

### Solemnity of St. Joseph

*In honor of saint, plenary  
indulgences granted*

Page 2

### Johnson & Johnson vaccine

*Bishops issue statement*

Page 3

### Disabilities Awareness Month

*Sensory-friendly Masses  
celebrated monthly at St.*

*Elizabeth Ann Seton*

Page 8

### Awaiting his new life

*Catechumen to receive  
sacraments of initiation  
at cathedral*

Page 9

### 'Deus Vult'; 'God wills it'

*Theology and spirituality  
meet modern culture  
in local podcast*

Page 10

# TODAY'S CATHOLIC

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## 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, multi-cultural 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 horrifying blow came in early June 2014 when militants of the Islamic State group launched an



CNS photo/Paul Haring

**Pope Francis participates in a memorial prayer for the victims of a three-year Islamic State offensive at Hosh al-Bieaa (church square) in Mosul, Iraq, March 7. The pope wrapped up a four-day visit to the country March 8.**

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."

"Today, 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 2013, 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



# Bishops address Johnson & Johnson vaccine

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 March 2.

The bishops concluded, however, that “while we should continue to insist that pharmaceutical companies stop using abortion-derived cell lines, given the world-wide suffering that this pandemic is causing, we affirm again 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.”



CNS photo/Harris County Public Health, Handout via Reuters

**Harris County Public Health workers at NRG Stadium in Houston receive 12,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson coronavirus vaccine March 2.**

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 used were derived from fetuses aborted in the 1970s.



## Public schedule of Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

- Sunday, March 14: 10:30 a.m. — Confirmation Mass, St. Dominic Church, Bremen
- Sunday, March 14: 7:30 p.m. — Mass, Holy Cross College, Notre Dame
- Monday, March 15: 10 a.m. — Meeting of the Bishop’s Cabinet, Archbishop Noll Center, Fort Wayne
- Tuesday, March 16: 9 a.m. — Mass for Sacred Heart School Students, Sacred Heart Church, Warsaw
- Tuesday, March 16: 10:30 a.m. — Meeting of the Presbyteral Council, Wyndham Garden Hotel, Warsaw
- Wednesday, March 17: 3 p.m. — Virtual Meeting of Our Sunday Visitor Institute Committee
- Thursday, March 18: 9:30 a.m. — Virtual Meeting of Board of Directors of Our Sunday Visitor
- Thursday, March 18: 4 p.m. — Meeting of Board of Directors of Catholic Charities, Archbishop Noll Center, Fort Wayne
- Friday, March 19: 8 a.m. — Pastoral Visit and Mass, Saint Joseph High School, South Bend

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/3sGUQR>.

### IRAQ, from page 1

suffered devastation at the hands of the Islamic State group. Less than half of the city’s inhabitants have returned since the militants were ousted in 2016.

Mounir Jibrahil, a 61-year-old math teacher, said he came back in 2016, but only finished rebuilding his house last year.

“Now it’s safer here,” he said. “It’s great to see the pope; we never expected him to come to Qaraqosh. Maybe that will help to rebuild the country, finally bringing love and peace.”

The largest crowds of the pope’s March 5-8 visit to Iraq lined the streets in Qaraqosh. While security concerns meant leaving the popemobile in Rome and using an armored Mercedes-Benz in the town, the pope had the window down and the driver going slow enough that the police and security officers on foot did not even have to jog.

Bells pealed to welcome the pope to the Syriac Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception, desecrated during its use as a base by Islamic State fighters, who turned the courtyard into a shooting range.

While much of the city still needs to be rebuilt, Pope Francis said the presence of the jubilant crowds inside and outside the church “shows that terrorism and death never have the last word.”

“The last word belongs to God and to his son, the conqueror of sin and death,” the pope said. “Even amid the ravages of ter-



CNS photo/Vatican Media via Reuters

**Pope Francis signs a book with a message for Syriac Catholics at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance in Baghdad March 5. He met in the church March 5 with the nation’s bishops and a representative group of priests, religious, seminarians and catechists from the Syriac Catholic community and Chaldean Catholic, Armenian Catholic and Latin-rite Catholic parishes.**

rorism and war, we can see, with the eyes of faith, the triumph of life over death.”

