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TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Volume 93 No. 40

50¢

TODAYSCATHOLIC.org



First Sunday of Advent

Nate Proulx



CNS photo/Bob Nichols, Catholic Moment

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson of Indianapolis raises the monstrance Nov. 21 at the beginning of adoration during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis.

Christ comes today and every day

BY LISA EVERETT

As the season of Advent begins, the focus is on Christ's first coming as a baby in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. During Advent, Christians also look forward to His second coming, in glory at the end of time. But He is also with us right now, in the present moment and in all of our joys and difficulties: He is with His children, as Pope Francis says, "today and every day."

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

(ISSN 0891-1533)
(USPS 403630)

Official newspaper of the
Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend
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Fort Wayne, IN 46856

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Published weekly except for the last Sunday in December; and every other week from third Sunday in May through fourth Sunday in August, by the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, 915 S. Clinton St., P.O. Box 390, Fort Wayne, IN 46801. Periodicals postage paid at Fort Wayne, IN, and additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Today's Catholic, P.O. Box 11169, Fort Wayne, IN 46856-1169 or email: circulation@diocesefwsb.org

MAIN OFFICE: 915 S. Clinton St., Fort Wayne, IN 46802. Telephone 260-456-2824. Fax: 260-744-1473.
BUREAU OFFICE: 1328 Dragoon Trail, Mishawaka, IN 46544. Telephone 260-456-2824. Fax 260-744-1473.

News deadline is 10 days prior to publication date. Advertising deadline is nine days before publication date.

Today's Catholic may be reached at:
Today's Catholic,
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46856-1169; or email:
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Archbishop Sheen's upcoming beatification greeted with joy, thanksgiving

BY TOM DERMODY

PEORIA, Ill. (CNS) — With joy and thanksgiving, officials and faithful throughout the Diocese of Peoria and around the globe welcomed the announcement Nov. 18 that Pope Francis has called for the beatification of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen in Peoria Dec. 21.

"It was a surprise, an early Christmas present from the pope, and it is truly a great blessing for our diocese, for so many people who have worked and sacrificed and prayed," said Msgr. Stanley Deptula, executive director of the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Foundation. "I've believed for a long time that Fulton Sheen is a gift to the Church, a hero that we Catholics need in our day."

The beatification ceremony will take place during Mass at 10 a.m. (local time) at St. Mary's Cathedral in Peoria, where the famed media evangelist and author was ordained to the priesthood 100 years ago.

Peoria Bishop Daniel R. Jenky announced the beatification date the afternoon of Nov. 18 after the diocese received a document sent by email from the office of the Vatican secretary of state confirming Pope Francis' directive.

In an interview the following day with The Catholic Post, Peoria's diocesan newspaper, Bishop Jenky described Archbishop Sheen — who died Dec. 9, 1979, at age 84 — as a kind of "American St. Paul the Apostle" because of his "endless zeal" for evangelization.

"It's hard to think of anyone, except among the saints, so involved in bringing the world to Christ," said Bishop Jenky.

Calling Archbishop Sheen "a model for all of God's people," Bishop Jenky — who petitioned the Vatican on behalf of the Diocese of Peoria to open the canonization cause 17 years ago — said he was "happy to see this step finally arrive." The archbishop was declared "venerable" by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012.

When he learned of the Dec. 21 date, less than five weeks away, "I simply said 'yes' and we're going to make it happen," the bishop said.

Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu, prefect for the Vatican Congregation for Saints' Causes, will preside at the Rite of Beatification and represent Pope Francis. It will be only the fourth such ceremony to take place in the United States. Archbishop Sheen will be the first bishop from the U.S. beatified; he'll be declared "Blessed," the step in the sainthood process prior to canonization.



CNS photo/Tom Dermody, The Catholic Post
The facade of St. Mary's Cathedral in Peoria, Ill., is seen Sept. 28, 2017. The cathedral will be the site of the beatification ceremony for Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Dec. 21. The famed media evangelist, mission promoter and author was ordained to the priesthood in the cathedral on Sept. 20, 1919, and is now entombed in a side chapel.

Local planning for the beatification began in July when Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to the intercession of Archbishop Sheen. It concerned the healing of James Fulton Engstrom of Washington, Illinois, who was considered stillborn when he was delivered during a planned home birth Sept. 16, 2010.

His parents, Bonnie and Travis Engstrom, immediately invoked the prayers of Archbishop Sheen and encouraged others to seek his intercession. Just as doctors were preparing to declare that he was dead, James Fulton's heart started to beat at a normal rate for a healthy newborn. He had been



CNS
Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen is pictured in an undated photo.

without a pulse for 61 minutes.

An evening Holy Hour will be observed at the cathedral Dec. 20. Auxiliary Bishop Robert E. Barron of Los Angeles — who, like Archbishop Sheen, uses modern media to spread the Gospel — will preach.

A Mass of Thanksgiving will be celebrated at the cathedral the morning of Dec. 22.

Further information regarding beatification events will be posted online at celebratesheen.com as details, including seating availability, are made known.

"I'm overjoyed that we finally have a beatification date after all these years of hard work," said Patricia Gibson, the diocese's chancellor. She said she

has been "in almost constant contact" with Vatican officials since this summer's events, which also included the transfer of Archbishop Sheen's mortal remains from St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City to St. Mary's Cathedral in Peoria.

Msgr. Jason Gray, who is chairing the diocese's Cause for Beatification Planning Committee, called it "a great blessing" that the beatification will happen "right on the spot where Archbishop Sheen was ordained and also in the presence of his tomb."

The cathedral location, however, also means seating will be extremely limited and interest is already overwhelming.

At the same time, people around the globe can watch in the manner that brought Archbishop Sheen into millions of homes in the mid-20th century — through the media, including television, livestreaming and social media.

"It's going to be an intimate celebration in Fulton Sheen's home parish church," said Msgr. Deptula. "But more importantly, the world is invited to the beatification via the media."

"What better man to celebrate in this way?" he asked. "In a beautiful church, in his church. But millions of people may truly feel present, truly participate in this beatification via the media world we live in and that's very Fulton Sheen."

The short time for preparation also has its advantages, said Msgr. Gray.

"We've been getting regular reports into the diocese about other alleged miracles attributed to the intercession of Fulton Sheen," he said. Noting a second approved miracle is required for canonization, he added that "it's a good thing the beatification will happen soon, because that opens the door to the miracle that might bring about his canonization."

In general a second verified miracle is required for canonization.

Msgr. Richard Soseman, who oversaw early research into Archbishop Sheen's sainthood cause and is now vice postulator, agreed it is fitting that the beatification takes place just before Christmas.

"Through him, many souls were prepared to receive the word of God and come close to his Son," said Msgr. Soseman. "His beatification will lead directly into the season of rejoicing, and prepare countless souls who will watch on television around the world to receive Jesus at Christmas with even greater joy."

Dermody is editor of The Catholic Post, newspaper of the Diocese of Peoria.

Honor martyrs, work for Christ's kingdom of peace, pope says in Nagasaki

BY CINDY WOODEN

NAGASAKI, Japan (CNS) — While the world knows Nagasaki as the site of a U.S. atomic bomb blast, for the Catholic Church it is also the site of one of the fiercest campaigns of anti-Christian persecution.

Visiting the city Nov. 24, Pope Francis paused for prayer on the hill where St. Paul Miki and 25 others were crucified in 1597; hundreds more were killed in the decades that followed. For more than 200 years there was not a single Catholic priest in Japan, but small communities of "hidden Christians" kept Catholicism alive by secretly baptizing their children and teaching them the faith.

When priests finally were allowed to return to Japan, not all the "hidden Christians" joined the parishes they established, preferring to preserve the family-focused faith they had learned from their ancestors. Small groups of them still exist today.

On a cold, rainy morning at the martyrs' memorial, Pope Francis said the place is not so much a reminder of death as of the promise of eternal life in Jesus.

The martyrs' witness, he said, "confirms us in faith and helps us to renew our dedication and commitment to that missionary discipleship which strives to create a culture capable of protecting and defending all life through the daily 'martyrdom' of silent service toward all, especially those in greatest need."

Pope Francis, who as a young Jesuit in Argentina longed to serve as a missionary in Japan, told the small crowd at the memorial that he "found powerful inspiration in the story of the early missionaries and the Japanese martyrs."

Standing before a monument featuring bas relief sculptures of the 26 martyrs on the horizontal beam of a cross, the pope urged prayers for all those who endure persecution because of their faith today.

"Let us speak out and insist that religious freedom be guaranteed for everyone in every part of our world," he said, and "let us also condemn the manipulation of religions" by those seeking power or hoping to sow violence and chaos.

After a brief rest in the Nagasaki archbishop's residence, Pope Francis celebrated Mass in the city's baseball stadium with

about 35,000 people, including members of the U.S. military stationed in Japan and Catholics from China and Korea.

In his homily, the pope made reference both to the unwavering faith of the Japanese martyrs and the horrendous suffering of the people after the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki in 1945.

"This land has experienced, as few countries have, the destructive power of which we humans are capable," the pope said in his homily. "Nagasaki bears in its soul a wound difficult to heal, a scar born of the incomprehensible suffering endured by so many innocent victims of wars past and those of the present, when a third World War is being waged piecemeal."

Pope Francis asked the region's Catholics to pray for those in other parts of the world who are suffering the effects of war today and to bear witness to Jesus' kingdom, which is one of "truth and justice, of holiness and grace, of love and peace."

The charred, eyeless head of a Marian statue that survived the destruction of Nagasaki's cathedral in 1945 stood near the altar. The pope venerated it with incense as the Mass began.



Public schedule of Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

Sunday, December 1: 1 p.m. — Tour of Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Fort Wayne, with St. Michael the Archangel Youth Group
 Tuesday, December 3: 10:30 a.m. — Advent Day of Reflection for Priests, St. Martin de Porres Church, Syracuse
 Thursday-Friday, December 5-13: Ad Limina Visit, Rome

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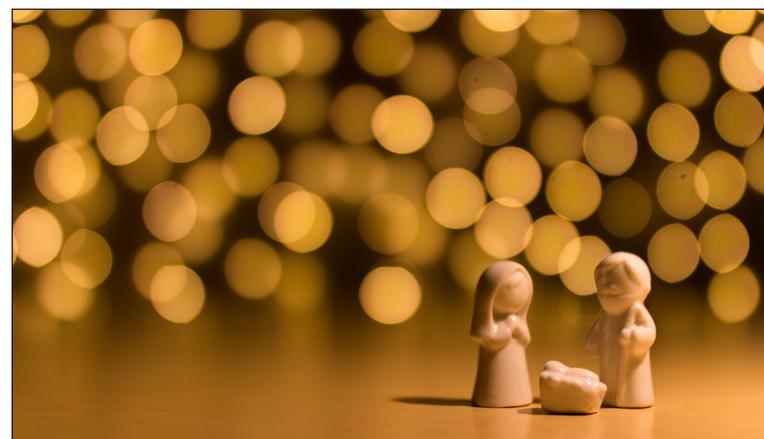


Photo by Gareth Harper on Unsplash

BY MARK PATTISON

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Compared to Christmas, Easter and Lent, Advent is the Maytag repairman of liturgical seasons. Hardly anybody calls on it.

To many, Advent may seem like four weeks of the priest wearing purple vestments at Mass, while people are otherwise hurtling about trying to get ready for Christmas. The sentiment is understandable, since Walmart posted Christmas displays in stores even before Halloween was over, and some radio station in virtually every city of any size has been playing nothing but Christmas songs since before Veterans Day.

But if Catholics do take time for Advent, which begins Dec. 1 this year, they can find it to be a meaningful season.

"I love Advent!" said Kim Smolik, CEO of the Leadership Roundtable. "I love that Advent is a time that we have an opportunity to reflect on the many blessings in our life and to show our gratitude."

"I know we get pulled in other directions," Smolik added, but advent is for her "a time to slow down and to be with people. That's what I think the season is about."

"And hope. Hope. It's a season of hope."

Given the scandals that have scarred U.S. Catholicism over the past year and a half, Smolik said, Advent can be the time for Catholics to ask themselves, "How can I contribute to the healing in our Church? What new life can I bring to the Church and how can I bring that forward in the next year?"

Smolik said one help for her is a Nativity scene. "I think that is putting our focus on Jesus, on healing, on light, on hope," she added. "I think we can use that nativity scene in our home. We can sit and be present at a place of meditation and prayer."

Joe Boland, vice president of mission for Chicago-based Catholic Extension, also finds great comfort in the creche.

Catholic Extension, which provides material and spiritual assistance to mission territories in the U.S. Church, promotes a concept called "Meet Your Creche," catholicextension.org/nativity. "The way that I'm going to meet my creche through the lens of Catholic Extension and as a Catholic is really through an encounter with the poor," Boland told Catholic News Service.

