Vale Mining Dam Disaster Claims Dozens of Lives in Brazil

On January 25, a massive mining dam collapsed in north central Brazil, devastating the nearby community of Brumandinho. Dozens are confirmed dead and hundreds are missing—and the numbers continue to grow. The dam was 280 feet high and nearly a half-mile wide, and was built to contain the often-toxic sludge that is a byproduct of large mining operations.

The company responsible for the mine and the dam was implicated in a 2015 dam collapse that killed 19 people, destroyed a town, and polluted a river—and 5,000 tributary streams—all the way to its outlet in the sea.

Read more about the disaster and its effects here.
TRAFFICKING VICTIMS PROTECTION ACT SIGNED

The Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act (HR 2200) was signed into law on January 8, 2019.

Named for abolitionist Frederick Douglass on his 200th birthday, HR 2200 reauthorized $430 million in current appropriated funds to bolster an integrated, multi-agency federal response to fight human trafficking. Representative Chris Smith (R-New Jersey), the bill's sponsor, said, “In the fight to end modern-day slavery, the new bill honors the extraordinary legacy of one of the greatest Americans who ever lived. Born a slave in 1818 — we celebrated the 200th anniversary of his birth this year — Frederick Douglass escaped slavery when he was 20 and dedicated his entire life to abolishing slavery and, after emancipation, to ending Jim Crow laws and lynching, all while struggling for full equality.”

Read the full text of the bill here.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY ON CLIMATE CHANGE NOW STREAMING

In 2017, President Donald Trump vowed to withdraw the US from the Paris Climate Accord, saying, “I was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris.” Almost immediately Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto began to rally mayors around the country to pledge to uphold the agreement. The movement inspired a new National Geographic documentary, Paris to Pittsburgh.

The film is available free on National Geographic's website.

2019 MARCH FOR LIFE MARRED BY CONFLICT

While more than 200,000 people attended the
annual March for Life in Washington, DC, most media coverage centered on a conflict between high school students and other groups demonstrating on the National Mall.

A politically charged debate continues on social media to assign blame for the conflict, with political loyalties causing division among those otherwise united around an issue of faith, peace, and justice.

This year marked the 46th anniversary of the walk, the largest pro-life event in the country. It took place during a 9-day vigil sponsored by the USCCB:

9 Days for Life is a multi-faceted novena for the respect and protection of every human life. Each day, a different intention is accompanied by a short reflection, suggested actions, and related information. While intended to coordinate with the March for Life, the prayers are suitable for any time.

The full text of the Novena is available here.

CATHOLIC SHELTERS SCRAMBLING TO PROVIDE FOR MIGRANTS

Maryknoll Father Frank Breen reports that the Diocese of El Paso, through its organization Annunciation House, operates 18 shelters—14 in El Paso
and 4 in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Not all are at Catholic parishes; there are at least two motels being used and at least two Protestant churches are participating.

Each shelter can accommodate from 20 to 125 refugees, in family units, a night. Each day Annunciation House distributes the refugees to the shelters and takes them there in buses from the detention centers run by Border Patrol (or ICE, or whatever the participating government organization is).

There was a sudden surge in those being brought to the Catholic shelters in El Paso in December. Previously there were about 300 a week, but beginning in late November through early December 2018, this number rose to 300 a day—2,000 to 2,500 a week.

Some governmental facilities are closing, including the much-criticized Tornillo, Texas, facility (see more here), adding to the burden shouldered by private providers.

All work in the shelters is done by volunteers—100% voluntary. Even the permanent staff are all volunteers, although they receive a place to sleep and their food. In a sense, each shelter is like a Catholic Worker House. In many of the shelters, the refugees also pitch in and do work.

To volunteer or contribute, or for more information, contact:
Annunciation House, Casa Teresa
815 Myrtle Street
El Paso, TX 79901
Website: annunciationhouse.org
Email: rubengarcia@annunciationhouse.org
Tel: 915-533-4675

CATHOLIC LEGAL IMMIGRATION NETWORK PROVIDES GUIDELINES ON TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS

Confused about the meaning and implications of Temporary Protected Status? The Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLIN) has compiled a helpful backgrounder on the history of TPS, its status under the current administration, and its impact on those fleeing dangerous conditions to come to the US.

You can read the entire document here.

For information on Catholic Social Teaching as it relates to migrants, see CLIN's overview here.
GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN AFFECTS MILLIONS

The longest federal government shutdown in history has had disastrous effects. In the first days of the budget impasse, national parks reported damage, airport security was impacted by worker shortages, and federal employees were required to work without pay. The shutdown ended, at least temporarily, after 35 days, during which the Coast Guard was not paid, IRS and other "essential" workers were recalled, and businesses dependent on federal workers lost income.

