Faith central at Knights of Columbus convention

**BY NICK HANKOFF**

For the first time in 120 years, the Knights of Columbus moved its state convention out of Indianapolis this year. A Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend chapter took home a faith award, and Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades raised up in faith the hearts of those in attendance during a memorial Mass celebrated Saturday at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.


Moderate wind and rain marked the three days of the 120th Annual Meeting of the Indiana State Council of the Knights of Columbus at Grand Wayne Center in downtown Fort Wayne, April 9-11. The atmosphere inside the convention, however, was warm. From registration to dinner events, the Knights, along with family and friends, were visibly proud and appreciative to be gathering together, many donning Knights of Columbus-themed masks.

Bishop Rhoades shared his gratitude to be able to be with the attendees at the cathedral, just a short walk away, during the eucharistic liturgy.

The bishop spoke in his homily about what inspired Knights of Columbus founder Father Michael McGivney and what inspires the Knights of Columbus to live the charity that is at the heart of the Christian life.

“The answer is ‘our faith,’” he declared. “The charitable works of the Knights and of the Church are inspired by our faith in Jesus and His Resurrection.”

He turned to the Gospel reading on Thomas the Apostle initially doubting Christ’s resurrection before proclaiming his faith boldly.

“Our Lord in His mercy invited Thomas to put his finger in the wounds in His hands and to put his hand in the wound in His side. After he did so, St. Thomas made what is probably the greatest statement of faith in the whole New Testament. He said: ‘My Lord and my God.’

“Since I was a child, I was taught by my mother to say those words silently in my heart at every Mass when the priest holds up the Sacred Host at the consecration, I still do.”

Proclamation of the faith was not only central to the bishop’s homily but also to an award presented to a local council of the Knights during the convention.

The Warsaw Knights Council No. 4511 won a state service award for best faith program of the year. The award was in recognition of four separate prayer rails that took place at the parish from October through January.

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**TODAY’S CATHOLIC**

Statue, plaza dedicated to St. Katharina Kasper — ‘woman of the beatitudes’

**BY DENISE FEDOROW**

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades presided over the dedication and blessing of a bronze statue of St. Katharina Kasper, foundress of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ congregation, on the grounds of the motherhouse at Donaldson April 9.

Prior to the unveiling and blessing, Sister Joetta Huelsmann, PHJC provincial, welcomed everyone. “As we bless St. Katharina’s statue, I pray that hopefully this will be the beginning of many people coming to pray with her and also model her life and spirit,” she said. “We have much to be grateful for.”

Led by Geoff Williams, director of ecological services, several people offered hopes for the dedication, including “that when we look at the statue of St. Katharina Kasper who has followed Christ faithfully, we will be motivated to do the same,” Williams said.

The Gospel from Matthew 5:1-12a — the beatitudes — was proclaimed by Father Michael Okoro. Sister Margaret Anne Henss introduced the committee for the statue, comprised of herself, Sister Marlene Ann Lama and Sister Connie Bach. She thanked Sister Marlene Ann Lama and Sister Connie Bach. She thanked

**BLESSING, page 2**

**TODAYSCATHOLIC.org**

Fostering families, faith and healing at the diocese’s new Foster Care Hope Office
The statue was unveiled, and Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades offered a blessing.

"Let us, today, we pray for you for the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on St. Katharina Kasper, in whose honor we dedicate this statue and declare this plaza to be a holy place of prayer and reflection," he said. "May we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, as we go before us the example of St. Katharina. May we proclaim Christ’s Gospel by word and deed like St. Katharina and so living our convictions, daily, expand ourselves in joyful service. May we, as followers of the charisms of St. Katharina, also proclaim the word of God powerfully, live simply and serve joyfully. May we always strive to the values of dignity and respect of all, openness to the Spirit, community and simplicity in our lives."

He also asked for a blessing on the plaza created for the statue, "nestled in this forest as holy ground upon which our Putawatomi sisters and brothers originally walked and where St. Katharina’s image now rests. Grant that all who walk on this holy ground who in the presence of this statue offer devotion to St. Katharina, may by her merits and intercessions obtain your grace in this life and everlasting glory in the life to come."

"I love this statue. This will be a great place for people to come," he later said. He thanked the artist and architect for the holy work they had done.

"All saints were men and women of the Beatitudes" and the beatitudes were a "self-portrait of Jesus," the bishop said. "Those who live the beatitudes are putting on the heart and mind of Jesus. "That’s what Mother Mary Katharina Kasper did and that’s why she’s now St. Katharina Kasper."

He said St. Katharina always carried the box, “imitation of Christ” by Thomas a Kempis, meditating on the passages and absorbing the teaching and that it helped her to imitate Christ. He said while all the beatitudes could apply to St. Katharina, “Three of the Beatitudes particularly come to mind when I think of Mother Mary Katharina… Those are the blessings of the poor in spirit, the meek and the pure of heart. “She was incredibly humble and appropriately took the name for the congregation the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ."

He said even though she was the leader of the congregation, she mopped floors, made beds and bandaged wounds. “That humble poverty of spirit stayed with her even as the congregation grew, and despite their material poverty being very real. Bishop Rhoades said the pure of heart were those who “loved God with undivided allegiance and single-handed pursuit of God’s will — this was St. Katharina’s inner life.”

He concluded, “She was a woman of the Beatitudes. I pray that everyone who passes by this statue or who prays in this plaza will be inspired by her example. May she intercede for all of us and help us live the Beatitudes in imitation of Jesus and one day be with her and all the saints in peace and joy in heaven.”

"Libby Rigs, director of PHJC associates, and Loretta Peters, Fiat Spiritus Community, offered intercessory prayers asking the Lord for the graces of St. Katharina Kasper including her attentive, listening heart, her openness to be moved by the Spirit, her constant seeking of God’s will, her sensitivity and compassion in ministry, her boldness to stand against mistreatment and injustice and her bold living of humility."

The closing song, "Poor Handmaid’s Anthem," was written by Sister Colleen Bach and accompanied by handbells.

Afterward, Sister Connie was asked what the day meant to her. "It’s thrilling. We started working on this right after her canonization. It’s an opportunity to show our gratitude to Sister Katharina from all of us who follow in her footsteps and her charisms," she said. “It feels like an extension of her canonization in Rome.”

A saint’s life: Germany and the U.S.

Katharina Kasper was born on May 26, 1820, in Dernbach, Germany, the eighth child of a peasant farmer and his wife. The domestic conditions in which she grew up gave her empathy for the plight of the poor, especially the rural poor. Because of these experiences she felt inspired by God to help them and awakened in her the desire to devote herself entirely to serving them.

On Aug. 15, 1851, Katharina and four companions received the religious habit and professed their first vows. This was the birth of the Congregation of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. Katharina, who was to lead the congregation, was given the name Mary.

The congregation grew quickly and expanded its ministries and activities to other countries and regions. On June 1, 1870, the Vatican endorsed and confirmed the congregation and Katharina became a member of the congregation. Pope Leo XIII gave the final approval of its constitution May 21, 1890.

Katharina Kasper died Feb. 2, 1898, and at the time of her death, 1,725 sisters belonged to the congregation, ministering in Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, England and the Czech Republic. The work that the sisters do includes pastoral care, health care, education and care of the elderly, children, disabled and refugees.

The beatification of Katharina took place in Rome. Pope Paul VI gave her the title of “Blessed” on April 16, 1978. The community received the support of the Diocese of Limburg, Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartzvan Elst, for the cause of canonization and paved the way via a private audience with Pope Benedict XVI in February 2012. On March 6, 2018, Pope Francis recognized the healing miracle caused by the Saint from all of us who follow in her footsteps and her charisms, canonized her in Rome. The name Pope Francis bestowed on her at the canonization is St. Katharina Kasper, foundress of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.

In 1868, Bishop John H. Luers requested the help of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ to minister to the German immigrants in the area. Eight Poor Handmaids came to Fort Wayne, and their service in the Fort Wayne-South Bend diocese grew. Current areas of ministry include Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm, Ancilla College, MoonTree Studios, Catherine Kasper Life Center and Lindenwood Retreat & Conference Center in Donaldson — all in Donaldson, along with the Motherhouse, St. Michael School, Plymouth; PHJC Volunteers Homeless Outreach; Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center, Plymouth; St. Pius X School, Granger; St. Albert School, South Bend; Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center, Mishawaka; and St. Joseph Community Health Foundation.