"Pope Francis keeps calling us to this idea of encounter. For me, for us, the creche and the Nativity scene is a moment of



CNS photo/Paul Haring

People attend Pope Francis' celebration of Mass at the baseball stadium in Nagasaki, Japan, Nov. 24.

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Appeal helps religious communities care for aging members

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The annual Retirement Fund for Religious collection will take place Dec. 7-8 in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. The parish-based appeal is coordinated by the National Religious Retirement Office, and proceeds help hundreds of U.S. religious communities to care for aging members. Some 30,000 senior Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests benefit.

Last year, the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend donated \$153,677.42 to the collection. In 2019, the Congregation of Holy Cross, U.S. Province of Priest and Brothers, received financial support made possible by the Retirement Fund for Religious.

The 2018 appeal raised \$27.7 million, and 360 religious congregations across the nation received funding. Distributions are sent to each eligible congregation's central house. Communities combine this assistance with their own income and savings and apply it toward various retirement expenses, such as medications and nursing care.

"We are humbled and profoundly grateful for the countless Catholics who honor the service and witness of senior religious through their prayers and generosity," said Presentation Sister Stephanie Still, the NRRO's executive director.

Catholic bishops of the United States initiated the Retirement Fund for Religious in 1988 to

help address the profound lack of retirement savings among U.S. religious communities. Since the collection's launch, U.S. Catholics have donated \$872 million to the annual appeal.

Despite this generosity, many congregations still struggle to provide for aging members. Most older religious served for low wages that did not include retirement benefits. Today, numerous communities face a critical shortage in retirement savings. Moreover, retired religious now outnumber wage-earning members, resulting in declining income and a rising cost of care.

Proceeds from the annual collection allow the NRRO to offer assessment tools, educational programming, services and resources that enable communities to evaluate and prepare for long-term retirement needs. The NRRO also coordinates an extensive network of volunteer consultants, including experts in eldercare and financial planning, to help congregations lower costs while enhancing care.

"Donations to the Retirement Fund for Religious enable our office to provide financial assistance for an array of direct needs," said Sister Stephanie. "They also underwrite education and resources that help religious communities stretch retirement dollars and plan for the future."

Visit retiredreligious.org to learn more.

Why we ask:

- In 1988, Catholic bishops of the United States launched the Retirement Fund for Religious to address the significant lack of retirement funding for Catholic sisters, brothers, and priests in religious orders.
- For most of their lives, elder religious worked for little to no pay. There were no 401(k) plans or pensions.
- Religious communities are financially responsible for the support and care of all members. Income, earnings, and expenses are managed separately from the parish and diocesan structures of the Catholic Church.
- The funding shortage is compounded by rising health-care costs and decreased income. And, as more religious reach retirement age and leave compensated ministry, income will further decline while care needs increase.
- By 2029, religious past age 70 are projected to outnumber religious under age 70 by nearly three to one.
- There are 30,151 religious past age 70 living in the United States. In 2018, the average annual cost for their care was roughly \$47,000 per person; skilled care averaged \$69,000 per person.
- Since 2009, the annual cost to support senior women and men religious has exceeded \$1 billion.
- In 2018, 72 percent of the religious communities providing data to the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) had a median age of 70 or higher.
- The average annual Social Security benefit for a religious is \$6,596.77, while the average US beneficiary receives \$17,535.72.

How donations help:

- Each year, hundreds of US religious communities receive financial assistance made possible by the Retirement Fund for Religious. Communities can use this funding for immediate retirement expenses or invest for future needs. Since the first collection, US Catholics have donated \$872 million.
- Since 1989, almost \$737 million has been distributed to support the day-to-day care of elderly sisters, brothers, and religious order priests. An additional \$98 million has been allocated toward self-help projects initiated by religious communities, including collaborative health-care facilities.
- In addition to direct financial assistance, proceeds from the annual appeal underwrite educational programming, services, and resources that enable religious communities to evaluate and prepare for long-term retirement needs.
- Support from the Retirement Fund for Religious helps religious communities care for senior members while continuing important ministries to the People of God.

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encounter. It's Christ encountering the world in a very unique and special way now," he said.

"It's going to be my moment with my own kids — they're 10, 8 and 6. They know their dad goes out around the country and meets a lot of kids. We have to pay attention to one really important to think about the creche. Jesus is born into poverty, and from poverty, we learn a lot."

He spoke of the hope people in Puerto Rico have despite the devastation they have suffered. Catholic Extension has ministered in Puerto Rico for a century, yet many are "recovering from the still-devastating effects of Hurricane Maria. Two years later and still absolutely no rebuilding yet," Boland said.

"But people still talk about their hope and God's solidarity with them as a people," he said, and "a sense of joy that God has given them life and they're going to use the best of their ability to help them and their neighbor."

The destruction there includes hurricane damage to 20 churches, yet people are "going out and still meeting their neighbors."

He recounted the tale of a Puerto Rican boy whose father has to work far away from home to earn money for the family. When the subject of Christmas came up, the lad's idea, according to Boland was: "We can put our gift in the front, and Dad will come home."

De La Salle Christian Brother Javier Hansen, a religion teacher at Cathedral High School in El Paso, Texas, sets out to instill habits his students may not have in cultivating Advent customs.

"A lot of our students cross the border (with Mexico) every day. I envy them in some sense because they go home and pray the rosary together," said Brother Hansen, adding that earlier in November, he "went over with them."

He noted that various institutions have their own calendar — the school year, the monthly calendar and "the church also has a liturgical year that begins in Advent."

A big fan of Advent music, Brother Hansen said he'll sit with his students and sing Advent songs with them.

"Advent tells a real story of our faith," he added. "Part of my job is to write reflections to the parents and the larger school community on virtues such as patience. That's a big virtue that's associated with the season."

Students, he said, "need a small reminder at times that secular society's not helping us all the time when they're putting Christmas ornaments in stores and everything, and (make it seem) that Advent doesn't exist. That's not their main intention, but that's kind of what it's doing to us."



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Pope names Msgr. Robert J. McClory fifth bishop of Gary

GARY — Pope Francis announced Nov. 26 that he has selected Msgr. Robert J. McClory, a priest for the Archdiocese of Detroit, to serve as the fifth bishop of the Diocese of Gary. Bishop-elect McClory was introduced to the clergy, faithful and public the same day at a 10 a.m. press conference by Bishop Emeritus Dale Melczek and Father Michael J. Yadron, diocesan administrator for the Diocese of Gary.

Bishop-elect McClory, 56, has served the Archdiocese of Detroit since his ordination to the priesthood in 1999. He was ordained a priest by Cardinal Adam Maida on May 22, 1999. His ordination and installation as the fifth bishop of Gary is scheduled for the feast of our Lady of Lourdes, Feb. 11.

Bishop-elect McClory currently serves as the pastor and rector of the National Shrine of the Little Flower Basilica in Royal Oak, Michigan. He also serves on the Archdiocese of Detroit Episcopal Council, College of Consultors and Priest Assignment Board. As a part-time faculty member at Sacred Heart Major Seminary graduate school of theology in Detroit, he has taught Introduction to Canon Law, Sacramental and Ecumenical Law, and the Theology and Law of Marriage.

Previously, Msgr. McClory served as the vicar general and moderator of the curia of the Archdiocese of Detroit. In that capacity, he was the chief of staff for Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron in coordinating the central offices of the archdiocese. Prior to becoming moderator of the curia, Msgr. McClory served as chancellor of the Archdiocese of Detroit, administrative secretary to Cd. Maida, and as an associate pastor at St. Isidore Parish, Macomb Township and St. Therese of Lisieux Parish, Shelby Township. He has been a weekend associ-



Provided by Diocese of Gary

Bishop-elect Robert J. McClory, 56, has served the Archdiocese of Detroit since his ordination to the priesthood in 1999. His ordination and installation as the fifth bishop of Gary is scheduled for the feast of our Lady of Lourdes, Feb. 11.

ate at Our Lady of the Lakes Parish, Waterford; St. Blase Parish, Sterling Heights; and St. Andrew Parish, Rochester, all of Michigan. Prior to his assignment at the National Shrine, he served as pastor at Presentation/

Our Lady of Victory, Detroit. Bishop-elect McClory studied philosophy at Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit. He was then sent to the Pontifical North American College in Rome, where he earned a bachelor's degree in

sacred theology in 1998 from the Pontifical Gregorian University. Then-Father McClory completed his advanced graduate degree in canon law at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome in 2000.

Prior to entering the seminary, Msgr. McClory earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science and communications from Oakland University, a master's degree in public policy and administration from Columbia University and a law degree from The University of Michigan.

"I am honored and humbled that the Holy Father has appointed me as the bishop of Gary," said Bishop-elect McClory. "During this week in which we celebrate Thanksgiving, my heart is full of thanksgiving that he has entrusted me to serve the people of Northwest Indiana. I look forward to getting to know the needs of our local Church and, together, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ."

Bishop-elect McClory will be the second priest of the Archdiocese of Detroit to serve as bishop for the Diocese of Gary. Bishop Melczek, ordained for Detroit in 1964, led the Diocese of Gary from 1992 until his retirement in 2014.

"Here in Msgr. McClory's home diocese, he is recognized as a zealous priest who generously devotes all the talents God has blessed him with to the ministry of spreading the Gospel," said Detroit Archbishop Vigneron. "The pastors and people of the Church of Gary will find themselves blessed by his service. We, the priests, religious and faithful of the Archdiocese of Detroit send him on mission with our heartfelt prayers."

"I was filled with great joy when I heard the news of Msgr. McClory's appointment. He is very gifted and very close to the Lord," said Bishop Melczek. "We are greatly blessed to have his

leadership. He is exactly what the Diocese of Gary needs to lead us deeper in our relationship with the Lord." "What I know of Msgr. McClory's pastoral and administrative skills and experience, clearly he will offer wisdom, insight and vision as he leads the Diocese of Gary as its fifth bishop," said Bishop Donald J. Hying, the fourth bishop of Gary. "I'm particularly pleased that he was instrumental in leading and implementing the pastoral synod of the Archdiocese of Detroit. He is uniquely poised to continue to build on Gary's 2017 Synod."

Father Yadron, who has served as administrator for the Diocese of Gary since Bishop Hying was appointed to the Diocese of Madison, was elated to receive a call from the Papal Nuncio. "I was delighted to hear that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, assigned Msgr. McClory to the diocese," said Father Yadron. "I'm impressed with his excitement and his vision. He is going to be warmly embraced."

The Diocese of Gary, Indiana, was established Dec. 17, 1956, by Pope Pius XII. The first bishop was Most Rev. Andrew Grutka (1956-84). He was succeeded by the Most Revs. Norbert Gaughan (1984-96), Dale Melczek (1996-2014), and Donald Hying (2014-19).

The diocese covers 1,807 miles, including Lake, Porter, LaPorte and Starke counties in northwestern Indiana. The mother church of the diocese is Cathedral of the Holy Angels in Gary.

The population of the area is 786,500; the Catholic population is estimated to be 168,500. The diocese comprises 64 parishes, seven hospitals, two colleges, three high schools, one private high school and 17 elementary schools.

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NEWS BRIEFS

Mission is seeking family members you don't know yet, pope tells Thais

BANGKOK (CNS) — Missionaries are not mercenaries, but beggars who recognize that some brothers and sisters are missing from the community and long to hear the good news of salvation, Pope Francis told the Catholics of Thailand. Celebrating Mass Nov. 21, the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in Bangkok's National Stadium, Pope Francis looked at the meaning of what he calls "missionary discipleship." Pope Francis' visit was part of the celebrations of the 350th anniversary of the establishment of the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam Mission, the first Catholic jurisdiction in what was to become Thailand. In his homily, the pope said the early missionaries realized "they were part of a family much larger than any based on blood lines, cultures, regions or ethnic groups," and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, "they set out in search of family members they did not yet know." The missionaries didn't see the Thai people as pagans or nonbelievers, but as brothers and sisters, the pope said. And they did not just want to share the Gospel with the Thai people, but wanted "to receive what they needed to grow in their own faith and understanding of the Scriptures." "A missionary disciple is not a mercenary of the faith or a producer of proselytes, but rather a humble mendicant who feels the absence of brothers, sisters and mothers with whom to share the irrevocable gift of reconciliation that Jesus grants to all," the pope said.