Most of those furloughed are slated to receive back pay in the weeks to come, but contract employees, who are some of the lowest-paid workers for the US government, have not yet been promised any back pay.

Here are some ways to help those who have been furloughed:

1. **Donate to a food pantry.**
   Without pay, furloughed workers are struggling to afford groceries. Find a food bank near you [here](#).

2. **Donate or volunteer to repair national parks.** The National Park Foundation has started a campaign to fund repairs to sites damaged during the shutdown. You can donate [here](#). If you live near a national park, you can consider volunteering to help repair damage.
1. Visit a community park, you can volunteer to help here.

3. Contact your Congressional representatives and urge them to provide for federal workers and contractors. Senators are listed here; members of the House are listed here.

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**PRAY**

Good and gracious God, we thank you for the gift of families. We are grateful for all of the joy and love that they bring into our lives, and we ask that you provide special protection for all families, particularly those who face hardships as they move in search of a better life. Show mercy to those who travel in danger, and lead them to a place of safety and peace. Comfort those who are alone and afraid because their families have been torn apart by violence and injustice.

As we reflect upon the difficult journey that the Holy Family faced as refugees in Egypt, help us to remember the suffering of all migrant families. Through the intercession of Mary, our Mother, and St. Joseph the worker, her spouse, we pray that all migrants may be reunited with their loved ones and find the meaningful work they seek.

Open our hearts so that we may provide hospitality for all who come in search of refuge. Give us the courage to welcome every stranger as Christ in our midst. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

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**GLOBAL GOALS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**YOUTH-LED PROGRAM KICKS OFF IN TANZANIA**
2019 is kicking off with an innovative, youth-led program called the Goalkeepers Youth Action Accelerator.

Goalkeepers is a multiyear campaign dedicated to accelerating progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Using powerful stories, data, and partnerships, Goalkeepers will highlight progress achieved, hold governments accountable, and bring together a new generation of leaders to address the world’s major challenges.

The launch of the Goalkeepers Youth Action Accelerator is a direct response to the challenges young people face in accessing sufficient and appropriate resources to meaningfully engage in development decisions and activities that affect their communities.

Read more about Goalkeepers here.

U.N. INTERNATIONAL DAYS

February 4: World Cancer Day - Nearly every family in the world is touched by cancer, which is now responsible for almost one in six deaths globally. On World Cancer Day (4 February) WHO highlights that cancer no longer needs to be a death sentence, as the capacity exists to reduce its burden and improve the survival and quality of life of people living with the disease. Learn more.

February 6: International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation - To promote the abandonment of FGM, coordinated and systematic efforts are needed, and they must engage whole communities and focus on human rights and gender equality. These efforts should emphasize societal dialogue and the empowerment of communities to act collectively to end the practice. They must also address the sexual and reproductive health needs of women and girls who suffer from its consequences. Learn more.

February 10: World Pulses Day - This will be the first-ever World Pulses Day, a global event to celebrate pulses worldwide and continue the important gains made with 2016 International Year of Pulses. Pulses are the edible seeds of plants in the legume family. Pulses grow in pods and come
in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors. Pulses are healthy, nutritious and easy to cook with. Growing pulses also promotes sustainable agriculture, as pulse crops help decrease greenhouse gases, increase soil health, and use less water than other crops. Learn more.

February 11: International Day of Women and Girls in Science - Science and gender equality are both vital for the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over the past 15 years, the global community has made a lot of effort in inspiring and engaging women and girls in science. Learn more.

February 13: World Radio Day - Radio is the mass medium reaching the widest audience in the world. It is also recognized as a powerful communication tool and a low cost medium. Radio is specifically suited to reach remote communities and vulnerable people: the illiterate, the disabled, women, youth and the poor, while offering a platform to intervene in the public debate, irrespective of people’s educational level. Furthermore, radio has a strong and specific role in emergency communication and disaster relief. Learn more.

February 20: World Day of Social Justice - Social justice is an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. We uphold the principles of social justice when we promote gender equality or the rights of indigenous peoples and migrants. We advance social justice when we remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability. Learn more.

February 21: International Mother Language Day - At least 43% of the estimated 6000 languages spoken in the world are endangered. Only a few hundred languages have genuinely been given a place in education systems and the public domain, and less than a hundred are used in the digital world. International Mother Language Day has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. Learn more.

Comboni JPIC Network
513-474-4997
www.ComboniMissionaries.org

Connect with us