Life triumphs over death as Christians rebuild in Iraq, pope says

BY CINDY WOODEN

QARAQOSH, Iraq (CNS) — Amid the rubble and bombed out remains of four churches destroyed by Islamic State militants, Pope Francis paid tribute to Iraqi Christians who endured persecution and even death.

But visiting Mosul and Qaraqosh in northern Iraq March 7, he also urged the Christians to live up to their faith and honor the sacrifice of those who died by promoting peace and reconciliation.

Much of Mosul’s old city center remains in ruins or under reconstruction. And Pope Francis stood in Hosh al-Bieaa, church square, facing some of those ruins: the remains of the Syriac Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox and Chaldean Catholic churches all destroyed between 2014 and 2017.

His message was clear:

“If God is the God of life — for so He is — then it is wrong for us to kill our brothers and sisters in His name.

“If God is the God of peace — for so He is — then it is wrong for us to wage war in His name.

“If God is the God of love — for so He is — then it is wrong for us to hate our brothers and sisters.”

In Mosul, 250 miles north of Baghdad, Pope Francis listened to the stories of Christians forced to flee, the fear many have to return and the encouragement of Muslim neighbors committed to making the city a thriving, multicultural metropolis again.

But he also heard choirs of children singing in welcome, women ululating to honor his arrival and the cheers of young people waving flags.

Father Raid Adel Kallo, pastor of Mosul’s Church of the Annunciation, told the pope that he and many of his people left the city in June 2014; at that point, he said, his parish had 500 families, “The majority have emigrated abroad,” but 70 families have returned. “The rest are afraid to come back.”

The 2003 invasion of Iraq by U.S. and coalition forces battered the city but the biggest, most horrid blow came in early June 2014 when militants of the Islamic State group launched an offensive. They controlled the city for three years, terrorizing the population, executing hundreds and kidnapping, raping and selling women. They blew up major landmarks, both Muslim and Christian. They destroyed libraries and museums and tens of thousands of lives.

Offering prayers “for all the victims of war and armed conflict,” Pope Francis said. Mosul is concrete proof of the “tragic consequences of war and hostility.”

“This, however, we reaffirm our conviction that fraternity is more durable than fratricide, that hope is more powerful than hatred, that peace more powerful than war,” the pope said. “This conviction speaks with greater eloquence than the passing voices of hatred and violence, and it can never be silenced by the blood spilled by those who pervert the name of God to pursue paths of destruction.”

Dr. Rana Bazzoiee, a 37-year-old pediatric surgeon who fled Mosul to Irbil in 2015, told reporters, “I don’t like to remember that moment.”

Before the Islamic State fighters came, “we were living here in Mosul all together — Christians, Muslims” — and “we couldn’t believe something like that would happen. I think nobody stayed here. All the Christians left.”

Explaining that her Muslim and Yazidi friends helped her in those dark days, Bazzoiee said she is not angry, and she hopes the pope’s visit will help the process of getting life back to normal.

“Why not?” she said. “We lived together for a long time in Mosul.”

After the prayer service and a private visit to the ruined churches, Pope Francis took a helicopter about 20 miles Qaraqosh, a majority Christian city that also

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Solemnity of St. Joseph is March 19 — Church grants plenary indulgences for year of St. Joseph

BY VATICAN NEWS STAFF WRITER

Pope Francis announced Dec. 8 a special year dedicated to St. Joseph from Dec. 8, 2020, until Dec. 8, 2021, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as the patron of the universal Church, as well as the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. The Apostolic Penitentiary also issued a decree granting special indulgences for the duration of the special year to celebrate the anniversary and “to perpetuate the entrustment of the whole Church to the powerful protection of the Custodian of Jesus.”

During this period, the faithful have the opportunity to commit themselves “with prayer and good works, to obtain, with the help of St. Joseph, head of the heavenly Family of Nazareth, comfort and relief from the serious human and social tribulations that besige the contemporary world today.”

Devotion to St. Joseph

The decree, signed by Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, the major penitentiary of the Apostolic Penitentiary, and the regent, Father Krzysztof Nykiel, noted that devotion to St. Joseph has grown extensively throughout the history of the Church, “which not only attributes to him high reverence after that of the Mother of God his spouse, but also has given him multiple patronages.”

At the same time, the Magisterium of the Church continues to discover “old and new greatness in this treasure which is St. Joseph, like the master in the Gospel of Matthew who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.”

Therefore, the gift of indulgences spiritual retreat of at least one day that includes a meditation on St. Joseph. “St. Joseph, an authentic man of faith, invites us,” the decree reads, “to rediscover our filial relationship with the Father, to renew fidelity to prayer, to listen and correspond with profound discernment to God’s will.”

The indulgence can also be obtained by those who, following St. Joseph’s example, will perform a spiritual or corporal work of mercy. St. Joseph “encourages us to rediscover the value of silence, prudence and loyalty in carrying out our duties,” the decree notes.

The recitation of the holy rosary in families and among engaged couples is another way of obtaining indulgences, in order that “all Christian families may be stimulated to recreate the same atmosphere of intimate communion, love and prayer that was in the Holy Family.”

Everyone who entrusts their daily activity to the protection of St. Joseph, and every faithful person who invokes the intercession of St. Joseph so that those seeking work can find dignifying work can also obtain the plenary indulgence. On May 1, 1955, Pope Pius XII instituted the feast of St. Joseph “with the intent that the dignity of work be recognized by all, and that it inspires social life and laws, based on the fair distribution of rights and duties.”

The plenary indulgence is also granted to the faithful who will recite the Litany to St. Joseph (for the Latin tradition), or the Litany of the Most Holy to St. Joseph (for the Byzantian tradition), or any other prayer to St. Joseph proper to the other liturgical traditions, for the persecuted Church ad intra and ad extra, and for the relief of all Christians suffering all forms of persecution. Because, the decree notes, “the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt shows us that God is there where man is in danger, where man suffers, where he runs away, where he experiences rejection and abandonment.”

A universal saint

In addition to these, the Apostolic Penitentiary grants a plenary indulgence to the faithful who will recite any legitimately approved prayer or act of piety in honor of St. Joseph, for example, “To you, O blessed Joseph” especially on March 19, on May, 1, the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, on St. Joseph’s Sunday (according to the Byzantine tradition) on the 19th of each month and every Wednesday, a day dedicated to the memory of the saint according to the Latin tradition.

The decree recalls the universality of St. Joseph’s patronage of the Church, noting that St. Teresa of Ávila recognized him as “a protector for all the circumstances of life.” Pope St. John Paul II also said that St. Joseph has “a renewed relevance for the Church of our time, in relation to the new Christian millennium.”

For the sick

Amid the ongoing COVID-19 health crisis, the gift of the plenary indulgence is also extended to the sick, the elderly, the dying and all those who for legitimate reasons are unable to leave their homes.

They too can obtain the plenary indulgences if they are detached from any sin and have the intention of fulfilling, as soon as possible, the three usual conditions and recite an act of piety in honor of St. Joseph, offering to God the pains and hardships of their lives.


Eight parishes in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend are dedicated to the foster father of Jesus: one in South Bend, one in Mishawaka, one in LaGrange, one in Garrett, two in Fort Wayne, one in Roanoke and one in Bluffton. Many secular locations in the area are named for the saint as well, including two St. Joseph rivers; and South Bend is located in St. Joseph County.
WASHINGTON (CNS) — Use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, approved Feb. 27 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, raises moral concerns because it was developed, tested and is produced with abortion-derived cell lines,” the chairmen of two U.S. bishops’ committees said Dec. 2.

The bishops concluded, however, that “while we should continue to insist that pharmaceutical companies step using abortion-derived cell lines, given the world-wide suffering that this pandemic is causing, we affirm that being vaccinated can be an act of charity that serves the common good.”

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Doctrine, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities, made the comments in a joint statement.

In December, the prelates addressed concerns over what then were the newly approved BioNTech and Moderna vaccines because “an abortion-derived cell line was used for testing them,” but “not used in their production.”

