



## Year of Mercy

"You don't just talk about mercy, you do it," says Rev. Brian Meredith, pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish in Estevan, Sask. "It's supposed to be an action."  
— page 3

## Papal apology

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told journalists Dec. 16, the day after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report, that he would make a request for Pope Francis to come to Canada to make an apology for Indian residential schools.  
— page 5



## Consecrated life

As the Year of Consecrated Life draws to a close, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools continue to celebrate the contributions that sisters, priests and bishops have made to Catholic education.  
— page 6

## Our Jewish roots

Just in time for Christmas, the Vatican is reminding the world just how Jewish the Christian religion really is, writes Michael Swan.  
— page 7

## Human drama

For holiday viewing Gerald Schmitz highlights a "carol"



of a different sort. The film Carol is an intimate human drama already showered

with awards and nominations since its Cannes debut and leading the Golden Globes parade.  
— page 9

## Meaning of Christmas

"There is an adult message about Christ in Christmas and the meaning of Christmas is to be understood as much by looking at the cross as by looking at the crib," writes Ron Rolheiser, OMI. "Hardly the stuff of our Christmas lights, carols, cribs, and Santa. And yet, these too have their place."  
— page 11

# TRC report begins a new reconciliation

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — The legal phase of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on Indian residential schools is now over, but a new reconciliation phase has begun, say Catholics involved in the process.

On Dec. 15, the TRC released its voluminous seven-volume final report that provides more detail and context for the 94 Calls to Action it had unveiled last June along with the lengthy executive summary of the final report. The report groups the Calls to Action into five categories, such as: child welfare; education; language and culture; health; and justice.

"Reconciliation will require more than pious words about the shortcomings of those who preceded us," the report says. "It obliges us to both recognize the ways in which the legacy of residential schools continues to disfigure Canadian life and to abandon policies and approaches that currently serve to extend that hurtful legacy."

It describes the present child welfare system — which today places more indigenous children in foster care than had attended residential schools in any single year — as the "residential school system of our day."

It blasts the present educational system, describing schools on reserves as a "national disgrace."

The TRC report exposes disparate health outcomes for Aboriginal people that "would simply not be tolerated by other Canadians."

It blames cultural genocide exemplified by policies within the residential schools that punished children for using their own tongues for the loss of many Aboriginal languages. The 90 that



Art Babych

**FINAL TRC REPORT** — Truth and Reconciliation Commission members Chief Wilton Littlechild, left, Justice Murray Sinclair (chair), and Dr. Marie Wilson unveil their final report in Ottawa before hundreds of people, including residential school survivors, church representatives and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

remain are under threat, it says.

The report also blames more than 3,000 recorded deaths of Aboriginal children through infectious diseases and suicide on "coldness" and "indifference" and says the real figures are probably higher due to bad record keeping. The report argues these deaths were preventable.

The TRC report indicts the justice system, saying residential school survivors were often "revictimized" when they sought redress for physical and sexual abuse and only a fraction of abusers faced criminal charges. Only 50 people were convicted, the report says. Today, Aboriginal Canadians face higher arrest, conviction and incarceration rates and are more likely to experience violence than non-Aboriginals, it says.

It urges a reformed justice system "based on Aboriginal law and healing practices and under Aboriginal control."

The TRC will now close down, and transfer its archives to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba.

"It's a successful commission in that the Canadian public has been made aware of the life and the legacy of the Indian residential schools," said Montreal-based lawyer Pierre Baribeau who has represented Catholic dioceses and religious orders involved in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA).

"I think reconciliation is very much a grassroots effort," said Grouard-McLennan Archbishop Gerard Pettipas, president of the

50 Catholic Entities, the legal body formed to respond to the litigation that led to the IRSSA. "It isn't by making laws you are going to overcome racism."

"Look at what's continuing to happen in the United States with black Americans," the archbishop said. "You still have white cops killing black kids. A lot has to happen at the grassroots and for people to come to a conversion in their own hearts about the issues. That takes time. We're going to be at this reconciliation project for a long time."

"The TRC believes that, too," Pettipas said. "They knew from the beginning they weren't going to bring about reconciliation."

The final document is "huge,"

— PETTIPAS, page 7

# In Jan. 1 message, pope asks rich to lift burden of debt

By Carol Glatz

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis called for abolishing the death penalty worldwide, lifting the burden of debt on poor nations, global aid policies that respect life and revamped laws that welcome and integrate migrants.

He urged individuals, communities and nations to not let indifference, information overload or pessimism discourage them from concrete efforts "to improve the world around us, beginning with our families, neighbours and places of employment."

Building peace, he said, is not accomplished by words alone, but through the grace of God, a conversion of heart, an attitude of compassion and the courage to act against despair.

The pope's multifaceted plea came in his message for World Peace Day, Jan. 1. The message,

which was delivered to world leaders by Vatican ambassadors, was released at the Vatican Dec. 15.

The message, titled Overcome Indifference and Win Peace, contained a three-fold appeal to the world's leaders.

He asked that countries: "refrain from drawing other peoples into conflicts of wars," which not only destroy a nation's infrastructure and cultural heritage, but also their "moral and spiritual integrity"; forgive or make less burdensome international debt of poorer nations; and "adopt policies of co-operation which, instead of bowing before the dictatorship of certain ideologies, will respect the values of the local populations" and not harm the "fundamental and inalienable right to life of the unborn."

Also part of building peace in the world, he said, is addressing the urgent problem of improving

the living conditions of prisoners, especially those still awaiting trial. Since rehabilitation should be the aim of penal sanctions, effective alternatives to incarceration should be considered as well as the abolition of the death penalty. The pope asked government authorities to consider "the possibility of an amnesty" or pardon.

The pope called on national governments to review their current laws on immigration and find ways they could "reflect a readiness to welcome migrants and to facilitate their integration" as well as respect the rights and responsibilities of all parties concerned.

All nations' leaders should also take concrete measures in alleviating the problem of a lack of housing, land and employment, the pope wrote, as well as stop discrimination against women in the workplace, which included unfair wages and precarious or

dangerous working conditions. He said he hoped those who are ill could be guaranteed access to medical treatment, necessary medications and home care.

The pope's message focused on the dangers of cynicism and indifference against God, neighbour and creation.

"Disregard and the denial of God," he said, "have produced untold cruelty and violence." And the exploitation of natural resources and mistreatment of animals have an effect "on the way we treat other people."

"With the present Jubilee of Mercy, I want to invite the church to pray and work so that every Christian will have a humble and compassionate heart" and that all people will learn "to forgive and to give," he said in his message.

God is never indifferent to the

— GOD'S MERCY, page 15



# Patriarch urges Christmas solidarity for violence victims

By Judith Sudilovsky

JERUSALEM (CNS) — Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal urged moderate celebrations of Christmas this year because of the current political situation, but he also called for an end to the arms trade.

In his Dec. 16 Christmas message, he urged a more spiritual holiday celebration and also encouraged all parishes to turn off the Christmas tree lights for five minutes in solidarity with all the victims of violence and terrorism. In Bethlehem, West Bank, the Christmas mass will be offered for the victims and their families, he said, “that they take to heart the participation in the joy and peace of Christmas.”

At the local level, he urged Palestinian and Israeli leaders to have the courage to work toward a just peace, rather than war and violence.

“Enough of stalling, reluctance and false pretenses,” he admonished. “Respect international resolutions. Listen to the voice of your people who aspire for peace, act in their best interest. Each of the two peoples of the Holy Land, Israelis and Palestinians, have the right to dignity, to an independent state and sustainable security.”

“What suffering it is, to once again see our beloved Holy Land

caught in the vicious cycle of bloody violence. What pain to see anew, hatred prevail over reason and dialogue. The anguish of the people of this land is ours, which we cannot ignore or disregard. Enough! We are tired of this conflict as we see the Holy Land sullied with blood,” he added.

He called for the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, and for the two to exist in “peace and tranquility.”

Without naming specific groups, he said the situation in the Holy Land is a reflection of what is happening around the world, which is “facing an unprecedented terrorist threat.”

He said that though recent attacks have taken place against France, Lebanon, Russia and the United States, people in Iraq and Syria have been suffering for years from the war. Syria is at the centre of the crisis, he said.

“The future of the Middle East depends on the resolution of this conflict,” he said.

He also condemned and called for an end to the weapon trade, which he said is perpetuating the conflict. He blamed “several international powers” for the continuation of a situation of “total absurdity and duplicity.”

“On the one side, some speak of dialogue, justice and peace, while on the other hand promote

the sale of arms to the belligerents,” he said in his message. “We call to conversion these unscrupulous arm dealers who may be without conscience, to make amends. Great is your responsibility in these devastating tragedies, and you will answer before God for the blood of your brothers.”

He urged world leaders to find the roots and cause of “this scourge.”

“We must combat poverty and injustice, which may constitute a breeding ground for terrorism. Similarly we must promote education on tolerance and acceptance of the other,” he said.

In response to a journalist’s question, the patriarch said that while he welcomed current international attention and solidarity with the plight of Christians in the Middle East in light of the fighting, he lamented that it is only when their own interests are affected that they have finally begun to take notice of the Christians of the Middle East.

“There have been thousands and thousands of Iraqis and Syrians who are suffering,” he said.

He noted the importance of the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, and its role as the foundation for dialogue.

“Here in the Holy Land, this

dialogue is of paramount importance where difficulties exist, but it is necessary to continue to hope all the more, to the viability of a Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue,” he said.

He invited pilgrims to continue visiting the Holy Land, despite

the current tense situation, and said they would find three doors designated as Doors of Mercy during the Year of Mercy.

“The pilgrim route is safe and they (pilgrims) are respected and appreciated by all sectors in the Holy Land,” he said.

## Pope Francis praises road map for peace in Syria

By Junno Arocho Esteves

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis endorsed a recent UN resolution on peace in Syria and expressed “deep appreciation” to the international community for reaching an agreement.

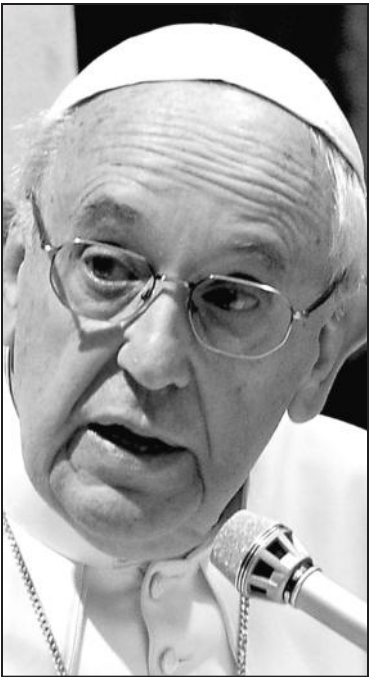
The UN Security Council approved a road map for a peace process between opposition forces and the government of President Bashar Assad. The Dec. 18 resolution calls for a ceasefire, the establishment of a unity government with a new constitution, and presidential elections within two years.

During his Angelus address Dec. 20, the pope called on the international community as well as those involved in the conflict to work toward bringing peace in the country, which has been in the grips of war for almost five years.

The conflict also has opened the door for terrorist groups, such as the so-called Islamic State, to take over parts of the country and neighbouring Iraq to establish a caliphate while persecuting Christians and other religious minorities.

“I encourage everyone to continue, with a generous spirit of confident willingness, toward the cessation of violence and a negotiated settlement leading to peace,” the pope said.

The pope also praised the establishment of a unity government in Libya, which has also been besieged by conflict since



CNS/Alberto Pizzoli, Reuters

**POPE ADDRESSES ROMAN CURIA — Pope Francis speaks during the traditional greetings to the Roman Curia in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican Dec. 21.**

the ouster of longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi. The Islamic State has also taken advantage of the civil war in the country in order to expand their attacks into Europe.

“I likewise think of nearby Libya, where the recent working agreement among the parties for a government of national unity invites hope for the future,” Pope Francis said.

## Pope warns of Jubilee Year fraudsters

By Junno Arocho Esteves

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pilgrims must beware of people who seek to use the Jubilee Year to profit off of them since salvation is a gift that cannot be bought, Pope Francis said.

“Be careful! Beware of someone who is sly or sneaky who tells you that you need to pay. Salvation cannot be paid for, salvation cannot be bought. Jesus is the door and Jesus is free of charge,” the

pope said Dec. 16 during his weekly general audience.

The pope’s warning comes one day after Rome’s financial police seized fake parchments — worth an estimated 70,000 euros — that were sold at a souvenir shop near the Vatican, according to a report by The Associated Press Dec. 14. AP said police seized 3,500 parchments being passed off as apostolic blessings that commemorate marriages, baptisms and Holy Year pilgrimages.

Prior to the start of the Jubilee Year, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, said pilgrims must be vigilant not only of terrorist threats but also of scam artists who see the Holy Year as “a source of income.”

“It’s not just about security for fear of ISIS. There has to be security to watch out for people’s dignity,” he told journalists Dec. 4.

During his address, Pope Francis expressed his hope that the Holy Year celebrations in dioceses across the globe would serve as “a visible sign of universal communion” and of God’s love and mercy to the world.

Noting that the start of the Holy Year coincides with the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, the pope said that the council highlighted this “mystery of communion” among the churches worldwide.

“Although spread throughout the world and divided into many particular churches, it has always been the one and only church that Jesus Christ wanted and for whom he offered himself,” he said.

The Holy Door is a symbol of Jesus Christ, he said, and pilgrims

who pass through it in Rome and in churches around the world make a visible sign of trust in him “who did not come to judge but to save.”

Before the start of the audience, pilgrims sang Happy Birthday to the pope who celebrated his 79th birthday Dec. 17. As he made his way to the stage, veteran Mexican journalist, Valentina Alazraki, presented Pope Francis with a sombrero-shaped birthday cake on behalf of the Mexican people.

## Experts praise new Vatican finance laws

By Carol Glatz

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — European experts on preventing financial crimes praised the Vatican for significant steps in establishing laws and procedures in line with international protocols, but called for “real results” in cracking down on infractions and prosecuting offences.

Moneyval — the Council of Europe’s Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism — said the Vatican has addressed “most of the technical deficiencies in its legislation and regulations.”

“However, there is a need now for the anti-money laundering and counterterrorist financing system to deliver effective results in terms of prosecutions, convictions and confiscation” of criminal assets, the experts said in a press release Dec. 12.

The Moneyval committee approved the Holy See-Vatican progress report at a meeting Dec. 8 in Strasbourg, France, and published its assessment of

the Vatican’s report on its website Dec. 15.

The Moneyval report said the Vatican showed significant progress in implementing recommendations Moneyval made in July 2012. The Vatican had met nine out of 16 key and core recommendations, thereby passing a major test in an effort to become more financially transparent and compliant with international norms.

