



Church Calendar

Events of the local, American and universal church

Feast days



St. John Holy Family

- Dec. 23 St. John of Kanty
- Dec. 24 Vigil of Christmas
- Dec. 25 Nativity of the Lord (holy day of obligation)
- Dec. 26 St. Stephen
- Dec. 27 St. John
- Dec. 28 The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
- Dec. 29 St. Thomas Becket
- Dec. 31 St. Sylvester I
- Jan. 1 Mary, Mother of God (holy day of obligation)

Midnight Mass from St. Peter Cathedral on JET-TV

For the 14th straight year, JET TV will broadcast Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve live from St. Peter Cathedral. The broadcast will begin at 11:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 24. The half-hour segment prior to Mass will include an interview with Bishop Donald Trautman. The program will be hosted by Mike Gallagher, special projects producer for JET TV.



Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God – Jan. 1 (holy day of obligation)

“Called in the Gospels ‘the mother of Jesus,’ Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as ‘the mother of my Lord.’ In fact, the one whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father’s eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the church confesses that Mary is truly ‘mother of God.’” – *Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 495*

National Vocations Awareness Week – Jan. 11-17

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord (Jan. 11) marks Jesus’ initiation into public ministry. At his baptism Jesus is named the beloved Son of God. With this celebration we recommit ourselves to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Initiated through our baptism we too are the beloved of God, commissioned to proclaim Good News with our lives.

Faith looks at catechesis, Catholic schools, St. Paul

“The lessons are just so beautiful, how can I not do this?”

That’s the question Sally Smith of Sacred Heart Parish in St. Marys asked herself when she learned about Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, the hands-on preschool religious education in place at all three parishes in her town. FAITH takes a look at the inspiring program in the January/February 2009 issue as the magazine begins its fifth year of production.

The issue also offers a special report on St. Paul—in this year set aside by Pope Benedict XVI so that Catholics around the world could study the teachings of this unlikely apostle.

Bishop Trautman focuses on Catholic schools, Ann Balaich uncovers what it takes to make a strong marriage and Fred Keck explores the benefits of persistence in prayer.

If you are a parishioner registered in the Erie Diocese, and do not receive your free subscription to FAITH, please contact Brenda Williams, circulation manager, at 814.824.1168 or by e-mail at BWWilliams@ErieRCD.org. The next issue is scheduled to arrive in mailboxes by Jan. 5.



Christmas

is the joyful reminder that ‘God is with us’

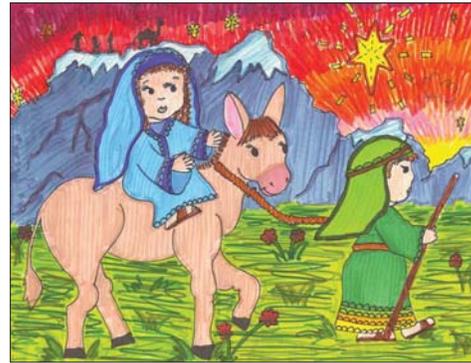
A Christmas message from Bishop Donald W. Trautman

Many today are in darkness and need light. Many are broken in body and spirit and need healing. Many are in sin and need salvation. Many are hungering and need food for body and soul. Many are wandering aimlessly and need direction. Many are broken-hearted and need hope.



And then came Jesus. Christmas brings the newborn child of Bethlehem, the light that overcomes the darkness. He is the healer, the divine physician, who mends broken bodies and souls. He is the savior whose blood washes away all our sin. He is the bread come down from heaven who strengthens us. He is the way, the truth and the life. His teachings are a moral compass that points us to eternal happiness. He is our hope and salvation. Let

us rejoice and give thanks. Our nation is suffering not just an economic meltdown but also a moral meltdown. Elected officials compromise their integrity; life in the womb is denied; some seek the redefinition of marriage. Good people, innocent people, suffer unemployment and the consequences of a secular culture. We all know firsthand these chaotic and challenging times, but we also know the



This drawing by Jillian Johannes of St. Luke School in Erie was chosen as one of 24 winning designs in the national Holy Childhood Association (HCA) Christmas Artwork Contest. Her design was selected from among some 10,000 entries submitted by children in Catholic elementary schools, religious education programs and home schools. Johannes

received a plaque honoring her achievement. Her artwork, featured on the HCA Web site (www.hcainc.org) as an e-greeting, is being displayed at the National Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., during Advent and Christmas. A Mass for winners and their families was celebrated at the shrine on Dec. 12.

