Quo Vadis

The monthly newsletter of Saints Peter & Paul Orthodox Catholic Church of Bayonne, N.J.
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Back issues of "Quo Vadis" may be viewed at https://sspeterandpaulbayonne.org/monthly_newsletters

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"Quo Vadis?" is a Latin phrase meaning "Where are you going?" It refers to a Christian tradition regarding St. Peter. According to the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, Peter is fleeing from likely crucifixion in Rome, and along the road outside the city, he encounters the risen Jesus. Peter asks Jesus "Quo vadis?" Jesus replies "Romam vado iterum crucifigi" ("I am going to Rome to be crucified again"). St. Peter thereby gains the fortitude to return to the city, to eventually be martyred by being crucified upside-down. The phrase also occurs a few times in the Latin *Vulgate* translation of the *Holy Bible*, notably in John 13:36 when Peter asks Jesus the same question, to which He responds, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me." The Church of Domine Quo Vadis in Rome is built where, according to tradition, the meeting between St. Peter and the risen Jesus Christ took place.

This parish newsletter is called ***Quo Vadis*** for a reason: to ask the question of where *you* are going in life. Is your life's journey leading you towards Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? St. Peter, at a pivotal moment in his life, when he understandably felt like running away, found the courage to go where Jesus Christ would have him go. Where are *you* going? Will *you* follow Jesus Christ?

Rector's Message

This month, we will take a more focused look into the more specific demographic findings of the Pew Research Center's most recent comprehensive study. But first let us summarize last month's message. In the 2024 Religious Landscape Study, 62% of U.S. adults describe themselves as Christians. The Christian share of the population is now 9 points lower than when the landscape study was last conducted in 2014, and 16 points lower than in 2007. The share of Americans who say they have no religion – identifying, instead, as atheist, agnostic, or as "nothing in particular" – stands at 29% in the new RLS, up from 23% in 2014 and 16% in 2007.

The long-term decline in the Christian share of the population and growth of religious "nones" is demographically broad-based. There are fewer Christians and more "nones" among men and women; people in every racial and ethnic category; college graduates and those with less education; and residents of all major regions of the country. However, the changes are much more pronounced among ideological liberals than conservatives. Today, 37% of self-described liberals identify with Christianity, down from 62% in 2007, a 25-point decline. Meanwhile, 51% of liberals now say they have no religion, up from 27% in 2007, a 24-point increase. There are now more religious "nones" than Christians among liberals, a reversal since 2007. Surprisingly, there also are fewer Christians and more "nones" among conservatives, but the changes in the religious composition of conservatives have been far less pronounced than among liberals, and a large majority of conservatives continue to identify with Christianity. Both Republicans and Democrats include fewer Christians and more religious "nones" today than they did a decade or more ago, but the decline of Christianity and rise of religious "nones" has been far more pronounced among Democrats than among Republicans.

The table below shows the demographic analysis of the 2024 RLS:

% of U.S. adults who ...

	... are Christian				... are religiously unaffiliated			
Among __	2007	2014	2023-24	Change between 2007 and 2023-24	2007	2014	2023-24	Change between 2007 and 2023-24
Men	74%	66%	59%	-15 pct. pts.	20%	27%	31%	+11 pct. pts.
Women	82	75	66	-16	13	19	27	+14
White	78	70	62	-16	16	24	31	+15
Black	85	79	73	-12	12	18	22	+10
Hispanic	84	77	67	-17	14	20	27	+13
Asian	45	34	33	-12	23	31	33	+10
College graduate	73	64	58	-15	17	24	31	+14
Less than college	80	73	64	-16	16	22	29	+13
Northeast	76	65	58	-18	16	25	30	+14
Midwest	80	73	64	-16	16	22	30	+14
South	83	76	68	-15	13	19	25	+12
West	71	64	55	-16	21	28	35	+14
Conservative	89	85	82	-7	9	11	13	+4
Liberal	62	52	37	-25	27	36	51	+24
Moderate	77	69	61	-16	17	25	30	+13

With regard to gender, as in the past, women remain more religious than men by a variety of measures, such as prayer frequency and belief in God or a universal spirit. However, the increase in the religiously unaffiliated from 2007 to 2024 has been greater among women than men, and gender gap in religiousness is less pronounced among the youngest adults than among older people. With regard to racial demographics, Black and Hispanic Americans are still more religious than White Americans, but the decline in religiousness of Hispanics from 2007 to 2024 was greater than any other racial category, though the increase in the religious unaffiliated from 2007 to 2024 was highest among White Americans. Asian Americans were the least religious racial category by far in both 2007 and 2024, although the change in between was no greater than among Black Americans. Today, as many Asian Americans are religiously unaffiliated as affiliated, whereas in 2007 twice as many were religiously affiliated as unaffiliated.