However, the Johnson & Johnson Janssen one-shot COVID-19 vaccine raises “additional moral concerns” because it was “developed, tested and is produced with abortion-derived cell lines,” Bishop Rhoades and Archbishop Naumann said. In their December statement, the bishops noted that cell lines were used from fetuses aborted in the 1970s.

In their March 2 statement, the bishops quoted the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which judged that “when ethically irreproachable COVID-19 vaccines are not available ... it is morally acceptable to receive COVID-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.”

“However, if one can choose among equally safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines,” the bishops added, “the vaccine with the least connection to abortion-derived cell lines should be chosen. Therefore, if one has the ability to choose a vaccine, Pfizer or Moderna’s vaccines should be chosen over Johnson & Johnson’s.”

Doses of this newest vaccine — now the third approved for use in the United States — were being shipped to distribution points around the country March 2.

Bishop Rhoades and Archbishop Naumann reiterated in their latest statement what they stated in December: that getting a COVID-19 vaccine is an important act for the common good amid this pandemic. The Vatican COVID-19 commission and the Pontifical Academy for Life have said, “We believe that all clinically recommended vaccinations can be used with a clear conscience and that the use of such vaccines does not signify some sort of cooperation with voluntary abortion.”

In a two-minute video posted on YouTube on March 4, Bishop Rhoades reiterated that there is no moral need to turn down a vaccine, citing the statement from the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “The Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine can be used in good conscience.” The bishop again emphasized that getting vaccinated can be “an act of charity” or “serves the common good.” At the same time, Bishop Rhoades emphasized the importance of encouraging pharmaceutical companies, as the bishops have done, to develop vaccines that do not use abortion-derived cell lines.

Editor’s Note: The USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life has prepared an informational resource titled “Answers to Key Ethical Questions About COVID-19 Vaccines” and posted it online at https://bit.ly/3sGUqUR.

Bishops address Johnson & Johnson vaccine

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Living the beatitudes can change the world, pope says in Iraq

BY CINDY WOODEN

BAGHDAD (CNS) — Pope Francis told Iraqi Christians that when they suffer discrimination, persecution or war, the Eight Beatitudes are addressed to them.

“Whatever the world takes from us is nothing compared to the tender and patient love with which the Lord fulfills his promises,” the pope told the congregation sitting inside and outside the Chaldean Catholic Cathedral of St. Joseph March 6.

“Dear sister, dear brother, perhaps when you look at your hands, they seem empty, perhaps you feel disheartened and unsatisfied by life,” he said in his homily. “If so, do not be afraid: The beatitudes are for you — for you who are afflicted, who hunger and thirst for justice, who are persecuted. The Lord promises you that your name is written on His heart, written in heaven!”

According to the Vatican, the service marked the first time Pope Francis celebrated a eucharistic liturgy, “the Holy Qurbana,” in the rite of the Chaldean Church. While the pope recited the prayers in Italian, Cardinal Louis Sako, the Chaldean patriarch, and members of the congregation prayed in Arabic.

Iraqi President Barham Salih and Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein attended the liturgy, which included a prayer for government officials, asking God to help them be “examples of honesty for the common good” and “know how to collaborate for a renewed world in which liberty and harmony reign.”

One of the prayers of the faithful, recited in Arabic, echoed the pope’s homily. “Benevolent Father, sustain your holy church in your love and power for the common good” and “help them be “examples of honesty for the common good” and “know how to collaborate for a renewed world in which liberty and harmony reign.”

The Mass was the final public event of a day that saw Pope Francis travel to Najaf, a center of spiritual and political power for Iraqi Shiite Muslims, and then to Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, about 10 miles outside of Nasiriyah. On March 7 he was scheduled to travel to Iraq’s Kurdistan region, where he was to visit Irbil, Mosul and Qaraqosh, cities devastated under the Islamic State group’s rule. There, he planned to meet with some of the Christians who have returned to the region to try to rebuild.

The pope’s March 5-8 visit took place under tight security.


CNS photo/Paul Haring

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ICC offers tools for public advocacy at state, federal levels

While gearing up for a busy second half of the 2021 legislative session, the Indiana Catholic Conference is also giving voice to important national issues and urging the faithful to do the same.

From COVID-19 relief and other federal legislation dominating headlines recently to ongoing debate over the death penalty, the Indiana Catholic Conference is staying engaged on matters that affect the common good and offering tools for people to influence the discussion at all levels of government.

“Advocacy is so important, and everyone can become involved in some way in shaping the outcome of critical issues,” said Angela Espada, executive director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. “People step forward to vote for all sorts of reasons, and that is absolutely essential, but we are called to be involved in the public forum more than once every four years.”

Staying informed is the first step, Espada emphasized, and a reliable resource is the new weekly podcast that she hosts along with Alexander Mingus, the associate director of the ICC. Each Friday, the two post their latest discussion highlighting the issues most important to the Catholic Church and calling for public awareness and engagement.

The podcast is accessible on the ICC website, www.indianacc.org, which also offers a wealth of other information and resources. This includes access to I-CAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network, which is the principal communication vehicle of the ICC for updating the faithful on the Church’s social teachings and legislative priorities to advance the common good. Signing up for I-CAN is simple, and members receive weekly reports via email that include a link to the latest ICC podcast.

“The ICC began podcasting at a time of booming popularity for this medium,” Mingus said. “Our brief I-CAN podcast episodes complement the written I-CAN reports and give members of our network another way to digest our updates from the Indiana Statehouse. In addition, the conversational format gives listeners anecdotal information they might not get from simply reading the I-CAN reports.”

In its education and advocacy efforts, the ICC supports and amplifies the priorities and messages of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Mingus has direct experience working with this organization of current and retired bishops who speak out on matters of importance to American Catholics and seek to promote the common good. As a college student years ago, majoring in political science and human rights studies, Mingus spent several months assigned to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C. There, he met with legislators on Capitol Hill and witnessed how matters of faith can influence public debate and decision-making at all levels.

“After spending a summer as a USCCB intern, I was able to see the inner workings of the Church’s advocacy efforts at the federal level,” said Mingus, whose efforts primarily encompassed health care reform policy and advocating for the poor and vulnerable. “Our counterparts there provide fitting guidance for our engagement with national politics in light of the Church’s teachings. We are fortunate to have their guidance in the complex and confusing web of national policies.”

The USCCB also offers this guidance to the general public through its website, www.usccb.org, and its action center, www.votervoice.net/USCCB/home. There, the organization posts alerts and position statements on the most important national issues and legislation of the day.

A recent example is COVID-19 relief. Almost exactly one year after the coronavirus pandemic drastically altered life for all Americans, the U.S. Senate on March 6 approved President Biden’s $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. At press time, the U.S. House of Representatives — which earlier passed its own version of the legislation — was expected to vote on Senate bill as well.

The USCCB urged passage of the relief package because it addresses the needs of many vulnerable people related to the pandemic. At the same time, the bishops lamented the lack of protections for the unborn in the legislation.

“Unfortunately, unlike previous COVID relief bills, this bill appropriates billions of taxpayer dollars that are not subject to longstanding, bipartisan pro-life protections that are needed to prevent this funding from paying for abortions,” the bishops stated.

Promoting the sanctity of life is always at the forefront for both the USCCB and the ICC, and that includes efforts to abolish the death penalty. This is an issue that hits close to home for Hoosiers, as the United States Penitentiary in Terre Haute is the site of nearly all federal executions.

In 2020, the federal government reinstated the death penalty after an almost two-decade hiatus. Since July, 13 inmates have been executed by the U.S. government — all of them in Terre Haute.

In a December letter, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson of Indianapolis called for an end to capital punishment. “The death penalty, far from resolving anything or providing ‘justice’ for victims, ultimately contributes to the perpetuation of a culture of death,” Archbishop Thompson wrote. “The urgency of this appeal is directed toward promoting a culture of life that takes into consideration the ultimate dignity and sacredness of every person as well as society itself. “I urge Catholics and all people of good will to join in the urgency of this call.”

Now, there are renewed efforts at the national level to do just as the U.S. bishops have been advocating. Congress is considering the Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2021, which would end the death penalty at the federal level and require re-sentencing of those currently on death row.