After U.S. reversal, Vatican reiterates two states needed in Holy Land

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican reiterated its call for a two-state solution in the Holy Land after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the United States would no longer recognize the illegality of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. In a statement released Nov. 20, the Vatican said that in the "context of recent decisions that risk undermining further the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the already fragile regional stability, the Holy See reiterates its position of a two-state solution for two peoples as the only way to reach a complete solution to this age-old conflict." The Vatican also reiterated that it supports Israel's right "to live in peace and security within the borders recognized by the international community." However, it also "supports the same right that belongs to the Palestinian people, which must be recognized, respected and implemented. The Holy See wish-

Pope Francis meets with bishops of Japan in Tokyo



CNS photo/Paul Haring

Describing himself as a "missionary pilgrim," Pope Francis finally fulfilled a more than five-decade-old desire to share the Gospel in Japan. Arriving in Tokyo Nov. 23 after a five-hour flight from Bangkok, the pope met almost immediately with the bishops of Japan and outlined the major themes of this four-day stay: nuclear disarmament, the example of the Japanese martyrs, interreligious dialogue and special care for the young. Setting foot in the country for the first time less than a month before his 83rd birthday, Pope Francis told the bishops it "has been long in coming."

es that the two parties, negotiating directly with each other, with the support of the international community and in compliance with United Nations resolutions, may find a fair compromise which takes into account the legitimate aspirations of the two peoples," the statement said. The Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land support the statement issued by the Vatican, a spokesman for the assembly told Catholic News Service.

Guatemalan bishops' ministry: Bad idea to send asylum-seekers to jungle

MEXICO CITY (CNS) — The Guatemalan bishops' migrant ministry has rejected talk of the U.S. and Guatemalan governments sending asylum-seekers to a remote and rugged jungle region rife with drug cartel activities. The bishops said conditions there are not secure for Guatemalan citizens, much less migrants. In a Nov. 18 statement, the migrant ministry raised alarm with a proposal to send plane-loads of asylum-seekers from the United States to

an airport in Peten department, near the border with Belize and far from the capital of what is considered a highly centralized country with a long history of ignoring its hinterlands. Asylum-seekers would arrive in Peten as part of a "safe third country" agreement. Such an agreement would force migrants traveling through Guatemala, who wish to apply for asylum, to do so in the impoverished country rather than the United States. The U.S. government has forged similar agreements with Honduras and El Salvador with the goal of creating a bottleneck for U.S.-bound migrants in Central America — or, as the migrant ministry posited, "a strategy to push the United States border further south and deny access to its territory and the humanitarian asylum process. It's undeniable, the interest, the pressure and threats of the United States president so that countries in the region turn into safe third countries. We remind people that we are the most violent region which is not at war," the bishops' statement continued. "Peten does not have the ability nor the infrastructure at this time to welcome, protect and integrate asylum-seekers and refugees," it added.

Knights still honor Kennedy as order's 'most distinguished' member

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (CNS) — The date was Nov. 22, 1963. That day, the seemingly peaceful world of 1950s America was torn apart. President John F. Kennedy — the first Catholic to be elected commander in chief — had been assassinated. Grief was immediate among Catholics, including the Knights of Columbus. Knights were "overwhelmed with grief," noted then-Supreme Knight Luke E. Hart, after the death of their "most distinguished" member. Kennedy had been a member of the Knights' Columbus Bunker Hill Council 62 in Charlestown, Massachusetts, joining on St. Patrick's Day in 1946. He became a fourth-degree Knight in 1954. In a letter to their Supreme Convention in July 1961, Kennedy praised the Knights' charity and service, writing that their "countless allied activities all unselfishly offered in the name of our common humanity have served to strengthen and solidify their hold on the public heart." But this man — who, according to Hart,

"our country has never known his equal" — was now dead. Hart attended the funeral. In fact, he was the only layman seated in the sanctuary at the funeral Mass at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington.

Minnesota high school preps for beatification of one of its own

ST. PAUL, Minn. (CNS) — A man who scrubbed toilets and shoveled sidewalks at Cretin-Derham Hall High School is on his way to becoming a saint, and the school is celebrating his beatification by elevating his presence on campus and connecting students to his legacy. Christian Brother James Miller taught at then-Cretin High School in St. Paul from 1966 to 1971 and again from 1979 to 1980, teaching Spanish, founding the soccer team and serving as maintenance supervisor. Brother Miller was martyred in 1982 — at age 37 — during the Guatemalan Civil War. Three hooded men found him on a ladder repairing a wall and shot him. Many assume he was killed because he fought to keep his students from being forced into the military. Pope Francis officially recognized Brother James as a martyr last year, clearing the way for beatification. He will be beatified on Dec. 7 in Guatemala, a ceremony that four members of Cretin-Derham Hall will attend, including President Frank Miley. Reminders of the late teacher pop up throughout the school. The chapel is being renamed in honor of "Blessed Brother James"; staff is working with the archdiocese to make the rededication official. The school commissioned a bronze statue of him that was recently installed in the courtyard, which is also being renamed after him.

Federal judge blocks scheduled executions of death-row inmates

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A federal judge Nov. 20 temporarily blocked the executions of four federal death-row inmates scheduled for December and January, saying the lethal injections they were to receive goes against the Federal Death Penalty Act. When U.S. Attorney General William Barr announced in July that the government was reinstating the federal death penalty after a 16-year hiatus, he said the executions would use a single drug instead of a three-drug protocol used in recent federal executions and used by several states. Several of the inmates have challenged the use of the single lethal injection. In her ruling, U.S. District Court Judge Tanya Chutkan of the District of Columbia said that since the inmates were likely to win their case, their executions should be blocked until their legal challenge is resolved.

Lay pastoral ministry in high schools — a ministry of accompaniment

BY JENNIFER BARTON

A shepherd walks among his flock, leading and guiding it through fair or stormy weather. He feeds them physically and spiritually. He spends his life amidst the flock.

Following Christ's example as the Good Shepherd is at the heart of pastoral ministry, the very name of which stems from this loving care. In a teenager's sometimes-confusing world, high school pastoral ministry seeks to play a loving, guiding role.

As Catholic schools in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend continue to embrace a strong Catholic identity, pastoral care has become a priority.

Mark Kirzeder, principal of Marian High School, Mishawaka, stressed recently the importance of such care. He noted that Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades changed the ministry's name from "campus ministry" to "pastoral ministry" several years ago in an effort to demonstrate the pastoral role those who engage in it are to take in the faith lives of students.

Kirzeder said he believes that as principal, the role given to him by the bishop includes an element of lay pastoral ministry — serving as a spiritual role model for the students entrusted to him. He also recognizes, he said, that he cannot fulfill that mission on his own. "The time needed to spend with each student could not be done by myself and the dean of student formation alone," he admitted. That's where lay pastoral ministry comes in.

Students at all four high



Jennifer Barton

Nicole Rudolph, new pastoral minister at Bishop Luers High School, spends time Nov. 22 getting to know a group of female students in the gym. The mission of lay pastoral ministry in Catholic high schools of the diocese is to provide encouragement and opportunities for staff and students to grow in their faith.

schools have access to their school's lay pastoral ministers at any time. Walking with students in their faith journey, providing guidance and help in their everyday lives is of greatest importance for those ministers. "Our team is central to meeting students where they are and helping them further develop and deepen their love of God and Catholicism," said John Kennedy, principal of Saint Joseph High

School, South Bend. "When students can allow the teachings of Jesus to influence decisions, how they treat each other ... we become a more kind and welcoming school."

The pastoral ministry office is situated next to the chapel at the schools, because caring for the spiritual lives of students is at the heart of Catholic education. The prominent location is a symbol for students, staff and visi-

tors of the role their faith should play in their lives.

"We want to help everyone to encounter the Gospel when they come through the doors," stated Kirzeder.

This year, three of the four high schools — Marian and Saint Joseph, and Bishop Luers High School in Fort Wayne — brought on new lay staff members in pastoral ministry. It also marks the first time since the early 1990s that each high school has two chaplains assigned to it, something Kirzeder said is a blessing. "It puts two priests in the building; that makes it easier to schedule things like adoration."

He also shared that the chaplains are very active in Marian student life. Father Nathan Maskal, for example, often spends lunchtime with the students.

Kennedy pointed out that having two chaplains gives students

two different personalities to relate to. Students tend to gravitate toward the young, vibrant chaplains whom, they feel, seem to understand them.

Lay pastoral ministers carry with them knowledge and experience in faith formation and ministry. Angie Hall brought her experience in retreat planning and catechesis to Marian, including familiarity with the liturgical calendar how it affects scheduling around it. "She is vital in all aspects of our school," said Kirzeder.

Nicole Rudolph felt called to minister to young people: She found a home at Bishop Luers, and said her experience living in different places throughout the southern Midwest has given her a great appreciation for the strong Catholic identity fostered within the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. Principal James Huth extolled the good work Rudolph does connecting with individual students, finding those who need to be presented with the challenge of growing in their faith and providing that guidance.

At Saint Joseph, director of pastoral ministry Tami Goy has been joined by alumna Rylee Kenney, whose previous experience included directing summer programs for high school students at The Catholic University of America.

Bishop Dwenger has not seen a change in lay pastoral ministry. Jason Garrett heads the department, and principal Jason Schiffl said he believes that with Garrett's dual role as coach and minister he has set an especial example for the young men at Dwenger. Garrett has helped them to grow their identity as Catholic men and shown them that they can be both masculine and strong in their faith.

Schiffl sees himself, other teachers and students who regularly seek the accompaniment of pastoral ministers as "active witnesses of the faith." Huth, too, sees the importance of pastoral ministry to staff as well as the students. "Pastoral ministry meets the needs of adults, too. Adults lead the way; we can go into the chapel to restore the

Fort Wayne Knights' Habitat home build



Provided by Justin Purdy

St. Charles Borromeo Parish Knights of Columbus Council 451 volunteers participated in a new home build for a local Habitat for Humanity family on East Pettit Avenue in Fort Wayne, Saturday, Nov. 16. The brother Knights spent the day hanging and finishing dry-wall as they worked together to build on faith, build up families and build community.

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Violins sound notes of hope at interfaith prayer service

BY KEVIN KILBANE

The prayer, music and song commemorated a time of great sadness and unimaginable evil. Yet, people walked out inspired by hope.

More than 1,000 members of Fort Wayne's Catholic and Jewish communities united for a Jewish-Catholic Interfaith Prayer Service that took place Nov. 20 at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Parish.

"I hope this service will move all our hearts as we remember the evil of the Holocaust and resolve to eradicate all hatred and violence from our community and the world," Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades said in welcoming remarks. "I thank God for the deep bonds that unite us in faith and love this evening, and I pray that we may walk together as a people of hope in our commitment to the common good, our deep respect for the dignity of every human person, and our pursuit of peace."

The bishop led the prayer service with Rabbi Paula Jayne Winnig, interim clergy leader of Congregation Achduth Vesholom Jewish congregation in Fort Wayne.

The gathering was one of many events held Nov. 9-Dec. 1 as part of the Violins of Hope project's visit in Fort Wayne. Activities ranged from an art exhibit of historic string instruments to presentations, radio and television programs, and concerts featuring local musicians playing the instruments.

The instruments previously had been played by Jewish people who died in the Holocaust or whose lives were altered by it. From about 1940-45, the Nazi regime systematically killed 6 million Jews and many other prisoners, people with disabilities and those from cultural minorities.

The Jewish Federation of Fort Wayne, the Fort Wayne Philharmonic and other organizers and sponsors brought Violins of Hope to Fort Wayne "to support and uphold Jewish culture and impart an understanding of the Holocaust while highlighting human behavior 'from ultimate evil to ultimate good,'" said the event's website, violinsofhopefw.org.

The prayer service opened with a welcome and thank you from Avshalom Weinstein, who assists his father, Amnon Weinstein, the master violin-maker in Israel who founded the Violins of Hope project. It continued with musical interludes, choral singing, stories about the owners of two instruments in the Violins of Hope collection and reflections by Rabbi Winnig and Bishop Rhoades. The service was based in the Psalms, a portion of Scripture shared by the Catholic and Jewish faiths because of their common heritage.



Bishop Rhoades offers a closing prayer.

Members of the Philharmonic's Youth Symphony Orchestra's Premier String Quartet used four instruments from the Violins of Hope collection to perform the music, which was somber and reflective. Songs by the Hazemir Choir of Congregation Achduth Vesholom and the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Choir maintained the same tone, though final selections by each choir looked to the future with hope.

Rabbi Winnig began her comments by speaking about Pope Francis' remarks during his Nov. 13 papal audience in Rome. The pope said the Jewish people have suffered greatly throughout world history and warned that

violence against Jews is on the increase.

"The Jews are our brothers and sisters and must not be persecuted! Understood?' the pope said." Sadly, she added, a Jewish man was stabbed on the morning of the interfaith prayer service while he walked to a synagogue in the New York City area.

We teach about the Holocaust to stop violence and persecution, she emphasized. "We want people to take action. We want people to say, 'Never again!'"

She said people living today have a special obligation. "In our lifetime, the last witnesses to World War II will die." That

Rhoades said the Violins of Hope visit to Fort Wayne wouldn't have been complete without the Jewish-Catholic prayer service and the lifting up local hearts and minds to the one God.

"This faith unites us," he said. "This love inspires us. It is a faith and love that Hitler and the Nazis tried to destroy, but they were unsuccessful."

