Bringing the world to Jesus... one person at a time
**Rite of Election**

**Bringing the world to Jesus one person at a time**

By JOE PISANI

TRUMBULL—“Bring the world to Jesus one person at a time,” Bishop Frank J. Caggiano told more than 250 children, teenagers and adults in the RCIA program who celebrated the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion, a ceremony that began their final preparation toward full communion with the Catholic Church, on February 18.

St. Theresa Church in Trumbull was filled to capacity by the bishop and the community. They came from 26 parishes throughout the diocese and St. Margaret’s Shrine in Bridgeport. Sacred Heart University in Fairfield brought 14 candidates to the Rite of Election. The largest single group—28 candidates and 12 catechumens—came from St. Mary/St. Benedict-Our Lady of Montserrat Parish in Stamford.

“Bring the world to Jesus one person at a time—that is your Easter homework,” he told them.

Some had already begun the assignment. Michael Wellington, youth director of St. John Parish in Danbury, brought 11-year-old Isaac Morales, whom he had prepared to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil Liturgy. Isaac, a student at Ponus Ridge Middle School in Norwalk, was accompanied by his parents Elizabeth and Edwin. “I wanted to get baptized so I can be closer to God and get into the Church,” he said, smiling.

Diane Kingsley of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish in Shelton is sponsoring Anila Drici from Albania, the sixth member of her family to go through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process. Anila grew up with no faith in a Communist country where Christianity was not allowed. She came to America two years ago and her daughter started taking her to church. She loved it. Her brother introduced her to Deacon Jeff Kingsley and his wife Diane.

“I’m so happy to become a Catholic,” she said, “When I was growing up in Albania, there was no faith, no Church, nothing. Now, my faith in God is so important to me. I am so thankful and want to grow in my faith.”

When Anila is baptized at the Easter Vigil, it will mark the 18th time Diane has been a sponsor, nine times through the RCIA program.

“Initiation is another step deeper into discipleship,” the bishop said. “The journey doesn’t end there. It continues because you are called into full communion with the Church so that you can continue to grow in holiness. Your vocation is to become a saint in this life and in the life to come … and to achieve our true destiny, which is heaven.”

“We live in a world that wants you to be comfortable, a world that wants you to only worry about yourself, a world that says it is only about ‘me,’” Bishop Caggiano told the group. “We come here to tell the world that it is wrong. And that a person who truly wishes to find himself or herself will never be afraid to go into the desert … There we find Christ, and in finding Christ, we have found everything we need.”

The Rite of Election, which is traditionally held on the first Sunday of Lent, marks the end of the formation period of study and prayer and the beginning of the final preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation at Easter—Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation.

During the service, catechumens (those who haven’t been baptized yet) and candidates (those who have been baptized but want to receive Eucharist and Confirmation) came forward to the altar to be personally greeted by Bishop Caggiano, who told them, “I will be praying for you.”

Rose Talbot-Babey, coordinator of Family Faith Formation for the diocese, said they then sign the “Book of Election” to signify their desire to receive the sacraments and be received into full communion with the Church.

Deacon Jeff Kingsley, who served as master of ceremonies, has been an RCIA coordinator since 2006, starting at St. Joseph Parish in Shelton and currently at St. Margaret Mary. He and his wife, Diane, lead RCIA classes together.

“We share our life experiences with them and teach them about the Catholic faith,” Diane said. “They see us practicing our faith, and they’re attracted to that excitement and the love of God in us.”

Deacon Jeff points out that RCIA is a formation program and not just educational instruction.

“You want them to embrace Catholicism as a way of life,” he said. “You have to teach them to pray and about the sacraments and the Church. You also have to share your faith. Our faith is really a relationship, and people have to grow in developing that relationship.”

Deacon Jeff often refers to the program as “RCIF”—“Rite of Christian Initiation for Families”—and stresses the importance of other family members participating in the formation process along with the catechumens so they can learn and grow together.

The first step in the RCIA program involves a reflective period of inquiry, when a person inspired by the Holy Spirit expresses interest in becoming a Catholic. This is followed by the Rite of Initiation when a new member is accepted into the worshipping community. Next, there is a period of learning and formation, sharing and prayer called the Catechumenate, which typically lasts from the First Sunday in Advent to the First Sunday in Lent. During Lent, members are urged to increase their prayer and get closer to God. At the Easter Vigil, they receive the sacraments and are fully welcomed into the community of believers. This is followed by “Mystagoguy,” a time to further explore the mysteries of the faith and go forth to build the kingdom of God on Earth.