“In a recent poll, more than 60% of Americans felt it was time for the death penalty to be abolished,” Espada said. “It’s important for the Catholic faithful to be involved in national conversations about important issues. We urge everyone to contact their state and federal representatives and make their voices heard.”

To follow this and other priority legislation of the ICC, visit www.indianacc.org. This website includes access to I-CAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network, which offers the Church’s position on key issues. Those who sign up for I-CAN receive alerts on legislation moving forward and ways to contact their elected representatives.

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Gomez: U.S. bishops’ working group set up last November completes work

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A special working group of the U.S. bishops formed last November to deal with conflicts that could arise between the policies of President Joe Biden, a Catholic, and church teaching has completed its work.

Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez said in a March 1 memo to all the U.S. bishops, Catholic News Service obtained a copy of the memo from Archbishop Gomez, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, as a follow-up to a February memo he sent to the bishops explaining the working group’s two recommendations given to him in its final report. The March 1 memo confirms the actions taken on them. The first recommendation made by the working group, he said, was to write a letter to Biden “conveying the USCCB’s eagerness to work with him on issues where we will undoubtedly express strong disagreement, while acknowledging a lack of support on other issues where we cannot agree with anticipated policies.”

Archbishop Gomez said in the letter Jan. 20, Inauguration Day. The second recommendation to develop “a document addressed to all of the Catholic faithful on Doctrine,” the archbishop said.

COVID-19 bill OK’d without Hyde language to prevent funding of abortion

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Democratic members of the U.S. Senate were hopeful their version of a $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package would be passed the second week of March, so they could send it to President Biden for his signature before unemployment assistance expires March 14. The measure includes $246 billion for extending unemployment benefits through August and increasing the federal supplemental payment from $300 per week to $400.

The House which approved its pandemic relief measure early Feb. 27 and included this provision, will likely have to vote again on its bill to reconcile any changes in the Senate version. Republicans said they would oppose the legislation because it includes billions for programs and projects that do not immediately address pandemic needs.

In the House, 212 members — all of the Republicans, plus two Democrats — voted against the bill. It passed with 219 votes. From the floor ahead of the vote, Rep. Chris Smith, R-New Jersey, caught House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-California, and the House Rules Committee for refusing to allow a vote on adding language to the bill “to ensure that taxpayers are not forced to subsidize abortion,” as provided by the Hyde Amendment.

Can St. Joseph sell a house? Skip burying statue, priests say

ST. PAUL, Minn. (CNS) — The folklore is well known: Need to sell a house? Bury a statue of St. Joseph in the yard. Maybe wrapped in a cloth. But it must be upside down, near the “For Sale” sign, facing the house. Or facing away from the house, near the road. Or near flowers because he likes that. On what exactly is to be done, the practice’s “authorities” are conflicting. So is its provenance. Some say it goes back to St. Andre Bessette, a Holy Cross brother in Montreal who at the turn of the 20th century “planted” St. Joseph medals in a property his monastery wanted to buy. Others say it began somehow in the 1970s. A few realtors provide instructions on their websites about how to bury the statue, with testimonials from people who say it worked for them.

A memorial for George Floyd is seen in Minneapolis March 4. Floyd, an unarmed Black man, was pinned down by former police officer Derek Chauvin, who knelt on his neck. Floyd later died in the hospital. Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis led a prayer at the Hennepin County Government Center during a gathering of pastors and clergy March 7, ahead of jury selection in the trial of Chauvin, who is facing murder charges.

Many Texas parishes to keep face masks, even with mandate lifted

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Many Catholic parishes in Texas will continue to ask parishioners to wear face masks and will limit church attendance despite the state’s governor, Greg Abbott, announced March 2 these pandemic restrictions would be lifted the following week. Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso said he has been getting a lot of questions after the governor’s announcement wondering if it would affect parish coronavirus safety practices. “The short answer is no!” he said in a March 4 statement, noting Abbott has often pointed out that “churches are free to exercise their religious liberty and set their own protocols. The protocols we have established were intended to collaborate with state and local practices but were not undertaken under the direction of these entities,” Bishop Seitz said. He stressed that the Catholic parishes in El Paso County “will not be making any changes at the present time to the protocols we have presently set in place.”

For the time being, churches will be limited to a maximum of 25% of their capacity. Social distancing and masks will be required in all church facilities.

First-person accounts illustrate CARA report on what inspires vocations

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A new report on vocations to men’s and women’s religious orders from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate is filled with facts that can help everyone from pastors to formation directors foster more vocations. But the report emphasizes the value of first-person vignettes of factors that helped and hindered their own vocation makes for compelling reading. More recent cohort of women and men religious in the United States is more culturally and ethnically diverse than their older cohorts. While this diversity enriches religious life, it also challenges the leadership and the membership of religious communities to better understand and adjust to the cultural changes in many aspects of their religious life together,” said the report, “First-person Accounts in Religious Life in the United States: A National Study of New Religious Members.”

Published by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), the report surveyed 3,196 men and women in formation or new members in religious life and got what it called “usable responses from 1,163 of them, or 38%.” White respondents make up two-thirds of those who have entered religious life since 2005, with the other third reporting ethnic backgrounds of Asian (12%), Hispanic (11%), Black (4%) and all ‘other’ ethnicities (5%), the report said.

Minnesota faith leaders pray for peace, justice during Floyd trial

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Minnesota faith leaders pray for peace, justice during Floyd trial

A memorial for George Floyd is seen in Minneapolis March 4. Floyd, an unarmed Black man, was pinned down by former police officer Derek Chauvin, who knelt on his neck. Floyd later died in the hospital. Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis led a prayer at the Hennepin County Government Center during a gathering of pastors and clergy March 7, ahead of jury selection in the trial of Chauvin, who is facing murder charges.

First-person accounts illustrate CARA report on what inspires vocations

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A new report on vocations to men’s and women’s religious orders from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate is filled with facts that can help everyone from pastors to formation directors foster more vocations. But the report emphasizes the value of first-person vignettes of factors that helped and hindered their own vocation makes for compelling reading. More recent cohort of women and men religious in the United States is more culturally and ethnically diverse than their older cohorts. While this diversity enriches religious life, it also challenges the leadership and the membership of religious communities to better understand and adjust to the cultural changes in many aspects of their religious life together,” said the report, “First-person Accounts in Religious Life in the United States: A National Study of New Religious Members.”

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Friends reunited through Catholic parish

It turns out the two had settled down within a mile of each other on what was then the outskirts of Fort Wayne, in the area of Getz and Illinois roads.

BY JENNIFER BARTON

In 1920, in the small town called Logansport, two little girls were born. Today, when asked who is older, Anna Marie Brough’s hand shoots straight up. With a smile on her face, she proudly states, “I am, by four months.” Brough was born on May 27 and Mary Catherine Craighead was born on Sept. 6. A hundred years later the ladies remain friends, connected in part by their Fort Wayne parish.

The ladies have been active parishioners at St. Joseph for decades. The parish, ironically, bears the same name as the school they attended together as children in Logansport. The similarities in their lives do not end there, however.

Both of them lost their fathers at a very young age. Brough’s father died from the Spanish flu three months before she was born; Craighead’s father died from a ruptured appendix when she was in the fifth grade. It was the height of the Great Depression and Craighead’s mother was unable to care for four children on her own, so Craighead was sent to St. Vincent Villa Children’s Home in Fort Wayne. The two girls wept, but that was not the case.

From the age of 10 on, Craighead lived at the children’s home. “She wanted to stay there forever,” daughter Charlene Anderson said. “Her mom never became financially stable.” The girls were born. Today, when asked who is older, Anna Marie Brough’s hand shoots straight up. With a smile on her face, she proudly states, “I am, by four months.” Brough was born on May 27 and Mary Catherine Craighead was born on Sept. 6. A hundred years later the ladies remain friends, connected in part by their Fort Wayne parish.

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From the age of 10 on, Craighead lived at the children’s home. “She wanted to stay there forever,” daughter Charlene Anderson said. “Her mom never became financially stable.” The priests and sisters who ran the orphanage inspired Craighead in her Catholic faith to the point that Anderson stated, “she could have been a nun.”