reality of God’s love. St. John reminds us: “God so loved the world that God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16). God our Father has seen our needs and has sent his only Son to rescue us. Note that “love” comes before “giving.” Love always leads to giving. God the Father’s love for us was so powerful and passionate that he gave up his only Son to rescue us,

to redeem us. The Child of Bethlehem comes not because of our great deeds but because of our great needs. He comes not because of our merits but because of his mercy. Jesus, born in the humblest maternity room in Bethlehem, a stable for animals, is the light which conquers the darkness. He comes to teach us how to love. Perhaps everything is going wrong in our lives this Christmas. If so, ponder the fact that everything went wrong

on the first Christmas. Recall the edict of Caesar Augustus ordering a census. Mary is pregnant. The decree comes at just the wrong time. Mary and Joseph are forced to travel 80 miles from Galilee to Bethlehem. Wary from travel, they hear the disappointing news: no room in the inn. One disappointment after another. Joseph finds a stable. This was all he could provide. Think of his hurt. Mary gives. See CHRISTMAS, page 3

Erie parish mergers

Tri-cluster to become Our Mother of Sorrows Jan. 1, Immaculate Conception to combine with St. Mary

By Jason Koshinski
FaithLife editor

ERIE – The tri-parish cluster of Holy Family, St. Ann and St. Casimir on Erie’s East side will be consolidated into a single parish as of Jan. 1 under the title and patronage of Our Mother of Sorrows. In another change for Catholics on Erie’s East side, Immaculate Conception Parish will close in 2009 and merge with St. Mary Parish. The moves were announced to the congregations during the Dec.

6-7 weekend Masses. Since 1990, the tri-parish cluster of Holy Family, St. Ann and St. Casimir have been under the care of a single pastor; Father James O’Hara has served as pastor of the tri-parish cluster since 1991. “We’ve been working toward this for 20 years and now it’s finally taking effect,” said Father O’Hara, who is a native of St. Ann Parish. “Instead of three parishes with three finance councils, we’ll have one. It’s mainly for administration so everything is streamlined.”

The names of the churches will not change and will continue to operate as worship sites, he said, but the parish will be known as Our Mother of Sorrows. In a decree, Bishop Donald Trautman said, “... based on the continued diminishing demographic changes that affect even the Catholic population of this East side Erie neighborhood, it has become apparent that changes in the canonical status of these parishes is opportune and necessary.” Holy Family lists 225 families in

its membership and St. Ann and St. Casimir each list 150. Officials cited a shrinking number of parishioners at both Immaculate Conception and St. Mary, as well as a declining number of priests, as reasons for the merger. St. Mary has 75 registered families, and Immaculate Conception lists 57. Bishop Trautman visited both parishes in October to make the announcement. The moves leave the Erie Diocese with a total of 120 parishes in 13 counties.

What is the Freedom of Choice Act?

FOCA’s effects seen as dire, but chance of it passing considered slim

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — About the only thing everyone with a stake in it is likely to agree on about the Freedom of Choice Act is that the legislation has languished in Congress for 20 years, only once rising — just barely — above the fate of hundreds of bills that are introduced each session and never heard from again.

What’s harder to nail down is whether the bill, known as FOCA, is going anywhere under the 111th Congress that begins in January.

Although there was no effort in the 110th Congress to move the bill along, pro-life organizations have since the summer been sounding the alarm about what would happen to current restrictions on abortion if a Democrat was elected president.

They also voice concerns for possible administrative actions under Democratic President-elect Barack Obama, such as reversing the ban on federal funding of embryonic stem-cell research; repealing the Hyde amendment, which bars federal funding of abortions; and the Mexico City policy, which prohibits foreign aid money from going to family planning programs that promote and offer abortion.

But stopping FOCA has become the rallying cry for the American Life League, the National Right to Life Committee and Priests for Life, among other pro-life groups. It was the central focus of a statement about the government transition issued Nov. 12 on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops by its president, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, during the bishops’ general fall meeting. A legal analysis of the most recent version of FOCA



The U.S. Capitol Building is seen at sunrise in Washington Nov. 17. Opponents of the Freedom of Choice Act who believe the measure could come before Congress under the new administration say it has frightening implications, but whether the 111th Congress will pass it remains unclear.

by the general counsel’s staff of the USCCB warned that it would wipe out many existing state laws and impede states’ ability to regulate abortion.