Bishop Rhoades told of visiting the former Nazi concentration camps at Dachau and Auschwitz, where thousands of Jews and others worked in forced labor or suffered mass murder.

"I never in my life experienced the emotions that I felt during those visits, filled with sadness and deep distress in contemplating the sufferings of so many tortured and killed and contemplating the depths of the evil that can take over the human heart."

The Violins of Hope visit reminds us always to maintain hope, the bishop said.

"When the forces of darkness seem to have the upper hand, when hatred and violence flair, we must remember the Shoah (Holocaust) and never cease crying out to God who gives us the strength to reject and fight evil and the courage to love and do good."

Afterward, people described the evening as deeply moving.

"It was powerful," said Rich Hines, a member of the St. Elizabeth choir. "You could see people were fully into it."

Bringing Jewish and Catholic people together "should have been done sooner and should have been done more," Hines added.

"It touched everybody who came," said Father David Voors, St. Elizabeth pastor, and Deacon Jim Kitchens said his own emotions ranged from tears to hope.

"I've had endless people walk up to me and say, 'We should do this again,'" said Deacon Kitchens, who has studied history and the Holocaust extensively. "I agree."

includes military veterans and Holocaust survivors. "It is incumbent on us to continue to tell the story. Those of us who are the survivors of today and the witnesses of today have the ability to bring God's hope and blessings to the world."

During his remarks, Bishop



The choir of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Fort Wayne performs during the prayer service.

Jennifer Barton

At the Jewish-Catholic Interfaith Prayer Service Nov. 20 at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Fort Wayne, Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades and Rabbi Paula Jayne Winnig, clergy leader of Congregation Achduth Vesholom in Fort Wayne, were co-leaders. The prayer service was among many Violins of Hope project events that took place Nov. 9-Dec. 1 in Fort Wayne.

Kevin Kilbane

Kevin Kilbane

Legacy of love continues beyond loss

BY JENNIFER BARTON

She called herself “the beggar.” She believed that was God’s intention for her life. So when Virginia Schrantz, founder of Miss Virginia’s Food Pantry on the south side of Fort Wayne, approached Suzy Beard more than 20 years ago asking for help getting a turkey into the hands of a needy family for Christmas dinner, Beard jumped on board. It was the first turkey Suzy collected in order to provide a holiday meal to those who could not afford one.

“She called it her mission.” Suzy’s husband, Bill, stated.

The collection started in her garage that first year and has grown to over 400 turkeys. After Suzy’s death on March 18, a committee of dedicated volunteers at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Fort Wayne decided to make it their mission to keep her effort alive: Thus, the ministry of Suzy Beard Christmas Dinners — named in her honor — was born.

“The church was filled for her funeral,” recalled Dian Sullivan, one of the committee members in charge of requesting turkeys from fellow parishioners. “Suzy gave so much to so many people. We want this to go farther, in her honor.”

One of Beard’s daughters, Erin, an art teacher in Colorado, set up a GoFundMe page to continue the cause her mother believed so strongly in. “She wanted to help from a distance,” Bill said. The page raised around \$3,000. Then, while cleaning the house after her funeral, Bill found two envelopes containing nearly \$1,700 for the turkey drive tucked in a drawer. Suzy used to visit local stores asking for donations, he shared.

Bill said he was “just a worker bee”; that Suzy was the organizer. Most of the names of families that she collected



Provided by Bill Beard

The memory of Suzy Beard is the inspiration for a newly formed Christmas dinner ministry in Fort Wayne.

came from Miss Virginia’s Food Pantry, though Suzy found additional names through her work at Matthew 25 Health and Dental Clinic, where she was a dental hygienist.

The organization of the turkey drive is taking on a slightly different form going forward. It’s a collaboration between St. Vincent and St. Henry parishes, which have been sister parishes for the last six years. Volunteers are also limiting themselves to soliciting only food donations from local stores.

St. Henry parishioner and property manager Paul Gerardot heads the efforts at his parish. Gerardot met Suzy while working at Miss Virginia’s Food Pantry a few years ago.

Last year Suzy informed him that it would be her final year for the turkey drive, and Gerardot promised to pick up where she had left off. Working with the committee at St. Vincent, he helps provide the means to col-



Jodi Marlin

Bill Beard, in black, Paul Gerardot and fellow St. Vincent de Paul parishioners collect frozen turkeys before the 11 a.m. Mass Nov. 17 in Fort Wayne. Bill’s wife, Suzy Beard, passed away March 18, after 20 years of organizing an effort that provided Christmas dinner to families in need. Dedicated to her mission, volunteers have stepped forward to continue it.

lect the turkeys by arranging for use of a donation truck to collect the turkeys.

He said it’s an honor to be able to help in her name, to serve as “the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.”

The response to this year’s turkey collection drive was overwhelming. On Nov. 17, volunteers worked from 6:45 a.m. to 8 p.m., collecting frozen turkeys from donors and moving them into storage. Beard and Gerardot made a game of it, guessing the weight of each turkey that came down the line.

Assembly will take place at St. Henry on Dec. 19: The turkeys will be packed into gift boxes, along with nonperishable goods like green beans, stuffing and potatoes, and delivered to several local organizations including A Mother’s Hope, Women’s Care Center, Euell A. Wilson Center and Vincent Village for distribution.

Gerardot has recruited volunteers from Fort Wayne Community Schools and Career Academy to help in the packaging process. Volunteers from nearly every high school in the

city and some in outlying Allen County are expected, along with St. Vincent and St. Henry parishioners.

A record donation of around 440 turkeys this year indicates that the mission of Suzy Beard has been uplifting for both parish communities. Suzy’s legacy of giving lives on in the hearts and minds of those she touched with her generous spirit. The continuation of her mission is a testament to the power of one person, a person who saw a need in the community and sought to fill it.



NCYC goes from rowdy to reverent for E

BY NATALIE HOEFER

INDIANAPOLIS (CNS) — Outside, a cold drizzle dampened Indianapolis Nov. 21.

Inside the city's convention center, however, it seemed as if the pure joy and enthusiasm of 20,000 people — mostly high school youths — would have held off the damp chill even if the building hadn't.

But in a heartbeat, the crowd went from rowdy to reverent. They knelt in silence as a eucharistic procession twined through the Indiana Convention Center, the Eucharist held aloft in a monstrance carried by Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson.

These joyful, worshipping people hailed from 145 dioceses around the country — and even from Australia, Canada and England. They came to participate in the largest biennial Catholic youth gathering in the United States: the National Catholic Youth Conference, or NCYC, held this year from Nov. 21-23.

The theme this year was "Blessed. Broken. Given." To explore the theme and to encourage youths to read the Scripture daily, four general sessions held in Lucas Oil Stadium across from the convention center dove into the story of the Road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) during the course of the conference.

At the opening general session on a chilly night, the youths first warmed up with the musical praise of the band For King and Country.

The sound level and energy were high. But when the 20,000 participants tilted their heads up to watch a videotaped welcome, the sound turned from dull roar to deafening.

"Dear young people of NCYC," said Pope Francis in his first recorded address to conference participants.

As with the eucharistic procession, the youths' shouts turned to silence as Pope Francis read his message.

"I send you an affectionate greeting and my prayers at this moment of encounter that you are living," he said, occasionally lifting his eyes from a transcript to the camera. "May it be an opportunity to deepen your faith and communion. May it light your missionary hearts with the courage and strength to live in and with the Lord, always as a Church sent forth.

"Go and fill your surroundings, even the digital ones. Not of convictions," Pope Francis said, setting his paper down and speaking off-script directly to the youths. "Not to convince others. Not to proselytize. But to bear witness of the tenderness



CNS photo/Sean Gallagher, The Criterion

Catherine Mistretta of the Archdiocese of Atlanta prays during a song Nov. 22 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference, which drew 20,000 people, mostly high school youths from across the country.

and mercy of Jesus."

He closed his message by blessing the participants with the sign of the cross. "And don't forget to pray for me," he added.

Moments later, the darkness of the stadium was broken as one ambassador from each delegation present streamed into the arena, each carrying a candle.

With the area encircled in candlelight, several singers dressed in choir robes ascended the stage and chanted the Emmaus story from the Gospel of Luke.

From the stage, Cleveland Bishop Nelson J. Perez reflected on the reading.

"This Gospel that you just heard sung to you today tells a story that is actually being lived out in these days," he began. "We've been on the road to get (to NCYC). Some have flown, some have driven long hours."

"As you came here ... in your mind you were already thinking of things going on in your life," he added, much like the two disciples traveling to Emmaus. "In these days, Jesus, through His word and His abiding presence in the Eucharist, begins to walk with you."

And as with the two disciples, said Bishop Perez, "He's asking you, 'What are you talking about? What's going on in

your lives? What's going on in your hearts? I want to know. I want to listen."

He encouraged the youths to consider how they would respond if Christ asked them these questions.

"You might say, 'Well, Lord, don't you know everything? You know what's going on,'" said the bishop. "But He wants to hear it from you. So talk to Him these days, before His presence in the Blessed Sacrament, in moments of prayer."

Bishop Perez told the young people they would be hearing many inspiring speakers in the following days.

"God will speak to you through the word, but also through their words," he said. "Listen, because God has something powerful and beautiful to tell you."

Participants were asked to bring a Bible to each of the general sessions.

"All of you who pledge to read the Bible every day, stay standing ... and raise your Bibles high," said author and international speaker Katie Prejean McGrady, one of the evening's emcees.

"Today, as in the beginning, we need to go out to meet each person," said the Holy Father in his recorded message. "It is our

mission to do so, especially with those most separated and those who are suffering most."

Bishop Perez shared a quote from the pontiff's March 25 post-synodal apostolic exhortation "Christus Vivit" ("Christ Lives"), primarily addressed to young people: "Young people are taking to the streets. ... You are the ones that hold the future. Through you the future enters the world. I ask you to be protagonists of this transformation."

As he spoke, all lights in the stadium were on the stage, leaving the seating sections in a shroud of darkness. So Bishop Perez asked each of those present to take out their cellphones and turn on the phones' flashlight.

Suddenly the rest of the stadium became like a night sky pierced by thousands of points of light.

"Everybody look around at all these lights," he said. "Remember what Jesus said: You are the light of the world. Do not, do not, do not let anybody put your light under a bushel basket. Do not let anybody extinguish your light. Do not let anybody rob you of the gift and the treasure of your faith and your dignity and your love."

In a tone that seemed to embrace each youth, Bishop Perez noted that many today say "young people are losing their faith. ... (But) I look at all of you, and I (say) to myself, 'They're wrong.'"

"Look around you — they're wrong!"



CNS photo/Sean Gallagher, The Criterion

Youth carry a statue of Our Lady of Fatima into Lucas Oil Stadium Nov. 21 at the opening general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis. The conference is organized by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry with the help of the Indianapolis archdiocese as the host.

Eucharist, pope's message

Diocesan teens see 'massive, unified body of Christ'

BY NATALIE HOEFER

INDIANAPOLIS — In 2017, six members from the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend ventured to Indianapolis to see what the biennial National Catholic Youth Conference was all about.

"We were all blown away," said Father Ryan Pietrocarlo, CSC, associate pastor of St. Adalbert Parish in South Bend.

So blown away, in fact, that with the encouragement of Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades, NCYC 2019 was promoted to high school students throughout the diocese.

As a result, the number of NCYC attendees from northeast-

'You know you're not alone'

According to comments by several youths and two chaperones before the closing Mass at Lucas Oil Stadium, Pratt's prediction proved correct.

Several of those interviewed mentioned two aspects as being particularly impactful: seeing so many youths excited about their faith, and seeing that same number kneeling reverently in silent worship before Christ in the Eucharist.

Ivan Lopez, a 16-year-old junior at Saint Joseph High School in South Bend and a member of St. Adalbert Parish, was struck by "seeing 20,000

toward the stage-turned-altar in Lucas Oil Stadium to kneel and adore Christ in silent adoration.

"I could feel this amazing presence and atmosphere," he said. "I was about to cry, to be honest."

'A unique experience'

The diocesan participants also left with takeaways from the sessions they chose to attend from among several dozen choices during the three-day event.

Addison Krebs, a member of St. Jude Parish in Fort Wayne, has been to large gatherings of young Catholics before, including World Youth Day. Yet she still found NCYC to be "a unique experience."

The 17-year-old senior at Bishop Dwenger High School in Fort Wayne walked away with three takeaways: "Scripture is important, I need to listen more, and I need to put my focus on Christ," she recounted. "I can

be so focused on me, me, me and the stuff going on in my life.

More photos are available at www.todayscatholic.org

I need to allow God into every moment ... and let Him take control of every situation."

There was something for everyone. Zachary Taylor, a 16-year-old junior at Saint Joseph who runs track and cross-country, attended a session on "bringing God into sports." He described how emotions like anxiety, worry and loneliness were displayed on a screen.

