

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

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Black Catholic Spirituality Fully Alive at St. Augustine

BY LISA KOCHANOWSKI

Nestled in historic downtown South Bend, Catholics of all backgrounds are invited to celebrate their faith at St. Augustine Parish. The multiracial parish in the African American tradition began with the move of seven African American Catholic families from Mississippi to the area in the 1920s. The Congregation of Holy Cross priest Father George O'Connor, who was teaching at the University of Notre Dame, heard about the newcomers and began offering Mass for them on Sundays.

Father O'Connor was from Kansas, and after his entire family died in a tornado, he was taken in by a neighboring African American farmer, which gave him a long history with the African American community. Initially, Masses were offered in a small building outside St. Joseph Parish in South Bend and later moved to a building on the west side of South Bend. As the community grew, the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend decreed St. Augustine a parish, and the church's current location is on West Washington Street in downtown South Bend, where there are 250 registered parishioners.



Lisa Kochanowski

Members of the St. Augustine Gospel Choir perform during Mass on Sunday, February 11, at St. Augustine Parish in South Bend.

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Scott Warden

Bishop Rhoades Forms Diocesan Pastoral Council to Listen, Serve

BY SCOTT WARDEN

As members of the newly formed Diocesan Pastoral Council gathered for their first meeting on Saturday, February 10 – the feast day of St. Scholastica – they began by praying with the day's Office of Readings, which featured a story written by Pope St. Gregory the Great about Scholastica and her brother, St. Benedict.

Given the strict rules of Benedict's monastery, the two

were only able to visit each other once a year. On one such occasion, the saintly siblings "spent the whole day praising God and talking of sacred things." As the evening wore on, Scholastica begged her brother to stay with her instead of returning to his cell. "Let us go on until morning talking about the delights of the spiritual life," she said.

While the Pastoral Council's time together was certainly more limited, Bishop Rhoades said the reading was fitting for the occasion, "Because it's about what we will be engaged

in today and as we go forward – having meaningful spiritual conversations."

Bishop Rhoades told the members in attendance at Westminster Hall on the campus of Grace College in Winona Lake that forming a Diocesan Pastoral Council has been a goal of his since he was appointed Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend 14 years ago. "It was always on the back burner." He was inspired to put the plan into

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'I Get to See the Work God Is Doing in Youth'

*Alex Giltner,
Saint Francis'
New VP for
Catholic Culture,
on the Role of
Catholic Colleges
and the Future of
the Church*

BY SCOTT WARDEN

In December, the University of Saint Francis in Fort Wayne announced the promotion of Alex Giltner, Professor of Theology and Director of the university's Assisi Program for Discipleship and Leadership. Giltner will now serve as the university's Associate Vice President for Catholic Culture. In his new role, he will continue his work teaching and with the Assisi Program, which he helped to establish in 2022, but now he will also oversee ministerial initiatives across campus and strive to "integrate the university's Catholic mission in a full, robust, and intentional way, where everybody, regardless of their role or department, sees their work as part of sharing and moving forward the mission of Saint Francis as a Catholic institution."

University of Saint Francis Interim President Lance Richey told Today's Catholic: "We are all excited about Dr. Giltner stepping into his new position as he helps us further cultivate the Catholic culture at Saint Francis. He has established a strong rapport and trust with our students and understands how to help and encourage them wherever they are on their life journey. I look forward to the impact he will undoubtedly make this spring and beyond."

In a wide-ranging interview with Today's Catholic, Giltner discussed his work with the Assisi Program, the faith life at Saint Francis, how he sees today's college students yearning for deeper meaning in their own lives, and why he doesn't fear for the future of the Church.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.



Photo provided by the University of Saint Francis

Alex Giltner was recently promoted by the University of Saint Francis to become its Vice President for Catholic Culture.

Today's Catholic: First, congratulations on your promotion. Do you see this new role as a move by the university to be even more intentional about fostering the Catholic culture on campus, or is this a continuation of work that had already begun?

Alex Giltner: I will say both. Since I came to Saint Francis in 2018, the Franciscan sisters have done great work in thinking through what their apostolates look like and how to incorporate their charisms within the scope of the university. They've really been casting this vision that we become more robustly, more clearly, more intentionally, and more genuinely in line with our Catholic identity, with Ex Corde

Ecclesiae – Pope St. John Paul II's document on the Catholic university – and really living out in an intentional, welcoming, uncompromising, but compassionate, loving, and kind way service to humanity in spreading the Gospel through knowledge, through education, through formation.

What makes Catholic education so wonderful, aside from it being one of the oldest institutional forms of education, is that we form the whole human,

the whole person – spirit, mind, and body. We do not just train students on a particular skill or transfer information to them. We are not just training people for a career. We are forming whole human beings; we are caring for the whole person, cura personalis, and helping them to be good people of good character who are also well trained in whatever their major or discipline is so that they can contribute to the commonweal.

Today's Catholic: What does this intentionality regarding Catholic culture look like at the practical level? How does it filter down to the students at Saint Francis?

Giltner: I think there's a process of communication, clarification, equipping, and empowering that has to be done. I think what students are seeing is that when we are talking about what we do here, we're talking about human formation. We're offering them programs like the St. Benedict the Moor Justice Center, like Campus Ministry, like student leadership, and each of these works to form the character of all our students – not just those who are Catholic, or even Christian.

In everything we try to do here, we're still bringing to bear that question about meaning, and purpose, and morality, and how one lives a life of full human flourishing, and how one can live a life of service so that others can live lives of full human flourishing. I think that really is supposed to trickle down through our classroom and our curriculum, through our co-curricular programs, through programs like the Assisi Program, and others. I

think there's a communication and clarification happening across the board for students through staff and faculty. It's an ongoing process, of course, but it's something we're striving to more clearly manifest as time goes on.

Today's Catholic: This past fall, the university welcomed its second cohort into the Assisi Program for Discipleship and Leadership. How did the vision of the program begin, and how has it evolved during its first couple of years?

Giltner: The basic idea stemmed from the fact that we had all heard the data on young people and their migration away from religious practices. And for us, we are all aware that, oftentimes, college is where the fates of young people go to die. We wanted to provide something that comes alongside students and helps their college experience not be in conflict with their life of faith but actually be a partnering of their life and their faith. We wanted to give students an experience of faith and reason so they could actually see how their academic training and education nurtures the deepening of their faith, and then that increased faith helps to deepen their experience of that education. Then, ultimately, this discipleship will help to transform them into effective, powerful Catholic leaders who can go out and spread the Gospel. And that doesn't just look like going out in the street and preaching. It looks like being a certain kind of nurse. It looks like being a certain kind of graphic designer, being a certain kind

Pope Francis Canonizes Argentina's First Female Saint

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – St. María Antonia de Paz Figueroa, known as Mama Antula, devoted herself completely to helping others experience God's closeness and compassion, Pope Francis said after he declared the 18th-century consecrated laywoman a saint.

By letting her heart and life be "touched" and "healed" by Christ, he said, "she proclaimed Him tirelessly her whole life long, for she was convinced, as she loved to repeat: 'Patience is good, but perseverance is better.'"

"May her example and her intercession help us to grow according to the heart of God, in charity," the pope said in his homily after proclaiming her a saint during a Mass on Sunday, February 11, in St. Peter's Basilica.

St. María Antonia de Paz Figueroa is Argentina's first female saint. She was closely tied to the Jesuits and continued to lead Ignatian spiritual exercises in Argentina after the expulsion of the order.

Argentine President Javier Milei was present at the Mass and was to have a private meeting with the pope on Monday, February 12. At the end of the Mass, the two shook hands, spoke briefly, smiled and laughed. The president, who has made disparaging remarks about the pope in the past, leaned down and gave a big hug to the pope, who was seated in his wheelchair.

Claudio Perusini, whose unexplained recovery from a severe stroke became the second miracle attributed to the new saint, was also present. He has known the pope since he was 17, and he, his wife, and two adult children brought the offertory gifts to the pope during the Mass.

Sickness and healing were the key themes in Pope Francis' homily during the Mass, celebrated on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and the World Day of the Sick.

Reflecting on the day's readings, which included St. Mark's account of Jesus' "cleansing of a leper," the pope spoke about other forms of "leprosy" that lead some people, even Christians, to ostracize and scorn others.

Those who were afflicted with Hansen's disease during Jesus' time were further wounded by ostracism and rejection because of fear, prejudice, and a false religiosity, the pope said.

People were afraid of contracting the disease and they were prejudiced by believing those who were ill were being



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis prays during the Mass for the canonization of St. María Antonia de Paz Figueroa, known as Mama Antula, in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Sunday, February 11.

punished by God for some sin they had committed and, therefore, deserving of their fate, the pope said.

Also, the belief that even slight contact with someone with leprosy made one "impure" is an example of false or "distorted religiosity," which "erects barriers and buries pity," he said.

Fear, prejudice, and false religiosity represent "three 'leprosy' of the soul' that cause the weak to suffer and then be discarded like refuse," he said.

Many people suffering today are also scorned and discarded because of so many "fears, prejudices, and inconsistencies – even among those who are believers and call themselves Christians," Pope Francis said.

The way to tear down those barriers and cure new forms of "leprosy," he said, is with the same style as Jesus, which is to draw near to those who are shunned to touch and heal them.

Jesus responds to the leper's cry for help "knowing full well that in doing so He will in turn become a 'pariah,'" the pope said.

"Oddly enough, the roles are now reversed: Once healed, the sick person will be able to go to the priests and be readmitted to the community; Jesus, on the other hand, will no longer be able to enter any town," he said.

Jesus could have avoided touching the man and instead perform "a distance healing," he said. "Yet that is not the way of Christ. His way is that of a love that draws near to those who suffer, enters into contact with them, and touches their wounds."

Christians must reflect whether they, like Jesus, are able to draw near and be a gift to others, the pope said. The faithful should ask if they "withdraw from others and

think only of ourselves" or believe "the problem is always and only other people."