The analysis cited as examples laws that could be overturned if FOCA became law such as: parental notification requirements; abortion clinic regulations; bars to government funding of abortion; prohibitions on procedures such as partial-birth abortion; and laws protecting the right of medical personnel and institutions to decline to participate in abortions.

In statements by pro-life leaders, much of the concern about FOCA refers to President-elect Barack Obama’s July 2007 answer to a question during an address to a Planned Parenthood group that signing the bill would be “the first thing I’d do as president.” But that presupposes FOCA gets out of Congress.

Spokesmen for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, and the bill’s chief sponsor, Sen. Barbara Boxer of California, all declined to discuss the

The Freedom of Choice Act

The most radical abortion legislation in U.S. history

FOCA endangers a wide range of laws enacted by the people and their elected representatives over 35 years—laws upheld under Roe v. Wade and cases applying it. These include laws on informed consent, parental involvement, physician licensure, clinic safety and taxpayer funding.

If enacted, FOCA will:

- Invalidate laws to protect a woman from unsafe abortion clinics and to ensure that she is informed about abortion.
- Require taxpayers to pay for abortions.
- Require states to allow “partial-birth” and other late-term abortions.
- Require states to allow abortions by non-physicians.
- Bar laws protecting a right of conscientious objection to abortion.
- Deny parents an opportunity to be involved in their minor daughter’s abortion decision.

—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

For more information on FOCA, including legal analysis, fact sheets and commentary, visit the U.S. bishops on the Web at www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/FOCA/index.shtml.



IN THE U.S.

■ **Catholic Charities USA is the country's top provider of social services,** according to Charity Navigator's Holiday Giving Guide 2008. The Alexandria-based agency also finished second overall in The NonProfit Times Top 100 list of the country's largest charities and 11th in the most recent Philanthropy 400 ranking by The Chronicle of Philanthropy. Charity Navigator, considered the country's most utilized evaluator of charities, annually ranks nonprofit agencies in 34 categories ranging from the environment to youth development. Charity Navigator's ranking list can be found online at: www.charitynavigator.org.

■ **Despite the small number of credible cases of clergy sexual abuse reported in 2007,** "we dare not become complacent" on the issue, said Bishop Blase Cupich of Rapid City, S.D., the new chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People. "In 2007, there were 12 credible instances of minors being abused. That's 12 instances too many," Bishop Cupich said in a Dec. 8 letter to his fellow bishops.

"However, even with the small number in a church of 67 million people, we dare not become complacent. The effects of the sin and crime of sexual abuse by a cleric are so horrific that we need to make sure that efforts to protect young people continue," he said. In his letter, he outlined steps the church had taken to prevent abuse from 2003 through 2007, when the last audits of U.S. dioceses' safe environment programs were completed. Audits of how each U.S. diocese and eparchy has dealt with clergy sexual abuse have been conducted since 2003. Bishop Cupich said

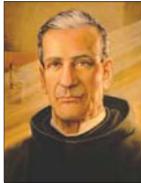
the 2008 audits were close to completion. In that five-year period, he said the church had trained more than 1.8 million clergy, employees and volunteers in parishes in how to create safe environments and prevent child sexual abuse.

AROUND THE WORLD

■ **The Vatican has confirmed tentative plans for Pope Benedict XVI to visit the Holy Land in 2009.** Israeli sources said the most likely time for the visit would be in May, with stops in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The pope was invited to visit Israel by Israeli President Shimon Peres in 2007. At that time, the pope made it clear he hoped to make the trip, but Vatican diplomats said the timing would depend in large part on efforts to calm the simmering Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In recent months, Israeli and Vatican officials began making more concrete plans for a papal visit. The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* said the most likely time frame for the trip was the second week in May.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

■ **Brother José Olallo Valdes, a member of the Hospitaller Brothers of St. John of God who worked among Cuba's poor and sick in the 19th century,** was beatified at an outdoor Mass attended by thousands of joyous people and broadcast nationwide. Cardinal José Saravia Martins, former prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Saints' Causes, beatified the Cuban brother during a three-hour Mass Nov. 29 in the Plaza of Our Lady of Charity in Camagüey. It was the first beatifica-



Brother José Olallo Valdes

tion ceremony held in Cuba. In his homily, Cardinal Saravia Martins said the event was a milestone and told the people of the Cuban Catholic Church: "You live in a memorable time. Confronted by a prevailing materialistic culture that is imposing and abandons the side of the weak and helpless, we learn from Blessed Ollaia the virtue of knowing how to trust in God, of knowing how to love our neighbor in universal form."