In November, the Vatican gave permission for the official inscription of St. Katharina’s feast day on Feb. 1 to be included in the Proper Calendar of the diocese as an optional memorial. The day is now observed in all German-speaking dioceses with a special Mass and a saint with a connection to the Fort Wayne-South Bend diocese to be inscribed into the proper calendar. Previously St. Mother Theodore Guerin, who founded the first Catholic schools in the diocese, and Blessed Solanus Casey were also inscribed.
Down syndrome advocate promotes employment for ‘friends like me’

**BY NATALIE HOEFER**

NEW ALBANY, Ind. (CNS) — Mark Hublar is a people person. The fact radiates in his greeting — the friendly smile, the extended hand, the confident eye contact and the chatter.

“There are two things you should know about me,” said Hublar, 56. “I love people and I love to talk.”

The member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany combined those traits to develop a career he is passionate about: as a motivational speaker advocating for employment of those with disabilities.

Which leads to a third fact about him that people should know: Hublar has Down syndrome.

“He never let his disability hold him back,” said Mark’s brother and fellow parishioner, Greg Hublar. “Everything he’s accomplished is a miracle.”

Accomplishments like graduating from high school, living and supporting himself independently, earning a degree in public speaking and, with the help of his family, creating his own business called Mark Hublar Speaks.

His job has taken him around the country. He has spoken with corporate and nonprofit leaders, employers, and members of a congressional committee in Washington. He has met a long list of politicians, athletes and celebrities.

“I want to see my people go into communities and get real jobs with real pay, equal pay,” Mark said.

He also wants people to know that those with and without disabilities “are different, but the same.”

Mark does not take his mission lightly. “God wants me to work for him,” he said. “God wants me to be a speaker for him.”

It’s a role made possible through faith, a loving family — and a crucial decision Mark’s parents made after his birth.

When Mark was born in 1964, his parents were told he had Down syndrome. “I didn’t even know he had Down syndrome until I was in fifth grade,” Greg told The Criterion, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. “One day later, Mark heard his father swear and told him: ‘You know God can hear every word you say. It’s not worth it.’”

Al recalled, saying he knew then that his prayer had been answered.

The Hublars decided to raise Mark no differently than their toddler, Mike, and two other sons, Greg and Todd, born after Mark.

“He had his chores like us, he was expected to behave,” said Greg, 52. “There were no special passes because he had a disability.”

“As we played hard with him as we did each other,” from tackle football to wrestling to “parachuting” from a window — one of many tales shared by Greg in his recently published book, “A Miracle Named Mark” — about his brother’s challenges and accomplishments.

“Because of the way we were raised, I didn’t even know he had Down syndrome until I was in fifth grade,” Greg told The Criterion, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. “Mark wanted to do everything his brothers did. Being ‘just like my brothers’ became a source of motivation that drove him to graduate from high school, find work and live on his own.”

In 2016, he earned a three-year degree in public speaking from a community college. A series of unrelated events that followed led to Mark’s true calling.

First, he was asked to speak about having Down syndrome with students at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School during Disabilities Awareness Week, and he was a natural.

A few years later, Mark took a job stocking shelves at Walmart. After only three months, Mark’s boss called Al to say the job wasn’t working out — Mark spent too much time talking.

“It was only kidding when I asked him, ‘Well, can you find him a job where he gets paid to talk?’” Al recalled asking, and the boss said yes.

Mark became a Walmart greeter and was so good at this job for five years local TV news station did a story on him when he had to retire for health reasons.

At one point during this time, his dad asked Mark what he thought his purpose was in life. His son thought about this and about two weeks later said it was “to help friends like me to have a full life and real jobs.”

But it would still be years before Mark’s gifts of public speaking and love of people would merge into his career as an advocate and public speaker. Once this happened, he was on a mission to share his message that those with disabilities and those without “may be different, but we’re the same.”

Since 2012, Mark has helped with initiatives led by The Arc of Indiana. The mission on its website aligns with his: to help “all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities realize their goals of living, learning, working and fully participating in the community.”

Susan Rinne heard one of Mark’s talks and was impressed years before she became co-director of Indianapolis-based group called Work to Include.

When the group launched in 2018 to promote employment for people in Indiana with disabilities, Rinne remembered Mark and hired him.

She supports him as he leads a team helping local people with disabilities identify their strengths. He and his team reach out to employers to share information about the benefits of hiring those with disabilities and to help them find such workers.

He is passionate about his vision for “my friends” who, like him, have some form of disability and wants people to understand that people with disabilities can be anything they want.

Al is a member of his son’s Work to Include team. He says after parents of children with Down syndrome hear Mark speak, they are more confident about what their children could do.

Mark’s recognition for what he has done is demonstrated in the long list of scholarships, awards and accolades he has received.

His face is on the Work to Include billboards in southern Indiana and was on the big screen in New York City’s Time’s Square, where his was one of 500 photos chosen from 3,000 worldwide submissions to appear as part of the National Down Syndrome Society’s annual video presentation in 2019.

But fame has not gone to his head. For him, it’s all part of his work to promote employment for those with disabilities and to spread his message of “different, but the same.”

“God is happy with what I’m doing,” he said, adding: “He works in heaven and I work down here.”

**Editor’s Note:** A Miracle Named Mark” costs $20, 10% of which is donated to a disabilities-related charity the purchaser selects from list. To purchase a copy, go to www.markhublarspeaks.com.

Hoefer is a staff writer at The Criterion, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.
Catholic educators share unexpected lessons of teaching in pandemic

BY CAROL ZIMMERMANN

WASHINGTON (CNS) — No one has to tell Catholic school teachers how different this past year has been.

At the start of the pandemic last spring, most Catholic schools adapted to online schooling and continued that way until the end of the school year.

At the start of this school year, many of these schools across the country reopened in person, with multiple safety protocols in place, or they operated under a hybrid model with some students attending classes in person and other students in class virtually.

Pandemic learning impacted Catholic preschools to high schools across the country and its success seemed to hinge primarily on the flexibility of students and teachers alike.

That’s why it’s not surprising the topic of pandemic learning was a theme of so many of the workshops offered during this year’s annual National Catholic Educational Association convention April 6-8. Even the convention, which often draws thousands of participants, was virtual for the second year in a row, due to pandemic restrictions.

At the start of the online convention with participants joining in from all 50 states, retired Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas of Tucson, Arizona, who is chairman of NCEA’s board of directors, thanked Catholic educators in a video message for how they “stepped up in the midst of the pandemic” saying their enthusiasm and creativity enabled many schools to keep going.

Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, similarly thanked Catholic educators in an April 7 message to convention participants where he noted the challenges of the past year and thanked teachers and principals for their response, which he said was a “testimony to your faith.”

Workshops focused on best practices in the pandemic, remote assessment of students, plans for students not returning next year and learning gaps during COVID-19.

One April 6 workshop highlighted what schools might keep from their virtual learning experiences and what they might not.

“We’ve had a year,” said presenter Michelle Lia, co-director of the Greeley Center for Catholic Education at Loyola University Chicago, reminding educators they likely had some “some amazing Hail Mary saves” and many opportunities to think on their feet.

When she invited the online participants to respond in the chat section with a few words to describe what they learned in the past year, responses included “flexibility” (several times), “patience,” “grace,” “humor” and “adaptability.”

One educator said they had been stretched this year, another said they were tried.

Lia said she has heard a fair amount of criticism from students and parents about busywork homework during the pandemic and said that going forward, “Google-able” homework, where students can find the answers online, should be eliminated.

But she also noted: “Technology is here to stay and it can be our friend,” noting students might be able to attend school virtually if they have a long illness and that parent-teacher conferences, which seemed to work better on Zoom, also might continue.

Teaching students who are virtually learning requires teachers to be very clear about their expectations, which of course should also continue, Lia said.

Another April 6 workshop on pandemic learning was led by a panel of teachers and principals from the Chicago Archdiocese and Julie Ramski, director of early childhood education for the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Office of Catholic Schools.

Ramski said when Chicago Cardinal Blase J. Cupich announced last summer that Catholic schools would reopen in person in the fall, this initially caused a lot of anxiety.

She said she spent a lot of time doing her own research and talking to teachers to reassure them they could do this.