This "leprosy of the soul," he said, is "a sickness that blinds us to love and compassion, one that destroys us by the 'cankers' of selfishness, prejudice, indifference, and intolerance."

"Once we let ourselves be touched by Jesus, we start to heal within, in our hearts. If we let ourselves be touched by Him in prayer and adoration, if we permit Him to act in us through His word and His sacraments, that contact truly changes us," he said.

"Thanks to the love of Christ, we rediscover the joy of giving ourselves to others, without fears and prejudices, leaving behind a dull and disembodied religiosity and experiencing a renewed ability to love others in a generous and disinterested way," he said.

Later, after reciting the Angelus prayer with visitors in St. Peter's Square, the pope recalled the day's celebration of Our Lady of Lourdes and the World Day of the Sick.

"The first thing we need when we are sick is the closeness of loved ones, health care workers and, in our hearts, the closeness of God," he said. "We are all called to be close to those who suffer, to visit the sick" the same way Jesus did with "closeness, compassion, and tenderness."

"We cannot be silent about the fact that there are so many people today who are denied the right to care, and, therefore, the right to life!" he said.

In those places where people live in extreme poverty or war zones, he said, "fundamental human rights are violated there every day! It is intolerable. Let us pray for the tormented Ukraine, for Palestine and Israel, let us pray for Myanmar, and for all war-torn peoples."



Public schedule of Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

Monday, February 19: 5:15 p.m. – Mass at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, followed by Speech to Right to Life Club, University of Notre Dame
 Tuesday, February 20: 12:30 p.m. – Theology Class for Masters of Divinity Students, University of Notre Dame
 Wednesday, February 21: Noon – Meeting of Diocesan Finance Council, Best Western Plus, Warsaw
 Wednesday, February 21: 7 p.m. – Presentation on "Authentic Masculinity," followed by Holy Hour of Eucharistic Adoration at 8 p.m., St. Vincent de Paul Church, Fort Wayne
 Thursday, February 22: 8 a.m. – Mass and Pastoral Visit, Huntington Catholic School, SS. Peter and Paul Church, Huntington
 Saturday, February 24: 3:15 p.m. – Question and Answer Session at Rekindle the Fire Men's Conference, followed by 4:30 p.m. Mass, Allen County War Memorial Coliseum, Fort Wayne
 Sunday, February 25: 2 p.m. – Rite of Election and Rite of Continuing Call to Conversion, St. Matthew Cathedral, South Bend



FEBRUARY

Immaculate Conception, Auburn: February 18-20
 St. Charles Borromeo, Fort Wayne: February 25-27

MARCH

St. Joseph, Garrett: March 2-4
 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Fort Wayne: March 3-5
 St. Casimir, South Bend: March 3-5
 St. Joseph, Fort Wayne: March 10-12
 St. Joseph, South Bend: March 17-19
 St. Joseph, Mishawaka: March 17-19
 St. John the Evangelist, Goshen: March 17-19
 Queen of Angels, Fort Wayne: March 17-19

APRIL

St. Vincent de Paul, Fort Wayne: April 14-16
 Blessed Sacrament, Albion: April 14-16
 Our Lady of Good Hope, Fort Wayne: April 21-23
 St. Adalbert, South Bend: April 21-23
 St. Robert Bellarmine, North Manchester: April 21-23
 Sacred Heart, Notre Dame: April 28-30

MAY

St. Joseph, LaGrange: May 12-14

JUNE

St. Anthony of Padua, Angola: June 2-4
 St. John the Baptist, South Bend: June 23-25

For the complete schedule, visit diocesefwsb.org/eucharist.

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action following his participation last October in Rome as a delegate at the Synod of Bishops, which proposed making pastoral councils "obligatory" in all dioceses.

"Based on the understanding of the People of God as the active subject of the mission of evangelization, we suggest legislating for the obligatory nature of pastoral councils in Christian communities and local churches," according to the synod's Synthesis Report. "It would also be desirable to strengthen the bodies of participation, with a proper presence of the laity, recognizing the role they can play in discerning decisions by virtue of their baptism."

"One of the whole ideas of a synod is that all of us are journeying together, walking together," Bishop Rhoades said as he opened the Pastoral Council's first meeting. "We're co-responsible for the mission of the Church – bishop and priests, deacons, religious,

laity; we're all disciples of Jesus, brothers and sisters in Christ, from our baptism, and we walk together. So, the Church has various structures for working together, and especially in pastoral planning and working toward our common mission of evangelization and bringing Christ to the world on every level," he added.

Bishop Rhoades will preside over the Pastoral Council, with Father Mark Gurtner, Vicar General of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, and Mary Glowaski, Victim's Assistance Coordinator for the diocese, serving as ex-officio members. Joining them on the council are a mix of ordained, consecrated religious, and laity. The members of the Pastoral Council are: Father Spenser St. Louis, Pastor of Queen of Angels Parish in Fort Wayne; Father Osman Ramos, Pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Angola; Holy Cross Father Cameron Cortens, Parochial Vicar of Christ the King Parish in South Bend; Sister M. Lisette Gettinger of the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration; Deacon



Photos by Scott Warden

Members of the newly formed Diocesan Pastoral Council hold their first meeting at Westminster Hall on the campus of Grace College in Winona Lake on Saturday, February 10.

Giovani Munoz, permanent deacon serving St. John the Evangelist Parish in Goshen; Peter Mang Kim Lian, parishioner at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne; Ryan Norden, parishioner at St. Mary Parish in Avilla; Suzanne Merz, parishioner at St. Joseph – Hessen Cassel Parish in Fort Wayne; Kevin Strater, parishioner at St. Gaspar del Bufalo Parish in Rome City; David Snyder, who attends St. Martin de Porres Parish in Syracuse and Sacred Heart Parish in Warsaw; Leo Patiño, parishioner at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Warsaw; Jeff Robertson, parishioner at St. Thomas Parish in Elkhart; Angeles Gonzalez, parishioner at St. Adalbert Parish in South Bend; Timothy Flanagan, parishioner at Christ the King Parish in South Bend; Nick Sorg, parishioner at St. Pius X Parish in Granger; Ed Rodriguez, parishioner at St. Michael Parish in Plymouth; Laura LaMaster, parishioner at St. Jude Parish in Fort Wayne; Lindsey Arnold, parishioner at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Fort Wayne; Cathy Catral, parishioner at St. Pius X Parish in Granger; Gretchen Crowe, parishioner at the Cathedral

of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne; Julie Wendel, parishioner at St. Robert Bellarmine Parish in North Manchester; Alexis Duffy, parishioner at St. Therese Little Flower Parish in South Bend; George Witwer, parishioner at St. Joseph Parish in Bluffton; and Stacey Noem, parishioner at St. Joseph Parish in South Bend.

Members of the Diocesan Parish Council were recommended by their parish pastors and chosen by Bishop Rhoades in consultation with other leaders of the diocesan Curia. Bishop Rhoades said the body reflects well the geographic and ethnic diversity of the diocese.

The council plans to meet three times per year and will contemplate "what it means to be Christ's Church on earth," Bishop Rhoades said, "focusing on our own diocese but keeping in mind our place in the universal Church." He added: "We really are to look at the big picture. You all come from particular parishes with your own experiences, your own projects. And at this level, that is helpful, but also, we're looking at the whole. We're looking at all the parishes, so we are to be concerned about everyone – that means those in our rural



parishes, those in inner city parishes, those in the suburbs. We're looking at the whole picture and our own pastoral vision and mission for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend."

Along with Bishop Rhoades setting forth the group's mission and those in attendance introducing themselves to one another, the first meeting gave members the opportunity to discuss two questions posed by the Synod of Bishops on synodality: "Where have I seen or experienced successes – and distresses – within the Church's structures, organization, leadership, or life that encourage or hinder the mission?" and "How can the structures and organization of the Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?"

In the end, Bishop Rhoades said, the mission of the new Diocesan Pastoral Council is to discern ways in which the Gospel of Christ can be better shared throughout the diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. It will begin, he said, by listening. Decisions cannot be made "in a way that's isolated from the whole People of God," Bishop Rhoades said. "One cannot be a good pastor if he doesn't listen to the people. I cannot be a good bishop if it's all about me. I need to get to know the people and listen to the people." Doing otherwise, he said "goes counter to what Jesus said. He said, 'I have come to serve, not to be served.' ... As Bishop, I am the servant of the Church in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. ... Authority is for service. ... The experience of listening and sharing in the light of faith – that's what this Diocesan Pastoral Council will do."

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Legislation to Protect Children from Online Pornography

INDIANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

BY VICTORIA ARTHUR

At the halfway point of the 2024 legislative session, a bill aimed at restricting minors from accessing online pornography is among the measures gaining momentum at the Statehouse.

Senate Bill 17, authored by Senator Mike Bohacek, passed the Senate in a near-unanimous vote and is now under consideration in the House. If the measure ultimately becomes law, Indiana would join eight other states in requiring pornography sites to use a robust age verification system to operate in the state.

"Today, kids carry the internet in their pocket," Bohacek said. "We've got kids who are seeing extremely graphic sexual content before they even go to their first eighth grade dance."

Similar to legislation now under review in nine additional states, Senate Bill 17 would require age checks to ensure users on adult sites are at least 18 years old – typically using a driver's license or other form of identification.

"This is about regulating a new space, but it's not a new idea," Bohacek said. "You can't go and buy a pack of cigarettes without showing an ID. You can't go into a strip bar without showing an ID. And yet anyone can access almost anything online. It's desensitizing people, and it's extremely damaging to children."

Among the advocates supporting Senate Bill 17 is the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC), the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. Its Executive Director, Angela Espada, can attest to the harm that easy access to online pornography can inflict on young people.

In a prior role as a deputy prosecutor in the Marion

County Prosecutor sex crimes division, Espada saw numerous instances in which pornography was used as tool to desensitize young victims.