As Bishop Caggiano told the group, their mission is “to truly become Christ’s mirror in the world.”
Reorganization of the Diaconate Office

BRIDGEPORT—A major restructuring of the Permanent Diaconate Formation program was put into place effective February 12 by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano. The purpose of the restructuring is to ensure that the diocese continues to attract qualified candidates to the diaconate, that their formation is of the highest quality, and that their ongoing formation remains a priority after ordination, the bishop said.

In order to revitalize the program and allocate resources more effectively, the Director of the Diocesan position has been eliminated and replaced with three part-time positions. The bishop has named Father Michael Novajosky Coordinator of Diaconate Formation; Deacon Tim Bolton as Coordinator of Diaconate Vocations; and Deacon Jerry Lambert as Coordinator of Continuing Formation.

“I am confident that the new team of Father Novajosky, Deacon Bolton and Deacon Lambert will attract good candidates and provide them with excellent theological and pastoral formation, and help ordained deacons to commit to lifelong learning and spiritual growth,” the bishop said.

FATHER MICHAEL NOVAJOSKY

These three coordinators will report directly to the vicar for clergy and meet monthly with him and the vicar general.

In addition to their new responsibilities, Father Novajosky will become pastor of St. Augustine Cathedral Parish in June. Deacon Tim Bolton will continue to serve as supervisor of Pastoral Care at St. Vincent’s Medical Center, and Deacon Lambert will also remain as deacon at St. Mary Parish in Ridgefield.

The bishop also thanked Deacon Anthony Cassaneto for his dedication and hard work over the last two years.

“He has done a tremendous job in putting into place the necessary changes that were identified by the Diocesan Director of Youth Ministry and Spiritual Formation. Father Novajosky, Deacon Bolton and Deacon Lambert will assume their roles from the Diocesan Director of Youth Ministry and Spiritual Formation.”

To achieve greater pastoral and spiritual formation, improved homiletics training, and encourage closer collaboration with the priest facilitators and faculty who teach during the formation weekends.

In the new role as Coordinator of Continuing Formation, Deacon Lambert will create, supervise and evaluate an ongoing diaconate continuing education and formation program. He will implement a three-year continuing education plan for all newly ordained deacons and collaborate formally with the members of the Diocesan Council, who represent the nine deaneries, in order to identify and provide educational support for permanent deacons and investigate online courses in partnership with the Leadership Institute.

Deacon Lambert will also plan and lead annual convocations, hold liturgical training sessions to ensure consistency and excellence when serving at the altar and work with the Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Fairfield University to assist deacons in finding a qualified spiritual director.

(For information on the diaconate program, contact: Father Michael Novajosky, Coordinator of Diaconate Formation: 203.416.1451 or fnova-josky@diobpt.org.)
Catholic Funerals

Bishop meets with funeral directors to discuss rites

BRIDGEPORT—On February 11, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano met with a group of 45 funeral directors at the Catholic Center for a wide-ranging discussion about Catholic funeral practices, including cremation, fees, eulogies, and the condition of the diocese’s nine cemeteries.

Bishop Caggiano brought the funeral directors together to solicit their thoughts and input about diocesan burial practices. The session was the first step in updating the diocesan sacramental guidelines, which were last revised in 1983.

“You are the face of compassion,” the bishop told the group, “you are part of the pastoral ministry of our diocese.”

Mgr. Thomas Powers, vicar general, said the funeral directors will help inform members of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, formed by the bishop to oversee the project to revise sacramental guidelines. The funeral rites are the first area to be considered.

“My goal is to create a set of uniform, comprehensive and effective guidelines for the pastoral and liturgical worship surrounding all the sacraments of the Church,” Bishop Caggiano said.

The process is beginning with funeral rites because in recent years there have been inconsistent practices and confusion. He said, “We live in an evolving world that has become a hodgepodge of practices around burials.”

The Liturgical Commission will draft provisional norms that take into consideration the input from the funeral directors. They will be reviewed at the General Meeting of the Presbyterate on April 18, and a first draft will be shared with the funeral directors.

By September the norms will be introduced, but they will not be finalized until the following September after a trial period during which any necessary revisions will be made.

The bishop asked the directors for an honest assessment about “what they are experiencing doing the work God has given them.” The discussion was open and candid and covered areas from pricing to differences in parish policies and the need for capital improvements in the cemeteries.

One concern that emerged from the meeting was that not all Catholics who want a funeral Mass and Christian burial when they die can depend on surviving family members to carry out those wishes. This is a growing phenomenon throughout the country. Bishop Caggiano said the diocese would explore developing a system that would pre-plan funeral rites so there would be a congregational faith formation. Leadership would be provided to each family to assist them.