■ **Pope Benedict XVI has accepted the resignation of Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze as prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments and has named Spanish Cardinal Antonio Caizares Llovera of Toledo to succeed him.** Announcing the changes Dec. 9, the Vatican said Cardinal Arinze was retiring after six years as head of the congregation and a total of 23 years at the Vatican. Cardinal Caizares, 63, is a specialist in catechesis and has served as a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith since 1995. Pope Benedict named him a cardinal in 2006.

■ **Cardinal Avery Dulles, a Jesuit theologian who was made a cardinal in 2001, died Dec. 12 at the Jesuit infirmary in New York, Murray-Weigel Hall.** He was 90 years old. Cardinal Dulles had been the oldest living U.S. cardinal. Cardinal Dulles, the son of former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and nephew of one-time CIA director Allen Walsh Dulles, both of whom served in the Eisenhower administration, became known in his own right for his groundbreaking 1974 work "Models of the Church" — one of 22 books published under his name — in which he defined the church as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant and community of disciples, and critiqued each.



Cardinal Avery Dulles

By the Way...



Jason Koshinski

John L. Miller, son of Dr. John and Barbara Miller of St. Michael Parish in Greenville, is scheduled to be ordained a transitional deacon Dec. 20 at St. Mark Seminary in Erie. Originally a seminarian of the diocese from 1998-2000, Miller spent the last eight years living as a Franciscan brother in temporary vows pursuing theological studies and priestly formation in the Holy Land. He returned to the diocese in June and resided at the St. Peter Cathedral rectory. He began teaching at Kennedy Catholic High School in Hermitage in the fall with residence at Notre Dame Parish. Born and raised in Greenville, Miller is a graduate of Greenville High School. Father Jim Gutting, pastor of Holy Rosary Parish in Erie, tells us that a new prayer room at the parish will be blessed shortly after the new year.

Congratulations to Sister Margaret Ann Hardner, SSJ, who had a building officially named after her Dec. 11 near the Saint Vincent Health Center campus. The Sister Margaret Ann Hardner Building, located at 2315 Myrtle St. in Erie, is the home to physician practices and hospital services. Sister Margaret Ann served as the CEO of Saint Vincent from 1974 to 1996. An endorsement was also created in her name to offer better care to underserved areas.

Father John Dear, SJ, who gave a talk in April at Villa Maria Academy, is on a nationwide book tour promoting his autobiography, "A Persistent Peace: One Man's Struggle for a Nonviolent World." As a young Jesuit, Father John Dear chose to add his own vow of nonviolence to his order's required vows of obedience, poverty and chastity. The vows still guide his life more than 25 years later, but after the initial thrill of making his public commitment to them he learned the hard work had only just begun. "The vows are the beginning of the journey," he said recently during a lecture at the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum in Atlanta. "I didn't know that. I thought it was the end. I have to keep experimenting." A life of "peace, love and nonviolence is a journey. There is no reaching perfection." Father John was recently nominated for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize.

A new Vatican document, titled "Dignitas Personae" ("The Dignity of a Person"), warns that certain recent developments in stem-cell research, gene therapy and embryonic experimentation violate moral principles and reflect an attempt by man to "take the place of his Creator." Look for more in our next issue. *FaithLife* will be taking a break for the holidays. Our next issue arrives in parishes the weekend of Jan. 17-18.

Wishing you peace and joy at Christmas and blessings in the new year!

Jason Koshinski is editor of *FaithLife*. Contact him at JKoshinski@ErieCCLD.org or 814.824.1171.

Top stories in the Erie Diocese for 2008

After poring over a year's worth of *FaithLife* headlines, here they are: the top stories and newsmakers in the Erie Diocese for 2008:

Year of St. Paul

Pope Benedict XVI has dedicated a special jubilee year to St. Paul from June 28, 2008 through June 29, 2009, to mark the approximately 2,000th anniversary of the saint's birth.

The Erie Diocese announced its plans for the Year of St. Paul, which includes two pilgrimage destinations and several diocesan Masses.