"We know that grooming can occur in a variety of different ways," Espada said. "It can begin with an individual – often a trusted individual – saying or doing things that are inappropriate. I prosecuted many cases where children had been victimized, and especially in situations involving a trusted individual, one of the devices used was exposing them to drugs, alcohol, and pornography."

Espada noted that in states where robust age verification systems are already in place, pornography sites have shut down access to their services.

The Indiana General Assembly recently reached what is known as crossover – the midway point of the session, when bills that are still active move from one legislative chamber to the other. With its 44-1 vote on the Senate floor, Senate Bill 17 moved to the House and now awaits further action under the sponsorship of Representative Joanna King.

"We're expecting that there's going to be a lot of support in the House," said Alexander Mingus, Associate Director of the ICC. "It's heartening to see this and other efforts across the country, and it being a truly bipartisan priority."

These legislative efforts at the state level coincide with the U.S. Congress considering federal action to better protect children online. They also come at a time when the Catholic Church and society as a whole grapple with the harm caused by the ready availability of online pornography for children as well as adults.

In a letter to Congress last

summer, officials with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urged lawmakers to take stronger measures to protect young people online. The bishops cited a study revealing that 15 percent of children report having first viewed online pornography – either accidentally or intentionally – when they were 10 or younger. By the time they are 13, a majority report having been exposed to it.

"Young people born in the digital age have grown up immersed in media and the internet and often are savvier at navigating this world than their parents," the bishops wrote. "Being exposed to pornography can be traumatic for children and youth. Seeing it steals their innocence and gives them a distorted image of sexuality, relationships, and men and women, which may then affect their behavior, including addiction to pornography."

The officials also called on Congress to take steps to protect children from the harms of social media. Just weeks ago, Big Tech leaders including Meta's Mark Zuckerberg faced lawmakers on Capitol Hill in a hearing focused on online child exploitation.

In Indiana, numerous bills aimed at protecting children online and from the harms of social media were introduced in this legislative session, but only Senate Bill 17 is moving forward.

Children's widespread use of social media platforms and other technology poses countless dangers, according to Theresa Chamblee, Director of Social Concerns for the office of Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

"Pornography is readily available on social media sites," Chamblee said. "This is not a matter of children

searching for pornography. It's a matter of pornography finding them through pop-up advertisements, videos, and pictures shared via social messaging sites, and misleading tactics used by groomers to lure someone to a pornographic video or image."

Two years ago, Chamblee's office added an anti-trafficking ministry. In numerous presentations to parents and schools, Chamblee educates her audiences about the link between pornography and human trafficking.

"Trafficking happens everywhere, and it's happening in plain sight," Chamblee said. "Traffickers will use pornography to normalize violent sexual behavior, to promote hypersexuality, and to encourage addictions to porn. Because of the incredibly easy access to pornography via social media and gaming apps, porn has become the readily available sex education for our youth

that can be accessed at any time."

Senate Bill 17 could potentially see additions that address social media, Bohacek said. The northern Indiana lawmaker expressed hope that the measure will move forward with bipartisan support in the House.

"I feel very confident," said Bohacek, a member of Notre Dame Parish in Michigan City. "I've got a great sponsor, and there are a lot of folks really engaged in this effort."

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



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Financial Aid Available for National Eucharistic Congress

INDIANAPOLIS (OSV News) – Organizers of the National Eucharistic Congress are making it easier for cash-strapped Catholic families to attend the July 17-21 gathering in Indianapolis. Aid for the congress, which will cap the National Eucharistic Revival, a three-year grassroots initiative launched in June of 2022 under the U.S. Catholic bishops, is now available through a new “Solidarity Fund.” Applicants who can demonstrate need, especially those from under-represented areas and groups, will be awarded assistance to cover the cost of passes to the congress. Applicants must be prepared to secure their own lodging for the congress. “Led by our bishops, we have raised nearly \$1 million to give away so people from all over the country can join us in Indianapolis and return home filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to bring renewal to their families, churches, and communities,” Kris Frank, Vice President of Growth and Marketing for the National Eucharistic Congress, told OSV News. The online application for the Solidarity Fund can be found at eucharisticcongress.org/solidarity-fund.

Pope: To Ignore Human Trafficking Is to Be Complicit

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The fight against human trafficking can be won, but it requires eliminating the root causes of the problem, Pope Francis said. Calling for action, the pope appealed for the mobilization of “all our resources in combating trafficking and restoring full dignity to those who have been its victims,” he said in a written message for International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking, observed annually on February 8. “If we close our eyes and ears, if we do nothing, we will be guilty of complicity,” he wrote. The day of prayer is held on the feast of St. Josephine Bakhita, who was kidnapped by slave traders in Sudan in the late 1870s and sold into slavery before she eventually secured her freedom and became a religious sister in Italy. “Let us remember the wrong she endured, her suffering, but at the same time her strength and her journey of liberation and rebirth to a new life,” the pope wrote. “St. Bakhita encourages us to open our eyes and ears to see those who go unseen and to hear those who have no voice, to acknowledge the dignity of each person, and to fight trafficking and all forms of exploitation,” the pope wrote.

NEWS BRIEFS

Storms Cause Historic Flooding in California



OSV News photo/Aude Guerrucci, Reuters

First responders inspect a mudslide in Studio City, California, on Monday, February 5, following heavy rains and flooding. One of the wettest storms in Southern California history unleashed at least 475 mudslides in the Los Angeles area after dumping more than half the amount of rainfall the city typically gets in a season in just two days.

Seattle Archdiocese Announces Plan for ‘Parish Families’

SEATTLE (OSV News) – On Saturday, February 3, Archbishop Paul D. Etienne released the final list of parish families as part of the Archdiocese of Seattle’s “Partners in the Gospel” strategic planning initiative. More than 170 parishes, missions, and stations have been grouped into 60 parish families – two or more parishes under the leadership of one pastor. The families go into effect on July 1. “This final list of families comes after a year of consultation with the archdiocese’s Presbyteral Council, the Partners in the Gospel Oversight Committee, priests, deacons, parish and school staff, lay leaders, and the public,” officials with the archdiocese said in a note accompanying the list. In a letter to the Catholic community, Archbishop Etienne expressed appreciation to “the thousands of people who engaged in the consultation process by providing insights during the input phase, sharing new ideas and praying for this renewal effort.” Officials with the archdiocese announced that each parish family will decide on its own

how to use its buildings, where Masses will be held at different locations, or whether current individual churches will close altogether.

New Study Explores Faith Habits of Catholic Adults

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – As about 15 percent of U.S. adults who were raised Catholic said they had remained practicing Catholics attending weekly Mass into adulthood, researchers at Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and the Peyton Institute for Domestic Church Life conducted the “Future Faithful Families Project” study to examine commonalities in families with children who remained Catholic as adults. The study found participants from these families generally described their households as “warmer and more affectionate than the average family,” with “very good communication,” listening to questions and concerns, rituals of meals eaten together, and faith-filled family routines. Participants emphasized the importance of weekly Mass attendance, and nearly all

participants reported doing service work and giving to charity, with many doing so through their parish or a church organization. Mark Gray, Director of CARA Catholic Polls, told OSV News the findings from these qualitative interviews were not meant to be taken as some sort of “checklist” of things to keep one’s child Catholic, but parents could gain insight from the common responses.

USCCB Chairman Criticizes Proposed Immigration Bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. – While reiterating support for bipartisan cooperation that leads to immigration reform, Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, asserted that the bill now before the U.S. Senate is “flawed, both in terms of substance and form.” In a letter to Senate leadership, Bishop Seitz, who serves as Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Migration, expressed serious concerns about some of the migration-related provisions included in the Senate’s version of the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024.

Taking no position on the overall measure, Bishop Seitz stated: “We welcome and encourage genuine bipartisan cooperation to address the challenges of our time, but we believe this effort to make sweeping changes to immigration law – particularly in the context of this supplemental funding bill – is flawed, both in terms of substance and form. ... Several changes proposed in this bill would unjustly undermine due process and pave the way for avoidable and potentially life-threatening harm to be inflicted on vulnerable persons seeking humanitarian protection in the United States. As shepherds committed to defending the sanctity of human life and upholding the God-given dignity of all, we implore you to reject those changes,” he wrote. In his letter, Bishop Seitz addressed several specific provisions that warranted concern, including those that would severely limit due process for noncitizens, make it even more difficult than it already is under current law for those with bona fide asylum claims to pursue protection in the United States, and create the opportunity for harmful, arbitrary, and counterproductive treatment of vulnerable persons. “We cannot achieve the necessary reform of our immigration system without authentic bipartisanship,” Bishop Seitz concluded, calling for a “transparent, well-informed, bicameral, and truly bipartisan approach” to immigration reform.

Missouri Bishop, Pro-Life Outreach Earn Wins in Super Bowl Wager

KANSAS CITY, Missouri (OSV News) – On Sunday, February 11, the Kansas City Chiefs claimed their second straight NFL championship by beating the San Francisco 49ers in overtime at Super Bowl LVIII in Las Vegas. Before the game, the archbishops of the respective cities engaged in a good-natured – and charitable – wager on the game. Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone of San Francisco and Bishop James V. Johnston of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri, agreed to pay up in seafood and steak if their team lost. Both prelates also agreed to wager with a different endgame: a donation to the local pro-life organization of the winner’s choice. The Chiefs’ win ended up being a victory, as well, for Patti Lewis, a cardiology nurse and founder of Alexandra’s House in Kansas City, Missouri. The funds to be donated by Archbishop Cordileone, Lewis said, will further the work of the perinatal hospice she opened in 1997 in honor of her niece, who had died three years earlier from a rare genetic syndrome just 45 days after birth. Lewis told OSV News she will be grateful for any donation resulting from the bishops’ wager.

AROUND THE DIOCESE

Pro-Life Breakfast Brings African American Community Together

SOUTH BEND – On Saturday, February 10, officials with Right to Life Michiana hosted the organization's annual African Americans for Life Breakfast in South Bend. The event, held during Black History Month as a way for the community to come together and honor the dignity of all human life, sought to seek collaboration and raise awareness of how abortion uniquely affects the African American community.