Instead, she got married. Her husband had been raised Protestant but converted to the Catholic faith under Craighead’s influence. He was killed in World War II. She remarried, to Robert Craighead, and went on to have eight children with him. Little did Craighead know that her childhood friend had also married a man named Robert and had moved to Fort Wayne, eventually having six of her own children. A coincidence brought the two now-grown women back together in 1965.

“A neighbor to my mom knew Anna Marie, and they both needed to get their children registered for school,” Anderson shared. Since Craighead owned a car, “and since she had to drive my brother to get registered,” Mom volunteered to drive her to register her daughter. From the moment Anna Marie got in the car, she recognized her.

It turns out the two had settled down within a mile of each other on what was then the outskirts of Fort Wayne, in the area of Getz and Illinois roads. “We could walk to their house,” Anderson recalled. “Back in those days, there wasn’t as much out there. It was old country roads back then.”

Their friendship rekindled, the Brough and Craighead families grew close throughout the years, sharing joyous occasions as well as commemorating during difficult times.

“We carpooled to high school,” Anderson remembered. Her older sister was best friends with one of Brough’s daughters, and the two were in high school and 4-H together. They remain friends as well. Brough and Craighead have attended St. Joseph for years, assisting with parish events and funeral luncheons. Craighead cared for the church’s plants and sewed altar cloths and vestments. Brough worked as parish secretary for a time and sang in the choir.

When Brough’s husband passed away, Anderson said that “knowing people in church helped.”

Last year Craighead and Brough celebrated their 100th birthdays with friends and family, along with favorite priests from St. Joseph: Father Evaristo Olivera and former pastor Father Timothy Wrozek. Anderson said her mother was devastated when Father Wrozek was asked to pastor to Immaculate Conception in Auburn a few years ago.

Anderson is amazed by everything her mother has lived through in her long life and all the memories still locked inside her. “We try to get stories out of them,” Anderson stated. “I’ve even found out a few things just recently.” Her mother’s strong faith set an example for all of her children. “Her faith is what kept her sanity. .. It was what she pulled on to get by, to survive.”
Imagine not being able to attend Mass as a family, worshipping God together, because the lights are too bright, and crowds or any other stimuli could trigger a massive behavioral outburst in a family member. Splitting up for Mass is often the only viable option that special-needs families see. Some families prefer to make this choice rather than risk aggressive behaviors or receiving condemning looks from other churchgoers.

Angie Profitt faces this reality every week and longed for another option. Profitt is a member of Belonging, a grassroots group that falls under the Ministry with Persons with Disabilities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. Her son Cole, 16, is on the autism spectrum. Things that might seem inconsequential to others present major problems for him, even the squeaky sanctuary door that he personally fixed by bringing a coke of WD-40 to church.

“As he was getting older, I felt like I was struggling to find ways to show him that he is a member of the church community and what he could do to be a helpful member,” Profitt declared.

While aiding in his confirmation preparation, Profitt noticed that Cole had excellent skills for organizing food pantry goods at the family’s home parish of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Fort Wayne. She wanted him to feel this same sense of excitement and purpose in his faith community—just the same way I feel when I come to church and it just became something important to me.”

Belonging, whose name describes its mission—to ensure meaningful participation for individuals with disabilities and their families in all aspects of the life of the Church—formed several years ago and has evolved into a group of parents, caregivers and others concerned about making the Church more inclusive for those with disabilities. Members come from a variety of parishes, mostly throughout the Fort Wayne area. The group previously helped organize a sensory-friendly, bilingual confirmation Mass presided by Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades and began discussing the possibility of holding sensory-friendly Masses at one of the local parishes.

“It’s really important for us to go to church as a family,” Profitt stressed. Cole had managed to make it through the confirmation ceremony with his classmates, which was no easy feat considering the large class size at St. Elizabeth. “But it was difficult. And it doesn’t have to be difficult.”

The idea for a sensory-friendly Mass was inspired by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati implemented in 2019, and where several parishes within the Dayton area now host these monthly Masses. “That’s what got me thinking. And I thought, let’s do this in little pieces; I’ll start with asking St. Elizabeth’s and we’ll see where this goes,” Profitt said.

So she took a leap of faith and met with her pastor about the possibility of hosting a Mass that would be more welcoming to people like her son: quieter, with lower lighting, shorter length, and increased tolerance of self-stimulating behaviors. Profitt remarked, “In Belonging, we talk about so many different ideas that we have, and this is one that we can do. It won’t cost us a dime.”

Father David Voors, pastor of St. Elizabeth, recognized the need for a Mass specifically designed for people with special needs and eagerly jumped aboard. He said, “I think most anybody, once they realize the good that is there and it doesn’t take much extra work at all, I’m hoping more will be able to say yes, we’d like to do that.”

He continued, “It’s a quiet Mass, basically what it amounts to. I think the priests in our diocese will respond with great enthusiasm. And I think by that also we will help others in the parish become more caring, loving and approaching to those who may have been sidelined in the past.”

A common ordeal that many parents of special needs children have shared with the Belonging ministry is times that other parishioners have attempted to force them into cry rooms if their children have occasional, uncontrolled outbursts in church. This attitude can be distressing for parents who need to be spiritually fed while at the same time exemplifying Mass attendance to their children.

“As a parent with a child with special needs, we go to church sometimes and we feel like everybody’s looking at us, and I’m so afraid for my kid to do anything,” said Profitt. “Sometimes we need that space, too, as a family, that that low-sensory Mass offers us; that we don’t feel like there’s any kind of judgement or fear of someone looking at you... I still hear the message loud and clear, and I’m with my family, celebrating Mass with my family the way it should be.”

People with special needs are not the only ones who feel this sense of isolation, even in their own parish, added Trisha Trout, evener of the new communications coordinator at St. Elizabeth. For Trout, it is crucial to reach out to those with mental illness as well, who sometimes are affected by the same type of stimuli, as she is. “I think those with mental illness are often overstimulated trying to live day-to-day life.”

She explained that the stigma of mental illness can be so great that oftentimes those afflicted will try to hide it, so a Mass with fewer people and less distractions can provide a more comfortable environment for them. “The dark, crowded feel of the church is not a safe-feeling atmosphere where one can feel hidden and totally immerse themselves in God.”

The benefits of sensory-friendly Masses are not limited to members of the parish. Donna Hazlett, a parishioner at St. Joseph Parish in Fort Wayne, heard about the sensory-friendly Masses through her contacts in Special Olympics. Her adult daughter has learning disabilities, and they decided to give the special Mass a try. “It’s a welcoming place because it’s not hectic and filled with distractions... People with disabilities are easily distracted by their atmosphere. Here there’s less people to be intimidated by.” Hazlett’s daughter even began calling the special Mass “her church.”

Although Hazlett acknowledges the progress the Church has made over the years in accepting people with special needs, she believes there is still much more that can be done. “I wish we could do more things like this for people with intellectual disabilities. I’m thrilled that a priest wants to do this; good for him... I’m excited about the future and the possibilities of where this could lead.”

Originally set aside as a separate Sunday Mass, St. Elizabeth shifted the date due to pandemic-related circumstances. It is now celebrated on a monthly basis at a previously scheduled weekday evening Mass. Before this change, attendance peaked at around 35 people, though the numbers cannot express the impact of the Mass to those who need it. Trout noted that families tended to prefer the dedicated sensory-friendly Mass and is hoping to return to the weekly Mass.

Members of Belonging hope to see the use of sensory-friendly Mass spread throughout the diocese, bringing greater spiritual fruits to those with special needs, their families and church communities. Lisa Schleinker currently serves as the national leader of Belonging. Together with Allison Sturm from the Ministry with Persons with Disabilities, she stated, “As requests from individuals and families who need a sensory-friendly Mass grows, Belonging is committed to assisting pastors, staffs and parishioners to make this available in their parish community in the hope that more people throughout the diocese can experience a sensory-friendly Mass.”

While Profitt was inspired to request this service of her parish by her son’s needs, she said, “I also know that there’s so many other people that are affected that I never imagined would be interested in something like this.” Mental illness, social anxiety and various disabilities can prevent people from full inclusion in the Body of Christ. A Mass specifically tailored to their needs can be a valuable step to show love and acceptance as a Church to these members.