After each emotion, audience members were asked to close their eyes. Then those who could relate to the emotion on the screen were asked to stand.

"Then they had [those standing] open our eyes and look around and see that you are not alone," said the member of Christ the King Parish in South Bend. "That gave me a lot more confidence to be able to admit those things."

For those and other reasons, Munsen hopes even more members of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend attend NCYC in Indianapolis in 2021.

The young people "had an experience of authentic faith, a very concrete one," he said. "To offer that kind of opportunity is so important."

Munsen said exposure to the many riches of the faith, the sacraments, motivating speakers

and the wisdom of great historical theologians "is huge, and opens the avenue for increased involvement in the Church — intellectually, spiritually, morally."

Plus exposure to "20,000 of their peers singing and worshipping with enthusiasm gives them permission to do the same," he added. "And I can only see that spreading to their own communities — all of a sudden that spark is allowed to shine, and it's lighting other kindling that's there. I can't say enough how important that is."

Some benefits were already evident by the end of the conference.

"We have formed really good friendships this weekend," said St. Jude youth minister Vickie Lortie of her group of five teens.

Ivan noted the importance of the "huge opportunity" NCYC offers "for people to really contemplate on what they want to do with their vocation. They talk about, 'What does God want for you?' I think that's a really big thing, for people around my age looking to get into college to really know what you want to do."

Blessed by generosity

To help Ivan and other youths of St. Adalbert attend NCYC, Father Pietrocarlo applied for a diocesan grant from money set aside from the diocesan annual appeal, as well as a grant from the National

Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, the organization that offers NCYC. His youth group raised additional money through car washes and hosting a Mexican food booth after a Mass.

"We were so blessed with the generosity of the parishioners," most of whom live in poverty, he noted. "And by the great generosity of the diocese and NFCYM. Our teens were so excited. A lot of time they don't travel because they can't afford it."

Lortie also applied for a diocesan grant. She said she and her group were grateful for the assistance.

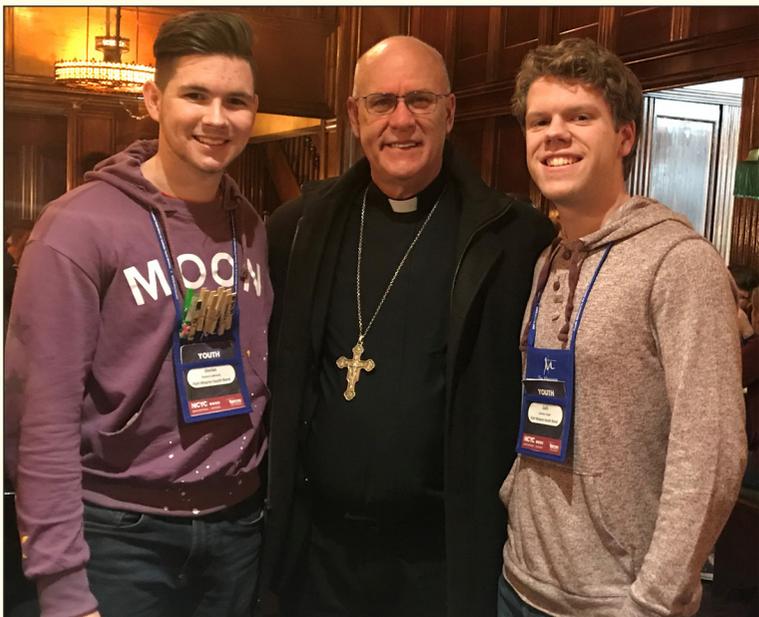
"One thing that just keeps coming up over and over in our conversation is how lucky we are that out of all the kids in our parish, in our neighborhoods, in our schools, that we got to come," she said.

"So these five teens take back with them this great gift, but there's going to be a lot of responsibility with that," she added.

For her group and all of the diocesan attendees, "God is going to ask big things of them," Lortie noted.

Their job now, she said, is "to pray and ask Him what He wants you to do with this gift you've been given."

Hoefler writes for The Criterion, newspaper for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.



John Pratt

From left, Declan Ladewski, from Christ the King Parish in South Bend; Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades; and Zachary Taylor, from Christ the King, gather before the concluding NCYC Mass, which Bishop Rhoades concelebrated Saturday, Nov. 23.

ern Indiana exploded from six in 2017 to more than 70 for this year's gathering on Nov. 21-23 at the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Ten parishes were represented in the delegation. Most participants were youths, about 60 percent of whom were Latino, including 24 from the predominantly Hispanic St. Adalbert Parish. The young people were joined by Father Pietrocarlo, Father Dennis DiBenedetto of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Fort Wayne, chaperones and diocesan youth ministry director John Pratt.

Pratt's 2017 NCYC experience "was more than I expected," he said. "I think this year could be a breakthrough year where people come back and say, 'This was awesome!'"

people who believe in the same thing I do."

Back in South Bend, we feel like such a small parish. But we're a massive unified body of Christ. I just find that so astonishing."

Fellow parishioner Ruby Delgado agreed.

"You have this feeling of wholeness because you see people around your age," said the 17-year-old junior at John Adams High School in South Bend. "You feel this presence of God in them, and feeling how the Church is universal."

"Me living in such a small area, it's hard to believe how the Church is big. But seeing 20,000 people, especially in the stadium, you know you're not alone."

Just as impressive to Ivan was seeing those teens rush



John Pratt

Ten parishes were represented between the 70 Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend participants at NCYC.

Searching for the lost sheep

BY JENNIFER BARTON

If there is one point to remember, it's that there is hope. Hope for brothers and sisters, daughters and sons who have fallen away from the Church. Not only is there hope, but parents are not alone — and they certainly are not to blame for their children's choices. "As parents, it is not your fault. But it is your problem."

That was the message Father David Huneck reiterated during an adult education presentation at St. Jude Parish, Fort Wayne, Nov. 19. "Return: Help for those whose children have left the Church" was part of the parish's ongoing "Fanning the Flame of our Faith" series.

Father Huneck saw a need, he said, to address the rapid loss of young people in the Catholic Church and sought to do so in a broader context than a homily.

According to Brandon Vogt, author of "Return: How to draw your child back to the Church," for every one person who joins the Church, 6.5 leave. Fifty percent of cradle Catholics no longer consider themselves Catholic, and 79% leave the Church before age 23. Many of these fallen-away Catholics gravitate toward Protestant denominations or a sense of "spirituality" rather than a profession of religion, Vogt asserts; rarely do they completely abandon God for atheism or agnosticism. And while it is reassuring for families in this situation to know that they are not alone, it's disheartening. What can a parent do to bring a lost sheep back into the fold?

Basing his presentation on Vogt's book, Father Huneck explored some of the common reasons young people turn away from the Church. He included several practical ways to help them find their way back.

"The first and most obvious thing to do is pray," Father Huneck said. He gave the example of St. Monica, whose prayers for her son Augustine did not go unheard. Indeed, the son for whom she shed tears became one of the Church's greatest theologians and a Doctor of the Church. Fasting is another powerful and often unused form of prayer. To fast is to detach from worldly things, not only food but also comforts and pleasures, in order to grow closer to God. Fasting, along with any other type of suffering, can be endured conscientiously and as a form of sacrifice on behalf of the hope that those who have left the Church will one day return.

Of greatest importance in the battle to bring souls back to the faith is to "equip ourselves with knowledge of the faith" by reading the Bible and becoming more familiar with the Catechism, Father Huneck said. That way,



Jennifer Barton

Father David Huneck, a parochial vicar of St. Jude Parish, Fort Wayne, speaks about the distress caused by family members who fall away from the Catholic faith during an adult education presentation Nov. 19. He encouraged hope, perseverance in prayer and sacrifice to those present, many of whom were the parents of children who have left the Church.

when questions arise, parents can be more prepared to answer them.

There will still be times when a parent must admit they do not have all the answers, however. The key is to know how to find them. Father Huneck encouraged those present to seek the aid of priests such as himself or other, older and wiser priests, who can help them with the answers to difficult questions. "The question that we need to be able to answer for ourselves is 'Why am I Catholic?' Because that's what people want to know."

At the heart of the matter is trust and dialogue. "Millennials like to be heard," Father Huneck noted. Listening to them helps build trust, which is essential to opening genuine dialogue. The knee-jerk reaction of dismissing a child's objections instead of listening to them is a mistake parents sometimes make. Nagging and being overly critical of young people's lifestyles and viewpoints are other mistakes that may drive them further from the Church.

Starting the conversation is vital, and Father Huneck pointed out that it may start small; not with deep theological questions but small droplets, including reminders of their Catholic upbringing or simple questions about the young person's happiness or current beliefs. Even the use of humor, through sharing relatable Catholic memes, can be a small step in the direction parents want to lead their non-practicing child.

Most of all, parents need to express unconditional love. If there is no love in the house, young people will not feel comfortable enough to open their minds and hearts to their parents' message. Maintaining a home of hospitality can also go

a long way toward inviting the return of a lost loved one.

All of these plant the seeds for growth, he said. Some parents might feel it appropriate to plant literal seeds, too: placing books, CDs, prayer cards or news articles where their child will find them and possibly, eventually, take notice. The parents present also were urged to remember that helping their child find a path back to the Lord and His Church is a process; the seeds might take years to bear fruit.

"One sows, another harvests," Father Huneck stated. "You may not be the one who wins them over."

Following the presentation, Father Huneck took time to dialogue with the parents, listening to their specific concerns and offering suggestions that might help others in similar situations.

No matter how devout or well-educated parents are, or what particular parenting style they applied, the likelihood that one of their children has or will fall away is distressingly high, Father Huneck and Vogt concurred. Even families in which a member has been called to a religious vocation can and often do see the negative effects of the world manifesting within their home. Two siblings raised with the same love and opportunities can produce vastly different results. As Father Huneck said, "Love is a choice."

Parents despair, weep and pray over their children's departure from the Church and their faith, but Father Huneck offered hope. From his work as chaplain, he said, he has seen firsthand the hope embodied in the younger generations. He urged parents not to try to change their children, but to be a loving support for them.



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Patroness of the Americas: Our Lady of Guadalupe

Novenas, the traditional Mañanitas song, liturgies and other events honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe begin next week in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. Everyone is warmly invited to join in the celebrations of Mary's apparition to Mexican peasant Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin at the following parishes. Many of the events will take place in Spanish.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Warsaw

Dec. 3-10	5:30 p.m.	Novena followed by Mass and rosary
Dec. 11	11 p.m.	Vigil Mass followed by midnight Mañanitas and gathering in the cafeteria
Dec. 12	---	Mass in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe

St. Anthony of Padua

Angola

Dec. 12	5 a.m.	Mañanitas
	4 p.m.	Procession with image of Our Lady of Guadalupe
	5 p.m.	Mass
	6:30 p.m.	Fiesta

St. Dominic

Bremen

Dec. 12	6 p.m.	Our Lady of Guadalupe Mass
Dec. 16-23	6 p.m.	Posadas

St. Patrick

Fort Wayne

Dec. 12	5 a.m.	Mañanitas
	6 a.m.	Mass

St. Vincent de Paul

Elkhart

Dec. 12	4 p.m.	Procession
	6 p.m.	Mass

St. Joseph

Fort Wayne

Dec. 12	6 a.m.	Mañanitas followed by hot chocolate and sweet bread
	6:30 p.m.	Mass in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, followed by dinner

Our Lady of Hungary

South Bend

Dec. 12	5 p.m.	Rosary followed by re-enactment of apparitions
	7 p.m.	Mass followed by dancers and Mañanitas with live band in the gym

St. Adalbert and St. Casimir

South Bend

Dec. 11	11 p.m.	Rosary, Mañanitas at 11:45 p.m., midnight Mass
Dec. 12	6 p.m.	Folkloric dance group, Mañanitas at 6:45 p.m.
	7 p.m.	Mass, followed by dinner, music and raffle at the school cafeteria

Immaculate Conception

Kendallville

Dec. 3-12	5 p.m.	Mass
	6 p.m.	Novena (Only on Dec. 7 novena will be at 7 p.m.)