With Muslim and Yazidi guests joining Catholics in the church, Pope Francis told the people that “this is the time to restore not just buildings but also the bonds of community that unite communities and families, the young and the old together.”

And he thanked the international organizations, particularly the Catholic organizations, that are helping fund the reconstruction of homes, schools, churches and community halls in the city.

Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan did likewise, specifically mentioning Aid to the Church in Need, the Knights of Columbus and L’Oeuvre d’Orient, a France-based charity.

And, on the eve of International Women’s Day, Pope Francis paid special tribute to Mary — a photo of a decapitated statue of her from Qaraqosh made the news around the world — and to “all the mothers and women of this country, women of courage who continue to give life in spite of wrongs and hurts.”

Solemnity of Saint Joseph

Prayer Service with

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades



In this Year of St. Joseph, join Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades for a prayer service livestreamed from the Chapel of St. Joseph at Saint Joseph High School.



March 19 // 1 p.m.  
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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 Chaldean, a modern form of Aramaic. The Bible readings were in Arabic.

Iraqi President Barham Salih and Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein attended the liturgy, which included a prayer for government officials, asking God to



CNS photo/Paul Haring

**Pope Francis celebrates Mass at St. Joseph Chaldean Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad March 6.**

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 with the strength of the Spirit so that it would courageously witness to Christ and would be for our country a sign of reconciliation and solidarity among all the

children of Abraham, our father in faith.”

In his homily, Pope Francis told the people that while “in the eyes of the world, those with less are discarded, while those with more are privileged,” it is not that way with God, which Jesus made clear in the beatitudes.

Jesus overturned the worldly order of things, he said. “It is no longer the rich that are great, but the poor in spirit; not those who can impose their will on others, but those who are gentle with all; not those acclaimed by the crowds, but those who show mercy to their brother and sisters.”

“The poor, those who mourn, the persecuted are all called blessed,” he said, not the rich and powerful.

The beatitudes “do not ask us to do extraordinary things, feats beyond our abilities,” the pope said. But “they ask for daily witness.”

“The blessed are those who live meekly, who show mercy

wherever they happen to be, who are pure of heart wherever they live,” he said.

The beatitudes are not a call for a moment of heroics, but about imitating Jesus each day, Pope Francis said. “That is how the world is changed: not by power and might, but by the beatitudes.”

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.

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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 one 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](http://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

## INDIANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

BY VICTORIA ARTHUR

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](http://www.usccb.org), and its action center, [www.votervoices.net/USCCB/home](http://www.votervoices.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 the 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](http://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.

*"Advocacy is so important, and everyone can become involved in some way in shaping the outcome of critical issues."*

ANGELA ESPADA,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ICC



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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 support, while acknowledging a lack of support on other issues where we cannot agree with anticipated policies." Archbishop Gomez sent the letter Jan. 20, Inauguration Day. The second recommendation to develop "a document addressed to all of the Catholic faithful on eucharistic coherence" has been "forwarded to the Committee 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 Joe 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, criticized 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

## Minnesota faith leaders pray for peace, justice during Floyd trial



CNS photo/Nicholas Pfosi, Reuters

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.

that taxpayers aren't 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 website about how to bury the statue, with testimonials from people who say it worked for them. A

website, [st-josephstatue.com](http://st-josephstatue.com), is dedicated to the practice, with its mission "to help all believers to sell their houses." Amazon.com sells several statues for the purpose, including, for \$6.72, a "St. Joseph Statue Home Seller Kit" made in the U.S. by veterans. Another seller offers 3-inch, beige, plastic St. Joseph statues in bulk. St. Joseph has long been understood as a patron of the home, but when it comes to burying his statue, don't, said Father Donald Calloway, author of "Consecration to St. Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father." He said the practice "concerns" him.