“The saddest thing is we took so long just to ask the question,” said Profitt.

March is national Disabilities Awareness Month, and this month’s Belonging meeting will be focused on the topic “Creating a Sense of Belonging in Your Parish.” The meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 16 over Zoom and is open to all. For more information on Belonging or advocating for those with special needs in a parish, contact Allison Sturm at asturm@diocesefw.org or 260-399-1452.
Faith found in the Far East brings Ballentine home

BY JENNIFER BARTON

After nearly 10 years of postponements, this spring will mark the fulfillment of Brandon Ballentine’s longing. He will become a member of the Catholic faith when he is welcomed into the Church at the Easter Vigil.

The catalyst for his conversion was meeting his future wife, Anna, in a rather unlikely place — the island nation of Japan.

Brandon was stationed in Japan while serving in the Navy; Anna moved from the Philippines to Japan to live with her family, as her father was employed there. They met by accident at a Germanfest celebration when Brandon literally bumped into Anna.

“I didn’t say ‘excuse me,’” I said, “you’re in my way.” Then I spilled my beer on her,” Brandon recalled with a laugh. Anna returned the favor by not helping him find his way back to base when she spotted him on the train later that evening, appearing lost and confused.

After that inauspicious first encounter, the two reconnected through an online dating app that one of Anna’s friends had signed her up for. As a single mom, she had not been interested in dating, but when her friend saw a profile picture of “that American dude” on the app, she messaged him in Anna’s stead.

“That’s how it started. Then the talking started,” Anna said.

They seemed to hit it off. Brandon spent much of his Christmas leave back home texting with Anna.

When they met in person, the relationship developed quickly — a little too quickly, actually, for Brandon. A couple of months after that first time, Brandon began to attend Mass with Anna regularly. They have been together for nearly 10 years and were married in Japan eight years ago.

Throughout that time, Brandon has been hoping to one day join the Church. “I’ve been wanting to convert since we were in Japan. We just didn’t have a chance.”

The couple seemed to move constantly until his five-year tour was completed and they were able to return to Indiana. Once back on American soil, however, it took time for the Ballentines to establish themselves enough that Brandon could dedicate himself to the RCIA process. The transition to civilian life and the training that new jobs required stole much of Brandon’s focus.

“I knew going through RCIA was going to take a lot of commitment and consistency,” he stressed. They didn’t have that for the longest time in their married lives. Anna felt. However, “Even though he hasn’t been baptized, he is very committed to learn more about it and delve more into the faith because he just felt so accepted and loved,” she said.

A job offer brought Brandon from Noblesville, where his parents live, to Fort Wayne, where the family finally settled down. They first began to attend a Catholic church near their house, but when they missed the early Mass one Sunday, they ended up at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception for evening Mass.

“I said, ‘oh, this feels like home.’ It felt like I went back to the Philippines because the cathedrals in the Philippines looks like this, most of the churches look like this,” Anna said.

Not only was the church itself familiar in style for Anna, but the same feeling of acceptance Brandon experienced in Japan struck him again.

With no more moving or traveling, he was finally able to start RCIA and develop a bond with Father Jacob Runyon, the cathedral’s rector. This Lent, Brandon’s faith has deepened even more through devotions such as the Stations of the Cross, which he recently attended for the first time.

Anna commented, “He was super-emotional that night. After Father Jake did the Stations, we walked through each and every one of them and he just stopped in awe of everything.”

Though the wait was long and there are still things he doesn’t understand, Brandon feels he is prepared to enter into the Catholic faith. “I’m nervous and excited at the same time,” he admitted.
Local podcast uses humor, friendship to explore Catholicism

BY JENNIFER BARTON

W hat comes from a priest and a deacon who love Catholicism, and love to talk almost as much as they love God? A podcast, of course.

Somewhere between the often-humorous sidebars and the friendly banter, Father Stephen Felicichia and Deacon Daniel Koehl tackle topics of interest in the Catholic world in “The Deus Vult Podcast,” a new venture the two clergymen undertook last fall. “Deus Vult” — Latin for “God wills it,” the rallying cry of the Crusades — is gaining in popularity, with more than 5,000 downloads since the first episode hit the airwaves last fall.

Deacon Koehl shared the story of how “Deus Vult” was first envisioned, on a long car ride home from seminary while both men were still in priestly formation. The two met at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. As the only two seminarians from Fort Wayne at the time, they quickly learned that they would have to become friends or face years of rigorous theological studies alone.

After a car crash, Felicichia found himself without the means to get home during a school break. It was only natural that he hitch a ride with his good friend. Throughout the drive, Deacon Koehl recalled, “We would just have good conversations; there was just always something to say and we never really were tired of each other’s company, which is a really good sign of friendship.”

When the conversation eventually did lull — about seven hours into the eight-hour drive — Deacon Koehl put on a podcast from a group of priests in Colorado he had begun listening to the previous summer while serving at SS. Peter and Paul in Huntington. “These podcasts were my source of intellectual formation,” he said.

Sometime during the podcast Deacon Koehl remembers commenting that the two of them could do something similar. After a brief hesitation, Father Felicichia declared that they could produce an even better one.

Shortly before their ordination to the diaconate, the two appeared on Redeemer Radio in an interview that Deacon Koehl described as having a “natural flow, back and forth.” With that experience, their foray into the podcasting world was cemented. They began preparing for the new podcast, which launched last September.

Both men have used the platform to relate stories of their vocation to the priesthood, tales of family life and jaw-dropping accounts of car crashes, sprinkled throughout with plenty of amusing anecdotes and jesting. Humor might be the catalyst to engage listeners, but the focus of “Deus Vult” is strictly Catholicism. Father Felicichia and Deacon Koehl share their knowledge and experiences of the Catholic faith while delving into a variety of subjects, from C.S. Lewis’s “Screwtape Letters” to liturgical life to finding gems of morality in areas of modern culture like music and animated television shows.

What makes the podcast popular is the relatability of the two hosts. “I quote secular pop culture a lot. I try and speak the language of the people. This is how I grew up,” said Father Felicichia. The references often revolve around movies, music and his perennial favorite characters, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

“It’s an inspiration, and you tie it into the saints. Ninja Turtles formed a part of my life,” he said.

“I keep this part of my childhood and try not to make it childish. I try to share it on a reasonable level with people who want to hear it.”

Deacon Koehl admitted, “The level of weird is up there. People appreciate that.

In some ways the two have contrasting personalities which, rather than conflict with each other, blend to create a cohesive production. Father Felicichia has a strongly outgoing and loquacious personality; Deacon Koehl is a self-professed introvert with a more reflective demeanor during discussions. Their dialogue flows naturally from a genuine friendship and is never scripted. And though their verbal paths may meander, the conversations always circle back to the topic at hand.

“I think for people to be able to have a sense in their minds that their clerics are also friends and have normal conversations is helpful,” said Deacon Koehl. “We’re showing our friendship and portraying topics in a way that’s hopefully approachable.”

Some of the subjects addressed they do not necessarily consider homily-worthy, such as their podcast on vesting prayers. And some are better unpacked in the context of a discussion.

“In the place of a conversation, it allows for a much deeper level of exploration, whereas if one just keeps talking just would seem to monologue forever.”

Felicichia explained, “Conversation is a place you witness — please, God — the human spirit and its great joy. And it’s fun, too. I come here honestly and I just decompress, talking about life and stuff that’s interesting.”

Subject matter is chosen on alternating weeks by Father Felicichia and Deacon Koehl based on their personal interests and areas of expertise. Deacon Koehl does keep an ever-growing list of ideas that they would like to cover in future episodes, including “Lord of the Rings,” mythology and well-known modern Catholic figures, among others. The duo also intends to bring in guests for future discussions.

In case these matters seem too lightweight for a Catholic podcast, Deacon Koehl plans to dig deeper into theology once he is ordained to the priesthood in the spring. “There are other things I want to do some podcasts about, things that are more cultural/moral problems like gender theology. We’ll get into the weeds with some things that are a little heavier.”

