



Sarah McGonigle, a Hermitage native, prepares for her photography Friday at the Colosseum in Rome.



ROME – The Via Crucis (Way of the Cross) is one of the most significant ceremonies of Holy Week. Held annually on Good Friday at the Colosseum in Rome, it draws pilgrims from around the world and is broadcast live to hundreds of millions of people globally.

Participants meditate on Christ’s passion through the traditional 14 Stations of the Cross, a centuries-old devotion tracing Jesus’ final hours from his condemnation to his burial.

This year marked the first Via Crucis as pontiff by Pope Leo XIV. Born Robert Francis Prevost in Chicago, he is the first American Pope in the history of the Catholic Church, making the ceremony particularly historic.

I gained press credentials to photograph the event initially through authorities in Scotland. In March, I photographed Archbishop Leo Cushley at the Rite of Election ceremony at St. James Parish in St. Andrews, where 42 people were taking the rites of Catholicism.



At that time, I met the Archdiocese of Edinburgh and St. Andrews head of communications and sent the archdiocese the photos to use on social media. That relationship proved pivotal weeks later when I learned about the opportunity to photograph the Via Crucis at the Colosseum in Rome.

I found the Holy See's press office online and sent them an inquiry about media accreditation. They responded the day before the ceremony with an application. Knowing I needed official backing, I immediately reached out to the archdiocesan communications director I had worked with at St. Andrews.

He responded within 15 minutes and provided a letter of support on my behalf, which allowed me to complete the application and receive press accreditation from the Vatican.

My press credentials granted me near-unique access inside the Colosseum itself, positioning me among a small group of accredited photographers in prime locations not available to the general public.

To stand in that ancient amphitheater where early Christians once faced persecution and document the first American pope leading this sacred ceremony was particularly moving. As a young Catholic, I feel called to use my gifts in service of the Church and community.



My vocation has taken many forms over the years, from altar service in my youth to teaching young people today, from cantoring at Mass to documenting moments of faith through photography.



Being able to capture and share these sacred experiences feels like another expression of that same calling to serve.

Sarah McGonigle, 27, a Hermitage native, is working on her Master's degree of science in International Education at the University of St. Andrews in St. Andrews, Scotland. She earned her bachelor's degree at the University of Dayton, where she studied art education and minored in photography and art history. She teaches high school art at Northmont High School in Dayton,

Ohio. McGonigle also owns Honey & Hue LLC, a professional art business with a focus on photography. She was an altar server at Notre Dame Church in Hermitage and sings in the choir at Good Shepherd Parish in West Middlesex when she returns home.

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