## Pope: Honor martyrs by remaining faithful, working for a better Iraq

BAGHDAD (CNS) — Visiting a Baghdad cathedral "hallowed by the blood of our brothers and sisters" murdered in a terrorist attack that shook the world, Pope Francis said their sacrifice must

motivate faith and a commitment to working for the common good. The Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance, sometimes referred to as Our Lady of Salvation, is now a shrine to 48 Christian martyrs who died Oct. 31, 2010, when militants belonging to a group linked to al-Qaida laid siege to the church, detonating explosives and shooting people; 48 Catholics — including two priests — died inside and more than 100 people were wounded. Photos of the dead, including a 3-year-old, hang over the altar. According to the Vatican, before the terrorist attack and the 2014-2017 war against Islamic State militants, some 5,000 Syriac Catholic families frequented the cathedral; now, it said, no more than 1,000 families belong to all three Syriac Catholic parishes in the capital. Pope Francis met in the church March 5 with the nation's bishops and a representative group of priests, religious, seminarians and catechists. They came from the Syriac Catholic community, but also Chaldean Catholic, Armenian Catholic and Latin-rite Catholic parishes.

## 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 capacity for Masses even though 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's inclusion of many first-person vignettes of factors that helped and hindered their own vocation makes for compelling reading. "The 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 welcome and adjust to the cultural changes in many aspects of their religious life together," said the report, "Cultural Diversity in Vocations to Religious Life in the United States: A National Study of New Religious Members," issued in February. CARA sent surveys to 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.



Provided by Tim Anderson

Anna Marie Brough, center left, and Mary Catherine Craighead were childhood friends in Logansport who were separated for several years but found each other again in Fort Wayne. They celebrated their 100th birthdays last year with Father Evaristo Olivera, left, and Father Timothy Wrozek, the current and former pastors of their parish, St. Joseph.

## Friends reunited through Catholic parish

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, so saddened were they by what seemed to be a permanent separation and an end to their friendship. 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

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.

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 1953.

"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 commiserating during difficult times.

"We carpoled 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."



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# Sensory-friendly Masses welcoming for Catholics of all abilities

BY JENNIFER BARTON

Imagine not being able to attend Mass as a family, worshipping God together, because the lights, sounds, 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 in 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 can 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 discovered 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



**Father David Voors gives a 1-2 minute homily during a sensory-friendly Masses at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Fort Wayne in February. This special Mass features a setting with lower lights, decreased volume and a shorter length to accommodate those with special needs.**

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 measures 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, is 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, evangelization and communications coordinator at St. Elizabeth. For Trout, it is crucial to reach out to those with mental illness as well, who sometimes



Photos by Jennifer Barton

**On behalf of her 16-year-old son Cole, Angie Profitt helped to bring awareness of sensory-friendly Masses to her parish priest. She feels it is important for her son to be able to participate in and enjoy Mass and for her entire family to attend together.**

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 darkness of the church also creates 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 Hazelett, 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." Hazelett's daughter even began calling the special Mass "her church."

Although Hazelett 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 that in the future.

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 Schleinkofer currently serves as the 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@diocesefwsb.org](mailto:asturm@diocesefwsb.org) or 260-399-1452.



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# 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." 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 into it he broke up with Anna, stating that "at 22, I wasn't ready."

Less than a week went by before he realized his mistake. It was a Sunday morning when he called to tell her he was waiting at the train station in Joso, the closest station to Anna's small town. Though he could neither read nor speak Japanese, he figured out how to make the 2-hour trip to apologize to her.



Jennifer Barton

**Anna and Brandon Ballentine met while he was stationed in Japan in the Navy. Anna's strong Catholic faith and the acceptance he found at her church led him into the Catholic faith; he will receive his sacraments of initiation at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception this year.**

On Sundays, Anna's devoutly Catholic Filipino family went to Mass, ate lunch and had family time. As the patriarch of the family, her father decided that day that "the American" could wait. "My dad said, 'if he waits, then maybe you should talk to him; if he doesn't, let it go,'" Anna said.

"I waited eight hours," Brandon remembered. Finally, Anna's father agreed to pick Brandon up at the train station. She went with him. Her father allowed Brandon to spend the remainder of the day with her, and even to stay overnight on an

uncomfortable foam mat on the floor. The next week, Brandon was allowed to return to the family home and attend Mass with them.

Brandon had been raised in southern Mississippi in a nominally Southern Baptist family, though regular church attendance was not part of his family life. He was never baptized.

"I've been to Catholic churches here and there with friends and family and stuff, but I wasn't really a strong Baptist. I didn't go to church a lot. So when she said they're going to a

Catholic church in Japan, I said 'I gotta see this.' Right away I was amazed; it was a beautiful thing, it really was."