The recommendations included improving record keeping; developing procedures for reporting suspicious transactions; enacting procedures to report transactions suspected of financing terrorism; ensuring there were procedures for confiscating accounts; making certain secrecy rules do not impede the prevention of financial crimes; and designing procedures for freezing and confiscating terrorist assets.

The Moneyval report said the Vatican’s stepped-up efforts in reviewing bank accounts meant that the number of “suspicious activity reports has risen sharply since the last report,” numbering

329 reports between January and September.

Vatican prosecutors have received 30 reports for investigation, have frozen about 11 million euros and have launched 29 money-laundering investigations, the report said.

“However, no indictments or prosecutions have, as yet, been brought in money-laundering cases,” it said.

Experts recommended that the Vatican make sure the Vatican police and prosecutor’s office “have the capacity to conduct proactive financial investigation in order to deliver real results in the money laundering investigations that are underway.” And it called for “ad hoc agreements” with foreign countries in order to expedite prosecution for cases involving cross-border crimes.

The committee said the “intensive review process” of surveying and identifying account holders at the Institute for the Works of Religion, commonly known as the Vatican bank, “appears to have been a success.”



CNS/Thomas Cheng, EPA

**BLESSED TERESA TO BE CANONIZED — Blessed Teresa of Kolkata, founder of the Missionaries of Charity, is pictured in a 2002 photo. Brazilian Father Elmiran Ferreira Santos, pastor of Our Lady of Aparecida Parish in São Paulo, believes prayers to Blessed Teresa for a parishioner with brain tumours led to a possible miracle.**



# Assisted-suicide panel recommends wide access

By Michael Swan  
The Catholic Register

TORONTO (CCN) — In 43 recommendations aimed at provincial and federal legislators,

a government panel has recommended the widest possible access to assisted suicide and very narrow exceptions for Catholic health professionals and Catholic hospitals, nursing homes and hospices.



CNS/Mark Blinch, Reuters

**WARM WELCOME** — A young Syrian refugee is greeted by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau after arriving Dec. 10 from Beirut at the Toronto Pearson International Airport. Trudeau met the first Canadian government plane carrying Syrian refugees as part of his pledge to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of February.

## Help needed for persecuted Christians in Middle East

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — Canada’s Catholic bishops and the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus are asking Canada to make helping persecuted Christians — whom Pope Francis and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks say face genocide — a priority.

“While we recognize that many religious and ethnic communities are subjected to prejudice in various countries, many observers have noted in recent years that Christians experience religious persecution more than any other faith group on a global scale and in absolute numbers,” wrote Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops president Hamilton Bishop Douglas Crosby and the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus co-chair Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl in an open letter Dec. 15 to Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion.

“From Egypt to Iran and from Iraq to Nigeria, Christian communities throughout the region experience persecution in various forms, ranging from state discrimination to intimidation by local populations to attacks by terror groups on churches,” the letter said. “In some countries this has resulted in a veritable exodus of local Christians — an added tragedy given that many of these communities have existed for millennia in a region that is the birthplace of Christianity.”

The CCCB president and Canadian Rabbinic Caucus co-chair asked Dion to make advocating for at-risk Christian communities in the Middle East and Africa a priority, and to find new ways to provide “diplomatic and humanitarian assistance.”

The letter cited several studies that reveal 200 to 230 million Christians “face daily threats of murder, beating, imprisonment and torture, and a further 350 to 400 million encounter discrimination in areas such as jobs and housing.”

“Pope Francis has repeatedly called on the international community to protect Christians and other minorities who are being persecuted in the Middle East,” the letter said. “Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly this past Sept. 25, he renewed his ‘repeated appeals regarding the painful situation of the entire Middle East, North Africa and other African countries, where Christians, together with other cultural or ethnic groups, and even members of the majority religion who have no desire to be caught up in hatred and folly, have been forced to witness the destruction of their places of worship, their cultural and religious heritage, their houses and property, and have faced the alternative either of fleeing or of paying for their adhesion to good and to peace by their own lives, or by enslavement.’”

The letter also cited former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’ speech to the British House of Lords last July referring to Christian persecution in the Middle East in which Sacks called on “people of all faiths and of none” to “stand together . . . for we are all at risk.”

“Both Pope Francis and Rabbi Sacks have described the persecution of Christians in parts of the Middle East and Africa as genocide,” the letter said. “From Egypt to Iran and from Iraq to Nigeria, Christian communities throughout the region experience persecution in various forms, ranging from state discrimination to intimidation by local populations to attacks by terror groups on churches.”

“In some countries this has resulted in a veritable exodus of local Christians — an added tragedy given that many of these communities have existed for millennia in a region that is the birthplace of Christianity.”

The Provincial-Territorial Expert Advisory Group on Physician-Assisted Dying goes beyond 2015 Supreme Court’s ruling by recommending “nurse practitioners, registered nurses and pharmacists will need to be involved in the process of physician-assisted dying.” It also recommends the new regime include “both physician-administered and self-administered physician-assisted dying.”

In a self-administered scenario, patients could ask for a prescription months or even years before they decide their medical condition has become unbearable and then take the life-ending dose. There would be no assessment for competence or other qualifying conditions. The Supreme Court’s Carter decision spoke only of termination of life for those who already have a “grievous and irremediable medical condition that causes intolerable and enduring suffering.” The court also requires an assessment of the patient’s competence and some way to ensure the patient hasn’t been pressured into the decision to end their life.

The provincial-territorial panel’s report gives three options for doctors and nurses who hold

that ending a life violates their conscience.

“Conscientiously objecting health care providers should be required to either provide a referral or a direct transfer of care to another health care provider or to contact a third party and transfer the patient’s records.”

The “third party” option presumes that provinces have set up a central referral agency that would assign cases for assessment to non-objecting doctors and institutions. This option is preferred by the Canadian Medical Association, the Christian Medical and Dental Society of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians’ Societies and Canadian Physicians for Life. All of the Catholic organizations object to providing a direct referral.

For nurses who have suddenly been thrust into the debate on assisted suicide, there are still plenty of questions about their role and their ability to opt out.

“Policies surrounding physician-assisted dying will impact all direct-care providers, including registered nurses,” said St. Elizabeth Health Care spokesperson Madonna Gallo.

St. Elizabeth provides home

health care, including home-based palliative care. There are no specific recommendations from the provincial-territorial panel that cover home care provided by a Catholic organization.

“St. Elizabeth is committed to ensure the availability of high-quality hospice and palliative care services in the community, including our investment of \$1 million to strengthen end-of-life care this year,” said Gallo in an email.

For Catholic hospitals the challenges will also be considerable, Mike Shea, president of the Catholic Health Alliance of Canada, told The Catholic Register.

“Faith-based institutions must either allow physician-assisted dying within the institution or make arrangements for the safe and timely transfer of the patient to a non-objecting institution,” the panel recommends.

The panel also wants provinces to prohibit Catholic hospitals from requiring their doctors not offer physician-assisted suicide when outside the hospital. Catholic hospitals and nursing homes also should not be able to refuse patients who before admission

— CHAC, page 5

## You don’t just talk about mercy

By Frank Flegel

REGINA — The Year of Mercy in the Regina archdiocese had a good start with all eight deaneries celebrating a special mass, incorporating the special prayers into their regular mass or holding a special adoration service. A regular mass at St. Cecilia’s Church in Regina incorporated some special prayers and activities associated with the Year of Mercy beginning on Dec. 8 and served as the kick-off for the Regina Deanery.

At least two parishes in the Weyburn and Esterhazy deaneries decided to recite the Divine Mercy Chaplet as part of their Dec. 8 celebration. The Esterhazy deanery is also planning a summer celebration at Camp O’Neil.

Several churches are sporting the banner developed by the archdiocese; for some it is displayed outside the church over a door while others display at the entrance to the church or in one case prominently behind the altar.

A special liturgy program handbook, developed by archdiocesan director of liturgy, Rev. Ron Andree, was sent to all parishes with suggestions for special celebrations.

“The Holy Father during the Year of Mercy also issued an invitation to the church to offer reconciliation more lovingly and frequently and so in this handbook are various materials for reconciliation and penitential services that parishes can use,” said Andree. As well, the diocesan pastoral staff has put together a pastoral overview of incorporating the theme of mercy in all its activities and initiatives.

“Any holy year or thematic year is not intended to replace the regular life of the church but to permeate everything that we do, so conscious attention to mercy and to proclaiming and teaching and



Tim Yaworski

**YEAR OF MERCY** — Members of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate mission team presented an evening of prayer and reflection focused on the Year of Mercy to begin the advent season Nov. 28 at St. Francis Xavier Parish in Saskatoon. God’s mercy at work in each person, in families, in the church and in the world were among the topics explored by each of the four speakers (from left): Rev. Nestor Silva, OMI, Rev. Michael Dechant, OMI, Rev. Nestor Gregoire, OMI, and Rev. Mark Blom, OMI. The evening also included Scripture, music, a dramatic reenactment of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and a washing-of-hands ritual action demonstrating the call to mercy and service.

preaching around mercy is an extra theme which I know all the pastoral offices are attempting to do.”

St. John the Baptist Parish, Estevan, decided to do things that help internal transformation and shows mercy to groups and individuals. The parish cancelled all fees usually charged parish groups for the use of facilities; and reduced the rental rate 40 per cent for groups like pre-school and others who use the church hall and other facilities. “It takes some pressure off local groups who are feeling the pinch

with the drop in oil prices,” said pastor Rev. Brian Meredith.

Estevan bills itself as the energy capital and its economy has seen a downturn. The parish has also cancelled some regular meetings so members can spend more time with their families, said Meredith. “We’re getting away from focusing on the external and focusing on internal transformation. We’ve done really well on the external but need focus. You don’t just talk about mercy, you do it. It’s supposed to be an action.”



# Canada needs National Council for Reconciliation

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — Now that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has completed its mandate, the federal government must establish a National Council for Reconciliation, says lawyer Pierre Baribeau.

Baribeau, who represented the 50 Catholic entities that were parties to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), said unless this council is created the momentum for reconciliation “will still be there but in slow motion.”

At the closing ceremony of the TRC where it released its final report Dec. 15, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his government “will work with leaders of First Nations and the Métis Nation, Inuit, provinces and territories, parties to the residential schools settlement agreement and other key partners to design a national engagement strategy for developing and implementing a national reconciliation framework including a formal response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action.”

Asked if the prime minister’s promise means the 50 Catholic entities corporation will continue to exist to participate in this new phase, Baribeau said no, it will wind down in January 2016 since it was created to meet the financial requirements of the IRSSA

litigation and it will have fulfilled its mandate.

“If the (prime minister) is asking for co-operation, I assume he will get it,” Baribeau said, but it will be directly from the Catholic bishops and religious orders.

“It will be through bilateral and multilateral requests,” he said. “The bishops have been offering their co-operation. The religious groups have not only offered but also are implementing reconciliation across Canada. They have not been waiting for the report.”

“We have hundreds of initiatives of reconciliation and compassion that have been taken by Catholic entities and organizations,” he said. “This has never been stressed or pointed out by anyone.”

Baribeau pointed out the creation of a National Council for Reconciliation is one of the Calls to Action. Now that the TRC has completed its work, “it doesn’t have any structural basis to continue.”

What’s needed is a council created by the prime minister, with appointments by the prime minister, with a budget from the federal government to become a “permanent, dynamic structure of Canadian leaders who were honorary witnesses to the commission, with a great profile of Canadians who want to participate in the movement,” Baribeau said.

The lawyer, who spent 22 years on the file related to resi-



Art Babych

**A LASTING TRIBUTE** — The volumes of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission lay on top of the Bentwood Box, a lasting tribute to all Indian residential school survivors. The box travelled with the TRC to all of its national events throughout Canada. It reflects the strength and resilience of residential school survivors and their descendants, and honours those survivors who are no longer living.

dential schools and dioceses and religious orders that ran them, said he feared media attention “will evaporate if there’s not concrete action that would make that council accountable to Canadians and accountable to Parliament.”

Baribeau said it would be “great” if former Assembly of First Nations chief Phil Fontaine were appointed chair of the council. “He is the first Canadian to have publicly taken the leadership on reconciliation,” he said. “He

started with the truth, and then went to healing, and observing Phil in front of the pope (Benedict XVI in 2009) he is the prototype of reconciliation that Canada needs.”

Former prime minister Paul Martin might be another choice, he said.

The National Council for Reconciliation is #53 in the Calls to Action the TRC published last June. This call to action demands Parliament, in consultation with Aboriginal peoples, enact legislation to “establish the council as an independent national oversight body.”

This council, comprised of members appointed by Canada and Aboriginal organizations, would “monitor, evaluate and report annually to Parliament and the people of Canada on the Government of Canada’s post-apology progress on reconciliation to ensure that government accountability for reconciling the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown is maintained in the coming years.”

At a news conference Dec. 15 after the TRC ceremony, TRC chair Justice Murray Sinclair told journalists: “What we’ve called for is we need to know how they’re going to go about looking at the Calls to Action that we have identified for the federal government such as the Council on Reconciliation . . .”

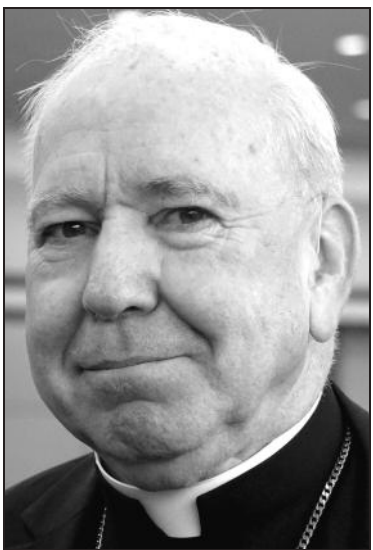
Sinclair also mentioned the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

“We know that it’s going to take a concerted effort for all of the parties working together to implement all of the Calls to Action, and that’s how I understood his indication that he was going to be calling together the parties on how to implement our calls,” he said. “But specific parties have specific abilities that they can do on their own and that’s what they should be doing.”

## TRC reconciliation part of Christmas message for Pettipas

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — Grouard-McLennan Archbishop Gerard Pettipas promised to include a message of reconciliation in his Christmas Eve services in the Little Red River Cree Nation in northern Alberta.



CCN/D. Gyapong

Archbishop Gerard Pettipas

Pettipas, who chaired the 50 Catholic entities who were parties to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), told the closing event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) he would be celebrating Christmas Eve mass in the Garden River and John D’Or Prairie, communities in Little Red River.

“I’m going to speak to them,” he said. “It’s Christmas. I know it’s about celebrating the birth of Jesus. But as we think about that child, Jesus, who was loved by his moth-

er and Joseph, Mary and Joseph, that in a sense this is what we wish for all of our people today.”

