Catholics reminded Lent a time of self-reflection, atonement, preparation

DETROIT (CNS) — “Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Detroit Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron reflected on these words of St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians, which are meant not just for a specific people at a specific time but are intended for the faithful here and today.

Ash Wednesday is a time of salvation, even amid a pandemic that has caused much suffering and economic strife, he told the congregation gathered at St. Aloysius Church Feb. 17, the first day of Lent this year.

“The Church is making a very bold claim: Even though Paul wrote this centuries ago, it’s about now,” Archbishop Vigneron said during his homily. “Now is an acceptable time.’ That’s what St. Paul is saying to you and me about Feb. 17, 2021, even in the middle of a pandemic.”

Beyond the smaller congregation, this year’s Ash Wednesday liturgy was different from prior years. Instead of using his thumb, the archbishop and the two priests assisting him sprinkled the ashes on the faithful’s heads, a custom that is traditional in many parts of the world. Reporters from local television stations and newspapers were present at St. Aloysius to cover the beginning of Lent.

“The media is fascinated about our ritual of ashes,” Archbishop Vigneron said. “But we must understand the meaning of this ritual. It’s about you and me coming forward with our own personal assessment about where we might be separated from Christ. Perhaps it’s as little as gossip, or as great (a sin) as racism. We all have sins in our hearts, but we’re in recovery.”

Lent as a time of personal self-reflection and atonement is part of a greater realization of how the world has been crippled by sin, which only Jesus heals, Detroit Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron said. It’s also “an opportunity for each of us to walk the path of repentance and recovery together.”

Father Evaristo Olivera sprinkles ashes on the head of a worshipper at St. Joseph Church, Fort Wayne, on Ash Wednesday. Lent as a time of personal self-reflection and atonement is part of a greater realization of how the world has been crippled by sin, which only Jesus heals, Detroit Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron said. It’s also “an opportunity for each of us to walk the path of repentance and recovery together.”
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TODAY’S CATHOLIC

BY SAMANTHA ROHLOFF

Virtual interactions have become a regularity, and some Catholics are struggling to keep themselves afloat in a world where people seem so disconnected because of social distancing.

Community is a basic element of what it means to be Catholic since the word “catholic” literally means “universal.” The faithful long for others and all are part of the body of Christ. The pandemic has hit hard at this core value.

The sacraments draw Catholics to the Lord and to one another, and one sacrament in particular invites a literal conversation with someone: reconciliation.

In a time when even casual small talk has been made more difficult, a strong, healthy and genuine conversation with someone is the remedy.

Everyone is a sinner, Father Polycarp Fernando, a parochial vicar at St. Vincent de Paul Parish and Father Thomas Shoemaker, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish, both in Fort Wayne, said. So, this one-on-one conversation is something to which all Catholics are invited.

“Reconciliation is important at any stage, season or time of our life. In other words, it is important all the time,” said Father Fernando.

Created especially for those who have not received the cleansing grace of the sacrament of reconciliation for a while, The Light Is On For You takes place Tuesday, March 9, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

“The general purpose of The Light Is On For You is to highlight the sacrament of reconciliation in a way that especially calls to the sacrament Catholics who have been away for a long time from the sacrament or even from the Church,” said Father Mark Gurtner, vicar general of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend and pastor of Our Lady of Good Hope Parish, Fort Wayne.

It’s definitely not too late. It’s never too late.

“Come back,” said Father Shoemaker. “You will leave with a weight lifted from your life and with a sense of peace unlike any other.”

Father Gurtner offered these words of encouragement: “Be not afraid! Christ’s merciful love is waiting for you!”

The light has been left on those who are looking for the path back home. “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,” quoted Father Fernando from John 8:12.

“This light” is “the light of God’s love, which beckons us to turn from our sins and to receive His mercy,” Father Gurtner added.

“The light is Christ Himself. His light guides us through everything that life brings,” said Father Shoemaker.

Come home. Come and rejoin a community of imperfect people who are striving together to become holier men and women of Christ. Come and talk to Jesus, no matter the amount of time that has passed by. The light is on, and He is here.

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How long has it been since you felt all the pieces were in place?

Be made whole again…

Confession available at every Catholic Parish Tuesday, March 9, 2021 6:00-8:00 P.M.

Come home: The Light Is On For You
Iraq full of historic sites important to understanding Christianity

BY DALE GAVIAR

AMMAN, Jordan (CNS) — Pope Francis hopes to embark on the first-ever papal visit to the biblical land of Iraq in early March in a spiritual pilgrimage of sorts to the place known in Arabic as the “land of the two rivers” — the mighty Tigris and Euphrates — and once renowned as Mesopotamia, the “cradle of civilization.”

The Garden of Eden is believed possibly to have been in ancient Iraq, but certainly the famed Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Tower of Babel were located there. Jews exiled to ancient Iraq in Old Testament times, such as the prophet Daniel, experienced God’s miraculous grace; Daniel was rescued from the lion’s den and his friends from the fiery furnace.

“The pontiff said he looks forward to visiting our country, which is also where Abraham began his journey,” Cardinal Louis Sako of Baghdad said of the March 5-8 trip.

The historically rich country is full of religious sites important to understanding the antecedents of the Christian faith, making the visit significant for Pope Francis. Here’s a snapshot of some of these places.

Old Testament patriarch Abraham is recognized as the father of faith in one God by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike and was born in the southern town of Ur. The place, which dates back to 6000 B.C., lies on a former course of the Euphrates river and is believed possibly to have been the Garden of Eden.

