, Italy, during World Youth Day 2000 and the impact it had on him in the wake of his “Real World” experience.

“It was awesome to think that only a few hundred years ago, he was here, standing up for his faith,” said Smith, reflecting on the life of St. Francis. The saint, whom he called Frank, had gone from riches to rags by choice.

“Frank was a cool dude for his day. He was in a band. He was a street fighter and a member of a gang who got beat up and was kidnapped by a rival gang but the one thing that he feared more than anything else was lepers,” he said. “And after he had this vision — what does he do?”

He goes up and kisses a leper. He faced his greatest fear.”

As a Life Teen spokesman, he takes every opportunity to share his faith with young people and encourage them to stand firm in their convictions.

Life Teen groups meet at about 800 Catholic parishes in the United States, Canada and 11 other countries. Following a teen Mass on Sunday evenings, the groups hold “life nights” offering discussion, education and social activities.

“When you live out your faith it does cause trouble,” Smith said.

Such an opportunity presented itself recently when he signed on to be part of another MTV reality series called “The Gauntlet,” which brought alumni from “The Real World” and “Road Rules” together to compete in 14 physical and mental challenges. Taping for the show was done last September.

In the first episode he spoke about chastity, criticized Playboy magazine, read the Bible and put a crucifix on the wall above his bed in the house “The Gauntlet” competitors shared in Telluride, Colo.

“I almost got voted off the first episode ... one girl said she considered herself a Christian but told the group, ‘Matt is so Christian it makes me uncomfortable.’ When I heard that, I was cheering, ‘Vote me off, vote me off.’”

Instead he was given priest-like status in the house, often lending an ear to cast mates who confided in him, though not everyone liked the personable redhead. One girl challenged him about his promise to remain a virgin until marriage.

“She really put me on the spot — asking me if I dated a girl for three years would I get with her then,” he said. “I told her if I dated a girl for three years I should probably be ready to get off the pot and marry her.”

At least one cast mate defended him, and before the end of the show, cast members could be seen wearing Life Teen T-shirts. They even prayed over him before he tackled the challenge that eventually led to his elimination. “It was so powerful,” he said. “I thought it was so cool that they would do that.”

He urged the college students not to be afraid to stand up and cherish their faith. He ended his talk with a quote from St. Francis: “Who you are before Jesus is who you are, nothing more, nothing less.”

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Religious rhetoric on the campaign trail: Democrats talk faith

WASHINGTON — Maybe the Democratic candidates for president are paying attention to those opinion polls that say voters genuinely want to know about politicians' religious beliefs. In the last few weeks, there's been a lot of talk about God and religion coming from the major contenders for the Democratic nomination. Numerous major daily newspapers have recently run prominent stories about the candidates' religious influences. It's even come up in the context of former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean's explanation of why he supported the state's civil unions law and in a National Public Radio debate among six of the candidates. In that Jan. 6 debate, Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman said that too often members of his own party "feel uncomfortable talking about faith or try to exclude faith or expressions of it from the public square." Lieberman, who as Al Gore's running mate in 2000 became the first Jew to be part of a major national party's presidential ticket, warned that because "religion matters to people ... we've got to talk about it. Otherwise the Republicans will convince people they've got some sort of a monopoly on values and faith."

Life meets Hollywood: Upcoming film on pope draws ire of biographer

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican usually braces itself when the latest Hollywood version of the life and times of notable religious figures gets ready to hit the screen. But a fresh maelstrom may be building over an upcoming made-for-TV movie about the life of Pope John Paul II. This coming October, the film biopic "Karol" is scheduled to debut on Silvio Berlusconi's Channel 5 — one of the Italian prime minister's three channels in his Mediaset empire. The TV "fiction" was meant to be based on the Vatican-approved book, "Stories of Karol: The Unknown Life of John Paul II" written by Gian Franco Svidercoschi. But Svidercoschi — after reading the film's first treatment — has denounced the direction the screenplay has taken, saying "it invents too much and doesn't present the man as he really was."

Conference looks at parish leadership at a time of fewer priests

NEW YORK — Diocesan staff members at a symposium in New York Jan. 8-10 wrestled with issues concerning leadership in parish life at a time when the proportion of ordained clergy serving as leaders is diminishing. The staff members, many of them lay people, reported on the challenges they face in selecting, training, compensating fairly and assuring accountability of the increasing number of lay workers who direct parish activ-

ities. They spoke about the shortage of priests and projections that the situation will worsen in the coming years, and the closing and merging of parishes. But a major aspect of the current situation, they indicated, is the increasing use of women religious and lay women and men as parish workers, often as coordinators of parishes with no resident priest, and its implication for the understanding of what it means to be a leader in the church. The New York gathering was the 16th annual Diocesan Leadership Symposium, sponsored by the National Pastoral Life Center in New York.