The church in Joso was small and people were spilling out the doors that morning. Many of those in attendance were Filipino migrant workers, though Brandon did see a great number of Japanese people as well. Of the Catholic faith in Japan, Anna explained that "contrary to popular belief that Japan is all Buddhist, it's really not. There are a lot of Catholic communities in different cities, even more in the countryside."

What struck Brandon the most about the Catholic Church was its openness to everyone. "Just the feeling and being there, it felt like I was accepted." He recalled that in the Baptist churches he had experience with, "if you didn't grow up there, you were an outsider."

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 to 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 look 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 developed 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.

*"Just the feeling  
and being there,  
it felt like I was accepted."*

BRANDON BALLENTINE

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# Local podcast uses humor, friendship to explore Catholicism

BY JENNIFER BARTON

What 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 had confidently 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 cata-



Photos by Jennifer Barton

**Born out of personal discussions while in seminary, Father Stephen Felicichia and Deacon Daniel Koehl record their weekly "The Deus Vult Podcast" in what they affectionately call "the Deus Vult Cave."**

lyst 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 unwrapped 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," Father 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 those 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.



OSV/courtesy

Jason Shanks, his wife, Melissa, and their children lived a harrowing three months after the Huntington family was hit by COVID-19. Although the rest of the family recovered fairly quickly, the virus seemed intent on taking Jason's life.

## 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

"He was thinking he would go, get a little oxygen, steroid shots and come home the next day."

— *Melissa Shanks*

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 sacrament of the



OSV/courtesy

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

anointing of the sick to Jason. Before entering Jason's room, the nurse pulled Father Steinacker aside to explain just how dire

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.

### Nothing short of miraculous

Organizations such as OSV, where Jason is employed as president of the OSV Institute for Catholic Innovation, organized weekly rosaries and the delivery of regular meals to the Shanks' home. Local parishes provided supplies and support. A summer babysitter for the family, who happened to test positive for COVID-19 while away at school, returned to Fort Wayne to quarantine with the family, giving 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.

SHANKS, page 14

# I will go, Lord

In my early 20s one of my favorite country songs was Josh Turners' "Would you go with me?" Images of following one's spouse to the ends 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?"

God never leaves the desiring soul unfulfilled. 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 heaven — we will be most blessedly happy because we will share a spousal relationship, mystical in nature, with Our Lord and God. The romantic and lifegiving love found in marriage helps us understand the type of love that God has for us. The gentle caress of a husband, the sweet kiss from a wife, and the adorable smiles of the child, offer us tender reflections of God's love for us.

The life of a priest or a consecrated person complements 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 were the source of grace through which I decided I could open my heart to hear God's invitation to consecrated life — if He desired to offer such an invitation. I had dated men: Why would I not allow God a chance at winning my heart in this 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. He filled 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 notion that it would be a life of loneliness. The life of a consecrated virgin is a full life, because He truly makes Himself present. He behaved as any suitor 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 locutions. 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



## GUEST COMMENTARY

ANNE THERESE STEPHENS

which 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 passively allow themselves to be consecrated at the Holy Mass.

The consecrated virgin living in the world holds a 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 vocation that allows the holiness of the Church to seep into the seams of society bringing grace to those she encounters. She brings the Church into the midst of the world. Almost uncon-

STEPHENS, 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 help 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 whole lot of quality 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 other number of "priorities" that consume our lives. But families — the first cell of society and that place where the faith is first shared — 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

## GUEST COMMENTARY

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.

3. The Church shouldn't be afraid of technology.

Parishes have known for years that digital communication via 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 parishioners 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 pass the collection basket.

4. We should not take the sacraments for granted.

OSV, page 13

# Joy and eternal life are found through Jesus



## THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MSGR. OWEN F. CAMPION

### Fourth Sunday of Lent John 3:14-21

This weekend the Church celebrates "Laetare Sunday," the name drawn from what is the first word in Latin of the Entrance Antiphon, "Rejoice!" Lent is well under way. Easter is not that far in the future.

The reason for rejoicing is not so trivial as to say that the drabness of winter and penance of Lent soon will end. Rather, it is a lesson about life. Indeed, the drabness of earthly life someday will end. The glory of heaven awaits, just as Easter awaits us now.