"We came together Saturday united in Christ's desire for us all: that we might have life and have it abundantly," said Antonio Marchi, Executive Director of Right to Life Michiana. "We were greatly encouraged by the opportunity to come together with nearly 150 African Americans in our community to build bridges in support of life from the womb to the tomb and everywhere in between."

At the event, Deacon Mel Tardy of St. Augustine Parish in South Bend offered the opening prayer.

"It was heartwarming to witness this ecumenical gathering of African Americans in support of life," Deacon Tardy told Today's Catholic.

The event's keynote speaker, Belinda Guyton, discussed her own experience with abortion, how she came to have a change of heart, and her work with pro-life causes. Guyton has spent nearly 30 years working with women experiencing crisis pregnancies in Chicago.

Marchi said the breakfast, and the preparation for it, "opened the door to countless opportunities for heartfelt conversations in search of mutual understanding."

Moved by these conversations, Marchi said he and officials with Right to Life Michiana look to continue the larger conversation and learn more about building a culture of life by better understanding how abortion impacts the African American community.

"My heart has certainly been moved as I am learning the unique challenges faced by African Americans in our community, and I look forward to soaking in more wisdom and insights from the experiences of African American brothers and sisters here in Michiana," he said. — *Claire Kenney*



Provided by Right to Life Michiana

Attendees gather at the African Americans for Life Breakfast in South Bend on Saturday, February 10. The event, sponsored by Right to Life Michiana, drew 150 people to celebrate the dignity of all human life.

Longtime St. Casimir Organist Given Spirit of Holy Cross Award

BY GENEVIEVE
WOJCIECHOWSKI

For 48 years as an organist and choir director – most recently at St. Casimir Parish – Richard Wojtasik has provided the Catholic community in parishes in and around South Bend with beautiful sacred music. For his service to the Body of Christ, Wojtasik was presented the 2023 Spirit of Holy Cross Award on January 26 by Holy Cross Father Ryan Pietrocarlo, Pastor at St. Casimir and St. Adalbert's Church in South Bend.

The Spirit of Holy Cross Award is given annually to lay collaborators who faithfully serve Congregation of Holy Cross, United States Province of Priests and Brothers, in the U.S. and abroad. The award acknowledges the critical role lay collaborators play in living out the vision and mission of Holy Cross Founder Blessed Basil Moreau: to make God known, loved, and served through education, parish, and mission settings.

Wojtasik was born and raised in South Bend. After high school, he entered the

novitiate of the Franciscan Order in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, which is where he learned to play the organ. After attending college at St. Mary's Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan, he returned to South Bend in 1975. His love of music led him to be a choir director and organist at St. Jude Church in South Bend, as well as St. Stephen Parish until it was closed and merged with St. Adalbert. That led to his current and longest role at St. Casimir.

Being of Polish descent and speaking the language in his home, he learned to appreciate the beautiful Polish hymns, which he sang at the well-attended Polish-language Masses at St. Casimir and St. Adalbert. Throughout his career as a musician and choir director, Wojtasik has played at countless weddings, funerals, and other religious ceremonies.

At the end of the January 26 Mass, during which he was presented with the Spirit of the Holy Cross Award, many people came up to congratulate him and share that he had played for their wedding, one as far back as 1988.

"I was very surprised and humbled when I was told I was chosen to receive the award," Wojtasik told Today's Catholic. "My faith is very important to me, and to be able to continue singing these hymns and keeping the Polish tradition alive is something I am so glad to be able to do."



Photos by Genevieve Wojciechowski

Richard Wojtasik, organist and choir director at St. Casimir Parish in South Bend, poses with the Spirit of Holy Cross Award he received from Father Ryan Pietrocarlo during Mass on Sunday, January 26.





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Understanding Our Lenten Call to Conversion and Repentance

BY FATHER MARK HELLINGER

"The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

The First Sunday of Lent is upon us, and through the readings and prayers, we dive right into richness of this season. The word "repent" can often land in various ways in a person's soul. And yet, it is among the first words uttered by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark.

The word itself has a twofold accent. To repent could mean to turn around, but the more dominant meaning is the changing of one's mind. The call of Jesus in the Gospel to "repent!" is eloquently elaborated by the prayers of the Mass this Sunday. In the collect prayer, we pray that, through our observance of Lent, "we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ" and pursue their effects. In the prayer over the offerings, we ask God for the right dispositions – that is, the right qualities of mind and character – to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice. The task of conversion/repentance involves seeing the

world and ourselves in a new light. It involves a change of mind away from the corruption of sin and toward Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom of God.

In his audience on Ash Wednesday in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI said: "What does 'to be converted' actually mean? It means seeking God, moving with God, docilely following the teachings of His Son, Jesus Christ; to be converted is not a work for self-fulfillment, because the human being is not the architect of his own eternal destiny. We did not make ourselves. ... Conversion consists in freely and lovingly accepting to depend in all things on God, our true Creator, to depend on love. This is not dependence but freedom."

The work of repentance is the work of being overtaken by God – freely accepting Him into our hearts, minds, and souls,

so that we might actually become free – free from the chains of sin, free from the corruption of our minds (which draws us into vice), free to live a life of love. And this begins with a turning back *toward* God and *away* from the prince of this world and his hold on us. That is to say, it begins with the renewal of the mind – as St. Paul instructs us in his Letter to the Romans: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Recognizing this reality – the need for the renewal of the mind as an essential aspect of the conversion that the season of Lent invites us into – we do well to also remember that this season has long been associated with the penitential preparation of the catechumens

to enter the Church through baptism at Easter. Thus, both the baptized and not-yet-baptized enter into a journey of conversion that is, in its essence, an *ecclesial* experience. Lent provides an opportunity for all of us to prepare our minds and hearts anew for the grace of baptism – whether we are receiving the sacrament at Easter or renewing the grace that was given to us before. This is because conversion is not a moment; it is not a one-and-done deal. It is a continual journey and task – one that requires renewal and grace to integrate the whole of our lives.

Thus, the command to "repent," which Christ utters in the Gospel this Sunday, excludes no one. From the most abhorrent sinner to the most faithful Catholic, all are commanded to allow the Lord to continually change and renew our minds. Through

this process, this continual journey, we grow in knowledge of the mysteries of Christ – the hidden richness of His Person and what He has done for us. We also grow deeper in our incorporation into the mystery of His body, the Church.

Conversion and the call to repentance are not projects that we check off of our otherwise full to-do list; rather, these are the life-tasks of the Christian. Everything – all our mind, heart, will, and passions – must be turned back to God, reconciled to Him, and changed into Christ. This is at the heart of the Lenten experience, and God already offers us the grace we need to engage this task with all that we have. This is all wrapped up in our prayer after Communion when we ask "that we may learn to hunger for Christ, the true and living Bread, and strive to live by every word which proceeds from your mouth."

Father Mark Hellinger is Parochial Vicar at St. John the Baptist Church in Fort Wayne. He will write weekly reflections throughout Lent in Today's Catholic.

Full of Grace Religious Goods: A Store Years in the Making

BY KASIA BALSBAUGH

Opening a Catholic gift store had been a dream of Judy Finkler's for 15 years. With support from her husband, Mike, that dream finally became real in 2023 with the opening of Full of Grace Religious Goods in downtown Mishawaka.

The Finklers are lifelong locals of the south side of South Bend, and they live five minutes from their parish, St. Jude Catholic Church. Judy went to school there as a child, as did the couple's own children. At first, they weren't considering Mishawaka as a potential location for their Catholic gift store. After abandoning their original plan of remodeling an old house, they had almost given up hope, Mike said.

"We'd been looking for 14 years, we just couldn't find anything that would be affordable," he said.

"Or suitable," Judy added.

The Finklers stumbled across their current space while they were in downtown Mishawaka for dinner. "It was such a poor-looking place; it was in such bad shape," Mike remembered.

A few months later, the Finklers were back in town for dinner and passed by the space again, noticing this time that it was empty. "I just stopped right in front of the store and said, 'If we're going to do this, this is the place to do it,'" Judy said.

The space needed a lot of remodeling before opening. Mike, a home remodeler and real estate agent by trade, worked on it for months, putting in walls, adding new flooring, and building almost all the display cases. The store officially opened on April 1, 2023. The mayor of Mishawaka was present at the ribbon cutting, as was the couple's pastor, Father John Delaney of St. Jude, who blessed the new store.

The Finklers said that both downtown Mishawaka and the local Catholic churches have been very supportive and have helped get the word out. "One of the biggest hurdles is just having people know that you even exist," Judy said with a laugh.

However, the store has already built up a solid customer base, especially because it is now the only Catholic gift store in the South Bend area. "People have been really happy to see us here, because we're the only place between here and Fort Wayne," Mike said.

Loyal customer Kathy Cruickshank said she visits Full of Grace Religious Goods once or twice a month. Most recently, she was there to buy a birthday gift for a young rela-



Photos by Kasia Balsbaugh

Mike and Judy Finkler stand behind the counter in their store Full of Grace Religious Goods, located in downtown Mishawaka.



Mishawaka's Full of Grace Religious Goods offers Catholic items from books to rosaries, icons to jewelry, T-shirts to dog leashes.

tive whose family just became Catholic.

"I'm just so happy that somebody opened a place like this," Cruickshank said. She added that she advertises the business to all her friends at her parish.

Mike Finkler said he and Judy have toured Catholic bookstores all across the Midwest and gone to a convention in Chicago to "get a feel for" opportunities and the types of merchandise they could offer. "We wanted to have higher quality things but still keep it affordable – the stuff that you don't see a lot online," Mike said.

Judy does most of the ordering and tries to procure new items and rotate out old

ones every two weeks so customers see new things every time they come in. Mike said they also try to scout out one-of-a-kind items. As an example, he pointed to the crucifix above their counter. "It shows so much of Christ's pain," Mike said, explaining how it is unique compared to many other crucifixes for sale.