“I kept saying, ‘If you’re all right, the kids will be all right,’” she said, adding she was convinced the best place for these students was to be in the classroom, with schools following numerous safety protocols.

The preschool teachers and elementary school principals told their online audience, many of whom went through much of the same experience, about keeping young students socially distanced and masked.

For preschoolers, it was important that they had more personal space and weren’t sharing crayons or other supplies, something that will continue in the future, these teachers said.

They also said they will likely continue Zoom parent-teacher conferences as these were convenient for both groups and they would absolutely continue with the safety protocols already in place, especially the daily cleaning of classroom surfaces.

“We are going to keep up (these practices) for the coming school year,” said Denise Spels, principal of St. Ethelreda School in Chicago, noting that if you...
School Choice Scholarship Program: ‘Still more work to do’

Exactly 10 years after the passage of groundbreaking legislation that made Indiana a national leader in school choice, the Statehouse is in the spotlight again as lawmakers weigh the first major expansion to the program since 2011.

More than a quarter million Hoosier students have benefited from Indiana’s Choice Scholarship Program, more commonly known as the voucher program, since it was signed into law by then-Gov. Mitch Daniels in the spring of 2011. The current legislation under review would expand eligibility to allow even more families to choose the educational model that’s best for their children — a move that advocates say is critical to extend educational opportunities to as many Hoosier families as possible.

As he was a decade ago, the lawmaker behind the current effort is Rep. Bob Behning, R-Indianapolis, chairman of the House Education Committee.

“The whole focus on what we did in 2011 was to put kids first,” Behning said. “That is not a condemnation of our traditional educational model. It’s just an acknowledgement that people are different, and as with everything else in life, choices are important. We have excellent schools across the state, but it is nearly impossible for them to meet every unique need of every child.

As Indiana marks a decade of school choice and increased opportunities, legislation would expand the innovative program to more families.

BY VICTORIA ARTHUR

While many Hoosier families already enjoy the flexibilities of Indiana’s school choice program, there is still a large group shut out of these opportunities,” Behning added. “When we started looking at the current eligibility requirements, we found a lot of hardworking families still could not send their child to the school of their choice.”

Behning’s proposed legislation, House Bill 1005, would help middle and upper-middle-class families still struggling to pay for private school tuition by raising the financial eligibility requirements for vouchers. Among other provisions, it also would increase the scholarship amount that a voucher student receives in a school year and create the Indiana Education Scholarship Account, which would provide eligible families funding to directly pay for tuition or other education-related expenses.

The bill, which passed out of the House, was not heard in committee in the Senate. Instead, efforts to expand school choice are now focused on negotiations over the state budget. The House version of the budget included all of the choice language found in Behning’s bill. Meanwhile, the recently released Senate version of the budget contained a scaled-down version of the expansions.

Choice advocates are hopeful that the final budget, through conference committee negotiations, will more closely resemble the House’s version of the choice expansions. Two of the strongest supporters of these efforts are the Indiana Catholic Conference and the Indiana Non-Public Education Association — two organizations that were instrumental in the creation and passage of the original measure 10 years ago.

“Approximately 273,000 Hoosier students have been blessed with the ability to make an educational choice because of the Choice Scholarship legislation enacted in 2011, and I have been privileged to directly hear the life-changing stories shared by many of those families,” said John Elcesser, executive director of the INPEA, which represents the state’s more than 400 non-public schools, including Indiana’s 175 Catholic schools.

“It is heartening that both the Indiana House and Senate too see the value of providing more educational opportunities as evidenced in their budget commitments to expand choice in Indiana.

“The question that remains during the final days of the 2021 General Assembly session is how many more families will be provided that same opportunity? We hope our legislators will be bold in that decision by provid-
**Five priests, two nuns, three laypeople kid-napped in Haiti**

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)** — The latest victims of rampant kidnappings in Haiti are five priests, two nuns and three laypeople who were abducted together on their way to a parish near the capital of Port-au-Prince early April 11. Kidnapping cases happen almost daily in Haiti, which has been experiencing increasing insecurity, political turmoil and gang violence; it is the poorest country in the Americas. "This new case is a reflection of the collapse of the security apparatus of the state and the country. No one seems to be safe anymore," Redemptorist Father Renold Antoine told Fides, the news agency of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, April 12. "Outlawed groups continue to sow fear and sadness in the hearts of the population," he said. Father Ludger Mazzile, secretary of the Haitian bishops' conference, told Agence France Presse April 12 that the kidnappers had demanded a ransom of $1 million for the group's release. The Conference of Haitian Religious issued a statement expressing its "deep regret" over the latest kidnapping but also its "anger at the inhumane situation we have been going through for more than a decade." Fides reported kidnappings by armed gangs have increased over the past several months.

**Holocaust’s righteou-s need to be remembered, too, survivor’s son says**

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As the number of Holocaust survivors continues to dwindle, so too are those “righteous Gentiles” who saved Jews who were almost certain to perish, according to the son of one such survivor.

"On my father’s side, he and his parents and his brother all survived in Italy because of the kindness and bravery and human decency of the people who saved them," said Jonathan Sacerdoti, a London-based writer and broadcast journalist, in an April 9 phone interview with Catholic News Service. Three of those who protected Sacerdoti’s father, uncle and grandparents have been recognized by Yad Vashem, Israel’s official memorial to Holocaust victims, as Righteous Among the Nations. They include the mother superior of a convent who took in the boys, ages 5 and 3 in 1943, and their mother, as well as the priests who arranged for new hiding places in Italy when the Nazis got too close for comfort. “It was a traumatic experi-ence, but one that saved them,” Sacerdoti told CNS. He wrote an essay, “How should we honor the ‘angels of the Holocaust’ when they’re gone?” for Spectator magazine. The article was posted April 8, recognized in Israel as Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day. Sacerdoti wrote that the number of surviv-ing Righteous Among the Nations has shrunk to 193, as two died during Holy Week.

**Canadian bishops: Assisted suicide law perilous for disabled, mentally ill**

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (CNS) — Canada’s Catholic bishops said the possible pressures the country’s new assisted suicide law will place on Canadians with mental illness or disabilities are “all too real, perilous and poten-tially destructive.” In a statement April 8, the Canadian Conference Catholic Bishops denounced the expansion of “medical assistance in dying” — or MAID, as it is known — to those who are not near death. They called on people of faith to pray and to lobby elected officials about the issue. The statement, signed by Archbishop Richard Gagnon, CCCB presi-dent, said: “Our position remains unequivocal. Euthanasia and assisted suicide constitute the deliberate killing of human life in violation of God’s command-ments, they erode our shared dign-ity by failing to see, to accept and to accompany those suffer-ing and dying. Furthermore, they undermine the fundamental duty we have to take care of the weak-est and most vulnerable mem-bers of society.” Canada’s Senate approved Bill C-7 March 17, days after it was passed by the House of Commons. The new law expands access to assisted suici-de to those whose death is not “reasonably foreseeable,” includ-ing the mentally ill, although that provision will not be enshrined in law for two years to allow a review to establish preconditions and safeguards. The new law also allows people to make advance requests for euthanasia if they fear losing the ability to make that decision later in life.

**Scholar urges Catholics to have courage to speak out against Equality Act**

PHOENIX (CNS) — Catholic scholar and legal expert Ryan T. Anderson warned that if the Equality Act is passed by the Senate and signed into law, it would significantly impact women’s privacy and safe-ty, genuine equality, medical prac-tices and religious liberty. It also would negatively affect Catholic schools, shelters, charities and hospitals, not to mention individ-ual educators, social workers and medical professionals who practice their faith, Anderson said. He made the remarks in the key-note address for the recent annual virtual fundraiser for the Diocese of Phoenix’s John Paul II Resource Center for the Body and Culture. The center focuses on forming youth, equipping adult leaders and evangelizing the cul-ture through St. John Paul II’s leaders and evangelizing the cul-ture through St. John Paul II’s teaching on human sexuality and the body. The Equality Act would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, public education, federal funding, the credit system and jury duty. On Feb. 28, the U.S. House passed the bill in a 224-206 vote. Now it will be taken up by the Senate. Anderson, who is president of the Washington think tank Ethics and Public Policy Center, said the bill also would force access to women’s only locker rooms, restrooms and shelters to anybody who identi-fies as a woman, regardless of biological difference.

