

Marielle's mural

Marielle LaFaro, with help from the Holy Spirit, painted a huge mural at St. George School.
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FaithLife



"Humility saves man; pride makes him lose his way."

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Special Collection



The Diocese of Erie annually holds the Diocesan Priest Retirement Collection on Good Shepherd Sunday. All parishes and missions are asked to contribute to the fund that assists retired diocesan clergy.

Pope announces Year of Mercy

BY CINDY WOODEN | CNS

VATICAN CITY—Pope Francis this month released a document officially proclaiming the 2015-16 extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy.

"If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected," the pope wrote in "Misericordiae Vultus," ("The Face of Mercy"), which is the "bull of indiction" calling a Holy Year to begin Dec. 8.

Standing in front of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica April 11, Pope Francis handed copies of the document to the archbishops of the major basilicas of Rome and to Vatican officials representing Catholics around the world.

In his homily at vespers, the pope said he proclaimed the Year of Mercy because "it is the favorable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone the way of forgiveness and reconciliation."

The boundless nature of God's mercy—his willingness always to forgive anything—has been a constant subject of Pope Francis' preaching and is explained



CNS photo

VATICAN CITY—Pope Francis embraces a man at the end of a weekly audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican.

in detail in the document, which outlines some of the specific projects the pope has in mind for the year.

Pope Francis asked that all dioceses around the world designate a "Door of Mercy" at their cathedral or another special church or shrine, and that every diocese implement the "24 Hours for the Lord" initiative on the Friday and Saturday before the fourth week of Lent.

In Rome the last two years, the pope opened the celebration with a penance service in St. Peter's Basilica and churches around the city were open for the next 24 hours for confessions and Eucharistic adoration.

The pope said he will designate and send out "Missionaries of Mercy" to preach about mercy; they will be given special authority, he said, "to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See."

And he urged all Catholics to spend more time practicing what traditionally have been called the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Preaching mercy, Pope Francis said, is not the same as ignoring sin or withholding correction.

Saints & Witches



Father Damien of Molokai is the second cousin to Pat Nurs, a member of St. Joseph Parish in Oil City.



Friedland A. Carter, artist

Rebecca Nurse (original spelling in the 1600s) is depicted in this rendering of her trial as a witch. She is the seventh great-grandmother of Jerry Nurs of St. Joseph Parish, Oil City.

Ancestors of Oil City couple ministered to lepers, hanged for witchcraft

BY MARY SOLBERG | FAITHLIFE

The roots of Jerry Nurs's family tree are tangled up in the infamous Salem Witch Trials. But his wife, Pat, shares her bloodline with a saint.

The Oil City couple—celebrating their 55th wedding anniversary this August—quip that their disparate backgrounds have kept them together all these years.

"If you go back a couple of centuries or more, people definitely wouldn't talk about the witch connection, but today when we mention it to anyone, we make a joke out of it," says Jerry, whose seventh great-grandmother, Rebecca Nurse (original spelling), was hanged for witchcraft on July 19, 1691.

"I'm protecting him," teases Pat, whose second cousin is St. Damien of Molokai, the Flemish-born priest who ministered to lepers in Hawaii in the late 1800s.

Even the Nurs's parish priest, Father Justin Pino, pastor of St. Joseph Church in Oil City, has found their family backgrounds historically interesting.

"In Salem, they had to fight for justice. St. Damien had to fight for dignity for lepers. The connections are fascinating," Father Pino says.

Jerry Nurs learned about his seventh great-grandmother's hanging through genealogical research done in England in the 1950s.

According to historical reports, Rebecca Nurse was a 71-year-old widowed mother of eight who was falsely accused by young girls for being responsible for their odd behavior. The town doctor in Salem Village, now Danvers, Mass., bowed to Puritanical fear, concluding that the girls' "horrid fits" were



Photo by Mary Solberg

Pat and Jerry Nurs enjoy the reams of documents and photographs about their family lineage, which includes a saint and a seventh great-grandmother hanged for alleged witchcraft.

a direct result of witchcraft.

Rebecca Nurse was dragged from her bed chamber and put on trial. Forty neighbors signed a petition recommending she be released; her children fought for her life. Initially, a jury found Rebecca innocent, but then it reversed its decision after her accusers began to experience "terrifying torments."