Once the Church required,

and still allows, celebrants at Mass to wear vestments of a rose color. It is not pink but rose. Pink results from an infusion of white, rose from an infusion of gold. Rose, in today's vestments, is Lenten violet brightened by the sunbeams of the approaching dawn. That dawn, of course, will be the brilliant flash of the Resurrection.

The Second Book of Chronicles supplies this weekend with its first reading. Once Chronicles was in a single volume. As time passed, and as editors and translators had their way, it was separated into two volumes. It has remained as two volumes, now appearing in all modern translations of the Bible.

It is part of the Bible's historical set of volumes. While these volumes tell of the history of God's people, their purpose is not to report history but to reveal developments in the people's religious experience.

This reading recalls the bitter events that led to the chosen people's defeat by the Babylonians and the removal of

many Hebrews — their numbers now unknown — to Babylon. In Babylon, they were not exactly enslaved, or hostages, in the sense that they were not held to prevent rebellion by their kin people back home. But they lived an unhappy life in a foreign and unwelcoming culture.

Using as an instrument Cyrus, the Persian king who overwhelmed Babylonia, God freed these people.

The Letter to the Ephesians is the source of the second reading. It is an eloquent proclamation of God's mercy, declaring that, before Christ, humans were doomed to everlasting death. Then, by salvation in Christ, they are able to attain everlasting life.

St. John's Gospel furnishes the last reading, recalling a moment in the Exodus, that long march by the Hebrews from Egypt, where they had been slaves, to the Promised Land. Wandering across the stark and unforgiving Sinai Peninsula, trials were many, hunger and thirst among them. They lost their way. Another trial was the

presence of venomous snakes.

Again, God supplied relief. He told Moses, the leader, to lift a snake on a staff and to hold the staff high. God promised that all who looked upon the staff with the impaled snake would survive.

The implication of the Crucifixion is clear. The Gospel subtly reminds us that all who look upon the Cross of Jesus with faith will live.

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 have renounced our lives, perfecting our renunciation in the prayer and penance 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

**Sunday:** 2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23

Ps 137:1-6 Eph 2:4-10 Jn 3:14-21

**Monday:** Is 65:17-21 Ps 30:2, 4-6, 11-12a, 13b Jn 4:43-54

**Tuesday:** Ez 47:1-9, 12 Ps 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9 Jn 5:1-16

**Wednesday:** Is 49:8-15 Ps 145:8-9, 13c-14, 17-18 Jn 5:17-30

**Thursday:** Ex 32:7-14 Ps 106:19-23 Jn 5:31-47

**Friday:** 2 Sm 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16 Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29 Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22 Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24a

**Saturday:** Jer 11:18-20 Ps 7:2-3, 9b-12 Jn 7:40-53

# '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 was occasioned by 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 totally 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 rather 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 owlish face looked out from every bookstore window 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.

Famously declaring that God is dead, Nietzsche denied the objectivity of epistemic or moral truth and saw human life as a ruthless power struggle.

Decrying Christianity as a "slave morality," the pathetic attempt of the weak to shame the strong, Nietzsche called for the *Übermensch* (the over-man or the super-man) to assert his will to power. In a universe void of objective moral values, the *Übermensch* is to embody his own values and to declare his dominance.

Foucault thoroughly embraced Nietzsche's atheism and hence denied any objective grounding to moral values. Instead, he interpreted these, whether espoused by Church or secular society, as the means by which powerful people maintained themselves in positions of power. Like Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, Foucault was, accordingly, a master of suspicion, an unmasker of what he took to be pretentious claims to truth.

He unfolded his Nietzschean project in a series of massively influential books from the '60s and '70s: "Madness and Civilization," "The Birth of the Clinic," "The History of Sexuality" and "Discipline and Punish." In all of these texts, he engaged in what he called an intellectual archeology, digging underneath the present consensus on matters such as the nature of madness, sexual morality, the legitimacy of incarceration, etc. in order to show that in previous ages, people entertained very different ideas in all of these arenas. The upshot of this move was to demonstrate that what appeared to be objective moral principles and high-sounding language were, in fact, the ever-shifting games played by the powerful.