Regionally, there is little surprise that the South remains the most religious region in the United States, and the decline between 2007 and 2024 has been slightly less than other regions. The West shows the lowest percentages in religiousness and the highest in the unaffiliated, both in 2007 and 2024, but the region having the greatest decline in religiousness between 2007 and 2024 was the Northeast. The increase in the unaffiliated was uniform in all regions except the South. Mississippi is the most religious state, with 50% of its adult population identifying as “highly religious.” Eight other states rank above 40%: South Carolina, South Dakota, Louisiana, Tennessee, Utah, North Carolina, Alabama, and Arkansas. Conversely, northern New England is the least religious: with only 13% of adults identifying as “highly religious” in Vermont, followed by 15% in New Hampshire, and 17% in Maine. The figure is under 25% in seven other states, Nevada, Oregon, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Iowa, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, and in the District of Columbia.

Mississippi also ranked number one in every other metric looked at by Pew, including “belief in God,” “importance of religion,” “religious attendance,” and “frequency of prayer.” Turning our

attention to perhaps a more significant measure, the percentage of adults attending worship services at least monthly, Vermont again is at the bottom, at 17%, followed by Nevada, Oregon, Maine, and Massachusetts. At the top, at 54%, is Mississippi, followed by four other states, South Dakota, Utah, South Carolina, and North Dakota, where at least 50% reported attending worship services at least monthly. Interestingly, New Jersey and Delaware are tied as the top states in the Northeast in this category. Personally, I was surprised that Pennsylvania wasn't the top state in the Northeast.

Other key findings from the new study include:

- 35% of U.S. adults have switched religions since childhood, leading to net gains for the unaffiliated population and net losses for the Christian population.
- All three major strands of Protestantism have declined in percentage terms since 2007.
    - Evangelical Protestants now make up 23% of U.S. adults, down from 26%.
    - Mainline Protestants account for 11% of U.S. adults, down from 18%.
    - Members of historically Black Protestant churches make up 5% of U.S. adults, down from 7%.
- The share of Americans who identify with non-denominational Protestantism is growing.
- Many other Protestant denominational families (including Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans and others) have declined as shares of the population.
- The United Methodist Church, which has splintered in recent years, now makes up slightly fewer than 3% of U.S. adults, down from 5% in 2007.
- Roman Catholics are the second largest, representing 19% of the entire Christian population. Other denominations, including Eastern Orthodox, Church of Latter-day Saints, and Jehovah's Witnesses, combined represent 3% of the Christian population.
- A majority of U.S. immigrants (58%) are Christian. About a quarter of foreign-born adults are unaffiliated, and 14% belong to other religions, including 4% who are Muslim, 4% who are Hindu, 3% who are Buddhist.
- Those identifying as non-Christian religious adults rose from 4.9% in 2007, to 5.9% in 2014, and to 7.1% in 2024. Among them, 1.7% identified as Jewish, 1.2% as Muslim, 1.1% as Buddhist and 0.9% as Hindu, in addition to the 2.2% who identified as "other non-Christian religions."
- Additionally, the growth of the religiously unaffiliated, also called nones, has plateaued after decades of rapid growth. It includes 5% who identify as atheists, 6% who describe themselves as agnostics, and 19% who identify as "nothing in particular." If this plateau turns out to be a new long-term trend, then the United States may remain a Christian-majority country for the foreseeable future.

Lives of the Saints

St. Leander of Seville, Bishop – commemorated on February 27

St. Leander, Bishop of Seville, teacher of the Church, and enlightener of Spain, lived in the 6th century, and was the scion of an aristocratic family. His father Severianus was a duke and belonged to an illustrious Hispano-Roman family from Cartagena, while his mother was the eldest daughter of the Visigoth King Liuvigild, who reigned in Seville, the capital of the Visigoth Kingdom. His younger brother (and successor as bishop) was the encyclopedist, St. Isidore of Seville. The family as a matter of course were staunch Catholics, as were most of the Romanized population; it was the Visigothic nobles and kings that were Arians.