The archbishop offered a personal reflection to the several hundred Canadians, including residential school survivors, indigenous leaders, the TRC commissioners and political leaders, describing himself as “a typical non-Aboriginal Canadian.”

“I grew up in a home with loving parents, with brothers and a sister. I got a good education,” he said. “My father used to say to me, you know, the day that you don’t learn something is a wasted day. And as I become familiar with the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and I’ve attended a number of the national events, I came away from there saying I have learned something today.”

“It’s not always been easy to learn it; it’s been very painful as I’ve sat and listened to the stories of countless former students who talk about their experience in the schools. It’s not easy to hear those kinds of stories,” he said.

The testimony of the many survivors documented by the TRC “calls us to honour the experience of their lives, of their youth,” he said.

Pettipas acknowledged the Roman Catholic Church ran the majority of residential schools for the federal government.

“We bear a great responsibility for what happened in those years,” he said. “Back in 1991 I know the first apology was given by the Oblates through then Father Doug Crosby, who is now the Bishop of Hamilton.”

“And it’s obvious that the reality of the schools began to dawn upon us, began to realize what we’ve done,” he said. “We may have thought that we were doing a good work, and to realize that even for all of those good intentions, it wasn’t always good that came of it. And we have to live with that. We have to try to deal with it. We come to the point now where we have to move forward.”

The archbishop said he has reflected a great deal on what reconciliation means, what it looks like and how it comes about.

“I’ve come to realize that it isn’t so much a destination; reconciliation is a way of life,” he said. “It’s a way of life. And it’s how we have to live our lives as Canadians, not just in terms of residential schools.”

“I think this has become sort of a paradigm for the rest of our society. We need to be reconciled — reconciled with ourselves, reconciled with one another, reconciled with our environment, with our world. There — this is a huge task and could be, as I say, a paradigm for everything that we do,” he said. “I commit myself personally, and I will continue to bring before my fellow bishops in Canada and fellow religious leaders the Calls to Action of the TRC. I think there’s a monumental task ahead of us. This is not going to be easy.”

Other churches that were parties to the IRSSA also addressed the meeting.

“The United Church of Canada accepts responsibility for its active role in this history and for our false assumptions of cultural

and spiritual superiority,” said United Church of Canada moderator Rev. Jordan Cantwell.

The United Church has committed itself to the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, she said, and will work with its partners in KAIROS and other parties to the IRSSA “toward a new relationship between Canada’s Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, a relationship built on respect, equity, and mutuality.”

“I want to say thank you for helping me and for helping all Canadians to listen, to wake up, and to learn about this sad chapter in our history as a country,” said Archbishop Fred Hiltz of the Anglican Church of Canada. “Thank you for your role in birthing the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg. Thank you for calling the Government of Canada and the churches who ran the residential schools, including my own, for calling us to account for our participation in an inherently arrogant and flawed policy of assimilation to address the so-called Indian problem, and for every form of abuse experienced by survivors in those schools.”

Rev. Karen Horst of the Presbyterian Church of Canada said she spoke with “mixed emotions.”

“Along with ongoing sadness and shame, we recognize the legacy that has been established, and that the way that the church played a part in all of this,” she said. “But I also am encouraged and am hopeful.”

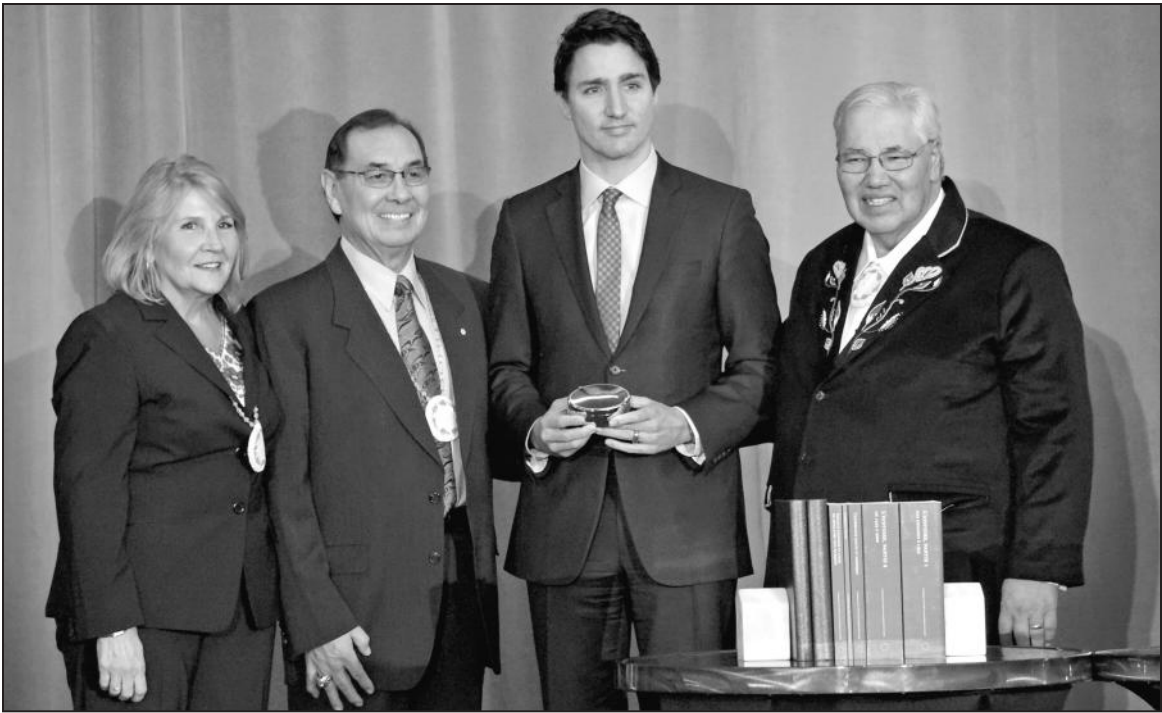


# Trudeau says he will ask Pope Francis to make apology

By Deborah Gyapong

OTTAWA (CCN) — Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he will ask Pope Francis if he would come to Canada to make an apology for Indian residential schools. Trudeau told journalists Dec. 16, the day after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its final report, that he would make the request. Among the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action published last June was a call to the pope to apologize to “survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools.” “We call for that apology to be similar to the 2010 apology issued to Irish victims of abuse and to occur within one year of the issuing of this report and to be delivered by the pope in Canada,” the TRC document said.

Asked if he would “urge” the pope to apologize, Trudeau said told journalists different churches, including the Catholic Church, “are very much engaged with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and I’m certainly intending to work with the Catholic Church, including the Holy See, to move forward on implementing that recommendation, to ask him directly, to engage with this issue, yes.” Trudeau explained it was not his “job to order other governments or other organizations to do anything,” but said he sought constructive engagement with “multiple levels of different organizations” that must recognize their role “in this terrible part of Canada’s past.”



CLOSING CEREMONY — Truth and Reconciliation Commission commissioners Marie Wilson and Chief Wilton Littlechild, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and TRC chair Justice Murray Sinclair Dec. 15 at the closing ceremony of the TRC. Trudeau was presented with a silver box containing a thumb drive of the final report.

Asked if he personally thought the pope should apologize, Trudeau said, “I look forward to have a conversation with His Holiness about this.” At the closing ceremony of the TRC Dec. 15, TRC chair Justice Murray Sinclair expressed hope Pope Francis would answer the TRC’s call for an apology. “Pope Francis’ recent willingness to acknowledge the past offences of his church in South America toward the indigenous peoples there also gives us hope that he on behalf of the Catholic Church will issue an apology to the survivors of residential schools in this country,” Sinclair said Dec. 15 at the release of the TRC’s final report.

Sinclair was referring to Pope Francis’ remarks in Bolivia last July in which he admitted “with regret: many grave sins were created against the native peoples of America in the name of God.” The Holy Father told Bolivians: “I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offences of the church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America.” “Together with this request for forgiveness and in order to be just, I also would like us to remember the thousands of priests and bishops who strongly opposed the logic of the sword with the power of the cross,” he said. “There was sin, a great deal of it, for which we did not ask pardon. So for this, we ask forgiveness. But here also, where there was sin, great sin, grace abounded through the men and women who defended the rights of indigenous peoples.”

Canada’s Papal Nuncio Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi said the pope, since he is a head of state, must be invited by the Canadian government as well as the Catholic bishops of Canada. Bonazzi pointed out the pope is postponing visits to some Italian cities that had already been planned. “He is postponing them to be more available in Rome for the Jubilee Year of Mercy,” he said. “It seems the agenda for 2016 is totally filled,” the nuncio said. “There is, in my opinion, no room for a visit in 2016.” He said the Holy Father already has invitations to come to Canada on his desk from Montreal Archbishop Christian Lépine and Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre to mark the city’s 375th anniversary in 2017. The pope also has an invitation from Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard. In 2017 Canada also marks the 150th anniversary of Confederation. Former prime minister Stephen Harper met with Pope Francis last June, and faced criticism from both the Liberals and the New Democrats for not expressly bringing up the TRC

call for an apology. “I imagine during this visit to Pope Francis in June, the prime minister (Harper) might have voiced this,” the nuncio said. “Of course, the Holy Father has been informed about this (call to action) request.” The nuncio said that the question of a possible visit must be explored with liberty of expression on both sides. But Bonazzi also said Canadians can play a role through prayer to help bring about a visit by Pope Francis. “Now, as far as I can sense and perceive, what is important to transmit to him also are the deep reasons, the deep spiritual and cultural motivations that can enlight-

en and sustain this request in order to let him see that it is not only a formal request contained in a document, but also is coming from a part of the soul of Canada.” At the same time, when the Holy Father receives these requests, “I am sure he is listening with all his heart as a pastor,” Bonazzi said. “I can assure that there will be truly deep attention.” The nuncio also pointed out that “travelling at the age of the Holy Father is not easy.” “He himself said, ‘I am elderly and travelling takes its toll,’ ” Bonazzi said, noting Pope Francis is now 79. The nuncio said he believes a visit to Canada by the Holy Father will be a fruit of a corporate work of prayer and offering “like a choir” so “if it is that must be done, is useful to be done, it may be fulfilled.” The Truth and Reconciliation committee has never acknowledged a formal apology Pope Benedict XVI made in 2009 when he met personally with a former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. In 2009, the pope met in the Vatican with a delegation of native leaders under Phil Fontaine. The explicit purpose of the meeting, which was arranged by Archbishop James Weisgerber, former president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, was to let Benedict apologize for church complicity in residential schools. “We wanted to hear him say that he understands and that he is sorry and that he feels our suffering — and we heard that very clearly,” Fontaine said after the meeting.

## CHAC has lobbying to do

Continued from page 3

express a desire to be euthanized. The panel also wants all institutions to be required to inform their patients and residents of “any institutional position on physician-assisted dying, including any and all limits on its provision.” “Physician-assisted death, by virtue of the Supreme Court decision, is going to be available in Canada. We need to figure out a way to work within that,” said Shea. Shea was glad the report at least acknowledges that Catholic hospitals, nursing homes and hospices simply can’t facilitate voluntary euthanasia. “The issue is, how is the system going to work around that?” he said. “That’s what we’re working with right now.” With the final report of a federal panel soon expected on assisted suicide and the federal government’s application for a six-month extension on the deadline for legislation still pending, the CHAC has a lot of lobbying and persuading to do, said Shea. “Catholic health organizations and individual providers will need to be active in dialogue with government on those provisions,” he said. The federal panel will not make

specific legislative or policy recommendations. The federal report will summarize feedback the panel has collected over the last six months. That leaves the provincial-territorial recommendations as the only input on regulation. Those recommendations include: — no arbitrary waiting or reflection period after a euthanasia request; — no lower age limit; — death certificates to indicate “physician-assisted death” and list an underlying medical condition as cause of death; — no euthanasia to be administered on the authority of a substitute decision-maker; — no requirement that a physician be present at a self-administered assisted death; — unlimited ability for patients to ask other doctors after one doctor judges the patient has failed the competency test; — euthanasia only offered to patients enrolled in publicly funded health insurance plans; — two doctors must sign off on physician-assisted suicide; — assessments by video conference to be allowed in areas where there are few doctors; — a pan-Canadian commission on end-of-life care to provide oversight.

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# GSCS continue to mark Year of Consecrated Life

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

SASKATOON — As the Year of Consecrated Life draws to a close, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools (GSCS) continue to celebrate the contributions that sisters, priests and bishops have made to Catholic education and to highlight the importance of religious vocations.

Pope Francis declared the year at the beginning of Advent 2014, calling for promotion and reflection on the gift of consecrated life. The year officially ends Feb. 2, 2016, the Feast of the Presentation, which is also the World Day of Consecrated Life.

Throughout the year, GSCS have focused on vocations and the call to consecrated life at events such as World Catholic Education Day 2015. A recently published history of Saskatoon Catholic Schools, *Celebrating a Century of Faith and Learning*, clearly shows the key role that sisters, priests and bishops have played in Catholic education since the district began in 1911.

“We have come to a deep realization of the degree of the contribution they have made to where we are today,” says Greg Chatlain, GSCS director of education. “It is important for us to understand our roots, and to appreciate the fact that we stand on the shoulders of giants. We are here today thanks in large part to the commitment and dedication of these folks.”

To conclude the Year of Consecrated Life, the GSCS Together in Faith and Action Committee has now initiated an Honour the Legacy banquet, to be held Jan. 29 at the Cathedral of the Holy Family in Saskatoon. Some 200 consecrated sisters and priests have been invited as special guests.

The school division’s Together

in Faith and Action Committee initiated the Honour the Legacy event. “The committee provides vision and direction for the faith dimension of our schools,” Chatlain said. The committee’s focus includes strengthening connections between home, school and parish; putting “faith in action” through social justice and outreach; and nurturing and supporting the faith journey of GSCS staff, community, parents and students, he said.

“The home-school-parish subcommittee is made up of members from the diocese, the eparchy, parents and school-based staff, and one of the realizations that came through as they were working through the Year of Consecrated Life was the absolute foundational work that the consecrated and ordained and religious did when it comes to Catholic education,” added Chatlain.

Ultimately, the call of Catholic education has always been grounded in the understanding of the human person as a child of God, with inherent dignity and gifts, he said. “Each child is gifted in amazing ways and our role is to help discover those gifts and then develop those gifts and help them hear their call and where that’s going to take them.”

Throughout its history, the church and religious orders have been involved in education, he noted.

“It has become clear the impact they have had — and that really raises the expectation for the laity now. We must continue to ensure that we are appropriately attending to the faith dimension of our schools. And that can be a challenge, because we don’t have that same background, the same training,” he said, stressing that Catholic schools in Saskatoon continue to

rely on connections to the ordained and religious in fostering faith formation for students and staff.