**Cardinal leads Catholics in mourning death of Prince Philip**

Children place flowers outside England’s Windsor Castle April 9, after Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, died that day at age 99. Cardinal Vincent Nichols of Westminster led Catholics of England and Wales in mourning the death of the husband of Queen Elizabeth II. The president of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales issued a statement April 9 posted on the website of the English and Welsh bishops’ conference. “At this moment of sadness and loss, I pray for the repose of the soul of Prince Philip, Her Majesty the Queen’s faithful and loyal husband,” he said.

**Saints accompany, intercede for Christians in prayer, pope says**

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Christians are never alone in prayer but instead are accompanied by myriad saints who protect them sending us their intercession, Pope Francis said. Whenever men or women open their hearts to God, they will always be in the “com-partment” of numerous and recog-nized saints who pray with us and who intercede for us as older brothers and sisters who have preceded us on this same human adventure,” the pope said April 7 during his weekly general audience. Continuing his series of talks on prayer, the pope reflected on the connection between prayer and the communion of saints who are “not far from us” and are a reminder of Jesus Christ because they have also “walked the path of life” as Christians. “In the Church, there is no mourning that remains solitary, no tear that is shed in oblivion, because every-thing breathes and participates in a common grace,” he said. The tradition of having graveyards around churches is a sign of that sharing, he said. It is “as if to say that every Eucharist is attended in some way by those who have preceded us.” Then, “our par-ents and grandparents, our god-fathers and godmothers, our cat-chists and other educators,” who have not yet transmitted faith but also “the way of praying.”

**Pope appoints bishop for Duluth, accepts resignation of New York auxiliary**

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Pope Francis has appointed Father Daniel J. Felton, a priest of the Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, and vicar general of Duluth, Minnesota, the new bishop of Duluth. The pope also has accepted the resig-nation of Auxiliary Bishop John J. O’Hara of New York. He is 72, the age at which canon law requires a bishop to turn in his resignation to the pope. The changes were announced in Washington March 2 by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio. A native of Virginia, Bishop-designate Felton, 66, also is moderator of the curia for the Green Bay Diocese. He was ordained a priest for the diocese June 13, 1981. His episco-pal consecration and installation as Duluth’s 10th bishop is scheduled for May 20. “We are grateful to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for selecting me as the next bishop of Duluth for his joyful Easter season,” said Father James Bissonette, Duluth’s dioc-esan administrator, in an April 7 statement. The diocese looks for-ward to getting to know Bishop-designate Felton, he said, “and beginning this new chapter in our walk of faith together under his leadership as our next shepherd.”

TODAY’S CATHOLIC

April 18, 2021
Knights of Columbus open critical conversation for parents on child sex abuse

Most parents operate under a naive belief their family is ‘immune’ from sex abuse - but without proper awareness, experts indicate they could actually be the most vulnerable.

BY PETER JESSERER SMITH

Jeff and his wife, Judy, thought they had an invincible circle of protection around their children to keep them safe from sexual abuse. A Knights of Columbus family in New Haven, Connecticut, with a strong Catholic faith, they lived in a secure, upscale neighborhood, had solid relationships with their children, and kept a close eye on their children’s friends and told them to be wary of strangers.

But like most parents in the U.S., Jeff and Judy were “naive.” They diligently looked for potential perpetrators of sexual abuse in all the places except the circles where experts say they were most likely to be found: trusted friends and family.

“It was so hard to think that someone we loved so dearly, and trusted so much, would hurt our child and strip his innocence,” Judy said in a video published by the Knights of Columbus called “Protecting Our Children: A Family’s Response to Sexual Abuse.” The video explains this Catholic family’s personal and practical account of how they addressed their son’s abuse by a close family friend and includes expertise outlining the actual scope and scale of the risks of sexual abuse to children that families face today, as well as practical steps for how to keep children safe or respond if they are harmed.

“This is not a Catholic Church problem,” explained Jeff. “This is a societal issue, this is a heart issue, and our hope is that our families face today, as well as their parents with a less serious child that they can talk to you,” she said.

Unfortunately, how parents respond to these situations has played a major role in why child sex abuse is under-reported. Many parents handle these situations poorly because they’re caught in the middle” between relationships they care about.

“They have to be prevented from having those opportunities, and they have to get treatment,” she said.

Perpetrators and grooming

Experts say parents can make a profound difference for prevention in two ways: teaching healthy sexuality and boundaries and enforcing boundaries, and recognizing the signs of potential grooming.

“Generally, with perpetrators, they thrive in secrecy and on their reputation,” Hartvigsen said.

Resources to get abused children the help they need

Applewhite said parents who discover one of their children or one of someone else’s children has committed child sexual abuse need to seek help from a child advocacy center, so the victim child can be safe from repeat victimization and treated and so children who are perpetrators can get the help they need.

“The vast majority of juveniles can be successfully treated never to do that again,” Applewhite said. If they do that, parents have every reason to be “optimistic” about the outcomes for their children.

But she said if parents fail to act, it increases the risk a child perpetrator will have a “deviant arousal pattern for life” as an adult. At present, she said, there is no known successful way to cure an adult.

“In nine out of 10 cases, parents will know the person who sexually abused their child, explained Matthew Hartvigsen, director of outreach at Defending Innocence, a project of the Younique Foundation, which helps equip parents with prevention tools and graphics to have the right conversation with their children about sex abuse.

You want to be looking closely at what we call ‘the circle of trust,’” he told the Register. He said that is a “hard transition” for parents to make, but they said parents cannot afford to keep themselves in the dark.

“The risk is still there, whether you’re acknowledging or understanding where it comes from,” he said.

The dangers are not just coming from trusted adults, but other children, as well. Ric Peeler, Defending Innocence’s director of awareness, explained the perpetrator may be within the same family or the older sibling of a child’s friend, or another child the same age.

“It’s often another minor that’s actually the perpetrator,” Peeler said.

“Parents need to be aware of potential abuse symptoms, such as sudden changes in behavior, inexplicable terror and fear in the presence of a particular person, or significant, intense separation anxiety. They also need parents to realize that it is “common” for perpetrators to abuse a child right under their nose and in their presence, such as on a couch covered by a blanket, in a dark movie theater or in the pool. It is a common tactic to deceive the child that their parents are somehow okay with the abuse or to convince the parents that the abuse was impossible to notice.

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Applewhite explained that child sexual abuse is under-reported because only one out of three children will ever disclose sexual abuse. The dynamics of sexual abuse — including involuntary sexual response to abuse — are confusing for a child to process. One thing a child will do before attempting to disclose, Applewhite explained, is to “test” their parents with a less serious disclosure to see how they’ll react.

Knowing the perpetrator

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In the Knights video, the son’s “test” at 10 years old was to confide to his father that he had watched pornography. Applewhite explained that the father’s loving and complete response to his son laid the groundwork for the son to reveal his abuse by one of his parents’ closest friends. But had the parents Explained, the abuse might never have come to life, and the victimization would have continued.

Applewhite said that children who confide need to be assured they are safe, that they are believed, that it is not their fault, and that everything will be okay. “Your children have to trust that they can talk to you,” she said.

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School choice myths and facts

The same arguments that opponents of school choice leveled against Indiana’s voucher program when it was introduced a decade ago are back in the public arena.

Then and now, one of the leading voices countering those attacks is the Indiana Non-Public Education Association, the only organization focused solely on supporting the 400 non-public schools in the state.

“There has been a growing negative narrative in the media from opponents to the proposed school choice expansions under consideration at the Statehouse,” said John Elcesser, executive director of the INPEA. “It’s a separate fact from fiction. Of course, if you want the full story, take a look beyond the numbers and ask a parent whose children’s lives have been impacted by the program.”

The INPEA, whose member schools include Indiana’s 175 Catholic schools, has compiled a list of common myths about school choice — along with the facts that refute them.

**MYTH 1: Choice undermines public school funding and costs taxpayers and public schools.**

**FACTS:** Students who receive a voucher make up 5% of Indiana’s entire K-12 student population, but they receive only 2% of the funding allocated for K-12 education.

For the 2019-20 school year, the average voucher amount in Indiana was $4,707, compared to the average traditional public-school state tuition support amount of $6,872 (the amount allocated per student from the state). That means that a voucher student receives, on average, $2,000 less in state money for his or her education. In addition, voucher students do not receive any federal or local dollars.