The hope for “Deus Vult” is to help Catholics learn more about their Faith and see Catholicism as interesting, rather than boring. “There’s a side of it that somebody else looks at the same thing you’re seeing and sees it from a different angle … and that allows all these different avenues to open up and discuss,” Father Felicichia stated.

Deacon Koehl elaborated, “There are plenty of podcasts out there that are giving you the same sort of thing — they’re just going through the catechism which is fine, but that’s not what our podcast is about. We might touch on these topics as foundational things, but we’re getting into some of the stuff that people have forgotten about and that’s the reason we exist.”

Deacon Koehl handles all the recording aspects, though he said starting a podcast is not difficult. Episodes are hosted on Buzzsprout and are available through podcast streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and others. Additionally, it has recently been picked up by Redeemer Radio as part of their podcast blocks, typically airing on Thursday mornings.

With plenty of Catholic material yet to unpack, Father Felicichia and Deacon Koehl hope to continue reaching listeners through “Deus Vult” and bringing Catholicism into the mainstream.

“We’re just talking. We’re not looking to advance any kind of agenda, other than that Catholicism is pretty cool and you might learn something maybe,” Father Felicichia asserted.
Nothing short of miraculous: A COVID recovery story

BY GRETCHEN R. CROWE

When Jason Shanks entered his Fort Wayne home in mid-February, it was the first time he’d been there since an ambulance had taken him away three months earlier.

In early November, when cases of COVID-19 were rising nationwide, one of Jason’s five kids was exposed to the virus at school, and the family, including Jason’s wife, Melissa, had been quarantining at home. Their 10-year-old son was the first to get symptoms, followed by the rest of the family. No one escaped illness, but it was Jason, who has asthma, who couldn’t shake it. During the second week of illness, as everyone else was starting to feel better, Jason was feeling worse. After doing breathing treatments every three hours, he eventually took himself to the ER, where doctors opted not to admit him.

“He had a cough he just couldn’t get under control, and he didn’t feel like he could breathe very deeply,” Jason’s wife, Melissa, said in an interview with Our Sunday Visitor in early February. At home there was more medicine, more breathing treatments, and other remedies. Nine days after Jason had tested positive — after he had to stop twice to catch his breath while walking down a flight of stairs — they called 911.

“In retrospect, Jason did not realize how sick he was,” Melissa said. “He was thinking he would go, get a little oxygen, steroid shots and come home the next day.”

That didn’t happen. When Jason was admitted into the hospital on Nov. 14, it didn’t take long for the doctors to determine that drastic steps needed to be taken. From the hospital, Jason called his wife and told her they were admitting him to the ICU, and that they were going to intubate and sedate him.

“That’s probably the first time I really thought, ‘Oh my gosh, this is really critical,’” Melissa said. That night, Father Tony Steinacker, pastor of SS. Peter and Paul Church in Huntington, who has known Jason and Melissa for nearly two decades, went to the hospital to administer the anointing of the sick to Jason. Before entering Jason’s room, the nurse pulled Father Steinacker aside to explain just how dire the situation was. The next time the priest would be called, she said, it would be because Jason was about to die.

“How humble, how privileged, how unique the role that the priest plays,” Father Steinacker said, calling it a “beautiful privilege to pray the prayers of the Church for this man who had such a deep faith.”

Doctors estimated that Jason would be sedated and intubated for two to three weeks. The goal was to allow Jason’s body to rest so it could fight off COVID, which was still raging inside of him. At that point, Melissa had to make a choice: Was she going to face this trial on her own, or was she going to reach out for support?

“I kind of had to surrender a lot of wanting to handle this on my own, without asking for help,” she said. So she took to social media, asking for urgent prayers. Around her, the community rallied.

Shanks in the hospital, where he spent six weeks. Upon release he began an extended period of rehabilitation due the extent of the damage the virus had wrought.

“The whole time, prayer was a huge comfort.” Practically, too, it gave Melissa a much-needed hand around the house. People around the world began praying for Jason’s recovery.

Every night, once the kids were in bed, Melissa would FaceTime Jason — the only contact she was allowed to have with him — to pray the rosary and to read the daily Scripture readings, hoping that even though he couldn’t respond, he might still be able to hear her.

“To me, it was like the one thing that I could do,” she said. “The whole time, prayer was a huge comfort.” Practically, too, it allowed Melissa to speak to her husband, and to let him know that he wasn’t alone.
I will go, Lord

In my early 20s one my favorite country songs was Josh Turner’s “Would you go with me?” Images of following one’s spouse to the end of the earth, the total gift of self towards one spouse, the joy existing in the most intimate relationship—all these filled my imagination with thoughts of the relationship that I longed to share with a spouse. I could not wait for someone to ask, “Would you go with me?” If I give you my hand, would you take it and make me the happiest man in the world?

I never let the desiring soul unfilled. For the willing and docile soul, He surprises her with invitations she never thought she would receive. Ultimately, this has happened for me. A wonderful and delightful Spouse has posed me a question, not in the way I imagined but with equal romance and joy. Perhaps even more so.

All souls created by God are made for the deepest and most intimate union with Him in eternity—in that blissful state of intimacy with Him. In eternity, the life of a priest or a consecrated person exemplifies the married life. God calls some souls to begin living out on earth the spousal relationship with our God in heaven. Among other things, the soul who delightfully and joyfully gives her “yes” is a reminder of the intimate union with God that each person is called to for all eternity.

The prayers of my pastor and the encouragement of my spiritual director helped me recognize the source of grace through which I decided I could open my heart to hear God’s invitation to consecrated life—and He was ready to offer such an invitation. I had dined: Why would I not allow God a chance at winning my heart in the same way that line of reasoning made sense to me, so I gave Him a chance.

Once my heart was open, God took it and ran with it. God has worked through my heart with the delightful love of a romantic relationship. He conversed with me throughout the months of discernment, leading me and teaching me in ways I never thought possible. He demonstrated the fullness of such a life. He undermined my initial intuition that it would not be a life of loneliness. The life of a consecrated virgin is a full life, because He truly makes Himself present. He behaves as any suit-er or would, providing delightful gifts which seem trivial, but their very triviality shows the tender care God has for us.

And yet, He did not physically speak with me. There were no apparitions or locations. How could I know with certainty that God was truly working as I perceived Him to be? Throughout the history of the world, God has worked through human beings. In this particular situation, He worked through the bishop who confirmed that I sensed in prayer. God desires me to live as a consecrated virgin in the world. A consecrated virgin living in the world lives life similar to any other person. She has a job. She has friends. She is active in society, in her parish, in her diocese. She may own a house. She buys normal clothes. She struggles with finances and paying taxes. She pays the electric bill. Yet, the difference between her life and others is that she gives her virginity to God as a gift. She is consecrated at the hands of the bishop, passively giving herself in a way that bears a resemblance to the way that the bread and wine are effectively allowed themselves to be consecrated at the Holy Mass.

The consecrated virgin living in the world holds ex-different charism from a woman in the religious life. She is closely associated with the bishop and the diocese by bearing witness to the particular Church. She exemplifies the mystery of Church. There is a hiddenness in her vocational identity: the holiness of the Church to see into the seams of society bringing grace to those she encounters. She brings the Church into the midst of the world. Almost unconsciously, she remains a consecrated virgin in the World.

Joy and eternal life are found through Jesus.

GUEST COMMENTARY

ANNE THEOPHIL STEPHENS

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THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24a

The Gospel continues. It is a moving description of God’s mercy. Humans can find joy, and they can find eternal life, through Jesus.

Reflection

The Church leads us onward through Lent, reassuring us that Easter is not far away. In fact, it will come in only a few more weeks. It is not about counting days. Lent is a symbol of life. If we are to renovate our lives, perfecting our renunciation in the prayer and peneance of Lent, we can expect to see the clarifying light and warmth of the sunburst of Easter.

Hopefully, at Easter, we too shall rise from death and the coldness of life without the Lord. Lent’s productivity and effectiveness depend upon us and our sincerity. The Church today urges us to continue to make Lent effective. The daybreak is near!

