



BRIEFS

Lawyers ask court: Is life in prison for teen like a death sentence?

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The Supreme Court is weighing whether to follow a ban on capital punishment for minor offenders with a prohibition or limits on sentencing teenagers to life in prison without parole. In two cases argued before the court Nov. 9, the justices were asked to rule that teens' immaturity and the potential for them to reform means they should be shielded from life imprisonment, applying the same logic that led the high court four years ago to end the death penalty for minors. Among those urging the court to rule that such sentences are cruel and unusual punishment — barred by the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution — are religious organizations and those who study the developmental differences between teens and adults. The cases involved offenders who were 13 and 16 at the time of the crimes for which they were convicted. Bryan Gowdy, arguing before the court on behalf of one of the teens, said sentences of life without parole are immoral for adolescents because it means society has given up hope on the juvenile and believes he or she will never change or be fit to re-enter society.

Monks' thriving coffee business helps attract young men to monastery

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A small Carmelite monastery in Clark, Wyo., has seen its coffee sales take off during the last couple of years, and the growing awareness of its coffee business has brought an added benefit to the community — more members. "During the past two years, the monks themselves have grown from six to 15 monks and all the new monks are under 25, some right out of high school," said Susie George, a neighbor of the monks who helped with marketing and computer work for the coffee business, in a letter e-mailed to Catholic News Service. One young man from Australia said he has found his place in life there. Carmelite Brother Paul Marie told CNS in a Nov. 4 phone interview that he was searching for more in life than just "conforming to society" and the Wyoming religious order has provided that for him. Brother Paul said he discovered the monastery by searching for religious orders online but was initially attracted to the Carmelite order because of the joy and spiritual aspect of the community and the fact that some of his favorite saints — including St. John of the Cross and St. Therese — were Carmelites. He also found he has a place in the cloistered monks' coffee business. Brother Paul started his work in packaging and then helped in operations, shipping the coffee products and ordering coffee beans. They call their product Mystic Monk Coffee.

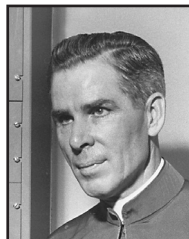


National campaign renews call to close Guantanamo prison

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Religious leaders have renewed their call to Congress seeking the immediate closure of the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The prison "is the symbol of our country's violation of our deepest values" and must be closed immediately, the group of more than 40 religious leaders said in a Nov 12 letter sent by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture to the Democratic and Republican leadership of the House of Representatives and the Senate. "Regardless of how it is operated now compared to how it was operated in earlier years, it stands in the minds of hundreds of millions of people in our nation and around the globe as a place where America broke faith with itself and used torture as an interrogation technique," the letter said. Closing the prison now rather than later will allow the country to begin to heal spiritually and "put an end to this dark and errant chapter in our history," the leaders wrote. As for the remaining 200 detainees, the leaders suggested that "appropriate alternative sites" can be found for their detention until they go to trial.

Masses to recall Archbishop Sheen's life, promote sainthood

PATERSON, N.J. (CNS) — A worldwide celebration of Masses Dec. 9 will commemorate the 30th anniversary of the death of famed author, lecturer and television evangelist Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, as well as promote his cause for canonization. Two women from the Paterson Diocese launched the program: Lo Anne Mayer, a parishioner of Christ the King Church in New Verona, and La Verne Washburne, a parishioner of Corpus Christi Church in Chatham Township. Mayer, who is a board member of the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation in Peoria, Ill., and president of its advisory council, credits her friend Washburne with conceiving the worldwide Mass idea. Washburne said it just struck her after hearing the foundation advise that Rome would like to witness an outpouring of support for Archbishop Sheen "from a lot of people!" "The Mass is our greatest prayer," she said, "and I can't think of a better way to dramatize his worthiness for sainthood than big turnouts of people around the globe attending Mass in his memory, all on the same day. That's public support on a grand scale; hopefully, it will impress Rome." Masses have been scheduled in 35 countries on six continents. Boise Bishop Michael P. Driscoll is a member of the Episcopal Advisory Board for the Cause for Beatification of the Servant of God Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.



From the Vatican...