Abraham is recognized as the Old Testament patriarch from the lion’s den and his experiences, after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

Flying into Baghdad from Rome, Pope Francis will be received in an official welcome ceremony at the presidential palace. At the capital’s Syrian Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance, he will meet bishops, priests, men and women religious, seminarians and catechists.

The cathedral was the site of a 2010 massacre that killed 58 people and was claimed by Iraq’s Al-Qaeda group, which splintered into the so-called Islamic State.

Mass is scheduled at the Catholic Chaldean St. Joseph Cathedral, also in Baghdad, a city with a rich, storied history where some 8 million inhabitants now live.

Heading north, Pope Francis will meet the Christian communities of Nineveh Plain, an area overrun by the Islamic State group in 2014 until its liberation three years later. The Old Testament prophet Jonah, who asked people to repent and return to God, lived in Nineveh.

It’s the historic Christian heartland of Iraq, where Christians have lived since Jesus’ earthly ministry, when St. Thomas brought the Gospel message around A.D. 55, aided by St. Jude. The pair were thought to base themselves in the northern city of Irbil in modern-day Kurdistan, where they preached to the local people.

And it is in that city where Pope Francis will be welcomed by religious and civil leaders.

Said Pope Francis, “It’s a time to refocus our vision on how to make a new beginning, an opportunity for each of us to walk the path of repentance and recovery together.

“This is a time to recast our recovery program,” Archbishop Viganò said.

“Forty days of saving grace. Forty days before the sacred paschal Triduum, to be ready to celebrate.

“Days of walking with the catechists, who like us, will be made whole in Christ.”

“After a year like 2020,” when so many sacrifices were made — from lost jobs and financial security to family gatherings and traditions, and even lives lost — it may seem difficult to think of a proper Lenten resolution.

But Archbishop Viganò offered some advice: instead of asking what to give up, ask what Jesus wants.

“Think about the perspective of Jesus as you concentrate on repentance and renewal. What’s in His mind? What’s Jesus thinking?” Archbishop Viganò asked.

“Think about Jesus glads as we resolve to be more like Him. He is filled with delight at our resolve to receive more love from Him.”

In Massachusetts, Bishop William D. Byrne of Springfield likewise addressed about 100 congregants — socially distanced — at St. Michael’s Cathedral during the noontime Ash Wednesday Mass.

In his homily, he acknowledged the challenges of making Lenten sacrifices during a pandemic and the spiritual rewards that await the faithful at the culmination of these 40 days spent in the “desert” with Jesus.

“It’s not easy to figure out what to give up because we’ve given up so much stuff — not hanging out with our larger group of families, not going to a restaurant that we like to enjoy — and so it gives us a reminder, just as we hear in today’s Gospel, that Lent is not just about giving stuff up.”

Bishop Byrne said.

“It’s about fasting, prayer, almsgiving,” he said, adding this should be the focus this year “because the whole goal of Lent is to get ready for Easter. It’s a time of preparation, not destination. I need to make sure that 40 days from now, I’m a little closer to my heavenly Father.”

“As we journey through this Lenten season,” he continued, “let’s keep our eyes on maybe going to our inner room a little more frequently, turning off things that may be distractions, give ourselves the gift of some silence, maybe when we take a walk, or early in the morning with our cup of coffee, to read some Scripture.”

“The power of this season” is not just about “giving something up,” Bishop Byrne said, because “if you finish this Lent and you have lost weight and your liver is healthier than it ever was,

LENT, from page 1

“Like most people, we know there is a problem (in the world); you don’t have to be a believer to see that,” Archbishop Viganò said.

Even sickness and death are bad fruits of original sin. God never meant it to be that way, but our first parents rebelled against God, and we’re all part of that. But we believe in Jesus of Nazareth, the risen Christ. He is the remedy for our sins.

Archbishop Viganò said the Lenten season “is an opportunity for each of us to walk the path of repentance and recovery together.

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“I suggest this: that you and I delight Him. He is filled with delight at our resolve to receive more love from Him.”

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Navigating the faith news media —
Diocesan communications team shares tips for getting the news Catholics should know

FORT WAYNE — Too much has arguably been said the last few years about news outlets, whether local, national or international, are truly informative or fair and balanced.

No matter where a person gets their news, as Catholics the most important way to digest it is through the lens of faith. What should the reaction of a Catholic be to news and events? Which Catholic news outlets cover the news in conformity with the Church?

Today’s Catholic, the newspaper of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, is the place to go for Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades’ direction on matters of faith as they play out in the news of the world today. In honor of Catholic Press Month, a few members of the diocesan Secretariat for Communications and the curia shared the news outlets they trust the most to inform and inspire them.

Jennifer Barton
Staff writer, Today’s Catholic

There are so many inspiring stories of individual Catholics and dioceses across the country and the world who are doing great things for Christ and His Church. I believe Catholic media has a mission to spread these good news stories so that other Catholics can benefit from the wonderful ideas and be inspired by the spiritual lives of others. It’s important for me to never stop learning, and my knowledge of the Catholic faith is bolstered by articles and columns in such outlets as Catholic News Agency and the National Catholic Register.

Jodi Marlin
Editor, Today’s Catholic

I get a lot of my news from Twitter, both Catholic and secular, during the week, because a Tweet is something I can read quickly to gain a general idea of what’s happening. Many bishops, dioceses, diocesan newspapers, national Catholic news outlets and even Pope Francis Tweet, and I click on their links and videos if I want to know more. To complement that I look to Catholic News Service, the vote service of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Today’s Catholic office also reviews some parish bulletins, diocesan publications and national Catholic periodicals from time to time. Along with Bishop Rhoades’ Truth in Charity podcasts on Redeemer Radio, they’re all sources of spiritual enrichment as well.