St. Robert Bellarmine

North Manchester

Dec. 12	6 p.m.	Mass in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, followed by gathering in the cafeteria
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St. Michael

Plymouth

Dec. 11	11 p.m.	Mass followed by Mañanitas at midnight and sweet breads with hot chocolate
Dec. 11	sweet	Mass in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe
Dec. 12	7 a.m.	Mass in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe for children
	8:30 a.m.	Knights of Columbus procession followed by re-enactment of the apparitions, Mass and folkloric dancers in the school cafeteria.
	--	

St. Joseph

LaGrange

Dec. 11	8 p.m.	Rosary
	9 p.m.	Conference about the apparitions
	10 p.m.	Re-enactment
	11 p.m.	Eucharistic adoration and special blessing for families who did 46 rosaries
Dec. 12	Midnight	Serenade with mariachis in honor of Our Lady
	5 p.m.	Rosary followed by Mass and re-enactment of apparitions
	7 p.m.	Special blessing for immigrants and their families, followed by serenade with mariachis in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe
	8:30 p.m.	Dinner

St. John the Evangelist

Goshen

Dec. 11	6 p.m.	Reception in the school gym
	8 p.m.	Folkloric dancers
	9 p.m.	Re-enactment of the apparitions
	10 p.m.	Mariachi serenade in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe

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Hearing God's voice: Ignatian spiritual exercises

BY MARY GATES

While the idea of a 30-day silent retreat may seem, in part, intriguing and appealing, four weeks away from family, work and responsibility can make the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola seem out of reach for many Catholics.

The exercises, prayers and meditations written by the 16th-century saint, who himself learned to pray while he recovered from life-threatening battle injuries, are a guide for any Christian seeking a deeper relationship with the Lord. The universal call to holiness is such that not only are men and women with religious vocations meant to pursue God through prayer methods such as the spiritual exercises, but rather, all of the faithful are given access to a profound relationship with God.

Diocesan seminarian Jacob Schneider's recent experience with the Ignatian spiritual exercises has impacted his life and faith. Now in his third year of seminary studies, Schneider grew up in a Catholic family in Fort Wayne and had the faith instilled in him at a young age. As is the case for many young people, however, his practice of the faith at one point became one of going through the motions habitual, and he restricted God to a limited role in his life.

His formation and studies

as he now discerns a vocation in the priesthood strengthened his relationship with the Lord, he said, and entering into St. Ignatius's spiritual exercises last summer transformed it.

"My current spirituality has grown since entering seminary, but even to a greater degree over this past summer. Ignatian spirituality brought me to a deeper relationship with God because it recognizes that at all times our relationship with God is manifested in different ways. Just as our bodies are constantly chang-

ing externally and internally, so too our spiritual souls are constantly receiving and giving," he said. "Ignatian spirituality focuses on the discernment of spirits, and this discernment heightens our awareness of our spirituality.

"Our souls are constantly informed by one or many of these 'voices': ourselves, God, our environ-

ment, the devil and the world," he continued. "We must discern which promptings to listen to and act upon. Every person has the great responsibility to choose God's voice and act solely upon it. This responsibility requires freedom to do what the Lord asks."

Schneider encourages others to seek out opportunities to enter into Ignatian spirituality.

The Christian seeking to do God's will must first be able to identify the Lord's voice in the quiet of their heart, he noted.

"Most of us will never receive an audible response from the Lord, so it is through our

"Ignatian spirituality brought me to a deeper relationship with God because it recognizes that at all times our relationship with God is manifested in different ways."

SEMINARIAN JACOB SCHNEIDER



Peter Paul Rubens, commons.wikimedia.org

thoughts, feelings and desires that the Lord is able to communicate His will for us. Ignatian spirituality equips people to recognize and be aware of the different thoughts, feelings, and desires: Through his spiritual exercises, Ignatius enlightens our minds to notice these through lingering temptations, our own thoughts, the influence of our culture and friendships, and most importantly the voice of God the Father," he said.

"It is the voice of the Father, who calls out to His beloved sons and daughters, leading them to safety and happiness. Driven by the desire to do the Father's will, Ignatian spirituality teaches how to discern those

thoughts, feelings, and desires and how to act upon them – to either reject or accept them."

Schneider's experience brought to light the ways God speaks to him in the call to prayer, helping reveal to him his true identity as a son of a loving God.

"I became aware that our relationship with God is affected by everything we do. The time we devote to prayer and developing our relationship with the Trinity, Mary and the saints is influenced by all our actions."

"The most important thing is to spend time with Him," Schneider continued. "We see this in human relationships as well: There are times when

people spend time together and don't exchange words, but the mere presence of another is comforting and is a loving gesture by which they receive and give love. We respond during these relationships, so we must receive from Jesus and react to our relationship with Him.

"The Lord communicates himself most frequently to us in silence," he reiterated. "Our identity as Christians is our relationship with God, as adopted beloved sons and daughters of the Father through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Many people define themselves by their own thoughts and actions, but this can be inconsistent with our reality. Thoughts and actions fluctuate so frequently that they don't establish a permanent identity. The Father bestows an everlasting dignity as sons and daughters through our baptism, though, and our duty is to act so as to be deserving of this relationship.

"By discerning His voice, we can conform our actions to His call. Being conformed to His will is the response and acceptance of His love. His love leads us to happiness, which is fulfilled partly in this life and completely in heaven."

Ignatian spirituality is not only for priests and seminarians, but is accessible to lay people through retreats and events hosted throughout the diocese, as well as in small prayer groups.

Schneider's advice for those who want to pursue the exercises? "Those who are interested must be ready to be flexible and molded by what Ignatius prescribes. Not every person fits the mold of purely Ignatian spirituality, but learn and use what benefits your relationship with the Lord. You can only benefit by entering into Ignatian spirituality because either you might benefit by entering into a deeper relationship with the Lord, or someone else may benefit through your experience that you share with them."

For more information on the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, go to www.priestlyformation.org. There is a 'Laity' tab that links to many easy-to-use resources.

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Parish takes leap of faith to bring joy to children

BY DENISE FEDOROW

A late-night leap of faith by Mom Amanda Woodiel paid off, and 150 'Boxes of Joy' are on their way to children in five impoverished countries through Cross Catholic Outreach's Box of Joy ministry.

Woodiel, a parishioner of St. John the Evangelist, Goshen, and a blogger for CatholicMom.com, said she was on the site around 12:30 a.m. Oct. 16 when she saw an article about the Box of Joy program. As coordinator for St. John's Living the Liturgical Year Moms' Group, she had been interviewing moms about what more can be done to support the domestic church.

"Over and over again they've said, 'we want a service project we can do as a family,'" Woodiel shared.

In order to participate in the Box of Joy program there has to be a group affiliation. Woodiel listed the moms group, but then noticed the deadline was Oct. 15. At that moment it was in the early hours of Oct. 16.

She decided to submit the application to participate anyway and see what happened. Because it was late and past the deadline, she didn't ask anyone first about whether she should sign up or not. "I had to go or not go," she said.

Initially, she thought she'd commit to 20 boxes. "Twenty scared me, but I felt God said 100."

Woodiel listened and signed up for the 100 boxes. She then spent a restless night, anxious because she didn't know if she'd be financially liable if she couldn't get 100

"Over and over again they've said,

'We want a service project

we can do as a family.'"

AMANDA WOODIEL

commitments.

The registration form indicated she'd hear from Cross Catholic Outreach in 24 hours. When she didn't, she just assumed the registration had arrived too late. But six days later she received an email saying

the boxes were on the way.

Woodiel reached out to the moms' group and also sent texts and emails to other friends in

the church, asking if they'd be willing to help. Within 36 hours she had 131 boxes pledged, including 25 from St. John the Evangelist School.

She called and told the organization she needed 31 more boxes than her original pledge and was informed increases could only be made in quantities

of 50. Her original commitment of 20 boxes was now at 150.

School secretary Peggy Mueller got the word out to teachers, and students in each grade were asked to donate specific items to go in the boxes. Kelsey Weddell, who is on the school advisory board, thought the school could fill 25 boxes.



Photos by Denise Fedorow

Donations to Cross Catholic Outreach's Box of Joy ministry are filled and ready for delivery to the drop-off location Nov. 8, just a week after parishioners of St. John the Evangelist Parish, Goshen, received the empty boxes to fill. From left are Kelsey Weddell, Amanda Woodiel and Pauline Allen. In the truck are the Woodiel children.

The students also had two dress-down days, where they could pay \$1 to not have to wear their uniforms – with the money going toward the shipping costs for each box. Weddell also approached parishioner Maureen Kercher, owner of Kercher's Orchard, a local business, and they offered to help too.

The boxes arrived Oct. 31 and needed to be filled and returned by Nov. 8. Forty-nine volunteers mobilized to comply.

Ani Wallach, another member of the moms' group, not only helped spread the word about the project, but instead of trick-or-treating with her family on Halloween delivered the empty boxes to the people who had volunteered to fill them and then picked up the boxes when they were ready.

The nearest drop-off location was at St. Boniface Church in Lafayette. Woodiel was prepared to make that drive Nov. 8. A conversation at a small group meeting prompted parishioner Pauline Allen, however, to volunteer herself and her husband, Doug, to make the delivery. "Pauline said one of her daughters lived there so they'd be glad to take it."

As the Allen's truck, filled with the Boxes of Joy, pulled out of the driveway Nov. 8, Woodiel breathed a sigh of relief and expressed gratitude for how quickly so many parishioners pulled together to provide a merry Christmas to children they have never met.

For more information about the program visit the website at www.crosscatholic.org.



Amanda Woodiel, Kelsey Weddell and Ani Wallach, pictured from left, helped spread the word through parishioners and friends of St. John the Evangelist Parish and school about coordinating the Boxes of Joy program. The women indicated the project may be repeated, with a bit more time and planning.

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Be fruitful and multiply

Last year, French President Emmanuel Macron, speaking at a Gates Foundation event in New York, suggested that no well-educated woman would have a large family. "Present me the woman who decided, being perfectly educated, to have seven, eight or nine children," he said.

Catherine Pakaluk, a professor at The Catholic University of America with degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard University, responded by posting a picture of six of her eight children. It ignited a Twitter storm. Other smart women around the world with large families followed suit.

There is this element of truth in President Macron's comment: First World countries do have lower fertility rates. In the United States, the rate has been cut in half twice over the past two centuries, from seven or eight children in 1800, to 3.5 in 1900, to 1.7 today. More babies made economic sense when children worked in a family business and supported aging parents.

Today, people, and women in particular, have more job opportunities. Social Security and Medicare take care of old people. And the pill makes it possible to limit family size to whatever the desired number might be.

The thing is, our incentives are now badly misaligned. Social Security and Medicare depend on a large number of young workers to support retirees. But because it doesn't matter whose children provide the support, people are tempted to become free riders — let someone else have the chil-

dren who will pay for the welfare state. Children are a public good.

This makes the answer to President Macron's question even more interesting. Why would educated women go to the trouble of bearing and raising the children who will support other people's retirement? This is a question that professor Pakaluk, an economist, has undertaken to explore. She is doing a study that interviews mothers with large families and asks them about their motives.

She won't finish her work for another year or so. But her contretemps with President Macron has got me wondering about the issue.

It is widely known that there is a strong correlation between fertility and faith. Most educated women who have large families are seriously committed to some religious tradition: Judaism or Islam, Catholicism, evangelical Protestantism, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That correlation suggests some possible lines of inquiry.

One is that such women are more likely to follow religious injunctions about reproduction. Genesis 1:28 tells Adam and Eve and their offspring to be fruitful and multiply. Traditional Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism encourage procreation, too. Many, perhaps most, traditional faiths condemn the practice of abortion. Some of them, most notably Catholicism, ban the practice of artificial contraception.

But I find it hard to accept that well-educated women, particularly in Western cultures, would resolve to have large



JOHN GARVEY

INTELLECT AND VIRTUE

families simply because their faith directed them to. That would give new meaning to the scholastic notion of marital duties. However seriously they might consider the obligations their faith imposed, I would be surprised if such women didn't also find that their approach to family planning left them happy and fulfilled.

And although women who have large families provide us all with a public good, the sense of fulfillment can't be just the satisfaction one derives from making a civic contribution, like serving in the armed forces or in public office. If it were, the phenomenon would not be limited to religious women.

I think the virtue that inspires such mothers is not obedience or even generosity, but hope. They see a future for themselves and their children, filled with the happiness that God has promised. If that's your view of what life has in store, why not share it?

John Garvey is president of The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Catholic University's website is www.cua.edu.

Happy holy days

Is it my imagination, or has the Christmas shopping season (or "holiday shopping season") extended itself by another few weeks?

What we used to call "Black Friday" sales, beginning the day after Thanksgiving, seem to be creeping back toward early November.

So we are heading toward an amorphous two-month "holiday season" — not much consolation to those who will be working harder than ever during these months, either to sell us presents or to earn enough money to buy them, or both. Some holiday.

And Thanksgiving may increasingly lose its meaning, merely marking the halfway point in the commercial frenzy. It's an embarrassing holiday for secularists anyway. Who or what can they thank? And ugh, Puritans are involved.

Last year, I was pleasantly surprised to be greeted by some grocery store cashiers with "Merry Christmas." I'm pretty sure this year it will be "Happy Holidays." And I'm tempted to confuse my greeter by replying "Happy Holy Days!" which has the advantage of covering both Christmas and Hanukkah.

So I have some practical tips for keeping one's sanity during this Advent and Christmas.