The new GSCS history book — *Celebrating a Century of Faith and Learning* — describes how in the fall of 1911, Rev. H. L. Vachon, OMI, and Bishop Pascal found teachers for Saskatoon’s first Catholic separate school, which opened in the basement of St. Paul’s Cathedral. The Saskatoon Catholic district began, staffed by three nuns from the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, with Sister St. Solange as principal and Sisters Mary Augustine and Leander as classroom teachers.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Sion arrived in 1917, establishing Sion Academy for girls in 1919. Meanwhile in the Humboldt area, now a part of the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools division, the Ursuline sisters were invited by the Benedictines to staff schools in that area. In total, 15 religious communities have served the Saskatoon Catholic school division, alongside both diocesan and eparchial priests, as well as priests from the Basilian, Benedictine, Dominican, Redemptorist, and Oblates of Mary Immaculate religious orders.

“The dedication of many religious communities was instrumental in establishing a tradition of excellence in Catholic education and faith formation,” recounts *Celebrating a Century of Faith and Learning*. “This tradition continues today in our school division. In the early years, the sisters taught for little or no pay. Until the 1960s they were paid less than lay teachers.”

Without the sacrifice of both religious and lay teachers throughout the early years — in particular during the tough times of the 1920s and 1930s — the district

would not have survived, the book points out.

“We hear those stories from the 1920s and 30s where the economy was challenged, and the school board was in rough shape financially,” noted Chatlain. “Many of the consecrated turned their paycheques back, so that the board could stay solvent and Catholic schools could continue to operate.”

Chatlain also emphasized that the focus for the Year of Consecrated Life has not only been about celebrating the past. “We are also continuing to highlight to our students and staff that these vocations are important today,” he said. “Vocations have come through students who have attended Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, and — God willing — there will continue to be vocations that come through in our students. We have a role to support that, to foster that, to honour that, and to celebrate that. We want this to also be a signpost in the ground that this is a very important aspect of who we are

and we want to be able to foster these calls within our students today and in the future.”

Chatlain also acknowledged that the path of Catholic education has never been a gentle, smooth journey.



Bayda

**HOLY DOOR — Bishop Bryan Bayda, CSsR, of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon officially opened the Holy Door at St. Basil’s Church in Regina Dec. 12, as part of the Jubilee of Mercy year proclaimed by Pope Francis. Other Holy Doors designated in the eparchy will be opened in the days ahead, including at St. George Cathedral in Saskatoon on Christmas Eve, at St. Joseph’s home and the Shrine of the Blessed Nun Martyrs on Christmas Day, as well as at St. Mary’s Church in Yorkton Dec. 26 and Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Canora Dec. 27.**

“Whether we consider the role of the religious and ordained and consecrated, or whether we think about the work of the laity — all have played significant roles over the years and have had to make sacrifices. People have put a lot on the line in support of and defence of Catholic education, and I don’t see that changing in this day and age.”

## Roughrider lineman helps students get a healthy start

By Derrick Kunz

SASKATOON — Jorgen Hus of the Saskatchewan Roughriders visited St. Edward School in Saskatoon Dec. 16 to help give students an active start to the day.

The school’s Building Our Kids’ Success (BOKS) program is a free activity program intended to empower students, parents and staff to live a healthier lifestyle. The program is designed to make a difference in schools by helping students get their brains and bodies ready for a day of learning.

“The goal of the BOKS’ curriculum is to keep children moving while having fun,” said St. Edward Principal Renée Cratty.

The program, organized and led by the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) facilitator and the school’s Aboriginal student achievement coordinator, has been running at St. Edward twice a week since September. It consists of a warm-up activity, running, relay races and many other team-oriented games. Sessions end with a cool down that includes a nutrition talk about making healthy choices. Children then take part in the breakfast program before heading to class.

“We know there is a strong link between physical activity and nutrition and cognitive awareness,”

said Candace Bloomquist, HPS facilitator. “Through the program, children increase their physical activity levels by up to 80 minutes each week, giving them the ability to focus better in the classroom.”

HPS is a partnership between the Saskatoon Health Region and four Saskatoon and area school divisions. HPS aims to improve students’ learning and well-being and support healthy school environments. HPS is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada’s Innovation Strategy for Achieving Healthier Weights.

BOKS was developed by a group of mothers who were inspired by the book *Spark* written by Dr. John Ratey. Ratey stated that “exercise is the single most powerful tool we have to optimize the function of our brains.” Implemented in nearly 1,000 schools in the U.S. and Canada, BOKS provides opportunities for children to be physically active and learn about nutrition.

With 45 schools and nearly 17,000 students, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools provides Catholic education from pre-kindergarten through Grade 12, “rooting students in their faith, helping them grow in knowledge, and encouraging them to reach out and transform the world.”



Oliver

**RPC OUTREACH — Volunteers recently gathered at the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon to deliver Christmas gifts to patients and staff.**

## Christmas outreach a joy-filled event

By Peter Oliver

SASKATOON — Volunteers recently gathered at the Regional Psychiatric Centre (RPC) in Saskatoon to deliver Christmas gifts to patients and staff. Joyful carols were heard up and down the halls and warm wishes were extended to RPC patients and staff. This is the fourth year the event has been held.

The Micah Mission worked

together with volunteers from Holy Family Cathedral to lead the event. A number of students from St. Thomas More College also joined in visiting those who might otherwise have no one to remember them during the Christmas season.

The Micah Mission is an ecumenical restorative justice organization and the co-ordinators said they were pleased to have volunteers from the Mennonite and Pentecostal communities join the initiative this

year. The Ukrainian Catholic community also supported the event by contributing to the gifts.

A number of schools also contribute to the event by providing Christmas cards and decorating the boxes in which the gifts are delivered.

The day was marked by a joy-filled spirit, with more than one volunteer remarking that “this helps us to remember what Christmas is all about.”



# Christmas: time to show Christians our Jewishness

By Michael Swan  
The Catholic Register

Just in time for Christmas, the Vatican is reminding the world just how Jewish the Christian religion really is.

The reminder comes in a 10,000-word reflection issued Dec. 10 by the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

"Judaism is not to be considered simply another religion; the Jews are instead our 'elder brothers' (St. Pope John Paul II), our 'fathers in faith' (Benedict XVI)," it reads.

Though it's all been said before, Cardinal Kurt Koch and his commission drive home the point that Christians can't understand our own faith without understanding its Jewish origins.

"One cannot understand Jesus' teaching or that of his disciples without situating it within the Jewish horizon in the context of the living tradition of Israel; one would understand his teachings even less so if they were seen in opposition to this tradition," reads the reflection.

Christmastime and the Christmas story are the perfect opportunity for Catholics to learn more about the Jewishness of Catholic faith. The story of the birth of Jesus is rooted in the Old Testament.

When Jewish New Testament scholar Adele Reinhartz starts her lectures about the stories of Jesus' birth, she often must overcome confusion among her Christian students at the University of Ottawa.

"My students are always shocked when I point out that the story they know as the Christmas story is actually some sort of conflation of Matthew and Luke, and that John and Mark don't have one," Reinhartz said.



CNS/Rainer Jensen, EPA

**OUR JEWISH ROOTS — An illuminated Hanukkah menorah stands in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin in this Dec. 23, 2014, photo. The Vatican is reminding Catholics, through its Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, how much our faith owes to Judaism.**

Writing for a mostly Jewish audience, Matthew knew exactly how Jews would understand the story of liberation he was about to tell. His account "has a lot to do with the Book of Exodus," said Reinhartz. She says that, in terms of Jewish thinking at the time the Gospel was written, the Book of Exodus was a model for God's intervention in history."

Matthew tells the story of how Jesus was born in terms that parallel Israel's escape from bondage in Egypt. This was the surest way of showing that the coming story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is the story of the liberation of humanity. The first two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew foreshadow the last two chapters.

Exodus begins with Pharaoh instructing midwives to kill the male children of Jewish women. In Matthew, Herod is the foreign king who instructs his soldiers to kill Jewish children. In Exodus, the prophet who leads Israel to

liberation, Moses, escapes the slaughter. In Matthew, the prophet who leads all humanity to liberation escapes the slaughter.

Jesus lives through a kind of exodus in reverse, fleeing Israel for the safety of Egypt — the way Joseph in Genesis found refuge in Egypt and thus saved Israel.

Matthew's Jewish readers would easily make the connection between Jesus and Moses. Each of them would know Moses' promise to Israel in Deuteronomy 18:15: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet."

Making this link between Matthew and Exodus was important in a culture that valued the past because, "as soon as you want to make another claim about divine intervention in history it's going to be more effective if you can link it up to the prior event," said Reinhartz.

Exodus also looms in the

background of the Gospel of Luke. But there are differences. Where Matthew was writing for Jews, Luke had a gentile, likely Roman, audience in mind.

"For Matthew (referring to Exodus) is to say to his own community, 'Hey, we're still Jews.' For Luke, it's to say to the larger community, 'Hey, we're actually Jewish,'" said University of St. Michael's College New Testament scholar John McLaughlin.

In the Roman Empire and particularly in the ancient near East, any claim to be a new religion that lacked a foundation in the past was regarded as dangerous. The gentile Christians needed the safety of being associated with an ancient tribe of monotheists.

But it was more than that. They genuinely believed themselves to be saved by a Jewish Messiah. They knew Jesus was Jewish.

"When Luke is writing, when Matthew is writing, there is no New Testament," points out McLaughlin.

"When they speak of Scripture they mean the First Testament, they mean the Old Testament. That's Scripture. The fact they use it so extensively means that they're making a conscious effort to link the experience of Jesus, and in this instance the Christmas story, to link it to those Jewish roots."

Where the Jewish roots to Luke's Christmas story really show is in the poetry. There are three poetic passages from the first two chapters of Luke that have entered the Divine Office, the prayer of the church, in morning, evening and night prayer. They are generally known by their Latin names — *Magnificat*, *Benedictus* and *Nunc Dimittis*.

Mary's hymn of liberation prayed by monks, nuns and priests around the world every evening is the best known — the *Magnificat*. It's a typically Jewish poem built on parallel lines, where the second line seems to repeat the first.

"It's a hymn of praise. It's a hymn of liberation too," said McLaughlin. "The casting down of rulers, the lifting up of the lowly — this kind of thing. This stuff is taken straight from the Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10)."

The same theme of liberation, again quoting from the prophets, comes up in the other two great poems of Luke's Christmas story. Simeon's prayer (Luke 2:29-32) on being presented with the infant Jesus in the temple is taken from Isaiah's servant songs (Isaiah 51:4-6). Zechariah's prophecy (Luke 1:68-79) talks about Israel overcoming its enemies in terms strongly reminiscent of Psalms 132:17.

"By invoking this, the liberation story, you've got (the story) rooted in the First Testament," said McLaughlin. "They're saying the same thing — that Jesus comes to set us free."

## Thoroughness of the TRC report is impressive, says Pettipas

Continued from page 1

he said, but the broad strokes were already outlined even in the interim report of a couple of years ago, and in last June's release of the executive summary.

"One of the things that struck me and impressed me about the report, is how thorough it is," Pettipas said. "There is not a stone unturned on the history of the schools; the history before the schools; the way the schools came to a slow and gradual halt; and what has proceeded after the schools in terms of education. It's comprehensive."

Among some of the Calls to Action concerning the various churches involved in the IRSSA is a call for the repudiation of the "doctrine of discovery" that gave European colonizers the right to claim discovered lands as their own, Pettipas said.

The TRC also calls for the churches to affirm native spirituality and customs because from the time of contact through the residential school system, "there was a sense their own spirituality and customs were denigrated," he said.

One area that is going to require more dialogue, the archbishop said, concerns the Christian "missionary

mandate" that is found at the end of St. Matthew's Gospel, to "go out and baptize all nations in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

In recent years, with the Catholic Church's emphasis on new evangelization, we are called on "to evangelize anew, to bring the Gospel and share it with others," he said.

"I've never believed in forcing people to accept Jesus Christ, and I don't know if there are examples in history, of people out of some misguided principles forcing people to be baptized," he said. "You cannot force people to have faith; it's a question of individual conscience and choice. It's what we would call a gift of faith."

"There is no way as a church we are going to deny our commission from Jesus Christ to evangelize," he said. "But the way that is best exercised is through freedom and not through any kind of coercion."

"This is where a call to action around those kinds of issues, I think would have to happen in dialogue. I would want to sit down and have a conversation maybe with a few church leaders and a few native leaders and talk about that and get an accurate sense of what that means," he said.

While the vast majority of Christian leaders and ministers recognize and accept the validity of other peoples' beliefs, "their having a faith is not going to stop me from being who I am," the archbishop said.

"If someone is seeking faith or asks me about Jesus Christ and the Christian church I'll be honest and forthright in presenting that," he said. "That doesn't prevent me from honouring their person and their culture."

What the TRC has helped everyone understand is how the residential schools and the policies that gave rise to them created great suffering for Aboriginal people, he said. "We realize more of this now; we realize what has gone wrong. There has been a lot of headway gained in this whole process. One of things I always look for in this is balance."

Baribeau said it "appears a very large portion of the Canadian public has reacted already and is trying to take roads to live through the concept of reconciliation."

Baribeau, who has spent 22 years involved in aspects of the IRSSA process that led to the TRC, said he thinks the "legal period" of the IRSSA is over and

now it is time for the "social and economic aspects of this matter" to be addressed.

"They have to be addressed," he said. "From what we gather from the new prime minister, he declared his intent to follow up on those Calls to Action."

Pettipas noted Justin Trudeau made campaign promises to adopt all the Calls to Action that "might be a bit naive" especially since many of them, such as getting the pope to come and apologize in Canada within a year, are not something the new prime minister can deliver. "Many have to be worked out by discussion; they can't be done unilaterally."

But, that said, the archbishop said Trudeau "seems to be starting off on the right foot. There's a certain confidence people have."

Baribeau admitted any report, especially "such a voluminous document," will "receive its fair share of criticism," but it's being received in a "compassionate atmosphere" and reconciliation processes "have already taken their own speed."

"We really hope it will be a major contribution to Canadian history," he said. "The dioceses and religious groups have to re-

think the ways things have been dealt with and ask 'How can we now, in the 21st century, get closer to the people who have been suffering, including on a cultural basis.'"

Even the dioceses that did not have Indian residential schools now have sizeable numbers of indigenous peoples living in them. Many First Nations, Métis and Inuit now live in large cities, not on reserves, Baribeau said. "There has to be a new dynamic to create expectancy of a second start with First Nations."