Jennifer Simerman
Secretary for Communications

I prefer to receive the majority of my Catholic news by following specific Catholic news organizations on Facebook and Twitter. In addition to following our own Today’s Catholic online, I also go directly to sources by following individual parishes, priests, bishops, the Indiana Catholic Conference, USCCB, etc., on social media. As a way to personal spiritual growth, I enjoy listening to Catholic podcasts.

Nate Proulx
7th Floor Productions/ Media Specialist, Communications Office

I’m a “folder of tabs” sort of guy. I click one button and a dozen or so news websites load so I can quickly see what’s up for the day without getting too pulled in. In this regard I pull up sites like National Catholic Register, USCCB, Vatican News, Catholic Herald, Genuflect.net or Zenit. I also check into specific ministries like Word on Fire, Renewal Ministries and Franciscan Media. Catholic Twitter is an almost-interesting entity that I try not to get involved with. I mostly lurk.

Father Andrew Budzinski
Vocations director, pastor of St. John the Baptist, Fort Wayne

My social media habits changed dramatically after doing Exodus 90. I used to follow around 100 people on Twitter and Instagram. Now it’s down to about half a dozen, including the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Redeemer Radio, Exodus 90, Word on Fire, Bishop Robert Barron, Vatican News and Pope Francis. For sending information “out,” in the good, old days I would occasionally post pictures of my food like so many of us do. Then I realized, no one cares what I eat! So now my posts are strictly mission oriented: activities at the parish, my homilies and other edifying information about our faith. I never post anything about politics or ideologies as such matters should only be spoken of face-to-face and not mediated via the impersonal, false shield of social media. I try to follow the rule of not posting something I wouldn’t feel fine preaching about from the pulpit.
Atholites concerned about the environment are tracking a number of bills at the Indiana Statehouse through the lens of “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home,” the groundbreaking encyclical by Pope Francis that continues to influence the landscape nearly six years after its release.

Legislation that would repeal all of Indiana’s protections for state-regulated wetlands is a particular cause for alarm, according to members of the Creation Care Commission of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Senate Bill 389, which passed the Senate on a 29-19 vote and is now awaiting action in the Indiana House of Representatives, would eliminate safeguards for up to 90% of the state’s wetlands.

Only about 10% of Indiana’s wetlands – those that are connected to a navigable body of water, such as a lake or a river – fell under federal jurisdiction and would remain unaffected. The rest, known as isolated wetlands, are under state control and would become subject to development without any permit process if Senate Bill 389 were to become law.

“This is a giant step backwards,” said Benedictine Sister Sheila Marie Fitzpatrick, one of the founding members of the Creation Care Commission and a member of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove. “We need to do a lot more education and build awareness among all constituents to help people realize the value of wetlands.”

Education and advocacy are at the root of the Creation Care Commission, which was formed in 2015 in response to the pope’s encyclical. In “Laudato Si’,” Pope Francis calls for dialogue and swift action worldwide to protect the environment, curb irresponsible development and respect God’s creation.

“One of the main points of ‘Laudato Si’ is that everything is connected,” said Sister Sheila, who holds a degree in chemistry from the University of Illinois and serves as director of facilities for the Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center in Beech Grove. “When we look at something like an isolated wetland, it may seem insignificant, but it’s really so connected to everything we hold dear – from the wildlife that lives there to the water that’s filtrated and purified through it.

“So many things are dependent upon a strong ecosystem, and wetlands are a significant piece of that.”

Senate Bill 389 is opposed by more than 50 environmental and conservation organizations, as well as the Indiana Catholic Conference.

“The Church’s rich tradition of environmental stewardship and care for creation form the basis of our opposition to this bill,” said Alexander Mingus, associate director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. “Wetlands are a deeply important ecological resource that protect our communities from flooding, help ensure the quality of our drinking water, and provide a necessary home for countless species. We have to recognize how necessary wetlands are for our human flourishing and for the flourishing of all creation.”

The ICC urges Catholics to reach out to their elected representatives in the House to oppose the bill.

By contrast, another environmental bill at the Statehouse has received unanimous support by the ICC and other advocates. Senate Bill 373, Carbon Credit Programs, would offer financial incentives to farmers to manage their lands in environmentally responsible ways.

The legislation would allow Indiana to join other states that operate in the carbon “market,” which involves companies across the nation seeking to reduce their carbon footprint and thereby curb global warming. These companies offset their environmental impacts by paying private farmers and landowners to preserve trees and conserve carbon in the soil, among other methods of “sequestering” carbon dioxide.

Senate Bill 373 awaits further action at the Statehouse following its initial committee passage. U.S. Sen. Mike Braun of Indiana is proposing similar legislation at the federal level.

“This is a very reasonable step in addressing the causes of climate change and one that has broad bipartisan support,” Mingus said.

Members of the archdiocese’s Creation Care Commission are equally enthusiastic about Senate Bill 373.

“This bill encourages preservation of private woodlands as well as ways for farmers to not depend on chemical treatments so much,” said Joe Shierling, a member of the commission who grew up on a farm in Randolph County.

Members of his family still own the 70-acre parcel of land, consisting of 20 acres of forest and 50 acres of farmland rented to a local farmer. Shierling said he and his family encourage the farmer to adopt natural practices that promote the preservation of carbon, such as planting cover crops in the winter to increase nutrients in the soil.

“Considering what’s going forward in the Senate with the wetlands bill, it’s encouraging that (legislators) are looking positively at something that protects forests and looks at a different way of farming,” said Shierling.

He and other advocates, including the ICC, also support Senate Bill 367 and House Bill 1469, which would require coal companies to properly dispose of coal ash and other residuals, thereby protecting Indiana’s waterways.

