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CNS documentary service

Faithfully Living the Gospel of the Family

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, opened the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Nov. 10 with a call to walk with hurting and broken families and “to build their confidence in faith.” In his first presidential address since he was elected to head the USCCB last November, Archbishop Kurtz also called for greater respect for life and reaffirmed the bishops’ commitment to the fight for religious liberty. He spoke about his own care for his late brother Georgie, who had Down syndrome, and encouraged his fellow bishops to use the example of their home visits as a guide to their interactions with their

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flock. “When I’d come to someone’s home, I wouldn’t start by telling them how I’d rearrange their furniture,” he said. “I wouldn’t begin by giving them a list of rules to follow.” The archbishop had recently returned from representing the USCCB at the extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family at the Vatican. “My prayer for the synod was that we would witness to the beauty of church teachings on marriage; that we would deepen the way we accompany those struggling with the many challenges families face today; and that we would encourage — even inspire — married couples to have confidence in their ability to faithfully live the Gospel of the family,” he said, adding that the synod took “some positive steps” in that direction. His text follows.

I had never met Paolo Rodari until he asked to sit down with me to talk about our families. Paolo is an Italian journalist, but this wasn’t about an interview. He had heard that I’d helped care for my brother Georgie, who had Down syndrome, and he wanted to talk about his hopes and fears for his own brother, Giovanni, who also has Downs.

We met when I was in Rome for the synod on the family. While I speak very little Italian, and Paolo speaks only broken English, we were able to speak together of our brothers.

“Does Giovanni read books?” I asked. Paolo said no. “Does he watch TV?” “Ahhh, si!” And so they watch together, and this is one way for them to be together, just as it was with Georgie and me.

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