The 50 Catholic entities will soon dissolve as a legal entity once it satisfies the last of its financial obligations. Pettipas said the entities are about to pay the last \$1.2 million of the \$29 million they owed under the IRSSA.

The IRSSA required the Catholic entities to pay \$79 million altogether: \$29 million in cash contributions; \$25 million of "in kind services" toward reconciliation and healing by the members over a 10-year period; and to make up the balance through a best-effort fundraising campaign, the archbishop said.

That fundraising effort fell short of what they had hoped to raise.



# Bon Bini: Christmas away brings thoughts of peace

## Around the Kitchen Table

Lloyd Ratzlaff



In late December of 1974, 50 or so members of my extended family travelled from our widely dispersed homes to the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba. The trip was in honour of my Aunt Betty, who had worked there as a

*Ratzlaff is the author of three books of literary non-fiction published by Thistledown Press: The Crow Who Tampered With Time (2002), Backwater Mystic Blues (2006), and Bindy's Moon (2015); and editor of Seeing it Through, an anthology of seniors' writings published by READ Saskatoon. Formerly a minister, counsellor and university instructor, he now makes his living as a writer in Saskatoon.*

missionary for her entire adult life. Among her many duties, she was compiling the first dictionary of Papiamentu, a Creole language spoken by residents of the “ABC Islands,” Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao. The Aruban governor was to give Betty a special citation marking the 25th anniversary of her residence, and this became the occasion for the 50-odd members of our clan to take a Caribbean holiday while at the same time celebrating one of our own kin.

As our flight from Miami pulled up at the Oranjestad airport, a welcoming committee hoisted a *BON BINI* sign. When we had cleared customs — an easy matter in those days — we boarded a bus to the camp where we’d be billet-

ed, and learned first of all that *Bon Bini* is the Papiamentu phrase for “Welcome.” On the short ride to Camp Washington (every ride in Aruba is short — the island is just 17 miles long by three miles wide), our welcome grew warmer by the minute. Outside the bus windows there were a few Christmas lights here and there strung on cactuses, and this sight struck me as almost absurdly funny.

By the time we had unpacked our luggage (in a religious, not military, camp) someone mentioned attending church the next morning, and I was puzzled. I’d already forgotten Christmas Day, feeling as far from my accustomed sleighbells and snow-laden pines as from a Bethlehem manger and desert kings arriving on camels. The temperature in Aruba is about 80 degrees Fahrenheit all year round, and some younger members of our troupe began pulling bunkbeds from the cabins to sleep outside under divi-divi trees in the yard (and continued doing this as long as we were there).

This was my first Christmas away from the prairies, and of

course the incongruous images stood out most. White sand beaches instead of snowdrifts, groves of coconut palms but not a single burning yule log, music from dinga-linga boxes and steel bands rather than folks in thick parkas carolling about a poor man gathering his winter fuel. One of the quaintest sights of all was the Texas gates in front of fashionable American hotels, to keep out the goats that ran free over much of the island. Yet the beaches behind the hotels were public, so that anyone — registered guest or not — had access to them through the hotels’ properties. Everyone welcome to Aruba’s sands and turquoise sea.

Very late on Christmas Eve we took a swim in the Caribbean, and on Christmas afternoon we went body-surfing, where at home we’d have been tobogganing down some slippery hill. Aruba is a small island of desert and oasis, where the sharks are regularly fed off the rocky eastern shore to keep them far away from the peaceable beaches stretching out on the opposite side.

Despite all the unusual sights

and a full slate of activities, there was in me an abiding sense of Christmas peace, and also this recurring thought: If the war machinery of the world can be made to hold still for 24 hours — as it mostly had been again — then why not for 24 days, or as many weeks?

Aunt Betty’s gala was a fancy Saturday-night affair at which she appeared humbly proud, if such an oxymoron may be permitted. On Sunday morning I was invited to preach (for I was a minister back then) with the aid of an interpreter, Reverend Bicenti Henriques, who many years later married Betty after his first wife died. I’ve long ago forgotten what I said in that callow sermon (but may it be forgiven), nor can I recall any Papiamentu whatsoever except for the enchanting term *Bon Bini*. Since that Christmas, the outer world has not stopped revolving, and the challenge to bring peace to our inner worlds remains as pressing as ever.

*Bon Bini* to us all — to our nativity, to another new year, and to greater and deeper peace on earth.

## Letter to children from Santa reveals to them their greatest gift

*St. Nicholas was born in the third century in a part of Greece that's now Turkey. His life was devoted to helping the sick and the needy, especially children, and he became the bishop of the city of Myra, which no longer exists. His ongoing work as Santa Claus, the jolly man in red who delivers gifts to all the beloved children of the world in just one night, is assisted by Cedric Speyer who is a Clinical Supervisor of E-Counselling for a major Employee & Family Assistance Program and a consultant for therapeutic letters. Speyer lives in Toronto.*

### An open letter to children from Santa:

To all those who have emailed, texted, and tweeted me, thank you for writing to me and believing in me. Children of all ages still believe in me, and I think I know why. It’s because, when they think of me, they think of someone who loves children and wants them to be happy.

When people say they believe in me, I think they are also saying that they believe there’s goodness in the world, and the smallest good deed can be the biggest gift. So thank you for all your messages. Some of them are very sad, but even then I can still hear your hidden hopes for happiness, and how bringing a smile to your face can be worth more than anything. At this time of year, I hear from many children around the world with many, many wishes. But there’s really only one wish — for people to be happy, beginning with yourself.

That brings us to *how* to be happy. As I read through your letters, I feel my own heart gets bigger. I already have a pretty big heart but when I see your “wish lists,” I want to reach out and give each of you a big Santa hug. You have been through so much this year. I’ll tell you a secret. You may hear me saying “Ho, ho, ho” all the time, but I know that people have lots of problems. I also know a lot about children. It makes me happy to see the sparkling eyes of children who know love and safety in their homes, but, sadly, not every

child comes from a happy home.

Some of you would give anything just to have a parent look at you and smile; to be proud of you and not act sad, mad or mean, calling you bad names as if it’s all your fault. Others have parents who aren’t there, or who are sick in some way. It can be really hard to watch someone we love not getting better. I also hear from kids who want to be so skinny that they disappear; kids who plead with me to make our schools and streets safer, and protect them from bullies; kids who come from other parts of the world and are trying so hard to be accepted here, in their new country. Many kids write to me who want to know what’s wrong with the world and what’s the point of living when people are so mean and cruel to each other.

I hear about a lot of things that hurt my heart. So I want to remind you of the most important Christmas gift there is — you! You don’t have to wait for Christmas day to open this gift and when you do, remember what Santa is saying. The magic in our hearts is too big to be held back. I can’t be everywhere at once and that’s why I need you. Maybe we can try something together. Every day we can remember to tell at least one person something we like about them. And don’t forget yourself! Stand in front of the nearest mirror and say to yourself out loud: “*I love you (say your first name), I really do, and no matter what happens I am here for you!*” Don’t think

about how weird it sounds or looks. As you get older, those words will come to mean more and more to you. Santa knows what he’s talking about when it comes to Love.


I will keep working hard up here in my North Pole studio to make our world a safe and loving home for all of us and I know you will too. At the same time, I won’t forget to have fun because when it comes to that, children are our best teachers! Thank you for your good wishes on behalf of my staff. It helps my elves to know you care about the stress they are going through at this time of year. I admit that come December I get all wrapped up in preparing gifts for everyone and dealing with the restless reindeer. I can even forget to tell Mrs. Claus how great she is (she’s so patient with me). Yet there’s one gift that matters most, more than all the presents you could ever receive. You are that special gift for those around you. Please remember that. Whenever you open your heart to others, I’ll know you’ll be helping me deliver the gift only you can bring!

Love, Santa



Design Pics

**SANTA AND HIS GIFTS** — At Christmas, Santa Claus reminds children that being themselves is the greatest gift.



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This Christmas carol stands out amid holiday crowd

Screenings & Meanings

Gerald Schmitz



Had your fill of “holiday” movies? Apart from the few perennial classics on TV, there’s so much dross. Current cases in point: the vulgar comedy *The Night Before*, slightly less awful *Christmas Eve*, *Christmas monster invasion Krampus*. Ugh.

There are much better choices, fortunately, including the most hyped movie of the century, *Star Wars Episode VI: The Force Awakens*, shattering records and showing everywhere. Needing no further attention from me, enjoy for what it is — fantasy and spectacle on an epic scale.

Let me highlight instead a much more intimate human drama — a very different Christmas story — already showered with awards and nominations since its Cannes festival debut, including leading the Golden Globes parade with five.

Todd Haynes’ *Carol* is based on Phyllis Nagy’s adaptation of Patricia Highsmith’s 1952 novel *The Price of Salt*, published under the pseudonym Claire Morgan since it speaks of the forbidden. From a prologue glimpse into the penultimate final scene we move back to a grey wintry New York circa 1950 and the moment when wealthy socialite Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett) eyes a young impressionable department store clerk in a Santa hat, Therese

Belivet (Rooney Mara). The impeccable alluring Carol, mother to four-year-old daughter Rindy, wants a divorce from stolid husband Harge (Kyle Chandler) who wants to keep the family together while stewing over her relationship with friend and former lover Abby (Sarah Paulson). Therese, an aspiring photographer, has a boyfriend, Richard (Jake Lacy), who wants to marry her. But she is beguiled by Carol, drawn into feelings she struggles to understand.

The chance first encounter leads to Therese visiting Carol in her country mansion when Harge barges in to remove Rindy for Christmas. Innocence is shed in stages as Carol invites Therese on a road trip west to Chicago, then to Waterloo, Iowa (my father was born near there), where passion takes over on New Year’s Eve. Discovering that Harge is having them followed and demanding sole child custody on grounds of “morality” forces a separation. Carol and Therese will have to choose.

Focused on the female gaze in a repressed society, the rendering of what grows between Carol and Therese is exquisitely realized due to outstanding performances by Blanchett and Mara (named best actress at Cannes). Ed Lachman’s superlative cine-

matography, shooting in Super 16mm celluloid, perfectly evokes the period in which the non-conforming must bear a price for the possibility of love.

Here are 14 other releases of note:

**Legend** (<http://www.leg- endthemovie.com/>): Tom Hardy caps a banner year in the dual role of the gangster Kray twins Reggie and Ronnie — the former, who makes an ill-fated marriage, unable to control the latter, a homosexual psychopath. Be warned about brutal violence as Brian Helgeland helms this real-life story of 1960s London vice and corruption leading to the brothers’ inevitable downfall.

**The Big Short** (<http://www. thebigshortmovie.com/>): Adam McKay directs an A-list ensemble cast including Canadian Ryan Gosling in a raucous adaptation of Michael Lewis’s eponymous book about the 2008 financial crash triggered in the United States by the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market. This oddball tale of malfeasance and speculative frenzy manages to be both hilarious and a biting commentary on hyper-capitalism gone off the rails.

**In the Heart of the Sea** (<http://www.intheheartofthe- seamovie.com/>): Ron Howard helms a watery yarn about the ill-fated Nantucket schooner *Essex* sunk in the early 1820s by a monster white whale, said to be the inspiration for *Moby Dick*. We get Herman Melville too, dragging out terrible secrets from the last of starving survivors pursued by the enraged giant while adrift in the Pacific vastness.

**Every Thing Will be Fine:** German master Wim Wenders’ latest, set in Quebec, follows the brooding arc of a writer (James Franco) responsible for a child’s death in a Christmastime road accident. Charlotte Gainsbourg is affecting as the bereaved mother, as is Robert Naylor as the troubled surviving brother.

**The Danish Girl:** Tom Hooper directs this story of the



Weinstein

**BEST PICTURE CONTENDER** — Todd Haynes’ *Carol* is based on Phyllis Nagy’s adaptation of Patricia Highsmith’s 1952 novel *The Price of Salt*. The film has received numerous nominations since premiering at Cannes.

Danish transgender pioneer Lili Elbe, born Einar Wegener, who in the 1930s was among the first to undergo sex reassignment surgery. As Lili, Oscar winner Eddie Redmayne effects another remarkable physical transformation, and Alicia Vikander, the year’s busiest actress, plays the supportive spouse.

**Joy** (<http://www.foxmovies. com/movies/joy>): Director/co-writer David O. Russell (*Silver Linings Playbook*) reunites Jennifer Lawrence, Bradley Cooper and Robert De Niro in a dysfunctional family saga revolving around the ups and downs of Joy Mangano (Lawrence) whose “Miracle Mop” became a home-shopping success in the 1990s. There’s plenty of melodrama to be mopped up.

**Sisters:** The irrepressible comedic duo of Tina Fey and Amy Poehler are the sparks for much sibling silliness when, to prevent the sale of the parental home, they throw a wild and crazy house party that goes outrageously wrong.

**Concussion** (<http://www.sony pictures.com/movies/concus- sion/>): Will Smith stars as Dr. Bennet Omalu, a Pittsburgh neuropathologist and Nigerian immigrant whose diagnosis of football-related brain trauma brings him in conflict with the big-business powers of pro sports.

**Macbeth:** Justin Kurzel’s stunning screen version of the Shakespearean classic stars Michael Fassbender as the murderous Thane of Scotland and

Marion Cotillard as Lady Macbeth.

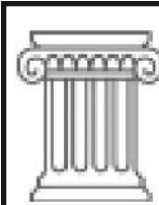
**The Hateful Eight** (<http://the- hatefuleight.com/>): Writer-director Quentin Tarantino serves up some of his trademark bloody ultra-violence in a wintry saga of deception and betrayal set in 19th-century Wyoming.

**The Revenant** (<http://www. foxmovies.com/movies/the- revenant>): Leonardo DiCaprio is a fur trapper mauled by a grizzly and Tom Hardy plays a malevolent figure in Oscar-winning director Alejandro González Iñárritu’s raw visceral 1820s frontier tale of vengeance and extreme survival.

**Life:** Dane DeHaan plays 1950s screen idol James Dean and Robert Pattinson is the *Life* magazine reporter assigned to do a photo shoot of Dean in this Canadian co-production (with the U.K., U.S. and Australia) directed by Anton Corbijn.

**The Lady in the Van:** The great Maggie Smith hams it up as Miss Shepherd, a cranky elderly squatter allowed to park her live-in van on the north London property of Alan Bennett (Alex Jennings) who gradually discovers her extraordinary life.

**Youth:** From writer-director Paolo Sorrentino comes this story of two old friends, Fred and Mick, a composer and a filmmaker played by veterans Michael Caine and Harvey Keitel, who while on vacation in a Swiss Alps spa reflect on their careers, their children, and what lies unfinished.



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CNS/Disney

**EPIC SCALE** — *Star Wars Episode VI: The Force Awakens*, is the most hyped movie of the century, shattering records and showing everywhere. Enjoy for what it is, writes Gerald Schmitz — fantasy and spectacle on an epic scale.