For guidance in this and in everything related to the environment, Shierling looks toward a long history of Catholic social teaching on caring for the earth, which Pope Francis distilled in his revolutionary encyclical.

“‘Laudato Si’ is so important to me because it calls on each person in the world to look at our own lives and how we can lessen our negative effects on the environment,” said Shierling, a convert to Catholicism who has been a member of SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral Parish in Indianapolis for more than 30 years. “We all have a role to play.”

To learn more about the work of the Creation Care Commission of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit www.ourcommonhome.org.

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**Indiana Catholic Conference**

By Victoria Arthur

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**Little Flower Holy Hour**

7 p.m. | First Tuesday of the Month

St. Mother Theodore Guerin Chapel

1139 S. Calhoun St., Fort Wayne
Word change in missal doxology took effect on Ash Wednesday

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A change in wording to the concluding doxology orations in the Roman Missal, from “one God, for ever and ever,” to “God, for ever and ever,” took effect on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 17. A Feb. 4 memo to bishops from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship said the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments wrote to the English-speaking bishops conferences in May to point out the current English translation that concludes “in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.” There is no mention of ‘one’ in the Latin, and ‘Deus’ in the Latin text refers to Christ. Therefore, the correction translation ... is simply “in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever,” the memo said, adding that the prefect of the congregation pointed out the importance of affirming this Christological truth amid the religious pluralism of today’s world.

Sisters’ residence in New Orleans gets Mardi Gras treatment

A two-story residence that is home to several Mount Carmel sisters in New Orleans is seen ahead of Mardi Gras, which was Feb. 16. Due to the pandemic the usual Mardi Gras parades were canceled this year, and instead houses along the usual route were decorated like floats. Mount Carmel Academy art students created Mardi Gras-style imagery with wood, corrugated plastic and outdoor paint for the 7-foot-tall class mascots and other decorations. “It was fun,” said eighth grader Lindsay Curry. “I feel like it doesn’t replace Mardi Gras, but it is still like it.”

Biden’s immigration plan begins what might be long journey through Congress

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Democrats formally introduced one of the most ambitious plans to date to address legal and illegal immigration in the U.S., while at the same time signaling legal provisions would come with refusing any of the mandatory health exams during the current health emergency exposes them to the same risks of spreading the novel coronavirus were included in a decree signed Feb. 8 and later posted on the Vatican website by the head of the commission governing Vatican City State. While the protocols apply to everyone at the Vatican, the harshest sanctions are reserved for Vatican employees whose contractual obligations include on-the-job health and safety regulations. Because of the current state of emergency, getting the COVID-19 vaccine is not a condition of employment. For employees who have “proven health reasons” to not be inoculated; in legitimate cases, those employees will be given a different job that reduces their exposure to the virus, the decree said. They will receive the same pay.

Pew report findings will validate faith of some, or cause soul-searching

WASHINGTON (CNS) — When a 176-page report is issued on a subject that hasn’t been addressed comprehensively in more than a generation, it’s tough to compress its findings into a few short paragraphs. The Pew Research Center’s “Faith Among Black Americans” is one such report, released Feb. 16. The center conducted online and mail interviews of 8,660 Black Americans from fall 2019 into the early part of last summer to learn how U.S. Blacks manifest their faith. What it found will validate how some feel about their own faith. In some instances, it may provoke soul-searching. “Millennials and members of Generation Z” — those born after 1996 — are less likely to rely on prayer, less likely to have grown up in Black churches and less likely to say religion is an important part of their lives,” Pew said in the report. Pew said in the report. “Fewer attend religious services, and those who do attend are less likely to go to a predominantly Black congregation.” But 9% of Generation Z reported being Catholic, a higher percentage than the 6% across all other age groups. Among Black Catholics, 17% said they attend a mostly Black parish, 42% said they worship at a mostly white parish, and 40% said they go to a multiracial church.

For Lent, ask if one’s life is centered on God or oneself, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Lent is a time to reconsider the path one is taking in life and to finally answer God’s invitation to return to him with one’s whole heart, Pope Francis said. “Lent is not just about the little sacrifices we make, but about discerning where our hearts are directed,” he said, “toward God or toward myself?” The pope’s remarks came in his homily at Mass Feb. 17 for Wednesday, which included the blessing and distribution of ashes, marking the beginning of Lent for Latin-rite Catholics. Because of ongoing measures in place to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, the Mass and distribution of ashes took place with a congregation of little more than 100 people at the Altar of the Chair in St. Peter’s Basilica. Pope Francis did not do the traditional walk from the Church of St. Anselm to the Basilica of Santa Sabina on Rome’s Aventine Hill to prevent large crowds of people from gathering along the route. In St. Peter’s Basilica, the pope received ashes on his head from Cardinal Angelo Comastri, archpriest of the basilica, and he distributed ashes to about three dozen cardinals, as well as the priests and deacons assisting him at the Mass.