Two churches have been selected at pilgrimage destinations during the Year of St. Paul:

- St. Paul, Erie
- St. Leo Magnus, Ridgway

Each location will have a simple shrine to St. Paul and provide a prayer booklet which pilgrims can use individually or in a group setting when visiting the church outside of scheduled Mass times. A plenary indulgence is also attached to these pilgrimages.

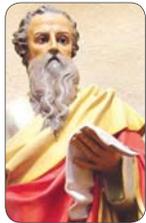
New priests, deacons, woman religious

In 2008, the diocese celebrated new vocations to the church.

Bishop Donald Trautman ordained Timothy Balliett and Johnathan Schmolz to the priesthood in front of a large gathering of family, friends, diocesan priests and guests on June 6 at St. Peter Cathedral.

Father Balliett is assigned as parochial vicar of St. George Parish in Erie, and Father Schmolz is assigned as parochial vicar of St. Jude the Apostle Parish in Erie.

Nine men were ordained as permanent deacons during a Mass and ceremony May 16 at St. Peter Cathedral. The new deacons include: Denis Coan (St. John the Baptist, Erie), Larry Caggese (St. Leo Magnus, Ridgway), Ray Ehrensberger (St. Mary, St. Marys), Frank Lombardo (Holy Rosary, Erie), John Mang (St. Francis Xavier, McKean), Tom Matusiak (Holy Trinity, Erie), Ken Reisenweber (St. Bridgid, Meadville), Owen Wagner (Notre Dame, Hermitage) and Tim Wren (St. Joseph, Oil City).



Father Timothy Balliett, Bishop Donald Trautman and Father Johnathan Schmolz

Sister Dolores Dean, OSB, professed her final vows as a Benedictine Sister of Eijk County during a Mass Aug. 16 at St. Joseph Monastery in St. Marys.

Father Schreiber named youth minister

After an exhaustive national search for a director of youth and young adult ministry, the Diocese of Erie found the perfect candidate in its own backyard.

Father Stephen Schreiber, the diocese's associate director of vocations, was tapped for the position, which had been vacant since November 2007.

Ordained a priest in 1999, Father Schreiber was a faculty member of Kennedy Catholic High School in Hermitage from 2001-08 while serving as the school's campus minister from 2004-08. In June, he was named the diocese's associate director of vocations, a position he will continue to hold as director of youth ministry.



Father Steve Schreiber

Diocese welcomes religious community

The diocese welcomed a new religious community that will make Erie its first-ever home in the United States.

Sister Kathleen Dietz, FSO, and Sister Josephine Vuodi, FSO, members of The Spiritual Family The Work, also known simply as The Work, arrived in mid-June.

Sister Kathleen, who has completed her doctorate in theology, teaches part time at Gannon University in the Theology Department. Sister Josephine serves as a pastoral associate at St. George Parish in Erie.

The community was founded in 1938 by Mother Julia Verhaeghe (1910-1997). The Work has a presence in several European countries with headquarters in Rome.



Sister Kathleen Dietz



Sister Josephine Vuodi

Chapel at the mall

The Roman Catholic Chapel at the Millcreek Mall will go down in the shopping center's history as the only store to show a net profit of zero.

On Feb. 6—Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent—the Erie Diocese became the mall's newest tenant, opening a chapel primarily for hearing confessions.

"My idea is to go to where the people are at and see if we can, by

presenting this opportunity, bring them back to the sacrament and meet them where they are," Bishop Trautman said.

The chapel, located just outside the concourse entrance to Bon Ton, has been called a spiritual success. Its hours are from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday during Advent. The chapel is closed on Sunday. Priests are available for confession or conversation on Wednesday from 2-4 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Locals have encounters with pope

Americans got their first close-up encounter with Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 during the Holy Father's apostolic visit to the United States April 15-20.

Among the capacity crowd of more than 73,000 for Mass at Yankee Stadium were 250 pilgrims from the Erie Diocese. The diocese dispensed its allotment of tickets on a first-come, first-served basis.



CSA, Catholic Charities Ball break records

The generosity of the people throughout the Erie Diocese was clearly shown in 2008. The annual Catholic Services Appeal (CSA), netted more than \$5.8 million in pledges, making it the largest annual appeal in the history of the diocese. The amount surpasses the 2007 CSA when donors contributed \$5.4 million.