# Stepping through a doorway can be life-changing

# Breaking Open the Ordinary

*Sandy Prather*



*Knock, knock.* My six-year-old granddaughter, delighted that she has learned a new joke, is persistent in demanding a response from the people around her. “Who’s there?” we reply patiently and while the answer is invariably an already known “groaner” from the adult’s standpoint, she is endlessly amused.

One might have heard *Knock, knock* echoing around the world beginning on Dec. 8 as Pope Francis stood at St. Peter's Basilica in front of a massive door and rapped on it. As the Holy Door swung open, Francis paused on the threshold, silently taking a moment to pray before stepping through and formally inaugurating the Year of Mercy. A few days later, on the Third Sunday of Advent, the knocking resounded worldwide as cathedrals and local churches, at Francis' decree, opened their own Doors of Mercy and invited people to step through them.

The action is not a meaningless one. Stepping through doorways can be life-changing, as the children of Narnia at the back of a battered wardrobe discovered and as Dorothy and her companions facing the doors of Emerald City were to learn. Doorways are portals to newness: behind is one space, one way of being; in front is another. When we step over the threshold of a doorway, we leave something behind and enter into something new.

*Prather, BEd, MTh, is a teacher and facilitator in the areas of faith and spirituality. She was executive director at Star of the North Retreat Centre in St. Albert, Alta., for 21 years and resides in Sherwood Park with her husband, Bob. They are blessed with four children and 10 grandchildren.*

Pope Francis stands at the doorway of the church and invites all into newness. “Enter into the land I am giving you,” says the Lord, and Francis describes for us the contours of the new landscape. It is a land where mercy reigns, the face of God is pure tenderness and where all are welcome. It is a church where people gaze at one another and the world with softened hearts and gentle eyes. It is a place where forgiveness and reconciliation trump legalism, and the church forgoes its obsession with dogmatism, rubrics and orthodoxy, in favour of being a hospital for souls and a witness and voice for the marginalized and the poor. “Step into this land,” Francis urges, “step over the threshold, into a church where God’s mercy is poured out and lived.”

But this Holy Year might also be a time to consider the other doors and thresholds in our lives, doors where we stand and knock, thresholds where we wait to be invited to cross into new lands.

Near where I live, a retreat centre has opened just such a “holy door.” With permission from the diocesan bishop, the centre has become a designated pilgrimage site for the Year of Mercy. It is a Franciscan owned centre and their theme for the year, in the spirit of *Laudato Si’*, is the sacredness of creation. Thus, their Holy Door is a little different: it opens not into the vast expanse of a church, nor even the intimacy of a retreat centre chapel. Their Holy Door is an indoor one which opens out into a grotto. One steps across its threshold out into a garden; one steps across its threshold into creation itself.

At this time of year it is winter's whiteness that greets you: trees and shrubs, barren and stark; a small frozen stream, grey with ice striations; deer and fox tracks marking the otherwise smooth



CNS/Philippe Vaillancourt, Presence

**HOLY DOORS** — North America's only Holy Door was reopened at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Quebec City (seen here) for the Jubilee of Mercy, with Cardinal Gerald Lacroix calling it "a sensible and tangible sign of our God's open heart, from which springs and flows the wide river of mercy." With the year of mercy, Pope Francis stands at the doorway of the church and invites all into newness, writes Sandy Prather.

snow; a crystal clear blue sky so bright it hurts your eyes to gaze up at it. But as the pilgrims come and the year unfolds, winter's white will give way to spring's tender green, followed by summer's vivid florals and, eventually, autumn's fire. At each season of the year, as people step through this particular Door of Mercy, they will experience the wonder and the grandeur found in the cathedral of creation. Hopefully, as they do so, they will know humankind's need to seek mercy for the sins we have committed against our beautiful home, "for the sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life" as Francis puts it in *Laudato Si'*. Stepping across the threshold out into the world, men and women will be invited to live

in right relationship with all created things and with the very stuff of our planet. Mercy, indeed!

Then there are the many doors each of us faces personally. They might be in our families: the locked bedroom door of our alienated teen; the closed door that shuts us out of our elderly parents' lives; the barrier between brother and sister. They might be in our places of work: bitterness toward co-workers; accumulated disappointments over time. How many of our relationships are characterized by seemingly impassable barriers of anger, pain, cynicism, or resentment? How can we open the doors of dialogue and gain entry into a new way of being with one another? During this Year of Mercy, we are invited to say, *Knock, knock.*

before all the closed doors of our  
lives and invite mercy in.

We stand before so many doors. Some we are eager to enter, but, standing before others, we are apprehensive or reluctant. Some doors will open easily; others only with difficulty. Some might even remain closed. But we try. Knocking, standing on their thresholds, we too pray. We pray to be invited in; we pray to enter in with transformed hearts, accompanied by the Lord of Mercy. Only then will we enter the land the Lord is trying to give us.

What doors stand before you? Where will you knock and ask to be allowed in? What thresholds are waiting to be crossed and especially, where and how will you let the Lord of Mercy into your own life?

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# Arise and shine, for our Christmas work begins now



My first walk to work in the New Year will be on Monday, Jan. 4. Starlight, a waning crescent moon and streetlights will illuminate my steps. Dark and cold easily characterize the early days of January in the Yukon. Pessimism and feelings of hopelessness can follow entrain. For about 10 per cent of northerners an actual type of depression, seasonal affective disorder, is triggered by the lack of sunlight at this time of year. As well the elderly, virtually trapped inside their homes by the cold and inclement conditions, can face increased loneliness. The stress of holiday bills coming due may touch others.

Yet the light slowly begins coming back now. At first only a few seconds of sunlight are added to each day. Soon, though, there will be minutes more gained with each

Epiphany of the Lord	Isaiah 60:1-6 Psalm 72 Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6 Matthew 2:1-12
January 3, 2016	

turn of our planet. From the winter solstice in December to the summer solstice in June we gain an additional 13 hours and 32 seconds of sunlight in Whitehorse. Always with that natural increase in light optimism and hope seem to come as a revelation.

Matthew tells us a story in the gospel for Epiphany of long-ago travellers who journeyed in the dark. They followed a star. Prophecies or something in their lore had linked the unusual rising of a star with a special birth, the coming of a king. They came “to pay him homage.” At the end of their trek a Saviour was revealed to them. Even as an infant his presence was made manifest to the world.

We know very little from Matthew about who these

*Dougherty is co-chair of the Social Justice Committee at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Whitehorse, Yukon.*

travellers were, only that they are “from the East.” No exact number is given for these visitors. Varying traditions have as many as 12 or as few as two coming to pay homage to the infant Jesus. In Matthew’s account, which is the only scriptural source that mentions them, they come bearing three gifts: “gold, frankincense and myrrh.” This sparks the most popular belief that there were three Magi, each offering one of the gifts.

These three gifts bear meaning. They serve as prophetic symbols of Jesus’ identity. The incense called frankincense, used in temple worship, alludes to Jesus’ priesthood. Gold speaks of Jesus’ kingship and myrrh, a balm used in preparing bodies for burial, foretells of Jesus’ death in atonement for the sins of humanity.

No names are recorded for the Magi. No country of origin given. The earliest translations of Matthew don’t even really confirm the gender of the Magi. The Greek word *magos* only refers to aristocrats of the Median nation or more particularly to Zoroastrian astronomer-priests.

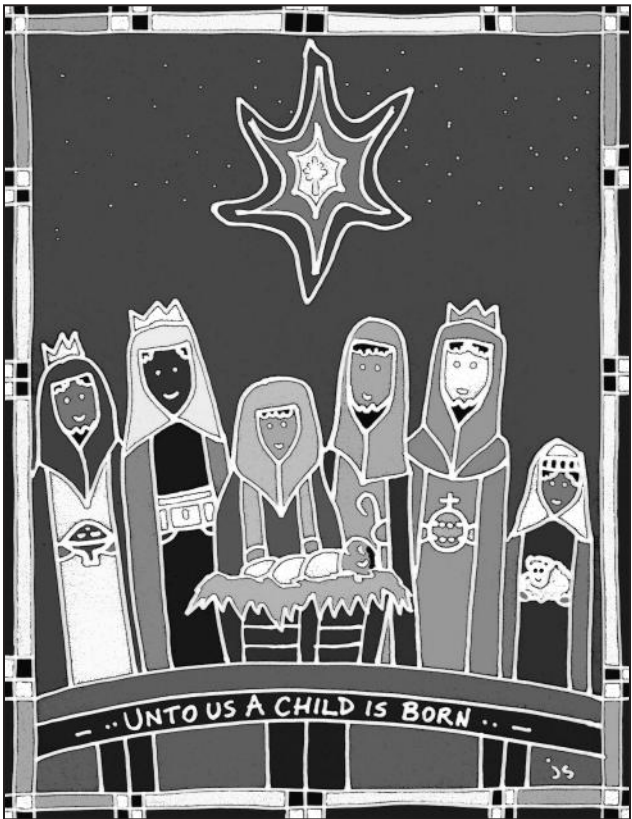
Born in humble circumstances into a Jewish family, in a country occupied by Romans who worshipped many gods, the infant had practitioners of an ancient monotheistic religion among the first to come to kneel before him. The gentile Magi welcomed the divine into the world whereas the leaders in his own homeland didn’t. King Herod “was frightened and all Jerusalem with him.” Did they perceive a threat to their worldly power and control? Had fear rather than hope gripped them?

The popular story we have become familiar with had taken form by the fourth century. By the sixth century three Magi had assumed names: Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar. Their witness to the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity ring out clearly in the ever expanding telling of this story. These sorely needed virtues are as much a balm today as then in what continues to be a dangerously indifferent and damaged world. Each generation must in its own context and time seek meaning anew in this story.

On every continent, in every corner of the world now at the end of the Christmas season we have heard these ancient stories told and retold again this year. In the reading from Paul we see the very beginnings of the opening up of the message they bring to the world. Now nearly a third of the world’s population follow one of the many variegated strands of Christianity.

Still all too often we find ourselves walking in darkness and despair. Aren’t we called as Christians to “Arise, shine, for your light has come”? The Christmas season should cause our hearts to “thrill and rejoice.” We know

that we should be Christ-bearers bringing his light into the world through the ages and to every corner of the globe. This is our challenge, our hope, our mission.



Stushie Art

How do we defeat the despair, gloom and darkness around us? (With apologies to Howard Thurman) Our Christmas Work Begins Now!

*When the carols have been stilled,  
when the star-topped tree is taken down,  
when family and friends are gone home,  
when we are back to our schedules,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to welcome the refugee,  
to heal a broken planet,  
to feed the hungry,  
to build bridges of trust, not walls of fear,  
to share our gifts,  
to seek justice and peace for all people,  
to bring his light to the world.*

## Meaning of Christmas: connecting the dots between crib and cross



The Gospel stories about the birth of Jesus are not a simple retelling of the events that took place then, at the stable in

*Rolheiser, theologian, teacher and award-winning author, is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He can be contacted through his website: [www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com). Follow Father Ron on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser](https://www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser)*

Bethlehem. In his commentaries on the birth of Jesus, the renowned Scripture scholar Raymond Brown highlights that these narratives were written long after Jesus had already been crucified and had risen from the dead and that they are coloured by what his death and resurrection mean. At one level, they are as much stories about Jesus’ passion and death as they are about his birth.

When the Gospel writers looked back at the birth of Jesus through the prism of the resurrection they saw in his birth already the pattern for both his active ministry and his death and resurrection: God comes into the world and some believe and accept him and others hate and reject him. For some, his person gives meaning, for others it causes confusion and anger. There is an adult message about Christ in Christmas and the meaning of Christmas is to be understood as much by look-

ing at the cross as by looking at the crib. Hardly the stuff of our Christmas lights, carols, cribs, and Santa.

And yet, these too have their place. Karl Rahner, not naive to what Raymond Brown asserts, argues that, even so, Christmas is still about happiness and the simple joy of children captures the meaning of Christmas more accurately than any adult cynicism. At Christmas, Rahner contends, God gives us a special permission to be happy: “Do not be afraid to be happy, for ever since I (God) wept, joy is the standard of living that is really more suitable than the anxiety and grief of those who think they have no hope. . . . I no longer go away from the world, even if you do not see me now. . . . I am there. It is Christmas. Light the candles. They have more right to exist than all the darkness. It is Christmas. Christmas that last forever.” At Christmas, the crib trumps the cross, even as the cross does not fully disappear.

How do the cross and the crib fit together? Does Calvary cast a permanent shadow on Bethlehem? Should Christmas disturb us more than console us? Is our simple joy at Christmas somehow missing the real point?

No. Joy is the meaning of Christmas. Our carols have it right. At Christmas, God gives us

a special permission to be happy, though that must be carefully understood. There is no innate contradiction between joy and suffering, between being happy and undergoing all the pain that life hands us. Joy is not to be identified with pleasure and with the absence of suffering in our lives. Genuine joy is a constant that remains with us throughout all of our experiences in life, including our pain and suffering. Jesus promised us “a joy that no one can take away from you.” Clearly that means something that doesn’t disappear because we get sick, have a loved one die, are betrayed by a spouse, lose our job, are rejected by a friend, are subject to physical pain, or are enduring emotional distress.

None of us will escape pain and suffering. Joy must be able to co-exist with these. Indeed it is meant to grow deeper through the experiences of pain and suffering. We are meant to be women and men of joy, even as we live in pain. That’s a colouring, taken from their understanding of Jesus’ death and resurrection, which the Gospel writers insert into their narratives about his birth.

But, of course, that is not what children see when they get caught up in the excitement of Christmas and when they look at the Christ Child in the crib. Their joy is still

innocent, healthily protected by their naiveté, still awaiting disillusion, but real nonetheless. The naive joy of a child is real and the temptation to rewrite and recolor it in light of the disillusionment of later years is wrong. What was real was real. The fond memories we have of anticipating and celebrating Christmas as children are not invalidated when Santa has been deconstructed. Christmas invites us still, as John Shea poetically puts it, “to plunge headlong into the pudding.” And despite all the disillusionment within our adult lives, Christmas still offers us, depressed adults, that wonderful invitation.

Even when we no longer believe in Santa, and all the cribs, lights, carols, cards, colourful wrapping paper, and gifts of Christmas no longer bring the same thrill, the same invitation still remains: Christmas invites us to be happy, and that demands of us an elemental asceticism, a fasting from adult cynicism, a discipline of joy that can hold the cross and the crib together so as to be able to live in a joy that no one, and no tragedy, can take from us. This will allow us, at Christmas, like children, to plunge headlong into the pudding.

Christmas gives, both children and adults, permission to be happy.