Mars missions can inspire next generation scientists, papal astronomer says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — As Perseverance, the latest probe to send to Earth high-definition images, video and audio of its surroundings, one papal astronomer said he hopes the fresh new opportunities will inspire future explorers. With advanced degrees in physics, philosophy and theology, and a doctorate in theology, Jesuit Brother Robert Macke said, “What really inspired me to come into this field was growing up with the results that were coming out of the spacecraft missions, like Voyager, and all the photographs that nobody had ever seen before” of Saturn and its moons and other objects in the solar system. Born in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1974, Brother Macke told Catholic News Service he only “dabbled a little” in reading scientific fiction, influenced by his father’s interest in the genre, and he credits it with inspiring him to think of new ideas for the real-life scientific discoveries that made him say, “Wow, these are real places that you can really explore and photograph and study.” Earlier this week, from the Vatican Observatory in Castel Gandolfo near Rome. “Seeing the results and the images that come out of these missions, like Perseverance, I hope these will be an inspiration to the next generation of young scientists,” he said.
Mission is ‘lifestyle’ at Granger dental clinic

BY JENNIFER BARTON

Tree of Life Dental clinic might seem similar to other dental offices, but it serves a purpose beyond cleaning teeth and filling cavities. A portion of the proceeds from Tree of Life goes to support GenderSave, an organization that aids female orphans and women in India, a country that places little value on its female population. Dr. Dan Kreager, a member of St. Pius X Parish and a dentist with 50 years of experience, explained how girls in India are frequently aborted or killed after birth. Unmarried women are considered the lowest class of citizen, often having to make their own way in life.

GenderSave provides a home for abandoned girls as well as educational opportunities for mothers and single women. Tree of Life came about when three men in the South Bend area, one of them from India, decided “to put together a dental office that would be a conduit to the women and children in India and have a constant flow of income that we could support them with,” said Kreager.

Kreager was approached by one of the organizers, a man for whom he had previously worked, who asked if he would be interested in running the organization. At that time, he was working at a clinic for the under-privileged in Elkhart. Initially, he professed that he “was a little taken back by the idea.” But the more he spoke with the man from India, “the more I realized that it was probably the kind of thing I’d like to do.”

Because of his strong Catholic faith, Kreager has always believed that “God asks us to give back to those in need.” He has long been a supporter of the Women’s Care Center and sees the mission of Tree of Life as an extension of it.

“I’ve always been one who looked at dentistry as a mission,” Kreager stated. “So to be able to do that in the United States and support them over there, I thought was an ideal way of putting my skills to work.”

Planning for the new clinic began about a year ago, though construction faced delays due to the pandemic and supply shortages. The doors were finally able to open for new patients in November.

The office space is bright and modern-looking in design, with state-of-the-art equipment and a comfortable feel, offering comprehensive dental care. COVID-19 precautions are currently limiting the number of patients allowed in the office at one time, but Kreager hopes to see the practice grow and further expand its charitable mission.

Eventually, he would like to see Tree of Life expand its charitable giving and aid local pro-life organizations, particularly the Women’s Care Center. For now, 12% of the profits of the clinic will go to GenderSave.

In India, the population is 70% Hindu, 15% Buddhist and about 1% Catholic. Since daughters in that country are considered a liability rather than an asset and their dowry a financial burden, newborn daughters were once thrown into the river as a sacrifice to the river god in exchange for a future son.

Kreager related a story of how, many, many years ago, a Catholic nun swam into the river to save one of those baby girls and brought her to the convent on the other side of the river. It was the beginning of a Catholic-run orphanage.

To this day, many baby girls are still unwanted. The GenderSave website estimates roughly 500,000 gender-based abortions are carried out each year there. This is known as gendercide.

Because of the disparity in the value of females, there is a vastly disproportionate male-to-female ratio in India and a much higher rate of preventable deaths in women and young girls. Even some married women are treated poorly by their husbands or their in-laws and forced into horrible situations such as prostitution.

GenderSave exists to rescue these girls and give them life: to enable rejected mothers to keep them things that they need to be able to take care of their children: “employment, food, classes, education; all those things that need to be done to make it reasonable for them to make a living.”

One of the ways is to provide women with sewing machines and classes to teach them a trade that allows them to achieve financial independence.

Kreager is no stranger to missionary work, having spent time in Medjugorje and Haiti serving the dental needs of those who live in extreme poverty. He served in Medjugorje in the 1990s, not long after the end of the Bosnian War, where many people in the area could not afford dental care.

In Haiti, he “worked with old La-Z-Boy chairs on boxes” doing mostly tooth extractions.

“We have a lot of problems in this country, but they’re first-world problems. We don’t know how it is in second- and third-world countries. We can’t imagine it. Until I went to Haiti, I couldn’t imagine people lived that way.”

Besides its mission of aiding women in India, Tree of Life is also sensitive to the financial needs of those within the South Bend area and provides affordable care to those who may not be able to afford it.

Kreager emphasized the importance of the practice being “conscious of the fact that we need to take care of those who might not be as fortunate as ourselves.” At Tree of Life and for Kreager, mission is not just a word; it is a lifestyle.
Living Lent well, even now

The first Lenten Scripture readings speak to this reality. “Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning; rend your hearts, not your garments and return to the Lord, your God.” (Joel 2:12-13) The Word of God calls to this deeper life, which God desires to have with each of us. God daily, continually, mercifully offers us an intimate and personal and unique relationship with the Blessed Trinity.

This beautiful first reading from the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, speaks truth about the whole season long. Each day of Lent can be a time to refocus, repent and start anew our relationship with God. Even if the first week—or weeks—of Lent was a bust … Even now, we turn to God to create our living creator and begin again … now in this very moment, we can pause, acknowledge reality, both our failures and our desire to become Easter people, men and women with hope to bring. Even now, we can offer what is dearest to God, our very selves, back to Him and begin again with and in His grace.

Living a good Lent cannot come from our sheer willpower, our feeble desperation to convert. We are mortal beings, dust after all. Lenten practices aren’t New Year’s resolutions to lose weight, find a spouse or keep our office tidy. Those outward signs might occur, but it is the transformation of our souls, our very being, our lives that first operate in tandem with God’s own grace. Disposing ourselves of this generous grace can happen at any stage of Lent. Receiving the sacraments, especially confession and Holy Eucharist, can supernaturally strengthen our souls. Partnering fasting with prayer is essential. Prayer and fasting together increases the effectiveness of each. Numerous examples from the Old Testament and New Testament demonstrate this ancient work. With our offering and daily work then, God’s grace alone can propel us into the life of the Spirit.