READINGS


OSV EDITORIAL BOARD

togetherness this past year, video technology was used to bring together groups for religious education, Bible studies and other ministries. Some parishes adopted phone call outreach to parishioners. Man was not made to be alone, and the pandemic reminded us of the importance of community—even if it looked a little bit different.

The Church shouldn’t be afraid of technology. Parishes have known for years that digital communication on websites, email and text messaging can be greatly beneficial to their mission. The same is true for online giving, a proven effective and reliable way for parishes to handle stewardship. But while some were quick to adopt, others, usually because of a lack of resources or know-how, lagged behind. Nothing is a better motivator than a crisis, however, and parishes soon learned they had nothing to be afraid of as they became adept at livestreaming, providing their flocks with regular digital updates and offering new ways to gather and collect funds.

We should not take the sacraments for granted.

OSV, page 13

Five lessons learned from a year of pandemic

How has it been a year? On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, saying it was “deeply concerned by the alarming levels of spread and severity.” Two days later, those of us in the United States were under a national emergency. One by one, dioceses began an unprecedented cancellation of all public Masses to slow the spread of the disease.

In the weeks and months that followed, we have lost more than 500,000 people to the disease in the United States alone. During this difficult year, we have learned much about our priorities, about our communities and about what it means to love. Here are five of those lessons.

1. Families need time together.

As the nation shut down, activities were canceled and lives were in limbo, families suddenly found themselves spending a lot of time together.

Forts were built, movie marathons were watched, bread was baked and every night was family dinner. And did we ever need it. All too often, familial relationships take a back seat to any number of “priorities” that consume our lives. But families are the first cell of society and that place where the faith is first shared—and need to be nurtured and strengthened regularly and intentionally, and the pandemic reminded us of that.

2. We need parish communities.

Centered around the Eucharist, parish communities are essential to the Christian life. In the absence of physical
‘Wokeism’ in France: the chickens come home to roost

I will confess that one of the biggest laughs I’ve had in the last several months occurred when I read a recent article in The New York Times by Norimitsu Onishi. In this lengthy piece, the author tells us that the current political and cultural leadership in France, very much including President Emmanuel Macron, is alarmed at the rise of “American-style woke ideology,” which is effectively undermining French society and fomenting violence.

Why, you are wondering, would this produce laughter? Well, what we call “woke” thinking in our American context was almost completely imported from French intellectuals who flourished in the second half of the 20th century. One thinks of Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and perhaps especially of Michel Foucault. The thinking that was originally shared in Parisian coffeehouses eventually made its way into the university system of Europe and then, especially in the ’70s and ’80s of the last century, into the world of American higher education.

Finally, in very recent years, much of this thinking has poured out onto the streets in the form of “wokeism.” In the measure that it is threatening French society — as indeed I think it is — the phrase “the chickens have come home to roost” springs readily to mind.

In order to make this plain, I should like to concentrate on the one French theorist who has had the greatest impact on the formation of the “woke” mentality — namely, Michel Foucault. When I commenced my doctoral studies in Paris in 1989, just five years after Foucault’s death, the philosopher’s intellectual influence was everywhere, from bookshop window to every coffeehouse in the city. It was simply impossible to avoid him.

Foucault is perhaps best characterized as a 20th-century disciple of the influential German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche.

STEPHENS, from page 12

...sionably, the world encounters the Church through her. Often named the most perfect gentleman, God knocked on my door, posing me the question: “Would you go with me?” Yes, of course I would go. Not only because I love adventures, but because I love the One who asked me.

Anne Therese Stephens will give her vow and be consecrated to the Lord Oct. 3, 3 p.m., at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Fort Wayne.

OSV, from page 12

For many weeks, public Masses were canceled and access to the sacraments was greatly limited. Many, especially the vulnerable among us, continue to livestream Masses and make spiritual communions. During this time of absence, we learned not to take the sacraments — especially the Eucharist — for granted, but to always be grateful for these great graces and gifts from God.

5. Charity is our guiding force.

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

OSV, from page March 7 and 14, 2021

For following the Fourth Sunday of Lent, the reading for the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Cycle B: about God’s love for the world. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

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WORD ON FIRE

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A spark of hope manifested itself during the first week of December. The doctors, who thought the COVID-19 was clearing, tried to wean Jason off the ventilator. He lasted two days. Instead of improving, Jason ended up getting hospital-acquired bacterial pneumonia and MRSA that caused his blood to go septic.

“When he went under the second time, he was actually sicker and in worse condition than when he first came in the hospital,” Melissa said. “That’s when we really got worried, when things got really critical, like we might not make it.”

Problems were compounding fast. Jason’s body began shutting down and he went on kidney dialysis full-time. “I remember putting him on a heart-lung bypass machine, but ultimately didn’t do it. Jason’s battle was not a race to try to outlive the virus.”

Determined to put Jason in the Lord’s hands, Melissa gave an update on Facebook that tried to walk a careful line. She wanted to “really let people know how critical he is and how much we need their prayer,” she said, but she also didn’t want to say that he was dying. Privately, the doctor was telling her that even if Jason survived, his body had sustained so much damage that he may be on dialysis and a ventilator for the rest of his life.

For a week, Jason continued to battle, and the doctors continued its vigil. Someone recommended praying the St. Jude Novena, and Melissa leapt at the idea. Starting on Dec. 15, people around the world began praying intensely to the patron saint of lost causes. Melissa herself often led the prayer on FaceTime with Jason. Her intention was very specific: “We need to get over COVID,” she said. “We need a radical change in the course of the virus.”

On the first day of the novena, a friend dropped off a St. Jude relic at the Shanks’ home, and Melissa brought it to the hospital that night. What happened next was nothing short of miraculous.

On the second day of the novena, Melissa got a call from the nurse. Jason finally had tested negative for COVID-19. And the X-ray taken of his chest — the place where the nurses placed the St. Jude relic that night — was the clearest since being admitted to the hospital. As the nine days of the novena continued, Jason’s recovery went from continuous to intermittent. His blood pressure stabilized, and his sedation was eased.

On the final day of the novena, Jason received a tracheotomy — a friend dropped off a St. Jude bypass machine, but ultimately didn’t do it. Jason’s battle was not a race to try to outlive the virus. The yearlong ordeal has changed the perspective as to what’s important and what’s not important, and a lot of daily things that we can get caught up on just go away,” he said. “What’s important, he’s been reminded, is his family.”

As time passed, Jason kept beating milestones. By late January, plans were in the works to enable him to return home. “We never expected anything like this,” Melissa said, when talking of the speed of Jason’s recovery. “I don’t think it could be anything short of a miracle. His healing has happened triple or quadruple [the time] of the best prognosis he was given.”

On Feb. 8, far sooner than any doctors had predicted, Jason went home. He still is faced with limitations and has appointments scheduled with “a long list of specialists.” His left arm wasn’t yet working, nor were some of his fingers. He needed to expand endurance, and his throat needed to heal. He couldn’t yet drive. But he was back with his family.

A ‘reset’ on life

At 44 years of age, Jason has experienced a “really profound intermission … a reset,” Melissa said, “Jason was dead. Machines were keeping him alive for weeks. The fact that he is now walking on his own, breathing on his own … it really has been a profound experience to watch.”

Theologically, I almost refrain from wanting to use the word miraculous, only because obviously the Church would have to verify,” Jason said, but from “everything the medical people are telling me, it seems like there’s no other explanation for the recovery.”

He added: “There was a moment when all of a sudden I was showing recovery, and that moment happens to correspond to when Melissa and people around the world started doing the St. Jude Novena. When I asked the medical people what would explain going from some of the worst X-rays you’ve ever seen to marked improvement, they [told] me it only could be prayer.”

Jason’s kidney doctor refers to his patient as the “Miracle Man,” whose kidneys are back to normal after having shut down. “He really doesn’t have an explanation for how that transpired,” Jason said.

Looking back at his illness and his ongoing recovery, Jason said he feels both grateful and humbled by the experience — and he’s left with a serious sense of responsibility, especially knowing how so many others fighting COVID-19 did not recover. “It makes me wonder, what purpose does God have for me? Why did he spare me when others died?” Jason said. “I don’t want to let him down. I don’t want to let all these people that prayed for me down.”