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# Caring couple is a reflection of God’s love

By Patricia Montemurri  
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DETROIT (RNS) — Because their Catholic faith is against same-sex marriage, Bryan Victor and Thomas Molina-Duarte made their wedding vows this summer before a Protestant minister in a Detroit Episcopal (Anglican) church.

Those in attendance included many family members, including Victor’s uncle, who is a Catholic priest and Macomb County pastor. Rev. Ronald Victor did not officiate but was there because, he told his nephew, the Catholic Church “needs more examples of gay holiness.”

When Victor and Molina-Duarte attend mass every Sunday, the couple go to a Detroit Catholic church, where Bryan Victor’s mom and dad join them in the pew. In their shared Catholic faith, Victor and Molina-Duarte find spiritual sustenance. And at their parish, they’ve also found acceptance.

“We remain in the church rather than leaving,” said Bryan Victor, 30, a Wayne State University doctoral student in social work. “The reason is that it’s my faith. It’s one of my guides. It’s how I treat people. It gives me a deep sense of community.”

The practice of his Catholic faith, said Molina-Duarte, 29, a leadership co-ordinator for the Highland Park Ruth Ellis Center, which serves many LGBT youth, “is right and life-affirming for me.”

“If it challenges things,” said Molina-Duarte, “that’s more of an afterthought.”

But the Catholic Church is being universally challenged from the pews to the pulpit, by the evolving ways society and many everyday Catholics include and welcome LGBT people.

It was a year of triumph for the LGBT community because the U.S. Supreme Court declared same-sex marriage legal throughout the country. Yet gay Catholics

still wrestle with their church’s condemnation of homosexuality as “disordered” and the church’s prohibition against same-sex marriage.

Pope Francis has signalled a more inclusive tone toward LGBT people, through his words and actions, even as his open-arms position draws fire from some conservative Catholics. But doors continue to open.

In 2012, Austrian Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn overruled an Austrian priest who wanted to ban a gay Catholic man, in a civil registered domestic partnership with another man, from taking his seat on the parish council after other parishioners elected him.

Retired Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, a longtime advocate for liberal Catholic causes, said Catholic teaching has long allowed Catholics to let their consciences, in part, be their guide in participating in the church’s rituals and sacraments, even when they may be at odds with church teachings. Gumbleton predicted Catholic teaching against same-sex unions eventually will change, as he noted did its onetime support of slavery and capital punishment.

“It’s clear the movement is there,” Gumbleton said, “but it takes a long time for the teaching to permeate the whole church, and people will fight it.”

Society’s changing norms, however, will not change church teaching that sex is for a man and a woman united in marriage, said Catholic moral theologian Janet Smith, a professor at Detroit’s Sacred Heart Major Seminary and an adviser to the Vatican’s Pontifical Council on the Family.

Jesus encountered many who “were misusing their sexuality,” said Smith, noting that refers to “cohabitators, adulterers, fornicators, you name it.”

“He treated them very lovingly, and he wants them under his roof,” Smith said, “but his words to them were that they should repent and sin no more.”

Detroit Archbishop Allen Vigneron said through a spokes-

person that he couldn’t comment for this story without knowing more specifics about the men. Officially, the archdiocese offers the ministry program Courage, to urge gay Catholics to abstain from sex; and another program, EnCourage, to counsel Catholic families with gay members. Fortunate Families, a support group for Catholic families with gay family members, is not officially recognized by the Catholic Church.

At the men’s wedding ceremony, family was in force.

Victor’s uncle and Catholic priest Ronald Victor said he was moved by the wedding ceremony, and at the same time, “a little angry and a little disappointed that we couldn’t do it in a church where I could have officiated.”

The church calls gay sex “intrinsically disordered” because it cannot result in procreation. Yet Rev. Victor said the caring, monogamous relationship between his nephew and Molina-Duarte “reflects God’s love.”

“While it’s not necessarily life-giving in a biological way,” said the priest, “it’s life-giving in other ways.”

Pope Francis, said Molina-Duarte, “completely flips the script” when it comes to ministering to gay Catholics.

Pope Francis, while not changing church teaching against gay unions, has made outreach to LGBT people a hallmark of his papacy. When the pope visited the U.S. in September, he met privately with a former student, who is gay, and the man’s partner. But that came after another revelation that confused and contradicted previous papal images of the pope’s outreach to gays — when Francis also privately met with Kim Davis, the Kentucky county clerk, who refused to issue gay marriage licences.

Although Catholic teaching says their union and their love are

sins, both men say they are at home, and even at peace, in a Catholic church. They have not encountered condemnation or cruelty. Only one relative refused the invitation to their wedding because of opposition to homosexuality.

Both men are Catholic school graduates, and both stopped going to church as young men wrestling with coming out.

The two met in late 2010 through a mutual friend in Chicago, where Molina-Duarte was living at

the time. Victor found himself missing the ritual and inspiration he found at Catholic mass, and Molina-Duarte began to join him at services in Ann Arbor, Mich.

“I felt too unattached from regular church life,” Victor said. “I wanted to embed myself in the life of the church.”

And because of Victor’s faith, Molina-Duarte said he could imagine a spiritual home for himself.

— CHURCH, page 13



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Montemurri reports for the Detroit Free Press.

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# Faith and politics are important, says author

## Journey to Justice

Joe Gunn



“Faith and politics matters,” says John Milloy, editor of a new book of this very title, released by Novalis Publishing last month. And he should know. Milloy was a former staffer in Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s office, later served as an Ontario provincial cabinet minister, and now is professor of Public Ethics at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary.

From his Catholic upbringing, Milloy reports that “almost everyone’s parents told them that religion and politics were topics (along with sex) that never made for polite conversation.” Yet the provocative series of short essays he has edited challenges this very notion.

Milloy’s own chapter in this terrific collection is the only reflection from someone who once served as an elected member of a legislature. He admits that he

*Gunn is the Ottawa-based executive director of Citizens for Public Justice, www.cpj.ca, a member-driven, faith-based public policy organization in Ottawa focused on ecological justice, refugee rights and poverty elimination.*

## Church is a welcoming place

Continued from page 12

“I hadn’t met someone my age who was gay and had a deep and respectful reverence for the church,” Molina-Duarte said. “Bryan was able to have both.”

Victor and Molina-Duarte moved to Detroit in 2012. They went to a few parishes, but felt most engaged and most welcomed at St. Charles Borromeo. Victor’s paternal grandparents grew up in the parish and were married there.

Victor said in the church he finds a welcoming place for “the real-lived experience of people” — and people from society’s margins and the poor.

That they present themselves to regularly receive communion is not a sin, both men say.

“We examine our consciences and we know that our love for each other does not take us out of a relationship with God,” Victor said. “It takes us into a closer relationship with God. And for that reason, we feel comfortable presenting ourselves for communion.”

Their sexuality is God-given, Molina-Duarte said. “You’re called to be in community and seek justice and how can you do that in a closet?”

“I carry that Gospel message out to the secular world, and my work is reflective of the church,” Victor said. “I am sustained and nourished by the church. I’m sharing my gifts and talents within the church.”

rarely heard a substantive discussion of religious faith in political circles, but that among politicians, “Religion is often caricatured as being made up of rigid, conservative, and exclusionary rules based upon supernatural revelation; rules that are overly focused on sexuality and reproduction, and out of



CNS/Jacky Naegelen, Reuters

**YEAR IN REVIEW — Terrorist attacks put Paris front and centre early in 2015, and again late in 2015. In this photo people hold a placard that reads “I am Muslim, I am Jewish, I am Catholic, I am Charlie,” following the mass shooting Jan. 7 at the offices of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical newspaper in Paris.**

## Reflections on the beatitudes of Catholic education

By Gertrude Rompré

More than 1,500 Catholic educators gathered in Rome from Nov. 18 - 21 for the World Congress on Catholic Education. Together they explored the theme, Educating Today and Tomorrow: Renewing the Passion. Sponsored by the Congregation for Catholic Education, the congress celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Vatican II Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, and the 25th anniversary of John Paul II’s Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

The congress spoke to the very soul of Catholic education. The whole process, from the initial working document to the keynote and panel presentations, the informal interactions among participants to the final audience with Pope Francis, shone a light on how the mission of Catholic education is currently being lived out in every corner of the globe. What emerged, for me as a participant, was something akin to a list of beatitudes for Catholic education.

*Rompré is the director of Mission and Ministry at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon.*

step with the times.” Milloy is critical of the “obsessiveness” of some Christians on the abortion issue. While he would refuse Justin Trudeau’s demand for federal caucus members to never vote for any measure that curbed abortion, he readily admits that, “I have no idea how an absolute pro-life position could realistically be translated into practical public policy that would curb abortions and find the broad acceptance necessary to become law.” The author concludes that, “My Catholicism is much broader than one or two hot-button issues that are not part of any party’s political agenda.” As a proponent of “incremental progress,” Milloy cautions faith

communities to “refuse to become so focused on an issue where there is no common ground or room for compromise that dialogue and engagement in other areas becomes impossible.”

Scott Kline, dean at St. Jerome’s University, is concerned that debates over religion and politics in North America have been filtered through the distorted rhetoric of the “cultural wars.” In Fox News commentator Bill O’Reilly’s 2006 book, *Culture Warrior*, “secular-progressives” are pitted against believers in “traditional family values” (usually Christians.) The resulting culture wars “breed suspicion, animosity and intractability.” No wonder, then, that secularists

argue for the complete separation of church and state — something ephemeral, as well as undesirable for the writers in this collection. Kline argues that “telling religion to shut up” is unwise, but that religious actors must be able to translate their moral and political values into a language of public reason if they really want to have an impact.

David Pfrimmer, former principal dean at the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, develops the term “public ethics” to describe the best role of faith in political society. This term was described by theologian Jürgen

Moltmann as theology that “becomes political” in the name of the poor and the marginalized, and yet is critical toward political religions and idolatries. “It thinks critically about the religious and moral values of society . . . and presents its reflections as a reasoned position.”

Pfrimmer posits that, “public ethics offers a means to construct ultimate meaning.” He has often told his students that, “Life questions are the questions that Google can’t answer!” since they deal with fundamental commitments, convictions and values. He believes that faith communities need to become “communities of moral deliberation” where deeply personal, social and political ethics are both considered and then acted upon. Pfrimmer argues that “Canadian churches may require pastors to be less like “shepherds” (the paternalist model) and more like “adventure guides (the community leadership model), helping people explore beyond their comfort zones to experience new places and different ideas and sources of meaning.” He believes this could revitalize the public roles of both religious leaders as well as their faith communities.

A fruitful area for reflection that this collection did not treat, however, could be found in the study of organizations that while faith-based, are independent from churches. Organizations such as the one which I serve, can be more agile than ecclesial institutions with their complex and often hierarchical structures. Faith-based membership organizations can allow the proposal of deeper and more specific policy options than church bodies offer. In short, there are several new avenues open to persons of faith who wish to assert that their “faith and politics matter.”

nities that create a place of belonging for students, particularly those students who would not otherwise have access to education. Such communities include more than just their current members, but are connected to past and future members as well. They provide a “mirror for the world we wish for” (Rev. Paul Béré, SJ) and become communities of witnesses to Christ’s loving action in the world.

*Blessed are Catholic educators who open students up to the possibility of transcendence.* Catholic education is based on a Christian anthropology that calls us to educate the whole person, nurturing the spirit as well as the mind. Students in Catholic schools and universities are invited to see themselves as beings capable of transcendence and of entering into ever deeper relationships with God and others.

*Blessed are Catholic educators when they move out to the peripheries.* Catholic education has an anti-elitist bent. It is meant to embody a preferential option for the poor. Pope Francis himself asked us to pay special attention to the peripheries and allocate our educational resources to meet their particular needs. He called us to take risks, “reasonable risks.”

*Blessed are Catholic educators*

*when they act as peace-makers.* The congress was held only a few days after the Paris attacks. The question of how Catholic educators ought to respond to violence in our world became an unexpected theme of the congress. When the question was posed to Pope Francis directly, he cautioned us against the temptation to build walls and to barricade ourselves behind them. He called us to embody the works of mercy through education.

*Blessed are Catholic educators when they are united in their diversity.* As a global event, the congress highlighted the incredible diversity that exists under the umbrella of Catholic education. Catholic education happens in countries where Catholics are minorities and majorities, in rich nations and poor nations, and in a multitude of linguistic and cultural contexts. Yet, Catholic educators are united in a common, Christ-centred, mission. As such, there is no room for competition in Catholic education.

The World Congress on Catholic Education was ultimately a celebration of Catholic education, Catholic education that exists in challenging times but nevertheless brings a message of hope to the world.”



## Churchpersons of the Year

On Oct. 1 religious sisters in Saskatchewan were honoured for their contribution in education and health services in the province. A Sisters Legacy Monument was unveiled in Wascana Park in Regina (PM, Oct. 7).

The event honoured more than 5,500 sisters from over 41 congregations who served in the province in the past 155 years. In the pioneer era of our province it was the sisters who established the first schools and hospitals, responding to requests from the newly arrived pioneers.

The first sisters to come to this province were the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, popularly known as the Grey Nuns. They opened a school in Ile-à-la-Crosse in 1860 and also ran an orphanage. They were followed by other groups, mainly from Europe. Their ranks were soon augmented by local women who were attracted to the charism and spirit of each com-

munity and who dedicated years of service, often with little financial remuneration.

While the Regina event honoured the sisters who pioneered the many services we now take for granted in the province, religious men of various congregations were also active both in the pioneer and building eras of the province.

The Jesuits, for instance, accompanied early explorers and fur traders in their travels through the western prairies. More permanent ministry was provided later by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. They came from France, first to Red River in 1841 and then in 1846 to Ile-à-la-Crosse in northern Saskatchewan.

During the settlement period in the west in the latter part of the 19th century, with the coming of the railroad and the opening up of agricultural land for homesteads, other religious congregations of priests and brothers arrived to serve the pastoral and educational needs of the new communities, according to

the Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan. Later, other ministries were undertaken, including the publication of Catholic newspapers, magazines and catechetical materials, as well as the establishment of retreat houses and seminaries.

Congregations of religious men and women thrived and grew in the first half of the 20th century. Changed conditions and new social movements in the 1960s saw a drop in their numbers. Gradually, the religious communities involved more and more lay people in their apostolates and some services were taken over by the provincial government.

However, the memory and the legacy of the religious communities remains and continues to act as a leaven for the next generation.

In this year that Pope Francis has dedicated to men and women in the consecrated life, the Prairie Messenger honours religious men and women as the Canadian churchpersons of the year. — PWN

## Doctors can help their patients' health by tackling their poverty

By Gary Bloch, Toronto and Sharon Macdonald, Winnipeg  
University of Manitoba  
Troy Media

Can a question asked in a doctor's office contribute to ending poverty for patients and their families? This is what we asked ourselves 10 years ago, as we set out to convince health providers to tackle poverty.