Pope urges international community to help Iraq establish democracy

VATICAN CITY — In his annual "state of the world" address to diplomats, Pope John Paul II urged the international community to help Iraqis "retake the reins" of their country and establish a democracy that reflects their aspirations. The pope's comments Jan. 12 looked beyond his own strong opposition to the war in Iraq and focused instead on the present challenges after the fall of former President Saddam Hussein's regime. "The numerous steps taken by the Holy See to avoid the painful conflict in Iraq are well known," the pope told more than 100 ambassadors accredited to the Holy See. "What is important today is that the international community help the Iraqis so that they are able to retake the reins of their country and democratically determine a political and economic system consistent with their aspirations," he said.

Father Groeschel in critical condition following auto accident

ORLANDO, Fla. — Father Benedict Groeschel, founder of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, was in critical but stable condition in an Orlando hospital after being hit by a car late Jan. 11. According to friends of the 70-year-old priest, he was walking to a restaurant near the Orlando International Airport for a meal when he was hit. He suffered a heart attack when he was hit, both his legs were broken, and he also sustained a broken hand and head injuries. The accident occurred at about 10:30 p.m., according to Brother Leo Fisher, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal based in New York state. Father Groeschel was in intensive care at Orlando Regional Medical Center.

Archbishop O'Malley urges lawyers to defend marriage

BOSTON — Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley of Boston urged members of the legal profession in Massachusetts to have the courage of St. Thomas More, the patron saint of lawyers, who "lost his life defending the sacredness of

marriage.” Speaking Jan. 11 at the annual Red Mass in Boston’s Cathedral of the Holy Cross — a liturgy that invokes blessings on the legal community — the archbishop implored the congregation to “witness to the truth about marriage,” and defend traditional marriage in the commonwealth. “We live in such an age ... where our courts have undermined the value of life itself and now attempt to dilute the meaning of marriage,” Archbishop O’Malley declared. “In diluting the meaning of marriage, we risk diminishing our own humanity.” Archbishop O’Malley went on to say that “part of our mission as disciples of Jesus Christ must be to defend the sacredness of life and the sacredness of marriage.”

Religious communities forming sex-abuse prevention programs

WASHINGTON — The fight to end clergy sex abuse of minors stretches into religious orders and communities as they adapt the U.S. bishops’ policies to their special situations. As part of coordinated efforts, religious leaders have produced a training video that includes interviews with victims of child abuse and hired a national organization to make spot checks on how well religious communities implement prevention programs. One Franciscan province even hired an ex-probation officer to keep tabs on offenders living in Franciscan communities. It’s all within a

framework of seeing the sex abuse crisis as part of the church’s constant need for renewal, said Marist Father Ted Keating, executive director of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. For many religious communities, it’s also a rediscovery of their roots, he said. “Many of our founders were calling us to protect children. This is part of our religious mission.”

Belgian cardinal differentiates moral levels for condom use

ROME — Using condoms to prevent a life-threatening disease such as HIV/AIDS is not on the same moral level as using them for birth control, said a Belgian cardinal. “Someone who is infected with the HIV virus and decides to have sex with an uninfected person has to protect his partner by using a condom,” said Cardinal Godfried Danneels of Mechelen-Brussels. Speaking on the Dutch Catholic television program “Kruispunt” Jan. 11, he said that sexual activity is confined morally to the boundaries of marriage between a man and a woman and that abstinence is morally correct and safe in offering protection against HIV infection. But, Cardinal Danneels said, “If a person infected with HIV has decided to not respect abstinence, then he has to protect his partner and he can do that — in this case — by using a condom.”

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Movie Review

“Chasing Liberty”

Conventional teenage romantic comedy about the president’s daughter (Mandy Moore), who, frustrated that her every move is monitored, ditches her Secret Service handlers while traveling abroad with her father (Mark Harmon) and embarks on an impromptu European adventure, aided and abetted by a dashing Brit (Matthew Goode) with a secret of his own. While giving parent-teen angst a presidential twist, there is little to hail about director Andy Cadiff’s touching on issues of independence and parental trust while seemingly equating personal freedom with irresponsible behavior. An implied sexual encounter, some sexual humor, brief rear nudity, and minimal mildly crude language. USCCB classification is A-III — adults. Rated PG-13.



Warner Bros.

Mandy Moore and Matthew Goode star in the romantic comedy “Chasing Liberty,” in which Moore plays the daughter of the president who shakes her Secret Service detail and embarks on a European adventure.

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