Another best-seller, Mike said, is clothing, such as religious print socks and the popular "Never go out without your wingman" T-shirt, which sports a picture of St. Michael the Archangel.

The store also features goods from local artists, such as Sacred Woodworks, and nonprofits such as the Starfish Project, which sells jewelry

made by women who have escaped the sex trafficking industry.

Full of Grace also stocks a wide selection of cards for all sorts of religious occasions. Mike pointed out the variety of cards just for priests – there are cards for ordinations, priestly anniversaries, new assignments, Christmas wishes to your pastor, and others. The cards keep some customers coming back, because they can't find baptism cards for a great-granddaughter anywhere else, Mike said.

Mike said a lot of their customers appreciate that the store is in-person. "They say, 'We'd rather give [money] to a local company where we can feel what we're buying and see the quality,'" Mike said. "Where online you can't; you're just guessing at what the quality is."

Judy also said their customers give back to them in more ways than financially.

"An unexpected blessing is the people who come in here every day, and they're telling their story and just sharing so much, and it really builds your faith," Judy said. "We see people all the time coming in that are so faithful, and it helps us."

As Full of Grace Religious Goods approaches its first anniversary, the Finklers said it continues to grow and become visible in the local community. Most recently, the store is collaborating with the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend to provide gifts for those who finish the "Eucharistic passport," a project of the diocese's Eucharistic Revival.

"We're just here to serve people and give options for expressing faith at home and in life," Judy said.



This is the storefront of Full of Grace Religious Goods, located at 124 N. Main St. in downtown Mishawaka.

meaning, that there is purpose and redemption in your suffering and your challenges. And that all flows from the fact that you are a unique human person who is loved by God in your uniqueness. That is not a message that people are finding out there, and to know that meaning and purpose is one way in which our own lives are folded into the reality of God's love. In knowing that, we see that our lives now become this further revealing of the God who made us and loves us. I think that we're going to continue to see people get more and more hungry for that kind of truth, and I think that we're also seeing a culture where it's harder and harder to find that.

Today's Catholic:

That sort of dovetails into why the mission of Saint Francis and other Catholic universities, high schools, and even grade schools remains so important, correct?

Giltner:

When we did our new student orientation in January, the first thing we told them – whether they are Catholic or Christian or of no religious tradition at all – was: You are a child of God. You have inherent dignity and worth as a human being, and we're not here to just teach you how to make a good spreadsheet or write a research paper; you're here to learn about your infinite value as a child of God, and then how that can provide meaning and purpose to your life, and that the world is not just the sometimes cold place it can seem, but that there is a deep calling that resonates with each of us, and it's a statement

about the fuller meaning of what it means to be human.

Like, Ex Corde Ecclesiae says, the Catholic university exists to help people come to the full measure of their humanity. That's the business we're in.

Today's Catholic: Again, there's so much negativity surrounding the perceived lack of faith by young people, but you see the young Church up close every day. Are you worried about its future?

Giltner: No. And I say that in kind of two ways. One is my vantage point as a historical theologian. God has always raised up, every generation, people who are sold out for Him and who are going to change the world. For example, on the road to Damascus, this thing happens, and a killer of Christians becomes an apostle who wrote half of the New Testament, and that changed the course of history. ... I see students here every day

who are going to change the world, they're going impact the world. God has lit them on fire, and this fire has sent them out into a world that needs them. And so no, I don't worry about the future of the Church.

One of the cool things about my job is I get to see up close the kind of work God is doing in youth that's going to change the world. And I know that God is not just doing it here; He's doing it all over the world. He always raises up leaders, and to get to see that happen and be a part of that is one of the most amazing things that I've ever done.

"While statistics show a real cause for concern, young people today seem to be seeking something greater, and they are hungry for meaning, because the culture's not giving them what they need."

ALEX GILTNER



ST. THOMAS MORE

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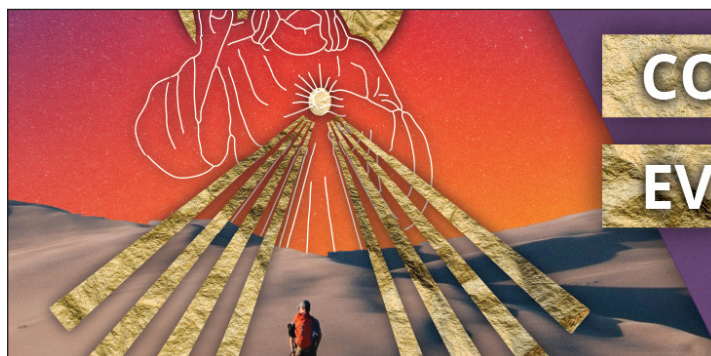
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Students in the Assisi Program at Saint Francis gather around a statue of Blessed Solanus Casey at the St. Felix Catholic Center in Huntington during a recent retreat.

CONFESSION IN EVERY PARISH

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How Boredom Helps Us to Know God (and Ourselves)

St. Augustine famously said, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee,” but what exactly is the “restlessness” from which we’re being rescued?

I think Augustine was thinking of people like himself, who moved from philosophy to philosophy and their associated ways of living, never finding any of them satisfying. But we can feel restless – we can be restless – in all sorts of ways.

The 17th-century mathematician-philosopher Blaise Pascal described one kind of restlessness I know well, and one I think afflicts many more people today than Augustine’s kind. He describes it in his “Pensees,” a collection of his notes for a book of apologetics he never got to write. (He died in 1662 at the age of 39. For more on his insights, read Pope Francis’ apostolic letter *Sublimitas et Miseria Hominis*.)

This restlessness he describes as the desire for “diversion,” constantly looking for ways to avoid facing the realities we don’t want to face. Chief among them, our unsatisfactory selves. “Being unable to cure death, wretchedness, and ignorance,” Pascal writes, “men have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about such things.”

We move restlessly through life because, if we stop moving, the realities we don’t want to think about will push themselves into our thoughts – realities like

the knowledge that we will die, that we have not been the kind of people we should have been and wanted to be, that we have not done what we could have done, that we have gotten so much and not given enough back. Or like that memory of the time we were so cruel to a friend, were so cowardly or calculating or contemptuous, or otherwise failed in a way we still feel.

“The only thing which consoles us for our miseries is diversion, and yet this is the greatest of our miseries,” Pascal writes. “But for that we should be bored, and boredom would drive us to seek some more solid means of escape, but diversion passes our time and brings us imperceptibly to our death.”

Pascal put this insight into some nice short sayings, such as, “We prefer the hunt to the capture,” and “Only the contest appeals to us, not the victory.” And my favorite, “The sole cause of man’s unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room.”

We can divert ourselves into what looks like happiness, but really isn’t. We’re not really happy, we’re tranquilized. Pascal gives as examples gambling and the theater — the kinds of things we expect. But we can divert ourselves in many ways.

We may face more danger of diversion than did the people of his day. His “theater” for us includes movies, sports, concerts, social media exchanges, even



LIFE IN THE WORLD

DAVID MILLS

politics and religion. Anything can divert us from looking at ourselves.

Pascal remarks several times that people work to provide kings with distractions. We are kings in that sense: A great many people (and society itself) work hard to keep us diverted.

Society does not want people who can face seeing themselves as they are, because they might do something to change, and that will mean rejecting much that society depends on — like buying lots of things they don’t need and instead paying critical attention to the society that encourages them to buy lots of things they don’t need.

Pascal had, I should say, a grim view of man’s “hollow and foul” heart and didn’t see the difference between a diversion and a proper entertainment. Whether an activity is for us one or the other depends on why we do it.

We aren’t necessarily hiding from ourselves or from God when we enjoy a baseball game

MILLS, page 13

Walking with St. Francis in Assisi

Fourteen meetings in six days may be a very efficient way to use one’s time, but perhaps it is not the best way to enjoy Italy. Landing in Rome on Saturday afternoon, I had my first meeting that evening, and they continued by ones or twos or fours through Thursday of the following week.

Our single meeting on Wednesday was in Assisi. A little more than two hours from Rome by car, Assisi, of course, has always been on my Catholic bucket list, but somehow I had never made it to the home of St. Francis and St. Clare and Blessed Carlo Acutis until we had an appointment with the Bishop of Assisi to discuss a book he has written.

A small, energetic, and jovial man, Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino greeted us with a twinkle in his eye, a broad smile on his face, and genuine delight that an American Catholic publisher might be interested in what he had to say about the life and work of the only economist ever to be beatified. (A few years ago, I would have said that tells us all we need to know about economists, but I am older and wiser now.)

Even more importantly, Archbishop Sorrentino wanted us to see the doorway through which St. Francis was dragged or pushed by his father, when, having had enough of his son’s



ALL THINGS NEW

SCOTT P. RICHERT

radical rhetoric, he brought him to the episcopal palace in a last desperate attempt to get Francis to embrace his station in life. There, on the other side of the Portal of Renunciation — only recently rediscovered through the archeological efforts of Archbishop Sorrentino — Francis stripped himself of the rich clothes of his father and was wrapped in the bishop’s own robes, embraced by the Church as he, in turn, embraced a life of radical poverty in service to Christ and His Gospel.

God writes straight with crooked lines, the Portuguese proverb says, subtly reminding us of the way in which He, and He alone, can take our sins and failings and turn them to the good. But the line from St. Francis to Blessed Carlo Acutis is straight and strong (as Archbishop Sorrentino has demonstrated in another book), and walking the streets of Assisi, one can see why. There’s something in the very nature of Italian hill towns

RICHERT, page 13

Our Actions, Desire for His Mercy, Show Our Love for God



THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

First Sunday of Lent

The first reading, from the Book of Genesis, presents the familiar story of Noah. It is a story of a contrast and of the consequences of this contrast. Noah was faithful, whereas the world was almost universally unfaithful. God protected Noah from doom, to which the sinful world succumbed.