By Catholic News Service

The Vatican consistently has criticized the U.S. embargo against Cuba and hopes the Obama administration will lift the restrictions, recognizing the fact that they cause untold suffering for the Cuban people, a Vatican official said. Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, visited Cuba Nov. 4-8 and met with local bishops and Catholics involved in communications work, but also with government officials. The embargo "undeniably has a negative influence on the life of the people," Archbishop Celli told Vatican Radio Nov. 13. Asked whether he expects U.S. President Barack Obama to change U.S. policy, Archbishop Celli said, "I hope this can occur because, undeniably, it is the population that suffers most." He said that while the Catholic Church in Cuba has few resources and extremely limited access to the media, its communications efforts are having an impact.

Catholics must be channels of God's goodness and love, offering concrete assistance to the poor and working for justice in the world, Pope Benedict XVI said. "Charity belongs to the very nature of the church," the pope said Nov. 13 during a meeting with members of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the Vatican office that promotes and coordinates Catholic charitable giving and distributes the money the pope designates for charity. Pope Benedict thanked Catholics all over the world who generously give their time, their resources and their energy "to witness to the love of Christ, the Good Samaritan," who attends to those who are physically or spiritually needy. "In proclaiming salvation, the church cannot ignore the concrete living conditions of the people to whom it is addressed," he said. "Acting to improve those conditions concerns the very life and mission of the church because Christ's salvation is holistic and regards the human person in every dimension: physical and spiritual, social and cultural, earthly and heavenly," he said.

The United Nations has a significant role to play in helping nations "fully ensure, at all levels, the implementation of the right to religious freedom" for all people, the U.N. nuncio said. "A century and a half ago ... religion was described as the 'opium of the people,' (but) today, in the context of globalization, it is increasingly regarded as the 'vitamin of the poor,'" Archbishop Celestino Migliore told the U.N. General Assembly Nov. 10. He said the U.N. charter and other U.N. documents affirm "full respect for and promotion not only of the fundamental freedom of conscience but also of the expression and practice of everybody's religion, without restriction." The United Nations' ultimate goal in pursuing interreligious dialogue and cooperation should be "to engage states as well as all segments of human society to recognize, respect and promote the dignity and rights of every person and each community in the world," he said. The unique contribution of religions is that they "tend to raise the human spirit, protect life, empower the weak, translate ideals into action, purify institutions (and) contribute to resolving economic and noneconomic inequalities," the archbishop said.

Migrants and refugees in prisons and detention centers have the same right to spiritual assistance as any other person, a U.S. bishop told a Vatican meeting. Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration, told the Vatican's World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees that the growing number of people in U.S. detention centers has made the issue of access even more urgent. Since the 2001 terrorist attacks, Bishop Wester said, "the U.S. government has turned to the detention of immigrants as another weapon in the 'war on terrorism.'" The government has increased the number of beds in detention centers 200 percent since 2000, he said, and it "detains over 280,000 persons a year, more than triple the number of those detained just nine years ago." Increased security concerns combined with an "onerous law" on immigration passed in 1996 has meant, in effect, that the government presumes undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers "should be incarcerated rather than released" while awaiting hearings on their status, he said. Catholic dioceses, organizations that care for foreigners and volunteers "have had some difficulty gaining access to detainees for pastoral purposes," because different facilities have different policies, he said.

Under the gilded ceiling of a Roman basilica, a choir performed while the taped voice of Pope Benedict XVI sang the Marian hymn "Regina Coeli" ("Queen of Heaven"). The performance marked the press launch of "Alma Mater," a CD featuring the recording of the pope leading the "Regina Coeli" prayer in St. Peter's Square on May 1, 2005, the first time he had led the hymn as pope. The CD features eight pieces. They each begin with six lines from the Marian Litany of Loreto and then segue into a new composition of classical music with the pope's voice overlaid, usually reciting a Marian prayer or talking about Marian devotion. The disc was co-produced by the Pauline Fathers' Multimedia San Paolo and Geffen Records, which is part of Universal Music Group. It was scheduled for worldwide release Nov. 30. Pauline Father Vito Fracchiolla, general director of the order's publishing companies in Italy, said the disc "is the fruit of the convergence of many artists and of many business and church entities, a result of teamwork aimed principally at making a gift to Pope Benedict XVI" by spreading his Marian devotion and a message of hope.

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Idaho Catholic Register, 1501 South Federal Way, Suite 400, Boise, ID 83705
Ph: (208)342-1311 • Fax: (208)342-0224 • Email: mbrown@rcdb.org



BISHOP MICHAEL DRISCOLL
Publisher

MICHAEL K. BROWN
Editor/Communications Director

ANN BIXBY
Advertising/Production Manager

LORETTA GOSSI
Admin Asst/Subscription Manager