In the 2019-20 school year, Indiana awarded approximately $175 million in school vouchers. If each of the $6,707 voucher students would have attended their district public school instead of a private school, the state would have spent approximately $239 million in tuition support for those students. That’s a savings to the state of about $66 million.

**MYTH 2:** Choice does not lead to better academic outcomes for students.

**FACTS:** Student academic growth scores from the Indiana Department of Education, which measure the amount of assessed learning over a one-year period, found that in 2019 eight out of the top 10 schools were voucher-accepting schools. The top five schools in terms of growth were all voucher-accepting schools.

In terms of student proficiency, which is measured by pass rates on state standardized tests, findings from the 2018 ILEARN/ISTEP tests revealed: Six of the top seven schools in the state on the ISTEP 10 were non-public (voucher) schools. Twenty-five of the top 50 high schools were non-public (voucher) schools. Nineteen of the top 50 grade 3-8 schools were non-public (voucher) schools.

**MYTH 3:** Choice programs do not have the same accountability as public schools.

**FACTS:** All voucher-accepting non-public schools must be accredited. Voucher-accepting non-public schools must administer the ILEARN test and receive A-F grades like all other schools.

Unlike public schools, voucher-accepting non-public schools are subject to consequences if they are low academic performers for two years (D- or F-rated schools). The truest form of accountability is choice. No one is automatically assigned to a non-public school. Parents have to choose to send their child to one of these schools, and they can also choose to leave that school if it’s not working.

**MYTH 4:** Choice programs allow for discrimination.

**FACTS:** Nine out of 10 national empirical studies show that choice programs lead to less segregation.

Voucher students are lower-income compared to traditional public school students. Statewide, 70% of voucher students are on free and reduced-price lunch compared to 47% of public school students.

Voucher students in Indiana are more racially diverse compared to traditional public school students. Voucher students are 57% white, 43% minority. Traditional public school students: 68% white, 32% minority.

Established in 1974, the INPEA is a leading advocate for parents’ ability to choose the best school setting for their children. The organization has been an important choice coalition partner during the 10 years of the Indiana Choice Scholarship (voucher) Program and is a key resource for schools, education leaders and public officials.

For more information, including access to INPEA podcasts, position papers and research...
Legal challenges also followed the 2011 legislation, but in 2013, the Indiana Supreme Court unanimously ruled the program constitutional, arguing that it is the families—not the schools—that mainly benefit from it. Bennett says he is heartened by the fact that since Indiana led the way in 2011 with the most comprehensive school choice program in the nation, so many states have passed or are currently considering school choice legislation.

“I believe that what we did has withstood the test of time,” said Bennett, who now serves as senior vice president of K12 Inc., the nation’s leading provider of online school curricula. “Indiana’s school choice program is still considered the gold standard.”

He and others credit key members of the coalition like Robert Enlow, currently president and chief executive officer of education reform organization EdChoice, with helping to craft the robust public policy case behind the Choice Scholarship legislation.

In recent months, The Wall Street Journal has covered school choice extensively, including research from the University of Arkansas that reveals better outcomes. In states offering more school choice extensively, including research from the University of Arkansas that reveals better outcomes. In states offering school choice, parents can make sure their reputation is squeaky clean and that they are thought of in high regard.

Parents need to observe potential grooming patterns, and the first place to look is closely at “who is forming really close relationships with my kids,” Hartvigsen explained. Perpetrators are methodical and will often use touch to slowly test boundaries.

“Touch can be very appropriate at the beginning, but [the perpetrator] is methodical, and what happens over time is it escalates into inappropriate touch,” he said.

Other boundary violations involve “inappropriate jokes” to see how a child reacts, communicating and sharing materials directly in a way that bypasses their parents, such as through texts, calls or email.

A later point of escalation is to get the child to test a boundary that the perpetrator knows the parents won’t be happy about and “use that as an intimidation factor.”

“They’ll threaten the child: ‘If you don’t do this or that, I’ll let your parents know about what they did wrong,’” Hartvigsen said. Signs of grooming, by their nature, are far more difficult to discern. But Applewhite said parents should confidently enforce boundaries and not try to figure out first whether a potential boundary violation was intentional or accidental. She said when a parent intervenes, a person who accidentally crossed a boundary will understand, apologize and make sure never to do it again; on the other hand, a person who responds to the parent’s intervention by becoming angry should not be around one’s children.

Applewhite said this correction of another person should be done, ideally, in front of the child, or, if not, the child should be immediately informed that the person was corrected.

Healthy sexuality and boundaries

Both Hartvigsen and Peeler recommended parents have regular age-appropriate conversations with their kids about appropriate signs of affection, consent, safe and unsafe touch, developmental changes in their body, puberty and the appropriate names for body parts.

Peeler said the most vulnerable children are those who cannot communicate effectively. He said parents need to establish with their children an “open and honest dialogue about what they’re experiencing and the situations they’re in, so the risk goes down.”

“The ideas of boundaries, consent, actually having a conversation about what is safe or inappropriate touch are all really critical conversations to have with your children,” he said. Peeler added that these conversations are also critical to help prevent one’s child from becoming a perpetrator.

Many times child-perpetrators are “acting out what they’ve seen,” and, unfortunately, the average age of a child’s first exposure to pornography is 11 years old. Applewhite agreed that parents need to make sure they educate their children about healthy sexuality first, so they can talk with their children about sexual abuse and sexual boundaries. If parents are silent about sex, their children won’t have any reference point to be able to identify the abuse. Because victimization happens at tender ages, waiting until a child is 18 is “too late.”

Applewhite said prevention starts with teaching the sacredness of the human body.

“Everyone should be able to get these resources through their dioceses,” she said. “Every diocese since 2002 has been required to have that.”

Although these discussions are difficult for parents, experts believe that large-scale awareness is key to depriving perpetrators of the secretive environment they need to abuse children.

Applewhite said she is exploring with the Knights the development of a guide for parents to discuss the video with their children, particularly in the age range of 8 to 12 years old. A spokesperson for the Knights said they are looking at further steps following the group’s general convention.

“We can make a significant impact,” Peeler said. He pointed out that the ubiquity of home fire alarms and car seats has shown how society can successfully reduce serious harm to children. “Those statistics have all declined—we can make an improvement as a society if we want to make this an issue. Part of our job is to say: ‘This can’t continue.’”


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

BY JENNIFER BARTON

In life, there is a habit of storms occurring in the paths of ordinary people. There is little argument that the last year brought fierce storms to many. The measure of a person’s faith is how they choose to handle being tossed about during unforeseen situations.

When they lost their husband and father, Lillian and Autumn Leap faced a challenging time with incredible faith in God’s providence and will.

In the weeks prior to Christmas, John Leap came down with symptoms of COVID-19 and was admitted into the hospital. On Christmas Eve, he was placed on a ventilator and by Jan. 16 had succumbed to the virus.

On the day John died, Autumn felt God working in her heart. She shared, “We had gone to Mass and I remember just being so filled with thoughts like ‘this could happen’ or ‘that could happen.’ And it was almost jarring for me at the Mass because every thing felt like it was happening in slow motion. But right in the middle of the homily, the Holy Spirit was so powerful. It turned all of that restless energy into a determination, like a readiness that no matter what happens – and something very real could happen today – I was so ready for it because the Spirit was right there and moving.”

Immediately after Mass they received a call from the hospital to come and visit John, and later that day learned that he was gone. Lillian remembers John as a kind man, a good provider and someone who loved to share new experiences with her and their daughter. The two met in Indianapolis and celebrated 20 years of marriage last year. The three used to volunteer at Our Lady of the Road, serving breakfast to the homeless.

The Leap family has also been involved at their parish, Queen of Peace in Mishawaka, for over a decade since they moved to the area from California. Autumn attended grade school and received her sacraments there.

“I believe that we put our trust in Him and we knew that at the end of the day, He would make the decision. If it was for God to take him, obviously we have no say in the matter and we understood that was His decision and we would be OK with that,” Lillian stated.

And yet, one does not get a sense of sadness or loss in Lillian’s presence, but a completely different feeling – a feeling of sadness or loss in the middle of the homily, the Holy Spirit was so powerful. It turned all of that restless energy into a determination, like a readiness that no matter what happens – and something very real could happen today – I was so ready for it because the Spirit was right there and moving.”