The theme of this year's appeal, "Of One Heart and Mind," was taken from Acts 4:32, referring to the formation of a new Christian community.

The 13th annual Catholic Charities Ball, held April 18 at the Bayfront Convention Center in Erie, raised nearly \$35,000, all of which went to families in need. More than 400 people attended this year's ball, which is a record for the event. The funds raised this year also broke last year's record of \$29,000.

Anniversaries and milestones

A number of parishes, organizations and agencies celebrated anniversaries in 2008:

- Avila House, Union City — 30 years
- Prince of Peace Center, Farrell — 25 years
- St. James School, Erie — 50 years
- Sisters of St. Joseph Thanksgiving dinner — 20 years
- Our Lady's Christian School, Erie — 50 years
- Our Lady Queen of the Americas Parish, Conneaut Lake — 50 years
- St. Bonaventure Parish, Grampian — 150 years
- Catholic Daughters of America, Erie Diocese — 100 years

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Briefly

Elections, economic crisis top stories of 2008, pope top newsmaker

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The election of the first African-American president and controversy surrounding the role of Catholic voters in the U.S. campaign topped the religious news stories of 2008, and Pope Benedict XVI and President-elect Barack Obama were the top newsmakers, according to the annual poll conducted by Catholic News Service.

The global economic crisis took second place among the 31 news stories on the ballot. Pope Benedict's six-day visit to the United States in April came in third. Most first-place votes on the newsmakers list went to either Obama or Pope Benedict, with the pontiff edging out the president-elect by a small margin. Catholic voters were a distant third.

2008



Top Stories

1. ELECTIONS

Illinois Sen. Barack Obama defeats Arizona Sen. John McCain to become first African-American president in U.S. history. Delaware Sen. Joe Biden becomes first Catholic vice president.

2. ECONOMIC CRISIS

3. PAPAL VISIT

4. ABORTION

5. GLOBAL TENSIONS

Pro-life prayer breakfast

ERIE — Ramesh Ponnuru, senior editor of National Review Magazine and author of "The Party of Death," will be the guest speaker at the 31st annual Pro-Life Prayer Breakfast Jan. 17 at 9 a.m. at the Ambassador Banquet and Conference Center in Erie.

In his book, Ponnuru examines abortion and euthanasia and how pro-choice activists struggle to dominate the political parties, the judicial system and the mainstream media.

For tickets, send \$12 per ticket (\$7.50 for ages 3-10; no charge for kids under 3) to People for Life, P.O. Box 1126, Erie, PA 16512. Tickets are also available at the downtown office (Alternative Choices for Women, 1611 Peach St., Suite 321) from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday.



Ramesh Ponnuru

Youth Stand for Life trip

ERIE — The Youth Stand for Life 2009 bus trip is planned for Jan. 21-22. Youth will gather at St. Mark Catholic Center in Erie Jan. 21 at 9 p.m. for Mass, praise and worship and refreshments. Students and chaperones will then board buses at midnight and depart for the national youth Mass and March for Life in Washington, D.C. Buses will return by midnight Jan. 22.

Youth in 8th grade or older are invited. To make a reservation, contact the diocese's Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry at 814.824.1218.

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(June 6-18) / (June 27-July 5) / Aug. 1-9
(Sept. 5-17) / Sept. 19-27 / (Oct. 6-18)

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Scheduled Days of Reflection

January 17: John Paul II: A Universal Love
February 28: Therese of Lisieux: Suffering meets Holiness
March 14: Margaret Mary: Treasures of the Sacred Heart
April 18: Thomas Aquinas: The Love of the Eucharist
May 16: Bernard of Clairvaux: The Human Jesus
June 13: Augustine: The Road to Salvation

To schedule Retreats (Private or Group)
Call the Retreat Center
(814) 438-7020

Avila Retreat Center
61 East High St.
Union City PA 16438



FOCA's effects seen as dire, but chance of it passing considered slim

FOCA, from page 1

prospects of any specific bill in a legislative session that doesn't start until January.

All pending bills expire at the end of each two-year congressional session, so FOCA would have to be reintroduced.

Erica Chabot, press secretary to the Senate Judiciary Committee, said she can't recall Leahy ever mentioning this piece of legislation. "That doesn't necessarily mean it couldn't suddenly move up on the committee's priority list, she said.