Rebecca Nurse was hanged on a summer day in 1691. Her children secretly buried her in an unmarked grave, but 200 years later her progeny erected a memorial in the family graveyard, now the location of the Rebecca Nurse Homestead.

Jerry and Pat Nurs, both in their 70s, traveled to Salem in 1993 to see the homestead and mark the 300th anniversary of the end of the Salem Witch Trials.

"I don't believe she was a witch any more than I believe I am," Jerry says. "It's not an honor that she was hanged, but I still feel honored that I am part of her family; it's my bloodline."

Pat Nurs grew up in Oil City, always proud of her family heritage, too. But hers isn't as difficult as her husband's.

According to Pat, her grandfather's first cousin was Joseph DeVeuster, known today

as St. Damien of Molokai. He was canonized in Rome on Oct. 11, 2009. Pat Nurs is St. Damien's second cousin.

"I feel very honored. He must have been a really kind-hearted person to live his life helping other people," Pat says. Joseph DeVeuster was born Jan. 3, 1840, in the hamlet of Tremelo, Belgium. When his older brother came down with typhus and could not leave for mission work in Hawaii, the young Joseph offered to go instead.

He reached Honolulu in March 1864 and two months later was ordained a priest—taking the name Damien—with the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts.

Eventually, Father Damien developed a keen interest in helping those with Hansen's disease, or leprosy, at a settlement at Kalawao on the island of Molokai in the Makalana Peninsula. The peninsula, surrounded by rough seas and 2,000-foot cliffs, became an ideal place for isolating people with leprosy.

According to family archives, Father Damien offered hope to lepers, helping them build houses, plant trees and construct a water system. He pushed the Hawaiian government and his church for supplies and resources, attracting worldwide attention.

"I feel so blessed to be related to St. Damien," Pat Nurs says, looking at her husband. "It's so amazing with his great-grandmother accused of witchcraft and my cousin a saint."

Persecution of Christians denounced

Religious plea for intervention

ROME (CNS)—Consecrated men and women from around the world issued a message April 10 "to urgently denounce" the persecution of Christians and to urge the international community to "implement concrete interventions" for peace.

The message was signed by Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, prefect of the Congregation for Consecrated Life and Institutes of Apostolic Life, on behalf of the nearly 1,300 Catholic religious gathered for an international congress in Rome. The participants at the April 7-11 conference represent dozens of religious congregations and thousands of religious men and women worldwide.

"We feel particularly close to

those in the world who are suffering because of their faith in Jesus Christ and we express our communion with all consecrated men and women who, in the various peripheries of the world, suffer because they are Christian and consecrated," said the message.

The religious thanked their suffering brothers and sisters for "their witness of fidelity" to their vocation and mission and for remaining "close to those who suffer," assuring them of their prayers. They also said they join Pope Francis and the whole church in praying "so that peace, the gift of the risen Lord, can overcome hatred and violence and so that all people can recognize themselves as brothers and sisters."

Pope criticizes slaughter of Armenians

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, Pope Francis has said that atrocities from the past have to be recognized—not hidden or denied—for true reconciliation and healing to come to the world.

However, Turkey's top government officials criticized the pope's use of the term "genocide"—citing a 2001 joint statement by St. John Paul II and the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church—in reference to the deaths of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians during their forced evacuation by Ottoman Turks in 1915-18.

Turkey rejects the accusation of genocide, and the government called its ambassador to the Holy See back to Turkey "for consultations" April 12, the same day Pope Francis made his statement. The government also summoned Archbishop Antonio Lucibello,

munio to Turkey, to lodge a complaint. Before commemorating the Mass in St. Peter's Basilica on Divine Mercy Sunday, Pope Francis greeted the many Armenian faithful who were present, including Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan.

The pope lamented the continued forced expulsions and atrocious killings of Christians in the world saying, "Today, too, we are experiencing a kind of genocide created by general and collective indifference" and "complicit silence."

Humanity has lived through "three massive and unprecedented tragedies the past century; the first, which is generally considered 'the first genocide of the 20th century,' struck the Armenian people, he said, quoting a joint declaration signed in 2001 by St. John Paul and Catholicos Karekin II of Etchmiadzin, patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church.