Warned by God, Noah took his family, and couples of the various animals, onto the ark that Noah constructed. As the floodwaters ebbed, the ark settled on dry land. By God’s help, all aboard Noah’s ark survived.

God assured Noah, and all people, that never again would a flood destroy the earth. God

promised a covenant with Noah’s people. Under this covenant, or solemn agreement, the people obeyed God’s Law. In turn, God protected them from peril.

It is the foundational story of all that would be revealed in the long history of salvation. Sin unfailingly destroys, but God protects the truly faithful.

The second reading is from the Second Epistle of Peter. The letter states that it was composed in Babylon, a symbol of Rome, the mighty imperial capital, and the center of paganism and of the most impious culture.

Roman Christians at the time very much required encouragement. This epistle provided such encouragement by recalling the faithfulness of Noah, insisting that God protects and saves the faithful, who in baptism, and in holiness, bond themselves with Jesus.

St. Mark’s Gospel furnishes the last reading. It is very brief, only a few verses, but its brevity gives it drama and direct-

ness in its message.

Use of the number “40” is revealing, suggesting the 40 days spent by Moses in the desert before God gave him the law on Sinai. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert. He was the bearer of God’s holy word, as was Moses. “Forty” was code for the perfectly fulfilled.

After 40 days of prayer, Jesus undertook the mission of redemption and reconciliation.

Wild beasts were a threat in the Judean wilderness, but angels protected Jesus. Mark does not lose the chance again to assert that Jesus is the Son of God.

At last, after John’s arrest and removal from the scene, the culmination of salvation awaits in Jesus. Jesus steps forward, proclaiming that God’s majesty literally will be seen.

The Lord calls upon the people to repent. “The time of fulfillment” is at hand. God will be vindicated. Jesus has come to set everything in balance. The sinful will be laid low. The good will endure.

Reflection

The Church has begun Lent, the most intense period in the year of enabling union with God. While Ash Wednesday was the first day of Lent, many Catholics will begin the Lenten process with this weekend’s Mass.

The readings call us to face the realities of our lives as humans, capable of good or evil, according to what we choose.

Regardless of the exact details of the flood described in Genesis, so often discussed in many circles, the religious message of Noah and his ark supplies a fitting beginning for reflection for Lent. Sin — the willful rejection of God — leads necessarily and always to destruction. Jesus saves us from peril.

His salvation is total and available to us if we sincerely turn to the Lord. He offers eternal life and peace to us now. Always, God is forgiving and merciful. No sin is too evil to be forgiven, no distance from God

too wide to bridge.

Essential to asking for forgiveness is honestly to admit personal sin, by delving deeply into our hearts and minds and scrutinizing what we have done or not done.

This process requires humility, courage, and a frank, maybe uncomfortable, analysis of ourselves. The Church gives us Lent as an aide.

READINGS

Sunday: Genesis 9:8-15; Psalms 25:4-9; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15

Monday: Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Psalms 19:8-10, 15; Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday: Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalms 34:4-7, 16-19; Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday: Jonah 3:1-10; Psalms 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19; Luke 11:29-32

Thursday: 1 Peter 5:1-4; Psalms 23:1-6; Matthew 16:13-19

Friday: Ezekiel 18:21-28; Psalms 130:1-8; Matthew 5:20-26

Saturday: Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Psalms 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8; Matthew 5:43-48

Grammys' 'Fast Car' Chatter Exposes the Need for Love

"You got a fast car / I got a job that pays all our bills / You stay out drinking late at the bar / See more of your friends than you do of your kids."

You may recognize the lyrics to the popular 1988 song by Tracy Chapman, "Fast Car." It's back in rotation, and Luke Combs, who is currently successfully covering it, got to sing it with Chapman at the Grammys in early February. He grew up listening to it, and you could see his love for it as he mouthed the words as she sang her parts.

I didn't watch the Grammys, but it was hard not to hear about the performance. I noticed people on the right and left talking about it. The song tells a human story about looking for meaning, having hope, and wanting better. It's about one partner wanting to work hard for the sake of the couple's flourishing.

"I'd always hoped for better," the lyrics explain at the end. "Thought maybe together you and me'd find it / I got no plans, I ain't going nowhere / Take your fast car and keep on driving." It continues, "I had the feeling I would be someone." These are the most brutal words of the song.

For a moment, I thought that loving the performance of "Fast Car," for those who watched, was a potential moment of cultural unity. Then I happened upon a columnist in the Boston Globe explaining how the song has different meanings now than when Chapman first wrote it based

on her experience of being raised by a single mother.

"Listen to the song today, and you'll hear the plaintive cry of a young trans person trying to leave a state infested with codified hate," the writer explained, "a woman forced to travel far from home to make the best decisions for her life and body."

Inasmuch as the song is about pain, OK. But the song is about a woman looking for something better and being failed by a man who doesn't step up to the plate. She wants more. And she thinks what he presents as love will make the difference if they work hard enough together. The song tells the real, painful story of why women feel forced to abort their children.

The beginning of the song should draw us to the hearts of innocent women (and men) who suffer — who have love in their hearts but haven't had the examples of living that love sacrificially. In the song, we hear about a mother who left, a father who drank, and a daughter who took care of him because of her motherly heart — even as a child dropping out of school to take on duties beyond her years.

What does it say that a mainstream reaction to rehearsing the song is to say: Make sure women can get abortions on demand and children can get hormone blockers? How about helping families flourish? How about providing women with what they need to be the mothers they already are? How about letting her know that



TAKING NOTE

KATHRYN JEAN LOPEZ

she is someone, and that we love her enough as Christians and neighbors and fellow citizens to do everything in our power to help her see that she is someone who is worth our time and more?

I don't drive (I was born in New York City, and it's a thing), but if I had a fast car, I'd want to use it to help more women who are dreaming about something better. Of course, you don't need a fast car. All you need is a heart and a willingness to open it to the kind of radical hospitality that Jesus showed us.

"We've gotta make a decision," Chapman sings. We need to start on a new road, or we may find ourselves answering to God for some things we did and didn't do. It's not just about abortion or the harm being done to our young people through gender ideology; it's about simply loving one another more deeply with the heart of Christ in every encounter.

Kathryn Jean Lopez is a Senior Fellow at the National Review Institute and Editor-at-Large of National Review.

RICHERT, from page 12

that seems designed to create saints.

If, to the average American, life in Rome seems slower and sweeter than the day-to-day grind back in the States, the very reality of having to walk uphill both ways as one goes about one's daily life in Assisi slows not only the body but the mind. As the constant buzz of modern life recedes into the distance, replaced by the rhythmic breathing of lungs not used to the climb, the still, small voice of God can reemerge in a silence punctuated only by the sound of one's slow footfalls.

Descending to the crypt in the Basilica di San Francesco d'Assisi and spending some time in prayer before the tomb of the saint before ascending into the upper church impresses upon the body as much as on the soul that our life on this earth, like his, will one day end, and the final disposition of our soul will depend not only on God's mercy then but

on our efforts here and now to rise from the depths and climb toward heaven. The holy sacrifice of the Mass, re-presented each day directly over the tomb of St. Francis, reminds us that St. Francis had so united his very being to that sacrifice that the wounds of Christ appeared in his own body. We may not personally bear the stigmata, but every Christian is called to enter into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection in such a way that we die to self and rise again with Him into a life that transcends our own.

Tomorrow, there are more meetings in Rome, and some time to visit a few of my favorite churches. But this evening, as Assisi fades into the distance, I am already hoping to return here one day, to walk these streets slowly once again, and to remind my soul and my body what it means to be a pilgrim in this life.

Scott Richert is the Publisher of Our Sunday Visitor. Visit OSVNews.com.

MILLS, from page 12

with friends. Nor did he have any idea of neurodivergence and other influences that would make someone look from the outside like someone seeking diversion.

Pascal intended his analysis of diversion as an argument for belief in God, by pointing out that we need diversion to keep us from seeing how wretched we are. He believed we remember in some way our ancestors' past happiness and want the truth that will make us happy again. "The less man were diverted," he writes, "the happier he would be, like the saints and God."

The psalmist says, "Be still and know that I am God." Pascal adds, "Be still and know that you are you." Don't divert yourself or let yourself be diverted. By knowing you are you, you may find yourself looking for the loving God who will save you from yourself.

David Mills is a columnist for OSV News. He writes from Pennsylvania.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for February 18, 2024

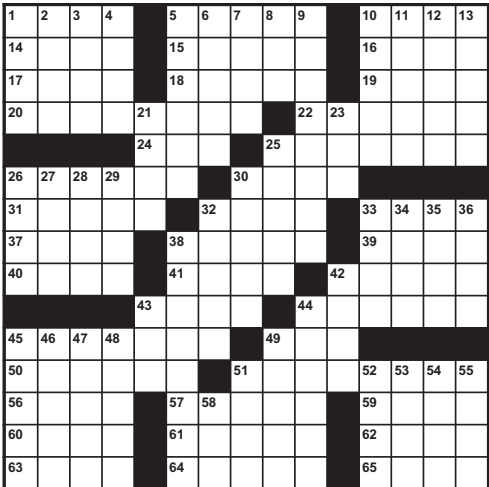
1 Peter 3: 18-22 / Mark 1:12-15

Following is a word search based on the second and Gospel readings for the First Sunday of Lent, Cycle B. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

CHRIST	SUFFERED	ONCE
FLESH	ALIVE	PRISON
DAYS OF NOAH	BUILDING	EIGHT
SUBJECT	SPIRIT	TEMPTED
SATAN	WILD	ANGELS
JOHN	ARRESTED	PROCLAIMING
THE TIME	KINGDOM	REPENT