The family moved to Seville around 554. The children's subsequent public careers reflect their distinguished origin: Leander and Isidore both became bishops of Hispalis (Seville), and their sister Florentina was an abbess who directed forty convents and one thousand nuns. The third brother, Fulgentius, was appointed Bishop of Astigi (Ecjia). All four siblings are considered saints of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Catholic hierarchy were in contact with representatives of the Eastern Roman (or Byzantine) emperor, who had maintained a considerable territory in the far south of Hispania ever since his predecessor had been invited to the peninsula by King Athanagild several decades before. In the north, King Liuvigild struggled to maintain his possessions on the far side of the Pyrenees, where his Merovingian cousins and brothers-in-law cast envious eyes on them.

At a young age St. Leander entered a Benedictine monastery and was distinguished for his education and virtues. In 579, at about 45 years of age, he was appointed Bishop of Seville. As bishop St. Leander had access to the Catholic Merovingian princess Ingunthis, who had come as a bride for the kingdom's heir, and he assisted her in converting her husband Hermenegild, the eldest son of Liuvigild, an act that cannot honestly be divorced from a political context. Leander defended the new convert even when he rebelled "against his father's cruel reprisals." The French theologian Pierre Suau puts it thusly, "In endeavoring to save his country from Arianism, Leander showed himself an orthodox Christian and a far-sighted patriot."

Exiled by Liuvigild, as his biographies express it, when the rebellion failed, he withdrew to Constantinople—perhaps quite hastily—from 579 to 582. It is possible, but not proven, that he sought to rouse the Byzantine Emperor Tiberius II to take up arms against the Arian king; but in any case the attempt was without result. He profited, however, by his stay in Constantinople to compose works against Arianism, and there became acquainted with the future Pope Gregory the Great, at that time legate of Pope Pelagius II at the Byzantine court (later St. Gregory sent him a copy of his *Pastoral Care*). A close friendship thenceforth united the two men, and some of their correspondence survives. In 585 King Liuvigild put to death his intransigent son Hermenegild, a martyr and saint of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. King Liuvigild himself died in 589. It is not known exactly when Leander returned from exile, but he had a share in the conversion of King Reccared, the heir of Liuvigild, and retained an influence over him.

St. Leander introduced the recitation of the Nicene Creed at Mass, as a way to help reinforce the faith of his people against Arianism. In 589, he convoked the Third Council of Toledo,[1] where Visigothic Hispania abjured Arianism. Leander delivered the triumphant closing sermon which his brother Isidore entitled *Homilia de triumpho ecclesiae ob conversionem Gothorum* ("A Homily on the Triumph of the Church and the Conversion of the Goths"). On his return from this council, St. Leander convened a synod in his metropolitan city of Seville (Conc. Hisp., I), and never afterwards ceased his efforts to consolidate the work of extirpating the remains of Arianism, in which his brother and successor St. Isidore was to follow him.

St. Leander founded a theological school with the aim of spreading Orthodoxy, but also for cultivating the sciences and the arts in general, for the people of the Visigoth Kingdom. He prepared his brother, St. Isidore, to succeed him as Bishop of Seville and Primate of Spain. He even helped his sister, St. Florentina, by composing for her nunneries a monastic Typicon, which was called "The Canons of Saint Leander." He also organized the Divine Services of the Church of Spain, which are

[1] The Filioque was inserted into the Creed as an anti-Arian addition, by the Third Council of Toledo, at which King Reccared I and some Arians in his Visigothic Kingdom converted to orthodox, Catholic Christianity. Nearly 300 years later, the Filioque was to become a source of controversy between the East and the West, and was one of several issues that finally led to the schism.

known as the "Mozarabic Rite."[2] The holy Bishop of Seville, after enduring many adversities and trials, surrendered his soul to the Lord on February 27, 600 (or 601).[3] The scroll on his icon reads: "The Orthodox Faith defined by the Council of Nicaea is the weapon of the Church against the thorns of heresy." The city of San Leandro, California is named after St. Leander. His supposed likeness and crosier is depicted on the crest of Sevilla Fútbol Club.

Theological Excerpt

"True wisdom is found in knowing Christ and making Him known."
— St. Leander of Seville (534-600/601)

Frequently Asked Questions

"Do you have to be Orthodox to be saved?"

