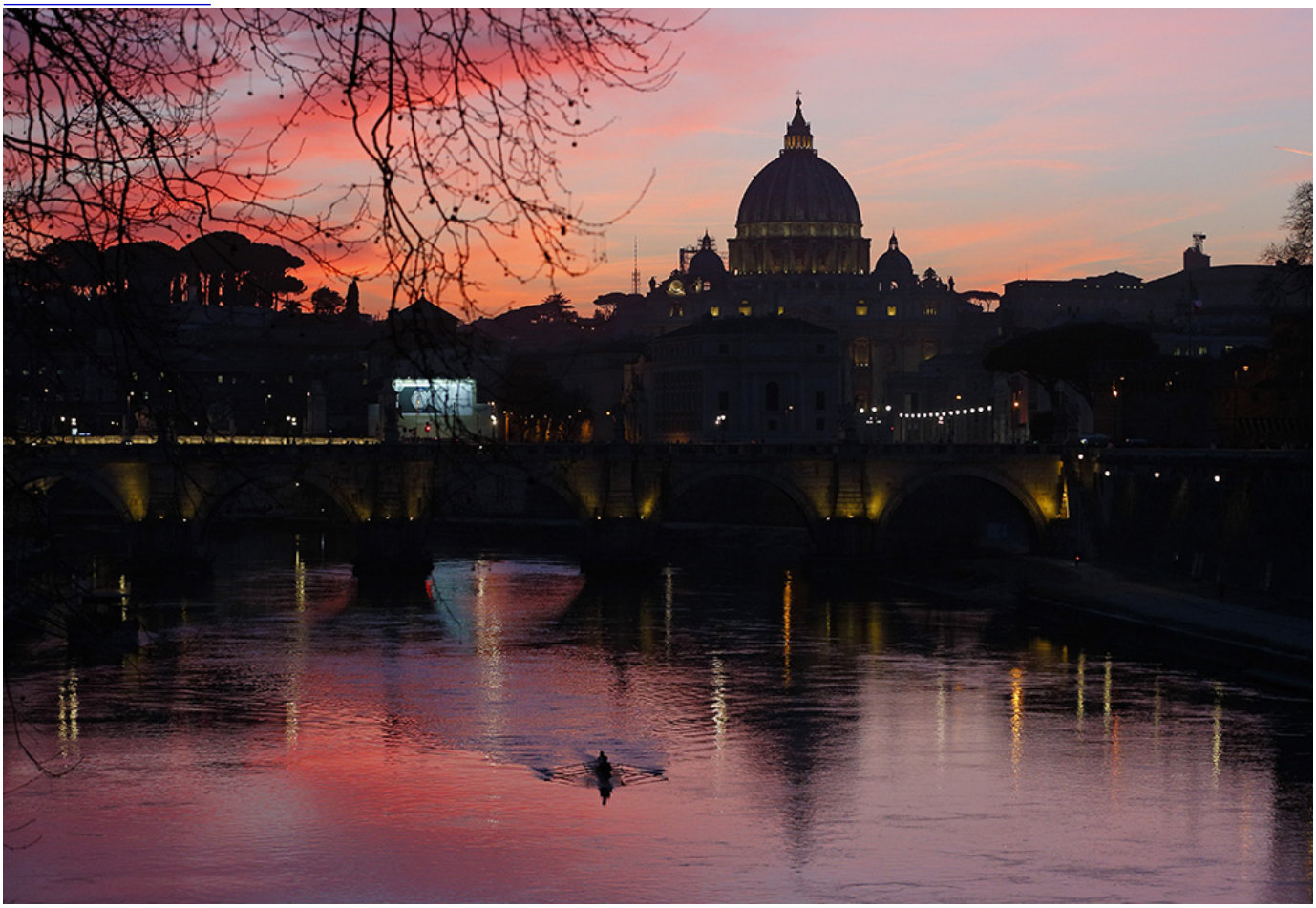
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St. Peter's Basilica is seen across the Tiber River March 5, 2019, as the sun sets in Rome. (CNS/Paul Haring)

by Catholic News Service

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Rome — November 18, 2024

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Pope Francis is asking parishes, Catholic institutions and religious congregations in Rome to celebrate the Holy Year 2025 by offering a home to someone who is without.

"In view of the Jubilee, I am asking my diocese to give a tangible sign of attention to the housing problem so that, alongside the welcome given to all the pilgrims who will come, forms of protection are activated for those who do not have a home or are in danger of losing it," Francis said in a letter dated Nov. 8 and released by the Vatican press office a week later.

Addressed specifically to "the superiors of religious orders, the legal representatives of church entities, pastors and the clergy," the pope's letter requested that any church body in Rome that owns real estate contribute to alleviating the city's housing crisis.

"Signs of charity and solidarity," he said, are needed to generate "hope in the thousands of people in the city of Rome who are in a condition of precarious housing."

The director of the Rome diocesan Caritas office issued a report in July saying that while there are "between 120,000 and 150,000 empty apartments in Rome," there are at least 22,000 people living on the streets and many thousands more who are just a few missed payments away from eviction.

Deacon Giustino Trincia, the Caritas director, and others have said the housing problem is worsening in the lead up to the Holy Year because many owners of empty apartments plan to rent them short-term to Holy Year pilgrims.

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Francis has chosen "hope" as the theme of the 2025 Jubilee, and in his letter, he said that "hope is born from loving and feeling loved. It is God's love that generates hope and God's love passes through our love."

The national and city governments and organizations of different kinds are trying to help those without homes, the pope said, and the church must make its contribution.

Francis asked all church entities, but especially those that have vacant apartments or who run guest houses, "to make a courageous gesture of love for their neighbors by offering the spaces they have available."

Social services and specialized agencies will look after the people being offered shelter, he said, while volunteer associations will help ensure they have the company and care they need.

Francis closed his letter with his thanks "for your generosity and for all that you already do to transmit the love of God and generate hope in the lives of all, particularly those who need it most."