There were two factors that pushed us into this work: first, the evidence shows us that poverty puts people at risk for almost every chronic disease, acute illness, even accidents and trauma. And for kids, poverty affects them from the time they are in the womb, right through adulthood.

The second push comes from our patients. We hear stories day in and day out, like that of Nico who, at age 42, has diabetes, heart disease and depression. He told us very clearly that he would not be able to get healthy when he has to struggle to eat and pay his rent on the \$1,400 a month he earns at minimum wage.

For doctors, the need to tackle poverty as a health issue is obvious — and it is urgent. Health providers told us that they didn't feel comfortable joining protests or writing policy briefs to government. So we decided to find ways for them to tackle poverty for their patients in their offices.

This is why we created a Poverty Tool that lays out a three-step approach for front line doctors, nurses and other health workers to deal with poverty. The steps are simple: ask everyone about their income, learn about how poverty impacts patients' health, and connect patients with key income benefits programs and community resources already available.

The critical message to health providers? Helping our patients reduce their poverty is part of our work as health practitioners.

The impact has been profound. Since we created the Poverty Tool in Ontario, we have taught this approach to thousands of health

providers across the country. We now have versions in development in multiple provinces — in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nova Scotia.

And this is not surprising, because the tool works.

Through simple interventions like asking patients to complete their tax returns, we have supported up to a doubling of incomes for highly vulnerable families: Sarah, a mother of two earning \$14,000 per year through part-time minimum wage work in Ontario, gained access to \$13,500 in extra tax and child benefits. Agnes saw her income increase from \$656 to over \$1,250 a month when we

helped her move from basic social assistance to the Ontario Disability Support Program and related income supplements.

In a sign of the Poverty Tool's acceptance, Manitoba brought together a powerful coalition of supporting community groups in the development of its Poverty Tool, including government, medical organizations, academics and many civil society groups. The Manitoba clinical poverty tool is now being broadly distributed throughout the province in health settings, libraries, schools and community agencies.

The push for doctors to treat social issues like poverty is start-

ing to change the way we practise medicine and how we work with community agencies and those with expertise in income benefits, food security and poverty law. Many health organizations now are right in the middle of advocacy for better social conditions.

Major medical organizations, including the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian College of Family Physicians have been vocal in their support for this approach. This demonstrates a real acceptance by the medical mainstream that reducing patients' poverty is a core part of a doctor's job.

This shift is exciting and profound. But it is not enough. Health

providers can provide a push, and can make a real difference in their individual patients' lives. But like other important public health issues, like smoking or substance abuse, major change will require significant shifts in public policy. It will require action from government and support from the general public.

Those who live without an adequate income cannot achieve their health goals without basic social foundations — including a liveable income, affordable housing and access to decent well-paid work. As we take real action to help patients and families, together we can all build those foundations.

## Health care should be modernized, not privatized

By Bryan Thomas and Colleen Flood, Ottawa,  
Troy Media

National Medicare Week has just passed (Nov. 29 - Dec. 5), buoyed with optimism as a fresh-faced government takes the reins in Ottawa — elected partly on a promise of renewed federal leadership on health care. Yet these “sunny ways” are overcast by recent developments at the provincial level that entrench and legitimize two-tier care.

Saskatchewan has just enacted a licensing regime for private MRI clinics, allowing those who can afford the fees — which may range into the thousands of dollars — to speed along their diagnosis and return to the public system for treatment. Quebec has just passed legislation that will allow private clinics to extra-bill for “accessory fees” accompanying medically necessary care — for things like bandages and anesthetics.

Once upon a time, these moves would have been roundly condemned as violating the Canada Health Act's principles of universality and accessibility. These days, two-tier care and extra-billing are sold to the public as strategies for saving medicare.

Under Saskatchewan's new legislation, private MRI clinics are required to provide a kind of

two-for-one deal: for every MRI sold privately, a second MRI must be provided to a patient on the public wait list, at no charge to the patient or the public insurer. Quebec's legislation is touted as reining in a practice of extra-billing that had already grown widespread.

Underlying both reforms is a quiet resignation to the idea that two-tier health care is inevitable.

This sense of resignation is understandable, coming as it does on the heels of a decade-long void in federal leadership on health care. Throughout the Conservative government's time

in office, the Canada Health Act went substantially unenforced as private clinics popped up across the country. Even in its reduced role as a cheque-writer, the federal government took steps that undermined national unity around

— BLUEPRINT, page 15



CNS/Debbie Hill

**FEW PILGRIMS IN BETHLEHEM** — Jasan Zided of Hebron, West Bank, waits to sell Santa hats to tourists in an empty Manger Square Dec. 15 in Bethlehem, West Bank. The Christmas spirit this year in Bethlehem has been dampened by the political situation which, since October, has taken the lives of almost 100 Palestinians and 22 Israelis. Few pilgrims are visiting the holy sites — or the souvenir shops that line Manger Square — and there was none of the customary festive caroling at the square in the evenings leading up to Christmas Eve.

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# Peace is the only solution in Syria

By Carl Héту, Toronto

In northern Lebanon on a cold, windy day, I met Ra’ed and his family — Syrian Christian refugees. “Over the last three years, we have experienced hunger and witnessed unimaginable atrocities,” he told me on my most recent trip to the region.

For his children’s sake, he desperately hopes to be able to go to Canada or Europe, but anywhere will do.

As Canada begins receiving 25,000 Syrian refugees (between now and the end of February) there is no peace in sight in the Middle East. The so-called Islamic State appears to be as strong as it was a year ago despite heavy bombing by the allied states. The reality is that defeating ISIS will only happen if there is the political will to build lasting peace in Iraq and Syria.

It is good policy as well as a wonderful humanitarian gesture for Canada to welcome Syrian refugees, but the lack of peace and increasing political unrest means that there will be more

*Héту is the Canadian national director of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.*

refugees knocking on the doors of the international community.

Will Canada and the West be ready to welcome more refugees in the coming years? Will the global community be able to keep up the aid required to reach out to millions of new refugees still in the Middle East? Already, countries such as Lebanon with 1.4 million refugees and Jordan with one million have reached their limits. Refugee camps are packed and miserable. Host countries are running out of resources — and patience.

The Holy See reports that Catholic charities around the world generated a whopping \$126 million U.S. in aid in 2014 to face the Iraqi and Syrian humanitarian crisis — reaching more than four million people in the process. This is far from enough, however, and it will be difficult to maintain this pace.

Peace and stability are the only lasting solution.

However, the peace process is influenced by the ugly truth that war is good business for countries with strong weapons industries. Petroleum supremacy and manipulation is at play, too. A long-lasting battle between Shiite and Sunni Muslims to control the region is another factor. As well,

Russia and the United States are trying to re-establish their global influence in the region and it appears this battle for political supremacy will amp up in coming years, to the detriment of those caught in the middle.

Pope Francis has said numerous times in recent months that political leaders seem more interested in petroleum and arms than in the well-being of people. “While they speak of peace and justice, they permit the traffickers in death to operate in that land.”

In Canada, while it has been a step in the right direction for the new government to welcome an increased number of refugees and end airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, the real test lies in how Prime Minister Trudeau will address the pressing challenge of building a lasting peace for the Middle East and our world.

In the meantime, organizations like the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and many others are doing their best to provide the basics of life for millions of people, like Ra’ed and his family, to live in dignity while waiting for a solution. They would like to return home, but without peace any home will do that is away from the horrors of war.



Saskatoon Public Library

## Kulak Women

Broad of beam  
Full of breast  
Hearty with laughter  
Ripe with children

My foremothers  
Bent over cradles  
Bent over sheaves of grain  
Bent over cookstoves  
Bent . . .

What did they dream of  
On the Steppes of Russia  
What did they hope for  
As the Bolsheviks thundered down the road  
Jewels, thrones, gowns made from silks  
A long hot bath?

Did they love well  
At the end of days of scrubbing, birthing, nursing  
Tending to vegetable plots

I think of you sometimes  
Wonder if your peasant look is in my bones, my eyes, my voice

What do I dream of a hundred years from you  
Jewels, thrones, gowns made of silk  
A long hot bath!

By Arleen Cornish

# Need new blueprint for health care system

Continued from page 14

health care, switching the Canada Health Transfer to a strict per capita formula, which takes no account of a province’s income level or health care needs.

To reverse this trend, Canadians cannot simply wage a rearguard battle for the enforcement of the Canada Health Act as it was enacted in 1984. Even if properly enforced, the Act protects universal access only for medically necessary hospital and physician services. This is not the blueprint of a 21st century public health care system.

We desperately need universal coverage for a full array of health care goods and services — pharmaceuticals, mental health services, home care and out-of-hospital diagnostics.

Canada is unique among OECD countries in the paucity of what it covers on a universal basis despite falling in the top quartile of countries in levels of

per capita health spending. Far from being our saviour, the Canada Health Act in its current incarnation is partly to blame — not because of its restrictions on queue-jumping and private payment but because it doesn’t protect important modern needs, like access to prescription drugs.

There are limits on what a public health system can provide, of course — particularly as many provinces now spend nearly half of their budgets on health care. But fairness requires that these limits be drawn on reasoned basis, targeting public coverage at the most effective treatments.

Under our current system, surgical removal of a bunion falls under universal coverage, while self-administered but lifesaving insulin shots for diabetics do not. A modernized Canada Health Act would hold the provinces accountable for reasonable rationing decisions across the full spectrum of medically necessary care.

Instead of modernizing medicare, Saskatchewan and Quebec are looking to further privatize it. Experience to date suggests that allowing two-tier care will not alleviate wait times in the public system. Alberta has reversed course on its experiment with private-pay MRIs after the province’s wait times surged to some of the highest levels in the country.

The current wisdom is that long wait times are better addressed by reducing unnecessary tests. A 2013 study of two hospitals (one in Alberta, one in Ontario) found that more than half of lower-back MRIs ordered were unnecessary.

Skirmishes over privatization have to be fought, but they should not distract us from the bigger challenge of creating a modern and publicly accountable health system — one that provides people the care they need, while avoiding unnecessary care. Achieving that will make National Medicare Week a true cause for celebration.

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# God’s mercy is tireless

Continued from page 1

world, he said. He not only sees, hears and knows, he “comes down and delivers” real healing and eternal teachings.

The credibility of the church and its members rests on their willingness to live and act with the same tireless mercy God has for the world, the pope said.

“We, too, then are called to make compassion, love, mercy and solidarity a true way of life, a rule of conduct in our relationships with one another,” he said.

Since these attitudes of compassion and solidarity are often handed down from person to person, the pope emphasized the importance of families and teachers in showing what love, respect, dialogue, generosity, charity and faith mean.

He also reminded the media and communicators of their responsibility to “serve the truth and not particular interests.” They don’t just inform people, he said, but also form and influence their audience.

“Communicators should also be mindful that the way in which information is obtained and made public should always be legally and morally admissible,” he said.

In his message, the pope praised those journalists and religious who raise awareness about troubling and “difficult situations,” and defend the human rights of minorities, indigenous peoples, women, children and the most vulnerable people in society.

## Letters to the editor

We welcome your response to articles published in the Prairie Messenger. Two-way communication assures everyone of a better exposure to the truth.

We cannot publish any letters to the editor unless you give us your full name, your address and your telephone number. *(It is especially important to remember this if you are sending your comments by email).*

Due to limited space we ask you to keep your letters short — 300 to 350 words maximum. The Prairie Messenger reserves the right to edit letters to conform to space requirements and newspaper style.



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CNS/Charles Platiau, Reuters

The terrorist attacks Nov. 13 in Paris did not dissuade organizations from attending the UN climate change conference there Nov. 30 - Dec. 11.



CNS/Reuters

The image that focused worldwide attention on the Syrian refugee crisis: the body of Alan Kurdi on a beach. He drowned in a failed attempt to sail with his family to the Greek island of Kos, in the coastal town of Bodrum, Turkey.



CNS/U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home, was released at the Vatican June 18.



CNS/Paul Haring

Muslim women wait for Pope Francis' arrival for a Nov. 30 meeting with the Muslim community at the Koudoukou mosque in Bangui, Central African Republic. In 2015 Pope Francis travelled to Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Cuba, the United States, Kenya, Uganda and the Central African Republic.



CNS/Maurizio Brambatti, EPA

Pope Francis opens the Holy Door on the Year of Mercy.



Kip Yaworski

Climate marches took place all over the world, including Saskatoon, in advance of the Paris talks on climate change.



CCN/D. Gyapong

Justin Trudeau's Liberal party won a majority government in the election Oct. 19.



Keith Allison via Flickr

The Toronto Blue Jays captured hearts across Canada in their October playoff run.



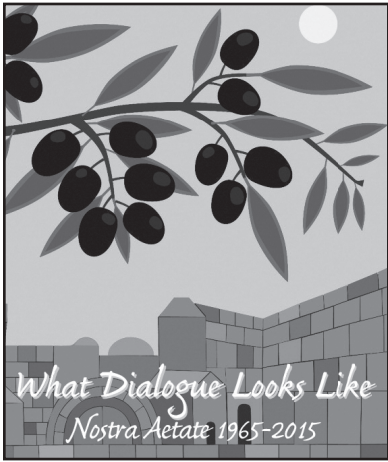
CNS/Aidan Crawley, EPA

Ireland becomes the first country to legalize same-sex marriage by popular vote in a move hailed as a social revolution. During the synod of bishops on the family at the Vatican, Irish Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin spoke about the referendum, faith and finding language to share church teaching with a new generation of Catholics.



CNS/Ettore Ferrari, EPA

Pope Francis leads the synod of bishops on the family at the Vatican Oct. 6. Among the controversies surrounding the synod was the fact that the presence of women was largely absent at a conference that focuses on marriage and family issues.



# 2015

Representatives of the world's religions gathered in Rome to commemorate the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council's declaration on relations with other religions. Its influence continues to be felt in the life of the church today.



Art Babych

In a historic decision Feb. 6, the Supreme Court says yes to doctor-assisted suicide.



CNS/Nabil Mounzer, EPA

Assyrian Christians, who had fled Syria and Iraq, carry placards and wave Assyrian flags during a gathering in late May in front of UN headquarters in Beirut. The survival of Christians in the Middle East has reached a critical point.



Frank Flegel

Sisters who contributed to the growth of Saskatchewan in education and health care are honoured as the Sisters Legacy Monument is unveiled in Wascana Park, Regina, in October.



Art Babych

Thousands of people took part in the walk for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in solidarity with survivors of Indian residential schools May 31. The final Truth and Reconciliation report was released Dec. 15.