Thus, our chosen Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving can guide our preparations as we attempt our ears and hearts in deepening relationship with God, make room for Him as we restrain our appetites, clear our minds and our bodies, and return to the poor what is theirs. Culturally, Lent holds a strong connotation of misery. Appropriately, perhaps, from common perception translated, but often missing is the prayer and joy that can come with it. We do offer up, withheld, fast—but not for that end in mind. We being, our lives that first operate in tandem with God’s own grace. Disposing ourselves of this generous grace can happen at any stage of Lent. Receiving the sacraments, especially confession and Holy Eucharist, can supernaturally strengthen our souls. Partnering fasting with prayer is essential. Prayer and fasting together increases the effectiveness of each. Numerous examples from the Old Testament and New Testament demonstrate this ancient work. With our offering and daily work then, God’s grace alone can propel us into the life of the Spirit.

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Lent is a time of renewal, of springtime in the Church, as we grow evermore to be the people that God has called us to be.

From the earliest days of the emerging Church, Lent was celebrated as a time of preparation for the great Easter. We continue to observe this Paschal Mystery, over and over. We still need to prepare our weary souls for this coming Easter, the holiest time of our whole year.

Our lives have been transfigured by the One raised to glory
The ‘quality of life’ error

During “serious illness conversations,” some doctors will ply their patients with this question: “What is your minimally acceptable quality of life?”

Behind the question can be the implication that if patients are experiencing a low quality of life, their medical treatments can be discontinued because their life has become “no longer worth living.”

This can even become a short-hand to justify actions like physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia. Making quality-of-life assessments about ourselves or others can lead us to devalue the gift of human life by insisting it must have a certain amount of “quality” before it can be deemed “meaningful” or “worthwhile.”

The clearest rebuttal of the “Quality of Life” error I’ve come across was from a 64-year-old retired Boeing computer program manager named John Peyton (1945-2009). He lived in Kent, Washington, and had an unusually aggressive form of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. The disease made him totally dependent on Patricia, his wife of 40 years. She dressed him, fed him and regularly shifted his body position in the living room recliner where he spent his declining months.

As Peyton’s one-son strong voice gradually began to fade away, he continued to use it publicly to oppose and lobby against Initiative 1000, the assisted suicide initiative in Washington. When he was interviewed by Laura Ingraham of Fox News, he said, “I’m one of those people who is somewhat of a target of the initiative and I don’t know how we as a society could really consider making doctors into killers.”

Ingraham countered: “John, I think a lot of people who are for this type of assisted suicide would say, ‘Look, what about the quality of life?’ ‘Look, you know, people suffering like you — what kind of quality of life? You really have? What do you say to those people?”

His reply was as brilliant as it was simple:

“I have a marvelous quality of life! Right now, I am totally dependent. I can do nothing for myself. I’m effectively paralyzed. But I have a family, I have friends. I have my church community. I have loving support all around me. I don’t understand how anyone could deny that I have a very high quality of life, and it gets me to understand and be compassionate toward those without the support that I have. Rather than going to the temptation to kill themselves, we should be trying to figure out how to help them to have the quality of life I enjoy.”

Peyton’s answer cuts to the heart of the matter: If anyone who is sick or dying is facing a low quality of life, we should take steps to raise and improve it. His story also reminds us how the one-sided category of “quality of life” can easily tempt us in the wrong direction when it comes to basic moral duties owed to our loved ones in compromised states like a coma, ALS, stroke, Alzheimer’s disease or dementia.

Instead of making quality-of-life judgments about people, we should be making “quality-of-treatment” judgments for those who are ailing and vulnerable, and perhaps “quality-help” judgments against ourselves.

As such, our focus should be on the benefits and burdens of a proposed medical intervention rather than on trying to impose our own conclusion that certain individuals no longer have enough value or meaning in their lives to merit receiving a particular treatment. Their humanity is violated if they are treated according to their functionality or quality of life, rather than according to their personal dignity.

Of course, everyone has a certain natural life or habituation when it comes to living in a disabled or compromised state. We may also be afraid of “being a burden on others.” When we acknowledge that the gift of life has “absolute value,” that doesn’t mean we must do absolutely everything scientifically available to maintain it, but it does mean that we should exercise good stewardship over it, making use of ordinary means of treatment and receiving supportive care, even in the face of imminent decline.

It also means the decision to refuse or stop a particular medical treatment should be based on the judgment that the treatment itself is extraordinary, that is to say, it offers minimal benefit or is unduly burdensome. It should not be because we conclude that someone’s life itself lacks value and needs to end.

Individuals struggling with grave ailments, even though they may be very compromised and unable to act as their own decision-makers, remain persons of great moral worth. They contribute to the common good simply by being, rather than by doing or choosing. Moreover, they continually call each of us to a higher and more beautiful standard of full acceptance, love and support and authentic care, even and especially in the midst of very challenging medical circumstances. They raise the bar for us and we should respond by elevating their quality of life.

There have been times I’ve answered a young child without knowing what I have just agreed to.

“I’m learning the value of taking a pause to give myself space for thinking — and to let my kids see that. I’m discovering the merit of a response like, “I don’t know yet” and “Let me think about it.” And I’m trying to halt my fast-talking, people-pleasing impulse long enough to size up a commitment before saying yes or no.