Now the legion of Foucault's disciples in the Western academy continued this archeological project after their master's death, looking especially into issues of colonialism, gender, homosexu-



## WORD ON FIRE

BISHOP ROBERT BARRON

ality and race. And what they found in all these areas, unsurprisingly, was a Nietzschean power struggle between oppressors and oppressed. Once awakened to this reality (woke), they endeavored to foment confrontation between the powerless and the powerful, and here the influence of Marx cannot be overlooked; indeed, one of Foucault's greatest mentors was the French Marxist Louis Althusser. Appeals to order, social norms, objective ethical values should be swept aside, for they are but a camouflage for the real social dynamics. *Vive la revolution!*

I trust that much of this is sadly familiar to any American who endured the worst of 2020's social upheaval.

Now, are there real injustices that obtain within our society at all levels? Of course. Should the Church and the political establishment be committed to fighting injustice wherever it appears? Of course. But is this Foucaultian "woke" philosophy, which holds to an antagonistic social theory, which deconstructs language, which denies the objectivity of moral norms, and which sees reality simply as an incessant struggle between oppressor and oppressed, the answer? Of course not. And perhaps we should be encouraged by the French alarm at the emergence of "wokeism" in their midst, for now the very society that produced the intellectual virus might join the fight against it.

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

all of this has required sacrifice, it has been the sacrifice of the cross — one that is made purely out of love. The pandemic, in all of its horror, has been a time for us to grow in the virtue of charity, as we have practice daily how to put others before ourselves.

A global pandemic such as the COVID-19 crises is (we pray) a once-in-a-lifetime event. While it has brought with it great crosses, it has also provided us with a unique time of growth. As we enter into this second year of pandemic and look with hope to its eventual end, let us not forget the lessons we have learned along the way.

**The Our Sunday Visitor Editorial Board** is comprised of Gretchen R. Crowe, Scott P. Richert, Scott Warden and York Young.

## SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for March 14, 2021  
John 3:14-21

Following is a word search based on the Gospel 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.

- |          |          |         |
|----------|----------|---------|
| MOSES    | LIFTED   | SERPENT |
| ETERNAL  | SO LOVED | WORLD   |
| HE GAVE  | BELIEVES | PERISH  |
| SEND     | CONDEMN  | ALREADY |
| THE NAME | VERDICT  | LIGHT   |
| PEOPLE   | DARKNESS | EVIL    |
| HATES    | EXPOSED  | TRUTH   |

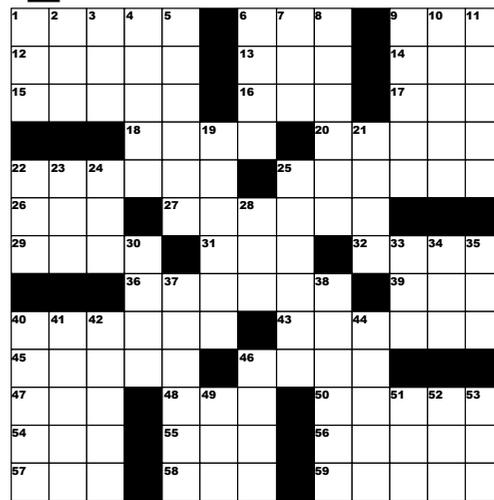
### SO LOVED

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

March 7 and 14, 2021



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**Readings:** Ex 20:1-17; 1Cor 1:22-25; Jn 2:13-25 and 2Chron 36:14-16, 19-23; Eph 2:4-10; Jn 3:14-21

### ACROSS

- 1 "\_\_\_ porridge hot..."
- 6 Exercise place
- 9 Tree
- 12 Forefinger
- 13 Popular pope name
- 14 Also
- 15 Music speed
- 16 Hearing part
- 17 Judge title
- 18 A fox's hole (2 wds.)
- 20 Woke up
- 22 Phonograph needle
- 25 Silken
- 26 "Raven" author
- 27 Frightener
- 29 Mary's mother
- 31 Lyric poem
- 32 Unbroken
- 36 Knows from practice
- 39 Rowing tool
- 40 "\_\_\_ crucified"
- 43 Eagerly
- 45 Churns
- 46 Association (abbr.)
- 47 No room here
- 48 Am. sign language
- 50 Musical composition
- 54 Distress call
- 55 Russian type of boat
- 56 Tree product