During the long weeks while they were tossed about, the Holy Spirit was present with them. During the same time period Lillian was recognized as a superior performer in her job as an interpreter for Saint Joseph Health System in Mishawaka.

“Immediately after Mass they immediately ... but I’m glad she is here at this difficult time with me.”

For Lillian, it was not a matter of hiding her grief, but putting herself second to perform a job that she loves. “I always ask the Lord every day to make sure that my journey with Him and my work is always what He would like me to do so He can always be proud of me in my job. So when I do my job, I do it with love and with respect.”

Lillian recognizes the hand of God working in her life in other amazing ways. The recognition she has received in the past year has touched her deeply, bolstering her faith and her spirit.

“I’m not sure what it is, but something beautiful lifted inside me then. It made me realize that life is still beautiful, and that people and the community care. That love you don’t see is truly there, and it feels beautiful.”

Mother and daughter Lillian and Autumn Leap have been each other’s strength through the loss of their husband and father, John, in January. During the same time period Lillian was recognized as a superior performer in her job as an interpreter for Saint Joseph Health System in Mishawaka.
Fostering comfort for children

BY JILL A. BOUGHTON

“There are no words for how grateful we are. When these amazing ladies brought the first bags of gifts for the foster children in our care, all I could do was weep,” said Yesenia Wilkinson, program manager with the National Youth Advocate Program.

Since mid-November, the Christ Child Society of South Bend’s new program, Foster Hope, has put together totes with personalized names for over 160 local children ages newborn- to 17 who are served by NYAP and Benchmark Family Services.

In addition to accessing a free supply of new shoes, boots, winter coats, books and clothing, as every child is welcome to receive from the Christ Child Society, children in foster care with the agencies are now being given duffel bags stuffed with toiletries, pajamas, slippers, fleece blankets and age-appropriate comfort items like stuffed animals.

The new outreach is the brainchild of Susan Coulter, who became involved with Christ Child Society about five years ago when her youngest son became a student at Marian High School, Mishawaka. Trained as a speech pathologist, she had been able to stay home while her three boys were younger. As they grew older, she began looking for a service opportunity. It quickly became a passion.

Coulter said she loves that the volunteers of the Christ Child Society provide high-quality clothing to the neediest children and that their work is appreciated in the community. For example, when a principal learned students in her school were being bullied because of their shabby clothes, the administrator sat down and wrote them a referral to the Christ Child Society. The next day, she reported, the students’ classmates were asking, “Where did you get those cool shoes?”

In her role as receptionist at the new Christ Child Society location in Town & Country Shopping Centre, Coulter fielded a request from the NYAP to become a referring agency. Instead of having them fill out the necessary paperwork, Coulter took the director on a tour so she could see the shoes selected by the “sisters.” The books every young Christ Child Society child receives as well as the full scope of what the Christ Child Society provides.

Expecting a cluttered thrift-store setup, the director said she was overwhelmed by the quality and organization of the clothing.

As Coulter learned more about NYAP’s work with vulnerable children, she began to envision Foster Hope — a program through which every child coming into therapeutic foster care could swiftly receive a few special items to call their own.

“These children are the neediest of the needy,” she said. “They’ve already been traumatized so much. I wanted better for them than a few items stuffed into a garbage bag.” At IKEA she found large, colorful totes, which she fluffs to look even more beautiful before the gifts are added.

Although the new program significantly expands the annual budget of the Christ Child Society, which is funded entirely by donations, the organization’s board of directors unanimously approved Coulter’s proposal to enter into a charitable relationship with NYAP. That meant entering into a charitable relationship with NYAP.

For a child who has abruptly had to leave home, Coulter learned, it is very reassuring to have things specially selected for him or her, guided by what the caseworker is able to find out regarding sizes and favorite colors. Foster children are often incredulous when they receive their duffel bags, she said. One who happened to be in the office for an appointment when some totes were dropped off asked, “What’s this for? It can’t be for me. You’ve got to be kidding!” Another foster child refused to let go of her Build-A-Bear cat that was dressed in office attire; it went everywhere with her.

Children often put on their brand-new shoes right away. If something doesn’t fit, they bring it back to exchange it so the too-small shoes can bless another child.

Because of the pandemic, the Christ Child Society had to modify several processes. Usually, the University of Notre Dame women’s basketball team sponsors a Teddy Bear Toss during one of its games each year, to which fans bring stuffed animals for the organization to give away. When that didn’t happen, Coulter searched and found a request for donations on the Build-A-Bear website. Filling out the form was so time-consuming that she modified her initial plan and instead asked for the maximum 1,000 Build-A-Bears to donate to the foster children. She got them: 3 pallets’ worth.

Coulter and Foster Hope co-chairman Patty Banet have set up a table at the Christ Child Society location. There, they assemble the duffel sets. Other volunteers often leave special donations on that table. Coulter put one such item, a Spider-Man toy, into a 5-year-old boy’s duffel bag recently. When she dropped it off, the caseworker exclaimed, “How did you know he loves Spider-Man?”

Like the entire Foster Hope program, “It was a godwink,” said Coulter.
The risen Lord is our offering for sin

THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MSGR. OWEN F. CAMPION

Third Sunday of Easter
Luke 24:35-48

T

he Acts of the Apostles again furnish us the first biblical reading. Almost every Sunday in the Easter season features a reading from this book of the New Testament. In this reading, Peter preaches to the crowd in Jerusalem. Americans are very accustomed to impassioned preaching. They hear it in their own churches. They hear it on the radio. They hear it on television. Preaching about salvation and God’s mercy is common. Actually, to preach is to assume a mighty role and a great responsibility. Preaching, after all, by definition, is not simply lecturing or speaking aloud. It is speaking in the very name of God. Those who preached, by ancient Jewish standards, were privileged people in this sense. None chose to be a preacher. Rather, God selected each preacher. Peter stood before this Jerusalem crowd after having been called to preach, but most importantly, he spoke in the place of Jesus.

He preaches the words of Jesus, on behalf of Jesus. This reading makes three points. First, it establishes the identity of Peter. He is an Apostle. Second, clearly, he is the chief of the Apostles. He speaks in the names of them all. Finally, through Peter and the other Apostles, the salvation given by Jesus still reaches humankind. They continue the Lord’s work.

The Letter of John provides the second reading. The letter of John are alike in their eloquence and splendid language. They are alike in the depth of their theology and revelation. This reading proclaims the majesty of God in the Crucified. But beware, you see the warnings, the cautions, however, that accepting Jesus as Lord is more than lip service. It is the actual living of the Commandments, by which and through which humans realize the perfection, love, order and peace of life in God.

The Church continues to summon us to the joy of Easter celebration. He lives! This week, the readings once more proclaim the Church’s great trust in and excitement about the Resurrection. As Paul said, the Resurrection is the bedrock of our belief. In these readings, the Church calls us to the fact that our redemption is in Jesus. He rescues us from death, from the living death of earthly, and hopelessness, and from eternal death. As did the Lord, all people, even all believers, must die. As long as we are alive, we have homosexual inclinations, which manifest the will to live in fidelity to the revealed plans of God proposed by Church teaching. In fact, “God himself never ceases to bless each of his pilgrim people in this world,” because “we are more important to God than all of the sins that we can commit.” In other words, God rejects sin but loves the sinner, and the Church must do likewise. Or as

DOEFLINGER, page 13

Numbers down and ‘nones’ up, where to now?

As if the bishops needed any-thing more to worry about these days. Gallup released a poll just before Easter documenting a sharp decline in religious membership among Americans over the past two decades. Unfortunately, the percentage decline for Americans belonging to the Catholic Church was one of the steepest. This what means for the future is a subject of growing concern in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the drop-off in Mass attendance that the pandemic forced.

Gallup, which has been monitoring Americans’ affiliation with churches, synagogues and mosques for more than 80 years, says that last year was the first time that the membership number has dropped below 50%. According to the polling company, 47% of Americans belong to some house of worship, down from 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1970. The third millennium, far from inspiring a religious revival, has seen a rapid shrinkage in religious practice in what has been one of the most religious countries in the developed world. A growing number of Americans are not expressing any religious preference, and in all age groups, the number that are explicitly saying they are unaffiliated with any church is growing. This includes 31% of millennials and 33% of Generation Z — that is, the future.