Roberto is an expert in youth, family and intergenerational ministry. His book, Reimagining Faith Formation, will serve as a supplemental text and was distributed to those gathered.

“Today is indeed the start of something big,” Donovan said. “We are at the precipice of great renewal, great change, great opportunities. We are about to embark on an adventure that could change the Church in the Diocese of Bridgeport as we know it.”

The focus of the first workshop, facilitated by Roberto, was to lay the groundwork for moving from programs to people, incorporating technology into ministry more effectively, and reaching out to those Roberto calls, “the occasional Catholics.”

“You saw them Ash Wednesday,” Roberto said, “and you will see them in about forty days. These are the people that check in once a while but are not actively engaged in the parish.”

In addition, Roberto told participants that “we are a ten-decade world. People are living longer. Yet we are not a ten-decade Church.”

“Confirmation preparation takes two years in some parishes, but Baptism preparation for new parents is one ninety-minute session on a Sunday afternoon,” he added. “There is something wrong with that picture.”

“And what happens after the child is baptized?” Roberto asked. “We all know the answer to that: very little. I am telling you now, that if we wait until the child is six years old, it is simply too late.”

This was confirmed, Donovan commented, in the work of the Catechetical Task Force. Those parishies who indicated that they engage children between Baptism and First Communion are three times more likely to retain a connection to those families.

“We need to start thinking and acting ecologically in everything we do,” Roberto said. “For example, if we are creating a plan for children’s faith formation, we need to consider how we will engage children in faith community experiences with all generations. Once we have identified faith-forming experiences in the broader ecology, we can identify the unique age-group experiences we need to provide children.”

“A new faith forming ecology must be responsive to the challenges of the twenty-first century world and the religious and spiritual needs of people today.”

Before closing the day, Roberto assigned homework. Parish leaders are to continue to build their teams and complete a congregational faith formation assessment tool, which provides a way for parish leaders to examine how it is currently forming faith through parish life, family faith formation, age-group faith formation, missional faith formation and leadership.

This workshop was recorded for those unable to attend. The next Reimagined Faith Formation workshop is April 9 at St. John Parish in Darien. If your parish is interested in accepting Bishop Caggiano’s Invitation to Lifelong Formation, contact the Leadership Institute: institute@dioct.org or 203.416.1670. To read the bishop’s invitation, visit www.formationreimagined.org.

List of parishes in attendance:
- Holy Spirit, Stamford
- Our Lady of Grace, Stratford
- Our Lady Star of the Sea, Stamford
- Sacred Heart, Georgetown
- St. Ann, Bridgeport
- St. Cecilia, Stamford
- St. Catherine of Siena, Riverside
- St. Catherine of Siena, Trumbull
- St. Elizabeth Seton, Ridgefield
- St. James, Stratford
- St. John, Darien
- St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, Shelton
- St. Mary, Bethel
- St. Mary, Ridgefield
- St. Paul, Greenwich
- St. Pius X, Fairfield
- St. Rose of Lima, Newtown
- St. Thomas Aquinas, Fairfield
- St. Thomas the Apostle, Norwalk
- St. Thomas More, Darien
- St. Peter, Danbury

Please join Bishop Caggiano in celebration and support of Catholic education throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport.

2018 Annual Spring Gala
Thursday, April 19, 2018 — 6:00-9:30 pm
The Woodway Country Club, Darien
For more information contact Karen Sportini, ksportini@foundationsineducation.org or call 203.416.1671

2018 Honorees
- Roger J. Fox, for his tireless efforts on behalf of Catholic Education
- Jo-Anne Jakab, for a profound, lifetime commitment to Catholic Education
- Daniel J. McCarthy, Frontier Communications, for an exemplary corporate commitment to Catholic Education

Gala Committee:
Chairs: Tom Cingari and Mary Donovan
Janet Catenacci
Peggy Cobb
Xandy Duffy
Gloria Garvey
Elise Major
Jody Myers
Barbara Ripp
Jennifer St. Victor de Pinho
Karen Sportini
Holly Doherty-Lemoine

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Lenten Journey

Bishop calls for ‘Reconciliation Monday’

By JOE PISANI

Father Rob Kinnally, pastor of St. Aloysius Parish in New Canaan, still remembers his first Confession almost 50 years ago. He was seven years old and went to Father Foley, who had been at Christ the King Church in Yonkers for “what seemed like forever.” The world was a different place. The Beatles were singing “All You Need Is Love,” and America was embroiled in the Vietnam War.