- 57 Before (prefix)
- 58 Observe secretly
- 59 Tendency

### DOWN

- 1 Cherry stone
- 2 East northeast
- 3 Admiral (abbr.)
- 4 Forms flower calyx
- 5 Book 2 of Bible
- 6 Dale
- 7 Affirmative
- 8 Mood
- 9 Community's culture
- 10 Stars
- 11 "\_\_\_ changers"
- 19 Travel with
- 21 Don't do on Sabbath
- 22 Resort hotel
- 23 2,000 pounds
- 24 Japanese money
- 25 They look for wisdom
- 28 Advertisements
- 30 "Their works were \_\_\_"
- 33 Billion years
- 34 Friend
- 35 Test
- 37 School writings
- 38 Jesus spent 40 days here
- 40 Crunchy
- 41 "\_\_\_ your father and mother"
- 42 Gargle
- 44 Come on stage
- 46 Partner nation
- 49 Exhaust
- 51 Employ
- 52 Obnoxious noises
- 53 "The \_\_\_ of the age"

### STEPHENS, from page 12

siously, 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! 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. St. Paul tells us that faith, hope and love remain and "the greatest of these is love." At this time of crisis, we have been reminded what it means to care for those around us by maintaining a safe distance, wearing masks and being ever attentive to the most vulnerable. And while

**SHANKS, from page 11**

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. They considered putting him on a heart-lung bypass machine, but ultimately didn't do it. Jason's battle became 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 community 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 Facebook Live. Her intention was very specific. "We need to get over COVID," she said. "We need a radical change in our course right now."

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 nurse had placed the St. Jude relic the night before — was the clearest since being admitted to the hospital. As the nine days of the novena continued, Jason's dialysis 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 step toward being weaned from the ventilator and toward breathing on his own.

"It was a completely different phase," Melissa said. "That novena took us from being sick and in fear of death to the path to recovery. It made a huge difference."

With the virus gone, Melissa



OSV/courtesy

**The yearlong ordeal has changed the perspective of the Shanks family as to what's important and what's not important, Jason said. What's important, he has been reminded, is his family.**

now was able to visit Jason daily, even celebrating New Year's Eve at his bedside.

### Long road to recovery

By early January, what had seemed unthinkable only two weeks before was happening: Jason was well enough to leave the hospital where he had been for a month and a half. He was moved to an acute care hospital in Lima, Ohio, where he continued the long road of recovery. Only just beginning to speak, Jason still could not stand, walk, eat or write on his own. In order to be able to fully breathe on his own, he had to strengthen his muscles.

He was also faced with a huge mental hurdle. One of the strangest and most difficult aspects of his illness was that during Jason's six weeks in sedation, he had created an alternate reality — a dream world that he remembers vividly. When he regained consciousness, he was faced with figuring out what was real and what wasn't.

"I came to figure out that this was the real world, because in this world, there was the ordinary," he told Our Sunday Visitor in an interview in mid-February.

"In my dream world, there wasn't going to the bathroom, there wasn't cooking dinner. There were just all these scenes." He relied heavily on Melissa to help him sort reality from fantasy. But despite his challenges, his recovery continued to steadily move forward.

On Jan. 10, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend celebrated Mass in Jason's room at the Ohio facility — Jason's first Mass since being in the hospital.

"We thanked God for his recovery, and we prayed for

all those harmed by the COVID pandemic. Personally, because of the seriousness of Jason's bout with COVID, I felt much gratitude that he had survived," Bishop Rhoades told Our Sunday Visitor of the experience. "His rebound and recovery was truly an answer to prayer."

On Jan. 11, with assistance, Jason stood up for the first time. On Jan. 19, his dialysis port and tracheal tube were removed.

Around the same time, Father Steinacker texted Jason to see if he could visit and bring him the Eucharist. At Jason's request, the priest read the readings of the day and delivered a short homily. The Gospel passage was the well-known story of how a group of men lowered a paralytic through the roof to lay him at Jesus' feet. And it resonated in Jason's heart.

"I really feel like I was the paralytic being lowered down from the roof," Jason said, recalling that story. "And so for me, the story is really more about those friends that lowered the paralytic down. I think in Scripture we focus so much on the paralytic and Jesus saying, 'rise and walk,' but it's the faith of those friends that frankly saved me. It was the prayer of my wife and friends and colleagues and people from around the world that lowered me through the roof and laid me before Christ. And he said, 'rise and walk.' I really think it was the prayers of many that saved my life."