In a word, no. However, we believe that Orthodoxy represents the fullness of the faith—that is, the most complete and accurate expression possible by man. God honors truthful belief and proper faith anywhere it is found. Then why become Orthodox? The fullness of the faith is found here, the fullness of the truth is found here, and the fullness of worship is found here. Simply put, why would you want a Kia when you could have a Cadillac? While it may be possible to be saved outside the normal boundaries of the historic Church Jesus Christ founded—the Orthodox Church—it is not something that should be counted on. Christ never explicitly revealed any alternate paths to salvation except in His one Church. Some of the church fathers, notably St. Cyprian of Carthage, were insistent that there is no salvation outside the Church. But the church fathers also believed that God's grace is dispensed as God so wills, although both faith in Jesus Christ and baptism are essential for salvation (John 3:3-8). Ultimately, our salvation is decided by the will and judgment of God.

Recipe of the Month

Golden Soup (Chicken Turmeric Soup)

Take classic chicken noodle soup to the next level with this Golden Soup, a vibrant, cozy bowl of turmeric chicken soup loaded with fresh veggies like carrots, butternut squash, and kale. Infused with zippy ginger and bright lemon, this golden soup is ready in just 40 minutes and the perfect way to warm up on a chilly day.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- Salt and ground black pepper, to season

[2] The Mozarabic Rite, officially called the Hispanic Rite, is a liturgical rite of the Latin Church once used generally in the Iberian Peninsula (Hispania), in what is now Spain and Portugal. After experiencing a period of decline in the 12th-14th centuries, when it was superseded by the Roman Rite as part of a wider program of liturgical standardization within the Roman Catholic Church, although efforts were taken in the 16th century to revive the rite and ensure its continued presence in the city of Toledo, where it is still celebrated today. It is also celebrated on a more widespread basis throughout Spain and, by special dispensation, in other countries, but only on special occasions.

[3] Some sources set the date of St. Leander's repose on March 13—which has been his feast day in the Roman Catholic Church since 1969. This was the feast day observed in the Mozarabic Rite even before 1969. In Spain, St. Leander has a second feast day on November 13.

- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 1 stalk celery, diced
- 2 medium carrots, diced
- ½ small butternut squash, peeled and diced into ¼-inch cubes (about 4 cups diced, may substitute with 1 medium sweet potato)
- 6 cloves garlic, finely chopped or grated
- 1 2-inch piece ginger, peeled and grated or finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 48 ounces low-sodium chicken broth or stock (6 cups)
- 2 lemons, juiced (about ¼ cup)
- 1 bunch kale, destemmed and finely chopped (about 3 cups packed)
- Optional: 8 ounces short pasta of choice, cooked to al dente according to package directions and drained

DIRECTIONS

1. **Brown the chicken:** Add the olive oil to a Dutch oven or large soup pot over medium-high heat. Pat the chicken thighs dry with paper towel, then season generously with 1 teaspoon kosher salt and ground black pepper as desired. Carefully add the chicken thighs to the pot, working in batches as needed to avoid over-crowding. Cook for 2-3 minutes per side, until deeply golden brown. Transfer to a plate and set aside. The chicken will not be cooked through at this point – that's fine!
2. **Cook the vegetables:** Reduce the heat under the Dutch oven/pot to medium heat. Add in the onion, celery, carrot, and butternut squash, seasoning with ½ teaspoon kosher salt and ground black pepper as desired. Stir to combine. Sauté, stirring occasionally, for 5-6 minutes, until the veggies are softened and tender.
3. **Add the aromatics:** Add the garlic, ginger, and turmeric to the pot. Stir to combine. Cook, stirring constantly, for 1-2 minutes, until toasty and fragrant.
4. **Simmer the soup:** Add the browned chicken thighs from Step 1 back into the pot. Pour the chicken broth over top. Increase the heat to medium-high to bring the soup to a simmer. Reduce the heat to low to maintain a soft boil and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes.
5. **Finish the soup:** Remove the chicken thighs from the pot and carefully shred. You can do so using 2 forks, or my favorite trick: pop them in a stand mixer and let the paddle attachment do the work for you (I swear this works!). Add the shredded chicken back into the pot, along with the lemon juice and kale. Stir to combine. Cook 2-3 minutes, until the kale has softened. Taste and season with additional salt or ground black pepper as desired.
6. **Serve:** Ladle the golden chicken soup into individual bowls. If using, stir in a handful of the cooked pasta. Feel free to garnish with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil or sprinkle on some finely chopped fresh herbs of your choosing. Serve immediately with a slice of buttered crusty bread, as desired. Enjoy!