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ACROSS

- 1 Commandment carrier, and others
- 5 Animal
- 10 One of the Mamas
- 14 Small mountain
- 15 Duck
- 16 Against
- 17 Start of a sphere?
- 18 Russian revolutionary leader
- 19 Alphabet string
- 20 Saint who founded an order of monks
- 22 Pairs' debarking point
- 24 Nevertheless
- 25 Thomas Aquinas is patron saint of these Catholic institutions
- 26 Catholic ____ Services
- 30 The Diocese of Youngstown is found here
- 31 Simon Peter drew one
- 32 Sitter's bane
- 33 Prejudice
- 37 The sacred scripture of Hinduism
- 38 Insanely
- 39 Part
- 40 ____-dieu
- 41 Encourage in wrongdoing
- 42 "____ Noster"
- 43 Sonny's ex
- 44 Council of 325 AD
- 45 Oldest chant in the Proper of the Mass
- 49 Biennial games org.
- 50 Simpler
- 51 "____ but never duplicated"
- 56 Small notch
- 57 Father-in-law of Caiaphas
- 59 Flat-topped rise
- 60 Drooling dog of comics
- 61 First name of Pope Francis I
- 62 ____ B'rith
- 63 Sale words
- 64 Ram sign
- 65 Responsibility

DOWN

- 1 Husband of Queen Jezebel
- 2 Religious ceremony
- 3 Alphabet string
- 4 Blackthorn fruit
- 5 Faith
- 6 College of Cardinals' task regarding the pope
- 7 Relative
- 8 Reagan security program
- 9 Perseverance
- 10 Source of chocolate
- 11 Male (comb.)
- 12 To do this is forbidden by the seventh commandment
- 13 Uses a sieve
- 21 Colored
- 23 Chi ____
- 25 Commandment word
- 26 Confirm, in a way
- 27 Pitcher
- 28 City southeast of Milan
- 29 "Dies ____"
- 30 Group of religious
- 32 Genesis tower
- 33 Bric-a-____
- 34 Very small quantity
- 35 On sheltered side
- 36 Vaccines
- 38 Prince of India
- 42 One of St. Columba's converts
- 43 Stimulus
- 44 Sounds
- 45 Archdiocese in northern Italy
- 46 Assaults
- 47 Computer file acronym
- 48 Embankments
- 49 "Let us make human beings in our ____" (Gen 1:26)
- 51 Letters above the cross
- 52 Lectern
- 53 US state in which the Diocese of Nashville is found
- 54 Biblical twin
- 55 Raised platform
- 58 Neither's partner

Answer key can be found on page 15

A Reading List for Catholics During Black History Month

BY KENNETH CRAYCRAFT

While ersatz celebrations of February as Black History Month have existed from as early as 1970, it became officially recognized in the United States in 1976. In conjunction with the national bicentennial, then President Gerald Ford encouraged Americans to “review with admiration the impressive contributions of Black Americans to our national life and culture.” Noting the ideals of “freedom ... and individual rights” at the heart of the founding of our country, Ford observed that “it took many years before ideals became a reality for Black citizens.”

Of course, the transition from ideals to a reality for Black people had not been fully accomplished in 1976; nor has it been fulfilled in 2024. To be sure, we have made significant progress in removing institutional and cultural barriers to economic, social, and political participation. Far more than was true in 1976, we have “witnessed significant strides in the full integration of Black people into every area of national life,” to use Ford’s words.

But the removal of institutional barriers alone is insufficient to accomplish the fulness of the ideals of which the president spoke. Residual disadvantages remain from the hundreds of years of slavery, followed by the scores of years of Jim Crow laws. Even more difficult to eradicate than the legacy of political and legal barriers are the fears, prejudices, and implicit biases that hide in the crevices of the

human heart. Thus, Black History Month remains a vital observation for our national conscience, for at least three reasons.

First, it is an opportunity for us to remember the unspeakable cruelty of chattel slavery. We must never forget the brutal history of American slavery, from the barbaric transportation in slave ships, to the rending of children from their parents and husbands from their wives, to the physical and psychological abuse of slave labor itself.

Second, Black History Month is a time to celebrate and advance the contribution that Black Americans have made to our common culture. This includes, but is not limited to, the intellectual, artistic, and political contributions of Black Americans. We must also recognize and admire the moral resilience of Black Americans. This spirit reminds us that we are all called to overcome suffering when we can and endure it with grace and dignity when we cannot. As Ford put it in 1976, “we can seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

Finally, Black History Month is the opportunity for all Americans to examine our own attitudes toward those who are different from us. It is a mistake simply to identify diffidence or reticence as racism. Tending toward people who are like us is not necessarily the same as steering away from those who are not. To reduce natural affinity to racism is often a barrier to authentic inquiry and understanding.



OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

A woman gives the peace sign during the Archdiocese of New York’s annual Black History Month Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City on Sunday, February 4.

That said, however, we all — without regard to race, ethnicity, or other demographic characteristics — must continue to examine our own attitudes about “the other.” Where people are alienated from one another, authentic solidarity is not obtained. Transcending alienation begins with self-examination of our own latent fear and distrust, even when they don’t descend to overt racism.

I suggest a very brief list of books that, each in its distinct way, helps us to observe all three purposes of Black History Month.

No book has taught me more about the cruelty of slavery and the nobility of the spirit of Black people than David W. Blight’s monumental biography, “Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom.” Drawing upon a wealth of original sources, Blight skillfully reconstructs the life of Douglass, from his childhood on a

Maryland plantation, to his audacious escape from slavery, to the heights of American journalism and political life. Douglass could be called the Black conscience of American history, and Blight’s book brings him to life. Shorter but no less valuable companions are Douglass’ own three volumes of memoirs, “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,” “My Bondage and My Freedom,” and “Life and Times of Frederick Douglass.”

Booker T. Washington’s classic autobiography, “Up From Slavery,” is the classic story of one man’s emergence from the legacy of slavery and his ability to bring others along with him. Washington’s most striking virtue was his indefatigable optimism. Born into slavery in 1856, Washington had every reason to abandon hope of building a happy life in early postbellum America. But Washington set his face forward and became a pioneer in educating the children and grandchildren of slaves. Indeed, he might be called the father of Black higher education in America.

Washington’s intellectual rival and foil, W.E.B. Du Bois, presents a less optimistic analysis of the lives of Black people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in his classic collection of essays, “The Souls of Black Folk.” This collection of political, economic, and sociological studies of the lives of Black people after the war is more critical of the legacy of American racism than Washington. The two sometimes called each other out about their respective positions, especially with regard

to accommodation of Black people to American political and economic institutions. Washington’s incremental approach was too timid for Du Bois, while Du Bois’ activist approach was too aggressive for Washington. Read together, the two books are a window into the economic and political dilemmas facing the first generation of freed Black people in America.

Finally, I don’t think any novel has stirred my emotions as much as Toni Morrison’s “Beloved.” Largely set in and near my native Cincinnati, Morrison’s novel is an account of the agonizing moral choices of Black slaves and the psychological legacy of slavery even after emancipation. If it is possible to characterize a book as “brutally elegant,” “Beloved” fits the description. Mixing magical realism with actual historical events, Morrison illustrates the sheer horror of slavery and its aftermath. And she takes us deep into our own moral lives as we reflect upon the agony of those who suffered this cruel period of American history.

Tension, misunderstanding, and alienation are part of the fallen human experience. But that does not excuse us from addressing them as a spirit of empathy and solidarity. Black History Month is a reminder that we Christians are called to be voices of reconciliation. These books are useful tools in finding that voice.

Kenneth Craycraft, an OSV columnist, is an Associate Professor of Moral Theology at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary and School of Theology in Cincinnati.

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Our Lady of Good Hope Knights of Columbus Fish Fry

FORT WAYNE – The Knights of Columbus at Our Lady of Good Hope, 7215 Saint Joe Rd., will hold a fish fry on Friday, February 23, from 4:30-7:30 p.m. featuring Alaskan pollock by Dan's of Huntington, baked potato, dinner roll, and dessert. All you can eat for \$15. Carry-out will be available. Must pay inside. Contact Benjamin Rinaldo at 315-415-5941 or brinaldo@gmail.com.

St. Jude Knights Lenten Fish Fry

FORT WAYNE – St. Jude Knights of Columbus Council No. 16065 is sponsoring a Lenten Fish Fry on Friday, February 23, from 4:30-7:30 p.m. in the church basement, 2130 Pemberton Dr. Dine-in tickets are \$15 and includes all-you-can-eat fish with two sides, roll and butter, dessert, and drink. Carryout tickets are \$10 and includes fish only with roll and butter. Contact Kris Church at 260-484-6609 or kchurch@stjudefw.org.

Don Bosco Night

CHURUBUSCO – Join an evening of Catholic faith renewal and entertainment with speakers and music by Chris Padgett, Mary Jo Parish, and ACCLAIM on Friday, February 23, at Churubusco High School, 1 Eagle Dr., from 7-9 p.m. Contact Father Drew Curry at 260-693-9578 or saintjohn.bosco@gmail.com.

Rekindle the Fire Men's Conference

FORT WAYNE – The 13th annual Rekindle the Fire Men's Conference at Allen County War Memorial Coliseum, 4000 Parnell Ave., from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., will offer four dynamic speakers: Father Dwight Longenecker, Father Chris Alar, Chris Padgett, and Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades. Lunch is included. Opportunity for adoration and confessions is available throughout the day. Mass will be offered immediately following the 4 p.m. closing. Cost is \$60, students \$30. Contact Joe Witulski at 260-452-6875.

St. Louis HASA Trivia Night

NEW HAVEN – St. Louis HASA will host a Trivia Night on Saturday, February 24, in the St. Louis Academy gymnasium, 15535 Lincoln Hwy E. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., trivia begins at 7 p.m. Bring your own snacks and drinks. Prizes awarded for best theme table and costumes. Tables are \$60 for six players. Call Alex at 260-715-2288 for information.

Queen of Angels Lenten Fish Fry (Drive-Thru)

FORT WAYNE – Queen of Angels Parish, 1500 West State Blvd., is serving Big Eyed Fish on Friday, March 1, for drive-through pick up from 4-7 p.m. or until fish runs out. Come early and guarantee your generous portion of fish, Big Eye's signature tartar sauce, chips, applesauce, and a cookie. Cost is \$12.50/carryout box.