His priorities, he said, have been refocused, too. “When you almost lose your life, you really move forward. There were not know where life insurance was or where accounts were. She had to take care of everything at home, rally people, get up on Jason’s and medical decisions for me, and be by my side. I believe that saved my life, and frankly, I think it’s for the better. Hopefully it will change our marriage going forward.”

Melissa, too, learned a valuable lesson about the power of marriage and the power of community. “This taught me that … your marriage isn’t necessarily just about yourself — your kids, but actually about the whole Church and your whole community,” she said. “At times in your marriage, you’re going to need support from a big group of people. We wouldn’t have made it through without them.”

One thing is clear: after this ordeal, life for Jason and Melissa will never be the same.

“There’s so much richness both spiritually and just in life experience that we’re going to have to continue to grow from. Melissa said. “This was a horrible, horrible trial, but it has taught me to have a beautiful perspective as to what’s important and what’s not important, and a lot of daily things that we can get caught up on just go away,” he said. “What’s important, he’s been reminded, is his family.”

“In many ways, I feel like I’ve been reborn. Life’s different. It’s almost like a rebirth.”

In the end, the Shanks family is grateful that he had survived, “We never expected anything like this,” Melissa said, when talking of the speed of Jason’s recovery. “I don’t think it could be anything short of a miracle. His healing has happened triple or quadruple [the time] of the best prognosis he was given.”

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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.

St. Patrick Day celebrations
SOUTH BEND — St. Patrick Church and the Knights of Columbus Santa Maria Council 553, 553 E. Washington St., are sponsoring a drive-thru or reserved seating corned beef and cabbage dinner. Dinner tickets are $15; potato soup and soda bread is $6; and desserts are $2. There is Irish entertainment for inside dining. The bar will have adult beverages, pop and water. Seating is limited. Advanced table reservations only for tables of 8 or 4. Tickets may be purchased at the St. Patrick Parish office, 331 S. Scott St. Call Karen Horvath at 574-339-2375 for more information or table reservations.

Belonging: ‘Creating a Sense of Belonging in Your Parish’ Zoom workshop
FORT WAYNE — Belonging: ‘Creating a Sense of Belonging in Your Parish’ Zoom workshop on Disabilities is offering a Zoom workshop on “Creating a Sense of Belonging in Your Parish” on March 21 and 28, 2021 from 3:30-7 p.m. Pre-sale tickets only by calling 574-291-3775. Two convenient drive-thru stations for quick access. $10 meal includes fish, baked potato, coleslaw, bread and butter and homemade dessert. Fish fried by Tyler I.O.O.F. Children’s meal $8 for ages 12 and under includes fish, mac and cheese, applesauce, bread and dessert.

St. Patrick’s K of Council 17446 fish fry
FORT WAYNE — A Lenten fish fry by Dan’s Fish Fry will be Friday, March 19, sponsored by Knights of Columbus. Dinners will be served from the parish pavilion at the corner of S06 E. DeWald and Warsaw streets. Call 260-744-2765 for information. $10 each.

St. Joseph Parish fish fry
ROANOKE — St. Joseph Parish, 1122 N. Main St. This is a drive-thru event from 4:30-7 p.m. The menu will be fried fish, baked potato, applesauce and coleslaw for $10.

Knights of Columbus fish fry
ANGOLA — St. Anthony of Padua K of C, 700 W. Maumee St., will have a carryout only fish fry Friday, March 19, from 5-7 p.m. Cost is $9 per meal. Fried fish, green beans, scalloped potatoes, coleslaw, roll and a brownie. Contact Pati Webster at 260-665-2259 or office@stanthonyangola.com.

Living Stations of the Cross
FORT WAYNE — Living Stations of the Cross for the three Most Precious Blood eighth grade Friday, March 19 from 5:30-6 p.m. in the church, 1529 Barthold St.

McElhaney-Hart
FUNERAL HOME
715 North Jefferson
Huntington
(260) 356-3320
www.mcelhaneyhartfuneralhome.com

Drive-thru Lenten fish fry
SOUTH BEND — Sacred Heart Parish, 63568 Old US 31-S, will host a drive-thru fish fry on Friday, March 19, from 3:30-7 p.m. Pre-sale tickets only by calling 574-291-3775. Two convenient drive-thru stations for quick access. $10 meal includes fish, baked potato, coleslaw, bread and butter and homemade dessert. Fish fried by Tyler I.O.O.F. Children’s meal $8 for ages 12 and under includes fish, mac and cheese, applesauce, bread and dessert.

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The CrossWord
March 7 and 14, 2021

Rest in Peace

Marguerite Ullman-Reith, 83, St. Jude
Huntington
Patricia A. Herber, 82, St. Joseph - Hessen Cassel
Daniel Holom, 87, St. Jude
Joanna M. Jacobs, 76, St. Vincent de Paul
Donald Morgan, 80, St. Vincent de Paul
Veronica Maggiori, 83, St. Bavo

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Bishop Dwenger students reminded of responsibility to serve

BY JOSHUA SCHIPPER

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades celebrated Mass with students at Bishop Dwenger High School in Fort Wayne Wednesday, March 3 and Thursday, March 4, in a pastoral visit that spanned two days.

Due to social distancing and capacity restrictions in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, alternating halves of the student body attended each Mass. During his visit he commended the staff, faculty and students for their perseverance through the global pandemic.

The bishop shared an excerpt with the students of a homily given by Pope St. John Paul II about Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which St. Luke recounted in Thursday's Gospel reading.

“You may think to yourself: ‘Well, I am in high school – I really don’t have much money – later when I have a career, I’ll make money and then I’ll give money to charity.’ No, the Lord is calling you now to be generous, even if you don’t have much money to give.

“I am happy that here at Bishop Dwenger High School, you are seeking to live the message of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus through your service of the poor, your support of Catholic Relief Services and all you do to actively help the needy,” he told them. “This is an essential part of the Gospel of Jesus and the life of His Church. And, at the end of our life, we will be judged accordingly.”

During both visits, in his homily the bishop highlighted the example of St. Katharine Drexel. Her feast day is March 3.

“Today is the feast of St. Katharine Drexel,” he said Wednesday. “She’s one of the richest people to ever be canonized a saint. She is the second American-born saint, canonized in the year 2000.

“Katharine was deeply touched by the poverty she saw, especially in the southern and western U.S. and in cities – the poverty of Native Americans and African Americans. So, when she got her inheritance, she financially supported missions that were serving Native and African Americans. She was concerned for their material and their spiritual well-being.”

Bishop Rhoades told the students that St. Katharine Drexel met with Pope Leo XIII in 1887. She told him about the money she was sending to support the Indian missions, and that that Native American populations needed missionaries to bring Christ to them.

“Pope Leo was quite moved by this request, but then he said something to her that changed her life. He said, ‘Why not, my child, yourself become a missionary?’

“Katharine had thought about entering religious life, perhaps as a contemplative nun, but she never thought about being a missionary,” the bishop said. “To make a long story short, Katharine not only became a religious sister, she founded a new religious congregation, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. She became ‘Mother’ Katharine Drexel.” He noted that she founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament “to share the Gospel and the life of the Eucharist among Native and African Americans.”

“She fought all forms of racism and bigotry through education and social services. Mother Katharine felt a compassionate urgency to help change racial attitudes in the United States. Since she recognized the inequality of education for Native Americans and African Americans at that time, she founded and staffed schools for both throughout the United States.”

Before concluding, the bishop pointed out that St. Katharine Drexel could have lived a very comfortable life of luxury and wealth, but instead chose to take the vow of poverty.

“She chose the oppressed over the ‘well-to-do’ in society. She chose over comfort, to be detached from money and riches, to avoid greed in all its forms and to notice and assist the Lazaruses at our door.”

After Mass Bishop Rhoades told the students he would send them an image of St. Katharine Drexel for the school to display, noting that in a high school where the student body’s nickname is “the Saints,” displaying images canonized saints everywhere — including in the hallways — would be fitting.

The school’s Queen of All Saints Chapel has eight stained-glass windows of saints, the mural over the altar features the patron saints of feeder school and the back of the chapel has the patron saint for each grade level at the high school.