“I remember being nervous, but not afraid at all,” he recalls, although he did obsess somewhat over the number of times he teased his sister and how many times he didn’t do a chore his parents had asked him to perform.

During those early years when he went to Confession with his parents and his sister, the lines were long and they knew everyone there. As a priest, he still receives the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly, when he meets with his spiritual director each month and when the opportunity presents itself. It’s something he recommends for all Catholics during Lent, particularly those who have been away from the sacrament.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has designated March 26 as “Reconciliation Monday” throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport. Three parishes within each of the nine deaneries—a total of 27 parishes—will offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation from 3 to 9 pm so Catholics can experience God’s mercy as Holy Week begins.

“The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation provides a profound opportunity to be freed from our personal sins and to experience the healing love of Christ for you and me,” said Bishop Caggiano, who will also receive Confession at St. Peter Church in Danbury and St. Aloysius Parish in New Canaan.

“Welcome back.” He encourages people to receive the sacrament frequently because “it’s the only place where we can feel Jesus’ love and mercy in a tangible way and receive forgiveness and grace.”

Some people, he said, don’t think they have to receive the sacrament because their attitude is “God knows what I did and every night I say I’m sorry.” That, however, is not sufficient. We need to engage in the sacrament with a priest, who represents Christ.

Father Kinnally said, “The term ‘reconciliation’ is perfect because when we sin, we separate ourselves from God. We get off track, and the sacrament provides us with a very direct experience of God’s mercy. God not only forgives but forgets, and our sin is completely wiped out. The sacrament restores us to a right relationship with God and it repairs our relationship with the rest of the community.”

Father Brian Gannon, pastor of St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull, said that because of social networking, the constant use of cell phones and computers, relationships are depersonalized in our culture.

“Family should be a quote by spiritual confessor Father Tony told him, “You’re in your 20s and you have to start celebrating the sacrament as a 20-year-old and not as a 10-year-old.” He challenged him to celebrate the sacrament in a mature way that was more joyful and less fearful.

Father Thorne said that above all, “family needs Confession more? The 8-year-old or the 38-year-old? When the whole family comes to Confession, enormous amounts of grace enter that family.”

How often should they receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Canon law says at least once a year, he said, although St. John Paul II and Mother Teresa went into Heaven. “I offer a warm welcome and remind them God’s love is unconditional and that our motivation is not to get God to love us again—it is to help us improve and be more loving of God and others and change what is selfish and sinful in ourselves.”

Father Thorne has been hearing confessions for 42 years, and when people come to him who are fearful, shy or embarrassed, he takes advantage of the opportunity to make them feel loved and forgiven.

“Confession should no longer be memorized, rubber and pre-fabricated, but a heart-to-heart encounter with God,” he said.

“I grew up thinking God was out to catch me, but today young people are growing up with the belief that God is always ready to forgive them,” he said.

As a priest, he says, “My mission in life isn’t to make people feel guilty; it is to make them feel loved.” And over the years, different confessors have taught him how to be a good listener, non-judgmental, patient and encouraging.

Priests will be hearing Confessions at the following locations on Reconciliation Monday, March 26, from 3-9 pm:

DEANERY A (Queen of Peace)
1. St. Andrew Parish: 435 Anton St., Bridgeport
2. St. Ann Parish: 481 Brewster St., Bridgeport

DEANERY B (Mystical Rose)
1. Our Lady of Grace Parish: 497 Second Hill Lane, Stratford
2. St. James Parish: 2070 Main St., Stratford
3. St. Lawrence Parish: 505 Shelton Ave., Shelton

DEANERY C (Queen of Martyrs)
1. Christ the King Parish: 4700 Madison Ave., Trumbull

DEANERY D (Our Lady, Queen of Confessors)
1. Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish: 46 Stone St., Danbury
3. St. Joseph Parish: 8 Robinson Ave., Danbury

DEANERY E (Seat of Wisdom)
1. St. Francis of Assisi Parish: 35 Norfield Rd., Weston
2. St. Mary Parish: 55 Catoonah St., Ridgefield

DEANERY F (Queen Assumed into Heaven)
1. Church of the Assumption: 98 Riverside Ave., Westport
2. Our Lady of the Assumption Parish: 545 Stratfield Rd., Fairfield
3. St. Pius X Parish: 834 Brookside Drive, Fairfield

DEANERY G (Mother of Divine Grace)
1. St. Aloysius Parish: 21 Cherry St., New Canaan

DEANERY H (Cause of Our Joy)
1. Church of St. Cecilia: 1154 Newfield Ave., Stamford
2. Holy Name of Jesus Parish: 325 Washington Blvd., Danbury
3. Sacred Heart Parish: 37 Schuyler Ave., Stamford

DEANERY I (Mary, Mother of the Church)
1. St. Catherine of Siena Parish: 4 Riverside Ave., Greenwich
2. St. Mary Parish: 178 Greenwich Ave., Greenwich
3. St. Michael the Archangel Parish: 469 North St., Greenwich
Youth Rally

Convivio inspires:

CONVIVIO, a weekend conference for high school students, run by youth, for youth, included talks, small group discussion, games, prayer and worship led by peer ministers. It was held the weekend of March 2-4 at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield. This year’s theme was “Made for More.”