In the end, we are defined by the promises we keep. I want mine to honor the values and people I hold dear. When the going gets tough and I’m covered in ice like Horton, I want to “make good to the Lord,” repeating my promises as a pep talk, turning my identity into a mantra — 100 percent.

CAPECCHI, from page 8

‘yes’ mean ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no.’ Anything more is from the evil one.”

I remember reading this as a girl and finding it simplistic. Yes means yes, no means no — yeah, yeah, yeah, got it.

I find it much harder as an adult, fielding invitations and opportunities that seem fine and lovely but are actually demands on my time and threats to my priorities. Putting first things first, I’ve come to realize, is no small feat.

As a parent, it’s even harder to say what I mean and mean what I say. My reflex is to respond as quickly as possible — not necessarily as thoughtfully.
Cleveland (CNS) — A two-part publication emerging from the most recent round of dialogue between representatives of the Catholic Church and the United Methodist Council of Bishops, the United Methodist Church offers practical helps and words of inspiration for day-to-day lives.

Belcher in her work the dialogues are important because there’s so much more to talk about, so much more to share,” she said."

The two-part publication, subtitled “Shared Prayers and Worship Together,” reflects on the day-to-day relationships — which the document is committed to helping people grow in understanding and appreciation of each other: marriage of a Methodist and Catholic, children of such a marriage, Methodists who teach at Catholic schools and Catholics who teach at Methodist schools and more.

The ecclesiological relationships are much more on the ground than we realize on a regular basis,” said Belcher, who was invited to join the dialogue as a younger theologian.

Belcher, as the first woman United Methodist bishop to participate in the dialogue, said she came to realize through her work the dialogues are important because there’s so much more to talk about, so much more to share.

The document’s second part, subtitled “Shared Prayers and Resources,” is a practical guide for Catholics and United Methodists to learn, pray and worship together, Father Kedjierski said.

It includes shared traditional prayers, such as the Stations of the Cross, and includes examples of Scripture-centered and everyday prayers. It includes templates for eucharistic prayer services for times of crisis, for people in need, including the poor, persecuted and refugees, for Christian unity and for peace.

Belcher played a major role in developing the second part of the work. She told CNS that throughout her 40 years as an ordained minister, she “fell in love with all the kinds of services we can design for congregations that are part of both bodies.”

“This is just the body of Christ,” Bishop Johnson said. She credits the collaboration between Methodist and Catholic humanitarian ministries in response to disasters, hunger, poverty and the needs of prison inmates for helping build bridges that strengthened the dialogues.

“The bridge keeps going further and further,” she said.

Belcher, as the theologian, said the document’s explanation of the common aspects and minor differences found in prayers such as the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s prayer between the two faith traditions can become a learning experience for Catholics and Methodists. She suggested that joint study groups can develop among congregations whereby each prayer can be broken down into segments as little as two lines for discussion to help understand the basic foundations of Christian faith.

“We want Catholics vested in the flourishing of Methodists and vice versa,” Belcher said.

The dialogues are expected to continue. Plans are underway for a ninth round, but its future will depend on how the coronavirus pandemic evolves. Bishop Jeffrey M. Monforton of Steubenville, Ohio, and Bishop Kenneth H. Carter Jr. of the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church will be co-chairs.

In the meantime, the United Methodist Church will be facing a major decision in upcoming years as members around the world are expected to take up a proposal to split the denomination over what it has called “fundamental differences” regarding its beliefs on same-sex marriage and LGBTQ clergy.

Sixteen Methodist leaders from around the world signed a proposal in early 2020 that was to be voted on during the church’s general conference last May. However, the conference was delayed because of the pandemic.

If passed, the proposal would permit a “traditionalist” denomination to separate from the United Methodist Church, the second largest Protestant denomination in the U.S.

The church’s Book of Discipline that outlines its law and doctrine does not allow pastors to perform same-sex marriages and prohibits “practicing” LGBT people from becoming ordained pastors. If the new traditionalist denomination is formed, the existing United Methodist Church would be able to repeal the prohibition of same-sex marriages and LGBTQ clergy.

Such an action would result in a major roadblock on the road to future unity between the Catholic Church and United Methodist Church. Catholic doctrine prohibits same-sex marriage and permits sexual relations only between a married man and woman.

If the split occurs, as observers expect, it is unlikely to affect the dialogues, however.

“We remain committed to our relationship with the United Methodist Church and pray that United Methodists as they discern these important moral issues while upholding genuinely Catholic positions on them,” Father Kedjierski said.

Bishop Johnson said she expects the dialogues to continue.

“We’ll have to keep talking about this, there’s a lot we can say, and we’ll have to talk with each other, and, with the grace of God, to help us through the different conversations,” Bishop Johnson said of the decision facing Methodist leaders.

Regardless of the Methodist outcome, Bishop Johnson said, “I firmly believe that God will make use one in the long run.”

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What’s Happening?

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.

Drive-thru fish fry at Hessen Cassel
FORT WAYNE — St. Joseph - Hessen Cassel Knights of Columbus will offer a drive-thru fish fry at the church, 11337 US 27S, on Friday, Feb. 26, from 4:30-7 p.m. Dinner includes fish, breaded potatoes, applesauce, coleslaw and roll for $9.

Original Jonah fish fry drive-thru
MISHAWAKA — St. Bavo Parish, 524 W. 8th St., will host a drive-thru only original Jonah fish fry on Friday, March 12, from 4-7 p.m. Cost is $10 per dinner and includes four pieces of fish, coleslaw, chips and cookies. No presales. Contact Sue Abwine 574-255-1437 or office@stbavo-church.com.