When looked at in terms of religious groups, the largest decline is for Catholics. From 1999 until today, the percentage of Catholics has declined from 76% to 58%, double the percentage decline for Protestants. Other studies have noted a decline in sacramental marriages and baptisms among Catholics as well, also biding ill for the future. For Catholics, the past two decades span the peak of the sexual abuse crisis. The corresponding lack of faith in the institutions of the church and broader trends in society, however, including a decline across religious faiths and demographic groups that suggests strong cultural forces at work.

While the United States remains a religious country compared to Europe, for example, the pace of decline in the past 20 years suggests no quick turn-around in the trend line. Should the decline pick up speed in the wake of the pandemic, business as usual for many churches will not be an option.

The consequence of this decline means intensifying of political divisions. That is the conclusion of Shadi Hamid, writing in The Atlantic. He notes the sharp decline in church membership and the growth in “nones.” But contrary to what secularists say, society may be becoming more divided, not less.

“As Christianity’s hold, in particular, has weakened,” he writes, “ideological intensity and division have risen. American faith, it turns out, is as fervent as ever; it’s just that what was once religious belief has turned into a political belief. Political debates over what America is supposed to mean have taken on the character of theological disputes. This is what religion without religion looks like.”

This has impacted the Catholic Church as well, where the melding of political ideology with ostensibly religious belief has meant that the fault lines in the Church are increasingly mirror political fault lines. The polarization of the faithful has been accompanied by an apocalyptic retreat to “a smaller and purer church,” on the one hand, and a willingness to embrace unhistorically the trends that created a large culture increasingly unmoored from Christian teaching on the other.

How Church leaders will steer the Church in the future is a stark challenge of this millennium’s first century.

Reflection

The First Letter of John provides the third reading. St. Luke’s Gospel provides the second reading. The let- ter given by Jesus still reaches us from the midst. He was no longer bound by location or time. Risen from the living death of sin and hopeless- ness, he rises and lives! The Emmaus story reports the walk to a small town outside Jerusalem by two disciples and by the risen Lord, and the disciples’ recognition of Jesus in the “breaking of the bread,” or Eucharist.

As this group of disciples was talking, Jesus rose from their midst. He was no longer bound by location or time. Risen from earthly life, victorious over sin, Jesus now lived in the fullness of eternity — still in the Incarnation, true God and true man. He showed them His pierced hands and feet. Indeed, these disciples were encountering the Crucified, but the Crucified had overcome death and lived!

Confusions about blessings

The Catholic Church has dealt a blow to LGBTQ worshippers hoping for a more liberal, progressive church.” So says NBC News about a recent statement by the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

What was this terrible blow? The congregation, with Pope Francis’ approval, reaffirmed that the Church does not “have the power” to bless same-sex unions — or any relationship involving sexual activity outside of marriage, “the indisputable union of a man and a woman open in itself to the transmission of life.” The Church cannot change its teaching for self-styled “liberals” or “conservatives,” as it must serve the designs of God found in Scripture and fully revealed by Christ.

The statement also recognized that same-sex relationships may have “positive elements” to be valued, although they exist “outside the context of a union not ordered to the Creator’s plan.” It said the Church should welcome with respect and understanding people who have same-sex attraction, opposing all unjust discrimination.

Priests may even bless “indivi- dual persons with homosexual inclinations, who manifest the will to live in fidelity to the revealed plans of God proposed by Church teaching.” In fact, “God himself never ceases to bless each of his pilgrim people in this world,” because “we are more important to God than all of the sins that we can commit.”

In other words, God rejects sin but loves the sinner, and the Church must do likewise. Or as

AMID THE FRAY

GREG ERLANDSON

director and editor-in-chief of Catholic News Service, can be reached at gerlandson@catholicnews.com.

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A MORE HUMAN SOCIETY

RICHARD DOEFLINGER

an accompanying commentary says, “the negative judgment on the nature of unions of persons of the same sex does not imply a judgment on persons.”

All this was lost on NBC News — and on its guest Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry. He had said in October that comments by Pope Francis on gay people would be a “tidal wave” sweeping away the Church’s past teaching and practice. He now says that Francis has only approved the new statement under “pressure” from the Vatican, apparently ignoring who runs the Vatican.

What Francis had said, in a documentary, was: “Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God. Nobody should be thrown out or made miserable over it.” Some decided to interpret him as saying that same-sex unions create families, but he was recognizing people’s need to keep receiving love and understanding from their own families.

That documentary also took out of context a position Francis has held since he was archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, when lawmakers were moving

READINGS


Tuesday: Acts 7:51-8a Ps 31:3cd

Wednesday: Acts 8:6-10 Ps 66:1a, 4:7a Jn 6:35-40

Thursday: Acts 8:26-40 Ps 66:8, 9, 16, 20 Jn 6:35-41


Saturday: Acts 9:3-4 Ps 116:12- 17 Jn 6:60-69
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forward with same-sex marriage legislation. A law allowing "civil unions," recognizing certain legal rights for people in nonmarital relationships, is preferable to the law confusing those relationships with marriage.

Then-Archbishop William J. Levada of San Francisco had taken a similar position shortly before Pope Benedict XVI named him to lead the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and made him a cardinal.

But Francis has also written that "there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar to traditional marriage and to confer legal rights accordingly to God’s plan for marriage and family" ("Amoris Laetitia, No. 251). Perhaps the least pastoral-sounding quote in the new Vatican statement.

Some say LGBTQ people and those who love them will leave the Church over its teaching. That would be a tragedy, especially if it arises from a false and cynical narrative by activists trying to divide the Church. Catholics would be leaving a sanctuary of God’s mercy and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict notions of marriage, family, and forgiveness. 

**MGR. CHARLES POPE**

or a comparative sense. I could say something, “You are my brother to My Father.” This uses the “and of equivalence” because it indicates that you are both a brother and a friend to me in the same or in an equivalent way.

Other uses of the word “and” indicate a more comparative sense. When we say that Jesus is Son of God and Son of Mary, we mean that He is the Son of His Father in a different way than He is Son of Mary. He is the Son of both in very different ways. In the Gospel, when the priest says, “Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the almighty Father,” he indicates that while his sacrifice and the sacrifice of the people are both sacrifices, they are sacrifices in different ways. The priest and Jesus are both members of Christi capacitatis – in the person of Christ the head – while the faithful act as members of the Body. Both are rightly called sacrifices, but they are so in different ways.

Thus, when Jesus says that He is ascending to “My Father and your Father,” He does not use the “and of equivalence” but the “and of comparison.” As a man, Jesus can speak of God the Father, but His human nature is hypostatically united to His divine nature as God, the Second Person of the Trinity. So although God is our Father and Christ’s Father, He is Christ’s Father in a far richer and more profound way. Jesus says, “My God and your God” by way of equivalence, but by way of comparison.

In all these ways, the Lord Jesus must ascend in our understanding. He will do that provided we do not go on clinging to Him in a merely human and familiar way.

Let the Lord ascend in your life.

**MGR. CHARLES POPE**

was the pastor of Holy Comforter - St. Cyrilian Catholic Church, Washington, D.C.
Catholic high school student Chelsea Venters sits next to a stand holding smartphones with two fellow students joining the class through FaceTime at Padua Academy in Wilmington, Del., March 30. The students participating virtually from home could participate in this particular lesson through smartphone technology.

Martha Holladay, who teaches Advanced Placement English literature and composition at Padua Academy, a girls Catholic school in Wilmington, Delaware, said her students are learning what they need to and also are “learning intangibles.”

“They’re learning gifts of the Holy Spirit. They’re practicing wisdom, fortitude, self-control, other-centeredness, resilience. These are all things that we want our children to learn, and they are learning it,” she told Catholic News Service March 30.

Holladay, like other teachers at Padua Academy, has been teaching a hybrid format since the fall. Some students are there in person while others are attending virtually, often by FaceTime on other students’ phones, which are moved around the classroom so the virtual students are included in every discussion and activity.

She said if someone told her decades ago she would be teaching this way, she wouldn’t have believed it, but the experience has taught her “that these girls are flexible, they’re resilient. They want to learn, and they really want to be good people.” “That encourages me,” she added. “It gives me hope.”

Contributing to this story was Chaz Muth in Wilmington.
WHAT’S HAPPENING?