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 life, 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. It's almost like a rebirth."

"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 where 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, it just puts everything in 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 the story of me in regard to all the last three months is more of a story about my wife and our marriage," he said. "When you get married and take those vows and you stand in front of your family and friends in a church, you say these things ... but it's not until something like this happens that I think you get to really see the face of marriage lived out — the face of what love looks like.

"And for me it was the strength of my wife," he said. "We did not have this planned. We did not have this in the cards. She did not know where life insurance was [or] where accounts were. She had to take care of everything at home, rally people in terms of prayer, make medical decisions for me, and be by my side. I believe that she 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 meaning of marriage and the power of community. "This taught me that ... your marriage isn't necessarily just about yourselves or 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 really going to have to plow through," Melissa said. "This was a horrible, horrible trial, but it has the potential to have a buried treasure chest at the bottom of it that we're going to be going through for the rest of our lives."

Jason returned to work on Monday, Feb. 22. He wears his St. Jude medal every day.

*Gretchen R. Crowe is editorial director for periodicals at OSV.*

# 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](http://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 \$14; 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: Ministry with Persons with Disabilities is offering a Zoom workshop on "Creating a Sense of Belonging in Your Parish" on Tuesday, March 16, from 7-7:30 p.m. A Q&A session will be offered at the end. There is no fee but you must contact Allison Sturm to get the Zoom link at or at 260-399-1452 or [asturm@diocesefwsb.org](mailto:asturm@diocesefwsb.org).

**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 home-made dessert. Fish fried by Tyler I.O.O.F. Children's meal \$5 for ages 12 and under includes fish, mac and cheese, applesauce, bread and dessert.

**St. Peter's K of C 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 506 E. DeWald and Warsaw streets. Call 260-744-2765 for information. \$10 each.

**St. Joseph Parish fish fry**  
ROANOKE — St. Joseph Parish will have a fish fry on Friday, March 19, at the Roanoke American Legion, 1122 N. Main St. This is a drive-thru event from 4:30-7 p.m. The menu will be fried fish, baked potato, apple-sauce 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 Patti Webster at 260-665-2259 or [office@stanthonyangola.com](mailto:office@stanthonyangola.com).

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

## The CrossWord

March 7 and 14, 2021

P	E	A	S	E	G	Y	M	E	L	M	
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## REST IN PEACE

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Fort Wayne</b><br>Thomas Delaney, 80, St. Jude  | Marguerite Ulliman-Reith, 83, St. Jude                         | William Moshak, 86, St. Monica                      |
| Patricia A. Herber, 82, St. Joseph - Hessen Cassel | <b>Huntington</b><br>Patricia Altenhof, 67, SS. Peter and Paul | Bernard Roberts, 89, St. Monica                     |
| Daniel Holom, 87, St. Jude                         | Sister Sharon Rose Eshleman, OLVN, 84, Archbishop Noll Chapel  | Sam Violi, 102, St. Monica                          |
| Joanna M. Jacobs, 76, St. Vincent de Paul          | <b>Mishawaka</b><br>Paul LaCluyze, 76, St. Bavo                | <b>South Bend</b><br>Joshua D. Berzai, 40, St. Jude |
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# Bishop Dwenger students reminded of responsibility to serve

BY JOSHUA SCHIPPER

**B**ishop 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 Jesus Christ over comfort. Whatever our personal circumstances, that's what we're called to do as disciples of Jesus — to choose Christ over comfort, to be detached from money and riches, to avoid greed in all its forms and to



Photos by Joshua Schipper

**High schoolers, just like all Catholics, are called to be generous with their time and talent, Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades told Bishop Dwenger students March 3 and 4 during a pastoral visit to the Fort Wayne high school.**



**Celebrating Mass at the school on the feast day of St. Katharine Drexel, March 3, with concelebrants chaplains Father David Huneck and Father Jay Horning, the bishop explained that St. Katharine left a life of luxury to care for the poor and to become a missionary.**

**A Bishop Dwenger student celebrates Mass with the bishop March 4.**



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.