However, "if there were overwhelming support for a bill, chances are I would have heard something about it," Chabot said. Staffers for those Democratic leaders and staffers for other members of Congress — Democrats and Republicans — all emphasized that the priorities of the 111th Congress will be the economy and the Iraq War. Speaking on background, several said passing FOCA is not a priority for members of Congress.

Kristin Day, executive director of Democrats for Life, called FOCA a radical bill, but while it's worthwhile to highlight its problems, "I don't think it's likely to pass anytime soon."

Day said it's more likely that

administrative orders will reverse the Mexico City policy or expand federal funding of embryonic stem-cell research. She wonders why there isn't more effort being put into highlighting opposition to such changes.

At a Democrats for Life event during the Democratic National Convention, Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.) called FOCA "dead on arrival."

Day said. She said pro-life Democrats including Casey and Reps. Lincoln Davis of Tennessee and Heath Shuler of North Carolina, who backed Obama during the campaign, expect their voices to matter when it comes to the legislative priorities of the White House.

Douglas Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee, told CNS that FOCA's inertia so far doesn't diminish the danger of it progressing.

FOCA moved forward only in 1993, when Democrats controlled the House, Senate and the White

House for the first time in 12 years. Introduced in the first days of the 103rd Congress, the House and Senate Judiciary committees quickly moved it on for floor scheduling within weeks.

But it never came up for debate or a vote in the House or Senate.

Johnson is skeptical that pro-life Democrats are numerous enough or powerful enough to stop a serious push to move FOCA forward if the party's leaders want it to advance.

He is especially skeptical of whether the Senate majority leader would prove any obstacle to FOCA, despite Reid's pro-life voting record. "Reid would be no impediment at all," he said. "His history has been that he may vote against something in the end after doing everything he can to have the pro-abortion side win," for instance by putting a bill on the floor for a vote.

Johnson acknowledged that it's unclear that either house of Congress has the votes to pass FOCA. He said there are more support-

ers of legal abortion in Congress than there were in 1993, though that doesn't necessarily translate to votes for the bill.

"Anybody who's even halfway pro-life isn't going to support FOCA," said Johnson.

NARAL Pro-Choice America, which supports FOCA and opposes any restrictions on abortion, counts both the House and Senate next term as having pro-life majorities. It projects 204 House members who generally oppose NARAL's agenda, and 185 who support it. It says another 46 members have a "mixed" record. NARAL counts 42 opponents of its issues in the Senate and 40 supporters, with 18 "mixed" records.

Johnson credits a nationwide postcard campaign opposing the bill in 1993 with helping keep it from reaching a vote. But the makeup of Congress has changed significantly since then, he noted. "Many of the current members of Congress weren't members in 1993," he said. "Lots of lawmakers have never paid any attention to FOCA." He said that raises the risk of "the other side" defining FOCA as more benign than how abortion opponents interpret it. FOCA opponents plan a new postcard campaign beginning in January.

"Anybody who's even halfway pro-life isn't going to support FOCA."

— Douglas Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee.

Christmas is the joyful reminder that 'God is with us'

CHRISTMAS, from page 1

birth to the savior and the newborn child in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Surely this is not how to begin the story of salvation. Should Christ not have entered the human scene more in the triumphant setting of Handel's Messiah, with the Hallelujah chorus singing in the background? Why does God permit such hardships for Mary and Joseph, good and pious people? Why is his only Son treated in this fashion?

Mary and Joseph show great faith in handling these circumstances. They trust in God. They carry out God's will with love. Our God is a humble God and he chooses the poverty and simplicity of the Bethlehem

When things go wrong in our lives, we need to imitate Mary's and Joseph's faith and trust in God. We need to imitate their perseverance in doing God's will. Do we realize that our own savior received no special privileges? Why should the Son of God leave the bliss of heaven for this? What does God gain by coming to us that first Christmas? God gains nothing; we gain everything.

How should we respond to this extravagant love of God? With faith, with trust, with joy, with transformed lives — with love of God and love of neighbor.

Christmas is the joyful reminder that Jesus is Emmanuel — which means "God is with us" now and forever. In spite of our

unfaithfulness and disloyalty, in spite of the darkness in our lives and in our culture, God has not left us alone. Jesus gives us new life, new hope, new strength. Trial and tragedies can sap our spirit, but God's love is stronger. Recession can cause fear and anxiety, but God's love is stronger. Sin and sinful habits can be strong, but God's love is stronger. Rejoice in God's love.