Knights of Columbus drive-thru fish fry
BLUFFTON — St. Joseph Parish, 1300 N. Main St., will have a drive-thru fish fry Friday, March 12, from 4-7 p.m. featuring Dan’s Fish Fry. Menu includes: fish, cheesy potatoes, green beans and dessert. Tickets are adults $10 and children ages 6-12 $6. Visit www.stjosephchurchbluffton.org or contact Rick Singer at 260-824-1380 or stjosephchurch@adamswells.com.

Knights of Columbus fish fry at St. Jude
FORT WAYNE — St. Jude Knights will have a drive-thru only fish fry by Dan’s Fish Fry from 4-7 p.m. Service from the school parking lot, 2130 Pemberton.

Soup supper
MISHAWAKA — A simple supper of homemade soup and bread before Stations of the Cross will be Friday, Feb. 26, in the Queen of Peace school gym, 4508 Vistula Rd., at 6 p.m.

Knights of Columbus chili and grilled cheese drive-thru meal
FORT WAYNE — Knights of Columbus will host a chili/grilled cheese drive-thru meal Saturday, Feb. 27, from 5-7 p.m. at St. Therese Parish, 2504 Lower Huntington Rd. Enter the far end of the parking lot and circle around the overhang for pickup. Cost per meal will be $5, which includes a grilled cheese made with two cheeses, along with Duane Waterman’s homemade ground beef chili. RSVP to Duane Waterman at 403-1534, or duane.waterman12@gmail.com.

Queen of Angels drive-thru fish fry
FORT WAYNE — Queen of Angels Parish, 1500 W. State Blvd., will have a drive-thru only Lenten fish fry on Friday, March 5 from 4 p.m. until sold out (approx. 7 p.m.). For $10, receive a generous portion of fish and containers of coleslaw and applesauce. Visit www.queeno-fangelsfw.org for information.

St. Vincent Scouts fish fry
FORT WAYNE — The St. Vincent de Paul Scouts will have a drive-up only fish dinner, March 5, from 5-8 p.m. Serving fish, mac and cheese, coleslaw, potato, roll and dessert for $7.11. Enter drive on Auburn Road south of Wallen Road.

Miracles and their Meanings speaker
FORT WAYNE — Tim Francis is a nationally known guest speaker. He will host “Miracles and their Meanings” at St. Charles Borromeo Church, 4916 Trier Rd., on Feb. 26, and Our Lady of Good Hope Church on March 1. Both events start at 6 p.m.

Mass for the feast day of St. Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary
FORT WAYNE — Our Lady of Good Hope Parish will celebrate the feast of St. Joseph with Father Daniel Whelan Friday, March 19, at Our Lady of Good Hope Church, 7215 Saint Joe Rd.

Sacred Music will be provided by Jessica Schuster and the young adult choir. The order of the evening is as follows: Stations of the Cross at 6:30 p.m.; prelude music at 6:50 p.m. and Mass at 7 p.m. Following the Mass there will be a consecration to St. Joseph and an opportunity to venerate a second-class relic of St. Joseph.

Life Defenders Boot Camp
MISHAWAKA — Right to Life Michiana will host the Klokska Family Life Defenders Boot Camp, an in-depth pro-life training for youth and adults (recommended age seventh grade and up) Saturday, March 20, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Miller-Moore Academic Center, 1001 Bethel Circle, Suite 150. Visit www.prolifenichiana.org/boot-camp or contact Abby Middleton at 574-232-5433 or programs@prolifenichiana.org.

R.I.P.

Joseph M. Tompkins, 80, St. Joseph
William J. Simunek, 76, St. Mary of the Woods
Duane Waterman, 16, St. John the Baptist
Thomas Makowski, 81, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
Richard A. Favel, 76, St. Mary of the Assumption
Linda L. Shepherd, 58, St. Mary of the Woods
Francis X. Deaton, 80, St. Mary of the Woods
Theresa Fitzgerald, 93, St. Charles Borromeo
Delma Guitard, 88, St. Jude
David C. James, Jr., 57, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
Angela Mater, 96, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
Luke Barnum, 16, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
Thomas Makowski, 81, St. Pius X
New Haven
Travis Hoefling, 80, St. John the Baptist
Paul E. Trabel, 64, St. John the Baptist
Thomas A. Hoffman, 80, St. Adalbert
Rita Driscoll, 87, St. Bernard
Ron Garlits, 78, St. Bernard
Waterloo
Joseph M. Tompkins, 65, St. Michael the Archangel

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Catholic Diocese of Evansville is seeking
Human Resources Director/Manager

The Catholic Diocese of Evansville, Indiana, which serves a Roman Catholic community of more than 75,800 across 12 counties in southwestern Indiana, seeks candidates for the newly created position of Human Resources Manager/ Director. The actual position title will be dependent on the qualifications and experience of the successful candidate.

The successful candidate will be responsible for all aspects of the diocesan benefits plan; develop, maintain and continuously improve the diocese’s comprehensive process for hiring employees; oversee the compensation system for diocesan-agency employees; develop and maintain a performance-evaluation process; and serve as an advisor to pastors and management team members parishes, schools and other diocesan agencies.

The successful candidate will be a Catholic in good standing, a bachelor’s degree is required (master’s degree preferred) in human-resources management, organizational development, business administration or a related field. At least five years of previous experience in human-resources management is required. Designation as a Senior Professional in Human Resources or Professional in Human Resources is preferred. The successful candidate also must complete a full Criminal History Clearance.

To apply, send a letter of application, resume and at least four references to: Search Committee, Human Resources, Diocese of Evansville, hr-manager@evdio.org. No phone calls, please.
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