NOTES

1. You may use chicken breasts instead of thighs if you prefer.
2. The soup may be made vegetarian by swapping the chicken out with two 15-ounce cans of chickpeas (drained and rinsed) and swapping the chicken broth for your favorite vegetable broth. Skip Step 1 of Recipe Directions, adding the chickpeas into the soup in Step 4.

Parish News

Lenten Food Drive

As a charity for Lent, our parish will collect cans of soup and other non-perishable foods for donation to a local food pantry. Donated food items may be left in the church hall from Sunday, February 15, 2026 to Sunday, March 22, 2026. Please make certain that donated items are not past the expiration date. Thank You for your donations to this charitable project.

Parish Council Meeting

The Parish Council is meeting in the church hall on Sunday, February 15, 2026 after Divine Liturgy.

Schedule of Services

January 31-February 1, 2026

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

February 1-2, 2026

5:00 PM (Sunday) – Great Vespers with Lity
9:30 AM (Monday) – Divine Liturgy with Blessing of Candles

February 7-8, 2026

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

February 14-15, 2026

9:30 AM (Saturday) – General Panichida
5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

February 21-22, 2026

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy with Rite of Forgiveness

February 23-28, 2026

6:00 PM (Monday-Thursday) – Compline with Great Canon of Repentance
6:00 PM (Friday) – Akathistos of Divine Passion
9:30 AM (Saturday) – Memorial Divine Liturgy

Daily Bible Readings

1. 2 Timothy 3:10-15; Luke 18:10-14
2. Hebrews 7:7-17; Luke 2:22-40
3. 2 Peter 2:9-22; Mark 13:14-23
4. 2 Peter 3:1-18; Mark 13:24-31
5. 1 John 1:8-2:6; Mark 13:31-14:2
6. 1 John 2:7-17; Mark 14:3-9
7. 2 Timothy 3:1-9; Luke 20:46-21:4
8. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Luke 15:11-32
9. 1 John 2:18-3:10; Mark 11:1-11
10. 1 John 3:11-20; Mark 14:10-42
11. 1 John 3:21-4:6; Mark 14:43-15:1
12. 1 John 4:20-5:21; Mark 15:1-15
13. 2 John 1:1-13; Mark 15:22-25, 33-41
14. 1 Cor. 10:23-28; Lk. 21:8-9, 25-27, 33-36
15. 1 Cor. 8:8-9:2; Matthew 25:31-46
16. 3 John 1:1-15; Luke 19:29-40, 22:7-39
17. Jude 1:1-10; Luke 22:39-42, 45-23:1
18. *See wall calendar for readings*
19. Jude 1:11-25; Luke 23:2-34, 44-56
20. *See wall calendar for readings*
21. Rom. 14:19-23, 16:25-27; Matt. 6:1-13
22. Romans 13:11-14:4; Matthew 6:14-21

23-28. *See wall calendar for readings*

Special Donations

Special Donations may be offered at $15 for the Altar Vigils, $10 for the Sanctuary Lamp, and $5 for any one of the following: St. John's Cross, St. Nicholas' Cross, and Triple Candelabra, and may be offered in memory of the departed or in honor of the living. For acknowledgement of Special Donations in the March 2026 issue, the donation must be recorded in the Special Donations register in the church vestibule by February 22, 2026.

February 8, 2026

Altar Vigils offered by Reader Stephen Wasilewski in memory of Richard Venezin (40th Day). **St. John's Cross** offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Fr. John Udics (10th anniversary of repose). **St. Nicholas' Cross** offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Fr. Athanasy Mastalski (10th anniversary of repose).

February 15, 2026

St. John's Cross offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Fr. Thomas Sheridan, S.J. **St. Nicholas' Cross** offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Ernest Alexander Royer.

February 22, 2026

Altar Vigils offered by Reader Stephen Wasilewski in memory of John Wasilewski (23rd anniversary of repose). **Sanctuary Lamp** offered by the Wasilewski Family in memory of Julia Wasilewski (23rd anniversary of repose). **Triple Candelabra** offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Rita Richards (15th anniversary of repose).

Remember to support the parish every time you shop!

ShopRite, Stop & Shop, and Acme gifts cards available for purchase in the church vestibule.