St. Paul Chapel's Fish Fry

FREMONT – St. Paul Chapel, 8780 E. 700 N., will have an all-you-can-eat fish fry on Friday, March 1, from 5-7 p.m. Dine-in and carryout available. Tickets are \$12 for adults, \$5 for children 6-12, and children 5 and younger are free. Contact Katie Waltke at 260-665-2259 or katie@stpaulcatholicchapel.org.

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Patricia Bonahoom, 89, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Darlene Clabaugh, 73, St. Henry

Joan Kerr, 92, St. Henry

Lou Meek, 85, St. Henry

John Weber, 83, St. Henry

Dorothy Jo Wrizon, 83, St. Vincent de Paul

Granger

Jacqueline Beverly, 79, St. Pius X

Barbara Ferraro, 91, St. Pius X

Kathryn Agnes Houk, 94, St. Pius X

South Bend

Mary Cebulski, 87, Cathedral of St. Matthew

Anthony Krakowski, 76, Cathedral of St. Matthew

Yvonne Mahan, 96, Cathedral of St. Matthew

Rita E. Fricano, 82, Christ the King

Jeffrey Schmuhl, 69, Christ the King

Sadie Guedry, 103, Holy Cross

Edwardine Kalicki, 97, Holy Cross

Christopher L. Miller, 68, St. Jude

Send obituaries to obituaries@diocesefwsb.org.

St. Joseph, Fort Wayne, Knights Fish Fry

FORT WAYNE – St. Joseph, Fort Wayne, Knights of Columbus will have a fish fry on Friday, March 1, from 5-8 p.m., in the school gym, 2211 Brooklyn Ave., corner of Brooklyn and Hale, Door #3. Dine in \$14, carryout \$12, children 4-12 years old \$7. Contact Valentin Vasquez at 260-432-5113 or lsilva@saintjosephfw.org.

St. Vincent Boy Scout Fish Fry

FORT WAYNE – A fish dinner will be held on Friday, March 1, at St. Vincent de Paul School, 1502 E. Wallen Rd., from 5-8 p.m. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$7 for children. Drive-up or carryout are available. Contact Jan Moore at 260-489-1763 or svboyscouts@svboyscouts.org.

Sensory-Friendly Masses Held at St. Vincent de Paul

FORT WAYNE – The 1:30 p.m. sensory-friendly Masses held every Sunday at St. Vincent de Paul, 1502 E. Wallen Rd., provide a safe, comfortable, and stigma-free setting for children and adults with sensory challenges, mental illness, or any kind of disability.

Mass Interpreted for the Deaf Offered in South Bend

SOUTH BEND – St. Matthew Cathedral Parish, 1701 Miami St., will offer an interpreter for the deaf for Masses on the first Sunday of the month at 4 p.m., Saturday evenings, and on the second, third, and fourth Sundays of the month at 11 a.m. at St. Matthew Cathedral.

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ST. AUGUSTINE, from page 1

"St. Augustine's is a multi-racial community but is still considered an African American parish," said Holy Cross Father John M. Santone, Parochial Administrator of St. Augustine. "The parishioners come from various parts of South Bend, but also the surrounding towns. The sense of community, hospitality, and worship brings Catholics to the parish. Those who join often cite the intimacy found in this small but tightly knit community of faith," Father Santone added.

The parish's published mission statement proclaims: "We, the people of St. Augustine Catholic Parish, are a multi-racial faith community, rooted in the African American tradition, nourished by word and sacrament, and empowered by our belief in the redeeming presence of Jesus Christ. We commit ourselves to living the faith and proclaiming the Gospel through our efforts toward evangelization, Spirit-filled worship, community outreach programs, and social services. We welcome all to share in our beliefs and our mission."

Deacon Mel Tardy, a permanent deacon who serves the St. Augustine community, said some think "our African American parish identity is mainly about numbers in the pews. If they see that we are visibly more diverse than expected or than we used to be, they might assume that we are no longer an African American parish. In truth, many things still point to that unique identity."

Deacon Tardy continued: "First is our unique history. Nationwide, many Black Catholic parishes originated as parishes for European immigrants but grew predominantly Black during the decadeslong Great Migration of Blacks from the rural South. Unlike them, St. Augustine Parish was initially founded in 1928 to serve Black folk (diocesan archives say 'Negroes in all of South Bend'). A Holy Cross priest, Father George O'Connor, dedicated his later years to establishing St. Augustine's once hearing that Black Catholic migrants were unwelcomed in local parishes and had no one to tend to their spiritual needs. Given our unique history, we are the only Catholic institution included in Indiana University South Bend's African American Landmarks Tour. We still have parishioners with a lineage dating back to the first families," Deacon Tardy told Today's Catholic.

"To say that we are an 'African American' parish is to also say that Black Catholics indeed exist and – regardless of our sense of welcome at other parishes – we are indeed welcome at St. Augustine and



Lisa Kochanowski



in the Catholic Church. It implies that we have a sense of belonging as well as an agency at St. Augustine to worship and serve in a way that resonates with our distinctive culture and spirituality as a people. It's a place where one's identity as an African American and as a Catholic can co-exist."

Deacon Tardy added: "Second is our attention to Black culture and heritage. Our patron saint, Augustine – a prominent Father and Doctor of the Church – happened to be from Hippo, Africa. Visitors will notice Afrocentric altar cloths, vestments, and images inclusive of Black folk (for example, our 'family portraits'). The latter include artistic renditions of Biblical figures, saints (St. Martin de Porres), candidates for sainthood (Venerable Father Augustus Tolton), as well as photos of bishops (Wilton Cardinal Gregory)," Deacon Tardy said.

The church proudly displays photos of clergy who have served the faith community. Although most have been white, this includes former Assistant Pastor Father Paulinus Odozor (from Nigeria) and two African American deacons: the late Frances Hubbard, who founded the church's soup kitchen, and

Deacon Tardy. Images of civil rights leaders include an iconic photo of the late University of Notre Dame President Father Theodore Hesburgh arm in arm with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Tardy noted if inclusive images alone don't convince visitors that they are welcome, they also welcome all visitors at each Mass and gather at least 30 minutes for heartfelt fellowship afterward.

The close-knit parish offers several special community programs parishioners can get involved with, including a soup kitchen, their active St. Vincent de Paul Society, and an after-school tutoring program. The church's commitment to social justice, hospitality, and ministry to the poor is one of their greatest strengths, Deacon Tardy said.

"Our parishioners individually and collectively serve the needs of the surrounding community, including those who are poor and many who are Black. Several non-Catholic churches are neighbors to St. Augustine. Community activism includes forging relationships and standing in solidarity with them on common concerns, particularly racism. Advocacy also takes place

through parishioner involvement in the local Neighborhood Association, the 100 Black Men of Michiana, Faith in Indiana, etc.," Deacon Tardy said.

Sunday Mass at St. Augustine's is described as authentic, fun, and relaxed, but also intentional. They share practical messages and inspirational music to visitors, presenting the faith in an easy way that can be applied to daily life.

Father Santone said unique aspects of St. Augustine include the parish's worship, "especially the Gospel Choir at the 10:30 a.m. Mass on Sunday," as well as "our outreach to the poor and those in need, [and] the sense of community and hospitality."

PARISH SPOTLIGHT

St. Augustine Church

1501 W. Washington St., South Bend

Founded: 1928

Phone: 574-234-7082

Website: staugustineparish.org

Parochial Administrator:

Father John M. Santone, CSC

Masses:

Sunday – 8:15 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

Parish population: 193 families

250 members

Deacon Tardy elaborated: "Visitors who attend the 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass will encounter the soulful, uplifting music of the St. Augustine Gospel Choir. Black Catholic spirituality is also at times reflected in the preaching, the prayers of the faithful, and the attention to the needs of the local community," he added. "From praying the Rosary together to praying for the canonization of the first recognizably Black priest, Venerable Father Augustus Tolton, our parish has Black Catholics who are faith-engaged and unashamed to be both Black and Catholic."

Deacon Tardy shared that in January, St. Augustine was

one of three historically Black churches invited to host a community event celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. The Indiana University South Bend-led event featured the South Bend Symphony performing the music of Black American composers, a community Gospel Choir, and the words of Martin Luther King Jr. As the only Catholic host church, they surprised all-comers by attracting a standing-room-only number of multiracial attendees.

"St. Augustine, the only historically Black Parish in our diocese, serves as an important hub for many gatherings pertaining to Black Catholics (although many of these gatherings are inter-racial and ecumenical)," Deacon Tardy said. "Our parishioners also participate in local, regional, or national organizations and events relevant to Black Catholic faith and understanding, from the Tolton Ambassadors of Indiana to the National Black Catholic Congress, which attracted 3,000 participants to Washington, D.C., last July. Convening in such ways also allows us to better support mainstream events – for example, gathering a critical mass of Black Catholics to attend the Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in July."

Church leaders work hard to teach the younger generation the importance of being engaged in their faith and carrying on the work and traditions of their church community.

"Through the years, some young folks have gotten involved in church leadership naturally by observing what their parents were doing," Deacon Tardy said. "For example, our Gospel Choir Director, LaDonna Flynn, happens to be the daughter of the late Rob Huddleston, who founded the choir. For 22 years, we've had an active youth ministry program, encouraging faith engagement and evangelization of local youth. Through youth ministry, they learn the Catholic faith in relevant ways; they get involved in sacramental formation and in-service ministries (for example, St. Vincent de Paul); they participate in parish traditions (youth Masses, devotionals regarding Black candidates for sainthood); and they attend events and programs via local Catholic colleges and the diocese (ND Vision, the March for Life)," Deacon Tardy said.

Church leaders hope the congregation finds inspiration in their faith journey when they come to St. Augustine's.

Father Santone said he hopes visitors and parishioners gain "a deepening of their relationship with God, faith, and brothers and sisters in Christ" and "to understand how we're called to put our faith in action as we meet the need of others."