First, be countercultural by setting your Christmas clock differently. Dec. 1 begins Advent, which means "It's coming!"

We await the first coming of Jesus in the manger, with an eye toward His second coming in glory. Hold off with Christmas decorations until Advent begins.



RICHARD DOERFLINGER

A MORE HUMAN SOCIETY

(This may be hard if you have small children.)

See Christmas Day as the beginning, not the end, of festivity and gift-giving. On or near the 12th day of Christmas, hold an Epiphany party. You can tell your secular friends it's an "after-Christmas" party.

People may ask why you're doing things this way. Then you get to tell them. This is how evangelization begins.

Second, find ways to keep the religious meaning of the season before your eyes.

Pray, in ways and at times you usually don't. The periodical "Magnificat" has a shortened version of morning and evening prayer for every day. Each day, with your loved ones, pray Mary's own Magnificat — "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" — thanking God for choosing her as mother of the Savior and for overturning the schemes of the rich and mighty.

Try some spiritual reading. Each year, Bishop Robert E. Barron issues a booklet of Advent Gospel reflections. Other resources abound.

Remember that Jesus is not someone you have to squeeze into an otherwise secular holi-

DOERFLINGER, page 17

The return of the Lord is at hand



THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MSGR. OWEN F. CAMPION

First Sunday of Advent Matthew 24:37-44

With this weekend, the Church begins its new liturgical year. In so doing, it also begins to use the "A" cycle of readings at Sunday Masses.

This weekend's first reading is from the first section of the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah is one of the most important prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures. Inevitably, it is eloquent and profound. It also is one of the longest books in the Old Testament, although in fact it is a collection of three distinct works.

As often the case with other prophetic books, Isaiah at times warned the people that if

they did not return to heartfelt religious fidelity, their doom was on the way. Certainly, this is a theme of the section of Isaiah.

No prophet, however, including Isaiah, spoke warnings without expressing a most hopeful and faith-filled thought that God, the almighty and merciful, would protect the people in the end.

After all, such was the promise of the Covenant. God had pledged to safeguard and secure the people, despite their stubbornness and their fascination with sin and in spite of the catastrophe they brought upon themselves by sinning.

This weekend's reading, the first Scriptural proclamation for Advent 2019, is a testament of this confidence and faith. God will judge the good and the bad. Such is the divine right. It is logical. Human behavior must be balanced against the justice and love that perfectly exist in God.

It is not a tale of gloom. Sin is to be feared. Human faithfulness to God brings peace and reward.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the source of the

second reading. Always, Paul called upon Christians to live as authentic followers of Jesus. While stressing their need to be faithful models of Christ in human living, the great Apostle urged disciples to set their priorities by making eternal life with the Lord their uncompromised goal.

Paul also bluntly said that earthly life can end at any time for anyone.

The Gospel of Matthew provides the last reading this weekend. It predicts the final coming of Jesus. In reading this passage, it is important to remember that the Catholic Church teaches that proper reading of the Gospels requires realizing three perspectives: 1) The Gospel event in the actual time of Jesus; 2) The event as its implications came to be understood in the time when the Gospels were written, decades after Jesus; and 3) The place that the event occupies in the general literary structure of the individual Gospel.

These are important when considering this weekend's

passage from Matthew. Composed generations after Jesus, Matthew was written for Christians who yearned to be relieved of the burden, and indeed peril, of living amid harshly antagonistic circumstances. They pined for the second triumphant coming of Jesus, recalling the Lord's own words. They earnestly believed that they would be vindicated when Jesus came again in glory.

Reflection

Advent, begun with this weekend's liturgies, calls us to prepare for Christmas. Preparation is more than addressing Christmas cards and decorating Christmas trees. It means actually working to make the coming of Jesus real in our daily lives; a personal event, because we admit the Lord into our loving hearts.

Especially in Advent, the Church calls us to be good Christians, ridding ourselves of anything standing in the way. It calls us to set priorities.

Regardless of Christmas 2019,

Jesus will come again to us at the moment of our earthly death. He will come as the triumphant Lord of life, the supreme standard of what is right or wrong. What appearance shall we make? Will we stand in the aftermath having been, in life, wholeheartedly devoted to Christ, or just occasionally, or maybe never? The choice among these options belongs to us now.

READINGS

Sunday: Is 2:1-5 Ps 122:1-9 Rom 13:11-14 Mt 24:37-44

Monday: Is 4:2-6 Ps 122:1-9 Mt 8:5-11

Tuesday: Is 11:1-10 Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17 Lk 10:21-24

Wednesday: Is 25:6-10a Ps 23:1-6 Mt 15:29-37

Thursday: Is 26:1-6 Ps 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a Mt 7:21, 24-27

Friday: Is 29:17-24 Ps 27:1, 4, 13-14 Mt 9:27-31

Saturday: Is 30:19-21, 23-26 Ps 147:1-6 Mt 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6-8

A talk on the Hill

A couple of weeks ago, I had the distinct privilege of addressing an audience of senators, representatives and Capitol Hill staffers in a beautiful room at the Library of Congress. This event was made possible by two congressmen, Rep. Tom Suozzi of New York, a Democrat, and Rep. John Moolenaar of Michigan, a Republican. Both had seen videos of the speeches I had given at Facebook and Google Headquarters and wanted something similar for those who work in government.

At the outset of my talk, I specified that I would not be addressing the hot-button issues that so often dominate discussions of religion and politics. I was quick to point out that this is not because I think those questions are unimportant or that they shouldn't eventually be addressed. But I insisted that the rush to those matters around which there is radical polarization effectively precludes the possibility of finding deep points of contact between the spiritual and political worlds. And it was that common ground that I endeavored to explore in my presentation.

I commenced with the idea of vocation. We're accustomed to using this term in an explicitly religious context, but I suggested that, with its full spiritual resonance, it applies just as well to other areas of life. I asked my audience to recall the moment when they first felt the summons to pursue a career in public service. I invited them to bracket the anxieties, disappointments and opportunities of the present moment and to recover that moment, undoubtedly marked by enthusiasm and idealism, when they decided to enter into politics and to work for justice.

The passion to pursue righteousness in particular cases, I told them, is a function of something more basic and more mystical — namely, the call from justice itself, the summons to be a servant of this great transcendental value.

In a similar way, an artist is someone who has heard the call — as James Joyce did, for example — to be a knight for beauty, and a philosopher or journalist or professor is someone who has heard the summons to serve truth itself. But in Catholic theol-

ogy, truth itself, beauty itself, justice itself are simply names for God. Therefore, provided they search out the deepest ground for their commitment, all of these participants in the culture can and should understand themselves as having received a vocation with religious implications.

And once that connection has been made, I told my Washington audience, the great biblical texts dealing with vocation from God open up in a fresh way. I drew their attention to the marvelous story of the call of the prophet Samuel. When just a boy, Samuel heard the voice of God, but did not at first recognize it for what it was. It was only after several repetitions — “Samuel, Samuel” — and after the helpful intervention of the high priest Eli, that the young man was ready to listen to God. So, I said, God (under His title of justice itself) called you each by name, most likely called you repeatedly until you listened, and probably employed some elder to interpret the meaning of His voice.

Next, I referenced the strange and illuminating account in the sixth chapter of Isaiah regarding the call of the prophet. Isaiah says that he saw the Lord in the temple surrounded by angels crying “Holy, Holy, Holy.” The Hebrew term here is “kadosh,” which carries the sense of “other.” God is not one being among many, not one true thing among true things; rather, He is the source of existence itself, the unconditioned ground of all that is — and this entails that He is greater than all of the particular projects and desires that customarily preoccupy us. His call to us is, accordingly, greater than career, family, personal pleasure, country or anything else.

Isaiah speaks further of how smoke filled the place where he was and how the foundations shook. Both of these symbols indicate the manner in which the experience of God puts anything finite or conditioned into question. So, I told the senators, representatives and staffers, the summons to serve justice itself must trump anything else, any other concern, any merely personal project. It properly shakes the foundation of your life and relativizes everything you once considered supremely important.



WORD ON FIRE

BISHOP ROBERT BARRON

To make all of this a bit more pointed, I moved to a consideration of Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of law. For the great medieval Dominican, positive law (the concrete statutes by which a polity is governed) properly nests inside the natural law (that whole range of moral precepts evident to reason), and the natural law nests finally within the eternal law, which is coincident with the divine mind itself. This entails, I argued, that an unjust positive law is not simply a political problem; it is a moral and finally spiritual problem. To legislate unjustly, I concluded, is therefore to stand athwart the God who originally called the legislator to be a servant of justice.

And lest this analysis seem too abstract and distant, I drew their attention to the extraordinary letter that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote from the Birmingham City Jail in 1963, prompted by a group of white Christian ministers who were questioning King's methods. In response, the great civil rights activist said that just laws ought always to be obeyed but that unjust laws can and should be opposed — always and despite the cost or inconvenience. And for justification, he reached to the very teaching of Aquinas that I just sketched. King was a political agent to be sure, but he had a keen sense that his activism was but an expression of finally moral and religious convictions.

My hope was and is that my presentation would both inspire and discomfort my audience. I wanted them to see both the high spiritual dignity of their call and the rather awful responsibility before God that they bear.

Bishop Robert Barron is an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries.

DOERFLINGER, from page 16

day. Christmas means anything at all because it marks the beginning of the central event in the history of the universe.

When I'm in danger of forgetting that, I recall the poem “Christmas” by John Betjeman. Written decades ago and set in London, some of the poem seems dated and its references unfamiliar. But the last three stanzas are timeless. May you have a blessed Christmas.

“And is it true? And is it true, This most tremendous tale of all, Seen in a stained-glass window's hue, A Baby in an ox's stall? The Maker of the stars and sea Become a Child on earth for me?”

“And is it true? For if it is, No loving fingers tying strings Around those tissued fripperies, The sweet and silly Christmas things, Bath salts and inexpensive scent And hideous tie so kindly meant,

“No love that in a family dwells, No carolling in frosty

air, Nor all the steeple-shaking bells Can with this single Truth compare— That God was Man in Palestine And lives today in Bread and Wine.”

Richard Doerflinger worked for 36 years in the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He writes from Washington state.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for December 1, 2019

Matthew 24:37-44

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the First Sunday in Ordinary of Advent, Cycle A: a warning about sudden changes. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

NOAH	COMING	THOSE DAYS
BEFORE	THE FLOOD	EATING
ENTERED	THE ARK	ALL AWAY
TWO MEN	FIELD	TAKEN
THE MILL	KNOW	LORD
NIGHT	THE THIEF	HOUSE
BROKEN INTO	AN HOUR	EXPECT

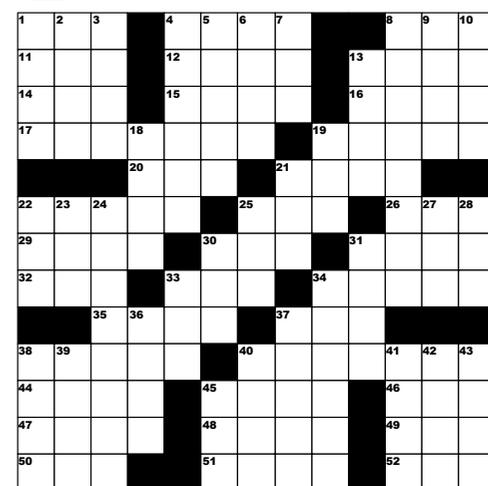
DAYS OF NOAH

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J E X P E C T W O M E N
O B K W D R O L Y A I T
T L R L C O M I N G H H
H J E O J N O A H Y O O
E I E D K I A T N A U S
F E I H T E H T N A S E
L G Y H N E N T E R E D
O N E L M G N I T A E A
O U E I R U O H N A W Y
D F L K N O W E D T U S
O L P Y A W A L L A O R
K R A E H T B E F O R E
    
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The CrossWord

December 1, 8 and 15, 2019



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Sunday readings: Is 2:1-5; Rom 13:11-14; Mt 24:27-34 and Is 11:1-10; Rom 15:4-9; Mt 3:1-12 and Is 35:1-6a, 10; Jas 5:7-10; Mt 11:2-11

- ACROSS**
- 1 One of Noah's sons
 - 4 Style
 - 8 Clean
 - 11 Bullfight cheer
 - 12 Rock of _____
 - 13 It's time _____ (2 wds)
 - 14 Cooking tool
 - 15 Smack
 - 16 Belongs to us
 - 17 Burst out
 - 19 Locusts and _____
 - 20 Cardinals' color
 - 21 Girdle
 - 22 Duck down
 - 25 Nettle
 - 26 Noah built
 - 29 Set off
 - 30 "With an iron _____"
 - 31 Roman eight
 - 32 Known as (abbr.)
 - 33 Bear's neighbor
 - 34 Church law
 - 35 Wash with a mop
 - 37 Wheeled vehicle
 - 38 City: Boca _____
 - 40 See before
 - 44 Graven image
 - 45 Skinny
 - 46 Have

- DOWN**
- 47 Will browse with young lion
 - 48 Gait
 - 49 Reverend (abbr.)
 - 50 "Blessed _____ you"
 - 51 Cain's brother
 - 52 Attempt

- DOWN**
- 1 Scripture gives
 - 2 Winged
 - 3 Restaurant list
 - 4 Owner of house
 - 5 Eyed
 - 6 They are raised
 - 7 Sixth sense
 - 8 "_____ of the Lord's House"
 - 9 Giant
 - 10 Bouquet
 - 13 Pliers
 - 18 Secondary
 - 19 _____ sign
 - 21 Pillow place
 - 22 Airport abbr.
 - 23 Make angry
 - 24 Heartbeat's relaxation
 - 25 Religious make one
 - 27 _____ de Janeiro
 - 28 Relation
 - 30 Steal
 - 31 Wind pointer
 - 33 Soup container
 - 34 _____ and Sharon
 - 36 Guest of the lamb
 - 37 Cries out in desert
 - 38 Costa _____
 - 39 6th month (Jewish)
 - 40 Excess flesh
 - 41 Classify
 - 42 Water pitcher
 - 43 Jealousy
 - 45 Hotel

Seminarians seek Cupertino three-peat

BY JOSHUA SCHIPPER

Marian High School, Mishawaka, will host the sixth annual Cupertino Classic basketball game Dec. 27. The seminarians, back-to-back Cupertino Classic champions captained by Benjamin Landrigan, seek to maintain their streak, while the priests, captained by Father Andrew Curry, hope to unseat their title-holding competition.