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

Organ concert planned for St. Charles Borromeo Parish
FORT WAYNE — Vincent Carr, associate professor of organ at Indiana University will present an organ concert Friday, April 16, at 7:30 p.m., at St. Charles Borromeo Church, 4916 Trier Rd. There is no admission fee, however, a freewill offering will be received. A socially distanced ice cream “meet and greet” will take place following the program. Contact Tim Robinson 260-446-3118 or trobson@scbfw.org for information.

Easter Hope, Healing and Hymns
FORT WAYNE — St. Vincent de Paul Parish, 1502 E Wallen Rd., will offer a musical evening of familiar songs and beautiful hymns of hope to help bring Christ’s healing from the many challenges of the past year. Thursday, April 22, at 7 p.m. Robert Rogers at the piano will be joined by his children in song. This event will also be streamed at www.saintv.org, Facebook and YouTube. Contact Dorothy Schuerman 260-489-5357.

The Way of St. Joseph Pilgrimage
MISHAWAKA — Celebrate the Year of St. Joseph by participating in a family-friendly walking pilgrimage from St. Joseph Church, Mishawaka, to St. Joseph Church, South Bend. There will be three other on-ramps along the way. The event will end with a prayer service, food and fellowship in the fenced-in parking lot and playground at St. Joseph Parish. The event is free, but registration is strongly recommended. For more information and to register, visit: diocesefwb.org/joseph-pilgrimage.

Building Manager

The Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend is looking for a full-time Building Manager. This management position is responsible for the overall appearance and successful operation of the Archbishop Noll Center (located in Fort Wayne) and its components including but not limited to: office set-up, moving furnishings for meetings, ensuring the good working order and maintenance of boilers, air conditioning, ventilation, elevators, lighting, generator, plumbing, maintenance supplies and equipment. The Building Manager is also responsible for the purchasing of building equipment, making sure the Archbishop Noll Center is in compliance with all applicable regulations, and maintaining proper vehicle registration/title work for all diocesan-owned vehicles.

Apply at www.diocesefwb.org/careers.

Queen of Angels Catholic Church in Fort Wayne is looking for a full-time Pastoral Associate. The Pastoral Associate functions as an integral member of the parish staff, assisting the pastor with religious education as well as the planning and implementation of his vision for parish ministries and operations.

The Pastoral Associate:
Works independently or part of a pastoral team; is flexible; professional and confidential; communicates effectively with stakeholders through verbal, written and digital means; multi-tasks to handle varied workload and demonstrates a high level of technology proficiency.

The Pastoral Associate must have a deep understanding of the Catholic faith and be an active practicing member of a Roman Catholic faith community. Three years’ experience in parish work or related field is desired. A bachelor’s degree in religious education or theology is preferred.

Apply at https://diocesefwb.org/careers
Queen of Angels Church and School • 1500 W. State Blvd.
www.queenofangelsfw.org

St. Theodore Guerin High School President Search

St. Theodore Guerin High School is a diocesan, college preparatory high school serving approximately 750 students in grades 9-12. The school is dedicated to its mission of educating students from diverse backgrounds and preparing them to be servant leaders through faith formation, academic excellence and student life. Nationally recognized as one of the Top 50 Catholic High Schools in the country, Guerin Catholic is located in the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana, and serves several communities in and around Noblesville, IN.

Essential Duties
- Ensures the Catholic mission of the school is developed and promoted among all stakeholders; embodies the expression of Catholic identity
- Serves as the CEO, overseeing all fiscal, advancement and supervisory operations
- Articulates the mission of the school to alumni, parents, faculty, staff and the wider community
- Inspires collaboration from all internal and external constituent groups, using exceptional relationship-building, interpersonal, and communication skills
- Develops and updates the strategic plan for the future of the school
- Serves as an administrative officer of both the Hamilton County Catholic High School Corporation Board and the School Governing Board

Qualifications
- Practicing Roman Catholic in good standing with the Catholic Church
- Proven success in advancing the mission of a business, nonprofit, or school
- Strong Advancement experience and financial acumen
- Transformational leader with innovative vision
- Leads with humility, serves with love, trusts in Providence

The anticipated start date of the President position is July 1, 2021. The President Profile and further information for this position can be found at www.guerincatholic.org

Guerin Catholic High School
15300 Gray Road • Noblesville, IN 46062 • (317) 582-0120 • GuerinCatholic.org

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On Oct. 4, along a state highway, the Warsaw Knights prayed the rosary and individual prayers for the protection of all babies and their mothers. Less than a week later, at the Kosciusko County Courthouse, they prayed for the safety of the unborn, for families, and for the institution of marriage.

Addressing the Knights later that Saturday evening, at the convention, Bishop Rhoades began by thanking the Knights on behalf of all the bishops of Indiana for all they do throughout the state to serve the Church and to assist the bishops in their mission to live and spread the faith, to serve parishes and to build up the body of Christ in the five dioceses of the state. “Your service of the Gospel in this portion of the vineyard of the Lord is a great blessing to us bishops,” he told them.

Recounting some of the vast charitable organization’s history, he noted that the Knights of Columbus spread to Indiana in 1899, just 17 years after it began in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1882. Its holy founder, Blessed Father McGivney, who died at the young age of 38 in 1890, would not have imagined that the order he founded would have expanded to the Midwest so quickly, he said, let alone throughout the United States and the world in succeeding years.

“I often think of how the Knights of Columbus are like the mustard seed in the Gospel. Our Order, now with over 2 million members, continues to be a force for good in countless ways, a fraternity animated by Christ’s love, that continues to respond to new challenges with the faith, love and creativity of Blessed Michael McGivney and the thousands of Knights that have gone before us. … I pray his beatification inspires us all to be re-energized with his vision and motivated by his example of holiness.”

The Knights began in Indiana in 1899, he continued. There were other Catholic fraternal orders in Indiana and around the country before the Knights, but within a few decades, the Knights of Columbus far outpaced the others.

“The Knights of Columbus began because of the pastoral concern of a holy priest,” said the bishop. “He saw the suffering of his people. He saw young men hurting and straying from the Church. He saw the ill effects on their families.”

The roots of the organization Father McGivney founded were strong, he said.

“We must stay connected to those roots, to the principles and ideals of the Order and to the vision and holy example of Father McGivney. The roots are the Gospel of Jesus, faith in Jesus, active membership in His Church, active charity, care for the poor and needy, spiritual and material solidarity, and real and deep fraternity as Catholic brothers in Christ.”

Speaking for himself, as one of the bishops of Indiana, Bishop Rhoades shared his hopes for the Knights of Columbus in the midst of the challenges the Church faces today. The first, “in the midst of division and polarization in the Church and society,” was their unity in fidelity to the Church and her teachings.

“I am so grateful for the loyalty of the Knights: your solidarity with us bishops and with your priests: your commitment to the Gospel of life – all you do protect human life and dignity; your solid defense of life in the womb, your service to the poor, the disabled, and the elderly. I so admire the Knights’ solidarity with our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East and around the world, your dedication to religious freedom, and your concern for, and solidarity with, our immigrant brothers and sisters.”

He challenged the Knights present to provide strong outreach to those affected by human trafficking.

“There is an urgent need, in my opinion, to significantly grow and increase K of C Hispanic membership. As you know, Latinos are our fastest-growing Catholic population in Indiana and in our nation. Let’s remember our roots: immigrants, particularly Irish immigrants. Father McGivney was a son of Irish immigrants. The first Knights were immigrants or sons of immigrants.

“In closing, he expressed gratitude to the Knights of Columbus in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend for their strong support of seminarians and priests and of priestly and religious vocations.

“Let’s move forward strongly connected to our roots and to the vision of Father McGivney! May we strive to imitate his virtues, his faith, his love, his hard and energetic work, and his fidelity to Jesus and the Church!”

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAINT FRANCIS WELCOMES

CARDINAL PETER TURKSON

COMMENCEMENT 2021 GUEST SPEAKER
MAY 1 AT 2 P.M. IN MEMORIAL COLISEUM

Serving as Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Cardinal Turkson works closely with Pope Francis and leads the Vatican’s teaching and advocacy on issues of justice and peace, economic inequality, and global solidarity.

USF Commencement is closed to the general public, but will be livestreamed through commencement.sf.edu.