— Donald W. Trautman

Most Rev. Donald W. Trautman, STD, SSL, Bishop of Erie

DEATH NOTICES

Msgr. Robert Schriever

Founding pastor of Notre Dame Parish

Msgr. Robert F. Schriever, 90, of Naples, Fla., formerly of Hermitage, died December 1, 2008 in Naples Community Hospital. He was born on June 24, 1918 in Erie, the oldest of three children; he was a son of John and Charles and Sylvia Strong Schriever. After finishing the eighth grade of Sacred Heart School, Erie, he entered the Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, Ohio, as a seminarian where he earned his high school diploma, college degree and completed his theological studies.

He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Erie on April 30, 1944 by Bishop Amleto Cicognani, apostolic delegate to the United States and later to be Cardinal Secretary of State in the Vatican.

His first assignment was with St. John the Baptist Parish, Erie, where he remained until June 1955. For two of those years, he taught history and Greek at Cathedral Prep High School in Erie. His first pastorate came in 1955 when he became pastor of St. Mary in Crown with its mission of St. Ann in Marienville.

In June 1960, he was named founding pastor of Notre Dame

Parish, Sharon, (now Hermitage). He began with the construction of Notre Dame School in 1961, which was expanded in 1963. The permanent church was dedicated in 1974. In 1977, while still pastor, he attended the North American College in Rome for courses in updated theology. He was a member of the Erie Diocesan Finance Committee and was a diocesan counselor.

Msgr. Schriever was also a member of the Shenango Valley Human Relations Board and the Heikory Township Welfare Board, the Community Mental Health and Counseling Board, president of the Mercer County Child Welfare Board and was a charter member of the Shenango Valley Ministerial Dialogue Group, a pioneer group in the establishment of ecumenism.

In 1985, he traveled to Naples on a leave of absence after nearly 25 years as pastor of Notre Dame, and the leave became retirement in 1988. He served as an associate at St. William Parish in Naples from 1985-91, at St. Raphael Parish in Lehigh Acres from 1991-95, at St. Ann Parish, Naples, from 1995-96, as well as St. William Parish since 1995. He also served as chaplain for Legatus.

On July 1, 1994, he was named a Prelate of Honor by Pope John Paul II with the title of Monsignor.

Sister Virginia Ann Gardner, SSJ

Longtime teacher also served congregation

Sister Virginia Ann Gardner, SSJ, 87 of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania died October 13, 2008. She was in her 68th year of religious life.

A native of Erie, she was born on November 3, 1920, a daughter of the late Arthur and Elizabeth (Carlin) Gardner.

She attended St. Bridgid School in Meadville, Pa., and graduated from Meadville High School in 1937. She entered the Sisters of St. Joseph on June 29, 1941 and professed her final vows on August 15, 1947. Her home parish is St. Bridgid, Meadville.

Prior to entering the convent, she worked as publicity chairperson for the Erie Diocesan Sodality Union and was responsible for writing a weekly Sodality column, "The Blue & White Quill," for the *Lake Shore Visitor*.

Sister Virginia Ann earned a bachelor's degree in social science from Villa Maria College in 1953 and a master's degree in English from Marquette University in 1960. In addition, she studied at Fordham, Case-Western, University of Chicago, State University of Iowa and Cambridge University.

Throughout many years of active ministry, Sister Virginia Ann was a well-known and respected teacher. She taught at Villa Maria Elementary, St. Joseph, Sacred Heart and Cathedral schools in Erie. She was department chair and English teacher at St. Bernard High School in Bradford, and at Villa Maria Academy in Erie. She was director of public relations for Villa Maria College and she served as pastoral minister at St. John the Baptist Parish in Erie.

Sister Virginia Ann's involvement in ecumenical activities earned her the Inter-Church Ministries Service Award in 1984. She served as director, REAP community relations; Dean for Adult Learning; and resource writer for Villa Maria College. She spent many years serving her congregation as director of communications. She also served on numerous boards in the community.

In her retirement, she resided at the Villa Maria Community Living Center and taught English as a second language in addition to writing. In 1999, she published a book titled "Let It Be: A Catholic Sister Remembering the Past, Living the Present, Pondering the Future." She also published numerous articles in various Catholic periodicals.

In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by a sister, Loretta Scherrer, and a brother, Arthur Gardner, former mayor of the City of Erie.

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