Seminarian Holden Berg said that his team is "ready to rumble."

Berg noted that matching the intensity of the brothers Coonan (Father Matthew Coonan and Father Terrence Coonan Jr.) would be key to a third consecutive win. "Father Niezer is a big pickup for the priests, but Ben Landrigan will have the seminarians ready to play, and we think

the individual matchups favor us." The seminarians are welcoming new player Andy Barnes to their roster.

To prepare for the game, the seminarians "pray to glorify God with our athletic abilities before scrimmaging Friday afternoons every week."

"I would ask them (the priests) to continue praying for us and know we are praying for them," Berg added. "All that said, we are looking forward to a fun game of basketball against them."

Father Curry indicated that his roster of clergy is excited for the game. "We love basketball and enjoy being able to be a source of joy and to shine Christ to others any way we can."

"I feel that every year the seminarians have prepared more than us because, for the most



part, they live in the same place and are regularly playing sports together," said Father Curry. "How prepared are we priests for the game? I would say that we're probably more prepared for our party at the rectory afterwards," he joked.

"Regardless, we expect to win. We are better than the seminarians."

Father Curry agreed that his team's chances of winning in

late December lie in a recently ordained priest who played with the seminarians in last year's matchup. "One word: Niezer. Father Daniel Niezer is one of our newest and youngest priests, and I think his presence on our side tips the scales our way."

He finished by saying that to win, the priests will need to spread out, slow it down and let smart passes and shots prevail.

The Cupertino Classic is named for St. Joseph of Cupertino, a 17th-century Franciscan monk who was known to levitate when in prayer, especially when Christmas carols were sung at Mass. St. Joseph of Cupertino is the prime saint to represent this annual basketball game, not only because it takes place in a season where Catholics sing Christmas carols in anticipation and celebra-

tion of the coming of the Messiah — but also because the players may pray for his intercession to levitate when they drive for the game-winning dunk.

The Cupertino Classic is a unique opportunity for everyone in the diocese to come together because of their shared Catholic faith and to watch their parish priests attempt to spoil the seminarians' streak.

"The priests would like to wish everyone a prayerful Advent and Christmas," said Father Curry. "May Jesus Christ be the center and joy of our lives and our families. May the presence and power of Jesus' love reign and be celebrated in our times."

For pregame updates from both benches, visit "Cupertino Classic" on Facebook. The duel begins at 6:30 p.m. and entry is free. The game will be broadcast by Redeemer Radio in Fort Wayne on 106.3 FM and in Michiana on 95.7 FM.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING carries announcements about upcoming events in the diocese. View more Catholic events and submit new ones at www.todayscatholic.org/event. For additional listings of that event, please call the advertising sales staff at 260-399-1449 to purchase space.

Children's adoration

FORT WAYNE — Children's adoration at Our Lady of Good Hope, 7215 St. Joe Rd., will be on the Feast of St. Nicholas, Dec. 6, from 6:30-7:30 p.m. All, young and old, are invited to attend. During adoration, Father Daniel Whelen will invite the children to gather around him at the foot of the altar for prayer, silence and song. Afterward, there will be a reception in the gym. Contact Father Whelan at 260-485-9615 or padredww@yahoo.com.

Masses interpreted for the deaf

SOUTH BEND — Masses Interpreted for the deaf are

on the second and fourth Sundays of the month at 11 a.m. at St. Matthew Cathedral, 1701 Miami St. An interpreter from Community Services All Deaf provides American Sign Language. A Mass interpreted for the deaf will also be celebrated on the second Sunday of each month at the 11:30 a.m. Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in downtown, Fort Wayne. An interpreter from DeafLink, a service of The League for the Blind & Disabled Inc., will provide ASL. Contact Allison Sturm at asturm@diocesefwsb.org or at 260-299-1452 for information.

St. Michael cookie walk and craft sale

PLYMOUTH — St. Michael's Altar Rosary Society is sponsoring a cookie walk and craft sale Saturday, Dec. 7, from 8 a.m. to noon in the school cafeteria, across Center Street from the church, 612 N Center St. Cookies are \$4/lb. Donated crafts are priced as marked. Proceeds will support the parish. Contact Chris Morrow at 574-540-9686.

REST IN PEACE

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| Bremen
Dominica K. Beath, 75, St. Dominic | Richard Jankowski, 85, St. Pius X | Edward Bilinski, 94, Holy Family |
| Decatur
Vincent A. Faurote, 82, St. Mary of the Assumption | Evelyn Klosowski, 89, St. Pius X | Johnny L. Brooks, 84, St. Jude |
| Fort Wayne
Frances Batt, 79, St. Vincent de Paul | Tedeusz Stanaszek, 78, St. Pius X | Eva Buday, 74, St. Matthew Cathedral |
| Pierre deCalonne, 72, Our Lady of Good Hope | Mishawaka
Dorothy Burggraf, 81, Queen of Peace | Jeff Dubois, 66, St. Matthew Cathedral |
| Richard Schmitt, 83, St. Therese | Craig Parmley, 61, Queen of Peace | Karen Gaby, 81, St. Matthew Cathedral |
| Dora Villalon, 94, St. Charles Borromeo | Helen Smogor, 88, St. Bavo | Eleanor Kolacz, 96, Holy Family |
| Nicholas Wyss, 74, St. Charles Borromeo | Richard Willard, 82, Queen of Peace | Mary A. Kwiecinski, 85, St. Matthew Cathedral |
| Granger
Pete Fox, 84, St. Pius X | Miriam Martin, 24, Queen of Peace | Robert Stoyhoff, 70, Holy Family |
| Louise Garman, 94, St. Pius X | South Bend
Stephen J. Balint, 54, St. Jude | Marlene VanWynsberghe, 84, Holy Family |
| | Beverly Barcome, 88, St. Matthew Cathedral | Mary Warner, 59, St. Matthew Cathedral |

The CrossWord

December 1, 8 and 15, 2019



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ADVENT, from page 1

"Thank you for talking with me today. I really do appreciate that you didn't judge me or make me feel bad for where I am. I didn't choose to get pregnant, but I chose my baby and I will not feel bad for that. It's easy for people to judge but harder to show compassion and understanding so thank you for that."

The email landed in my inbox last fall, just hours after my first meeting with the young woman. She had been referred to me through our ministry, Miriam's Blessing, which offers emotional, spiritual and practical support to anyone who receives a difficult prenatal diagnosis. The baby she was now carrying had been diagnosed with Trisomy 18, and since she had lost several other babies before birth, the mother was simply hoping to hold this little one in her arms for whatever time they would have together. As a single woman with multiple health issues herself and little support, she struggled to get by and was grateful that day for a listening ear.

We met every few weeks, talking about her hopes and fears for the baby beneath her heart, and made keepsakes in preparation for the possibility that this little one — like the siblings before her — would not live to see the light of day. When she was 30 weeks pregnant, labor began and her baby was born without a heartbeat. Her grief was devastating, and she began spiraling downward at a dizzying pace. I feared for her life and prayed that I could find a way to stanch the bleeding of her broken heart.

In March, just before the feast of the Annunciation, the Office of Family Life had its first Ava's Grace retreat for anyone who had lost a baby before or after birth. I invited the woman to come, and she said she would. She had nothing to lose and would at least spend the day in the company of others who understood her unspeakable pain.

Toward the end of the retreat we had a half-hour of eucharistic adoration in the lovely little chapel. She was not Catholic and really did not know what to make of the white host in the middle of the monstrance.

For the first time in a long, long time, she opened her heart to God and poured out her pain. That day, in the Chapel of the Sacred Heart, she encountered the one whose own heart had been pierced by a lance, and who has come to bind up the broken-hearted. It was the beginning of her becoming a new creation in Christ.

On the feast of the Annunciation a few days later, far away in Rome, Pope Francis wrote this in a letter, Christus



CNS photo/Ann M. Aughterton, Arlington Herald

The sequence of lighting the candles on an Advent wreath is to light the first purple candle on the first Sunday of Advent, which is Dec. 1 this year. Then move clockwise and light a second purple candle for the second Sunday of Advent, Dec. 8. On the third Sunday of Advent, Dec. 15, also known as Gaudete Sunday, the pink candle is lit. The last purple candle is lit on the fourth Sunday of Advent, Dec. 22.

Vivit, addressed to young people all around the world:

"Christ is alive! We need to keep reminding ourselves of this, because we can risk seeing Jesus Christ simply as a fine model from the distant past, as a memory, as someone who saved us two thousand years ago. But that would be of no use to us: it would leave us unchanged; it would not set us free. The one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us is someone fully alive.... Because he did not only come in the past, but he comes to you today and every day, inviting you to set out towards ever new horizons."

Christ comes to us in the Eucharist, whether we receive Him in holy Communion or simply spend time in His presence. The Church knows that the Lord comes even now in the Eucharist and that He is there in our midst. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us of this.

Christ comes to us in the midst of our daily duties, wait-

ing for us as He waited for the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. Like her, we have only to open our hearts to Him. As the Catechism points out in one of its most beautiful passages:

"The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where

This Advent, may we be especially attentive to all of the mysterious, marvelous ways that Christ comes to us.

LISA EVERETT

we come seeking water. There, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his ask-

ing arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we might thirst for him...Prayer is a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God."

Christ also comes to us, today and every day, in the "distressing disguise" of the poor, as St. Teresa of Kolkata often remarked. Her dear friend and fellow saint, Pope John Paul II, echoed this conviction in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, a letter he wrote to the whole Church at the beginning of the new millennium:

"If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me' (Mt 25:35-37). This Gospel text is not a simple

invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ. By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity as the Bride of Christ."

Christ comes to us in His Church, His mystical body, His beloved bride with whom He has become "one flesh," and who like Him, desires to seek and to save what is lost. The tender mercy which Christ continues to extend through His Church is mysterious, and it can happen in through the manifold works of mercy that characterize the everyday life of the Christian community, and it can happen in miraculous ways.

Soon after the retreat, the young mother I had been mentoring asked if she could accompany me to daily Mass at a local parish, even though she could not receive Communion. We began staying afterwards to pray for a little while, and she started to reorient her whole life towards God and His plan for her life.

As new life was burgeoning in her soul, she discovered that there was new life blossoming once again in her body. She prayed that this baby, unlike all the others, would survive. Her pregnancy progressed without complication under the care of a Catholic physician, and at the same time she asked to begin the RCIA process to enter into the Church.

Well into her third trimester the baby's growth slowed dramatically, and an ultrasound revealed that significant fluid had accumulated around her tiny heart. Given the seriousness of the condition, an appointment at Riley Children's Hospital in Indy was arranged for the following week. An evening of healing prayer was being hosted at a local parish that Saturday evening, and I urged her to go and asked to be prayed over.

When the prayer team placed their hands upon her, she felt the baby move, like John the Baptist jumping for joy in his mother's womb. When she went to Riley a few days later, the new scan showed that the baby's heart was completely healed.

"Amen, amen I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do even greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in me." (John 14:12-13)

In a mysteriously beautiful manifestation of the mercy of Christ through the ministry of His Church, a mother's heart has been healed, and so has her baby's. And the due date of this little one is none other than Christmas Day.

The poet Rabindranath Tagore once wrote, "He comes, comes, ever comes."