Their personal reflections testify to the power of faith during the weekend.

Teddy Whiteman, president of Convivio CT 2018 is a senior at Fairfield Prep and parishioner of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull:

Throughout the Convivio weekend, I witnessed the magnificent nature of one united Catholic group. Often times the greatest struggle for a Catholic teenager is to “fit in” amidst the push from an ever-growing secular world. We feel the pull to “be normal” and thus to abandon our faith.

Convivio, on the other hand, pulled us to the opposing conclusion; one can be strong in his or her faith, and be celebrated among peers. The students, along with me and all the other group leaders, found new relationships that will surely last for years to come.

As for my personal experience, Convivio was special to me because I held the co-presidential role, along with Elizabeth Vas. For this year, I worried that my new role might create a barrier between the participants and myself.

Responding to this concern, I set out to connect personally and deeply with new participants at Convivio. Additionally, I strove to build lasting relationships that developed to more than a simple “good morning!” to these new friends over my snapchat streaks. Rather, I met and discussed with ten or so participants that shared amazing stories. Luis, Diego, Nadya, Casey, and Kaylee include some of the wonderful friends I met, to whom I owe much of my joy and excitement through every day of the retreat.

I am sure that Convivio will continue to provide a perfect environment for a genuine “Catholic Community” that fosters relationships for every participant, so long as they “take the jump” and “dive into love.”

Claire Regan, vice-president of Convivio CT 2018, is a senior at Fairfield Warde High School and a parishioner of St. Pius X Parish in Fairfield:

Convivio is always such an amazing experience. The thing that makes it so special is that it is a retreat for teens, planned by teens. Every aspect, including the theme and talks, are very applicable to the struggles we face as high schoolers.

Although it can sometimes be difficult for young Catholics to understand, the theme of the weekend taught us we are all truly “Made for More.” As Travis Moran said in his talk, serving and honoring God in all that we do in today’s world is no easy task. Being Catholic isn’t supposed to be easy, but as this weekend showed us, there are very prevalent, negative things in the high school culture and our world that make it that much harder. Also, as Sister Oresville told us, by saying “no” to one thing, we are able to say “yes” to so many others, including the fruits of God’s love for us. I think that message was very powerful for all the participants.

Because to some extent, we have all become victims to the ills of our secular society—the one that tells us we need to be certain people, and do certain things, and that if those are done we will be happy. After being told this time and time again, receiving a message to the contrary this weekend was very refreshing.

Getting that reassurance that God has a plan for us, a plan that is greater than any high school party and one that will surround us forever, was something a lot of people needed to hear this weekend.
School News

Optimism and excitement over new school model

BY BRIAN D. WALLACE

Diocesan Schools Superintendent Dr. Steven Cheeseman and St. Joseph School Taskforce members unveiled plans for the new school model at a meeting attended by parents and educators on March 8 at St. Joseph Parish in Brookfield.

“The bishop charged us with creating a school that is authentically Catholic, academically excellent, and financially viable,” Dr. Cheeseman said. “And we believe this model does all three.”

Dr. Cheeseman said that, based on the results of a recent survey of parents, he is optimistic that the school will reach an enrollment of 100 students.

“Most of the responses said they were likely to re-enroll their students,” he said, noting that he hopes the group of undecided parents will be excited by the plans. Only a small number responded that their children would not return to school.

“This model will work. It comes down to if you all want it,” he said to the parents, encouraging them to register their children. “I know this will be a great educational experience for your child.”

He told parents that the multi-age plan is “not experimental,” and that it has been gradually taking hold in many private and public schools, including schools in the area, since the 1990s.

Throughout the evening, Taskforce members offered presentations on all aspects of the plan, including classroom organization, technology, finances and other activities.

“This group of people has worked incredibly hard, giving countless hours over the last five weeks,” Dr. Cheeseman said as he thanked members for their enthusiasm and passion for the project, which will give the school “a fresh start.”

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano had introduced the plan for the transition of St. Joseph School into the new blended learning and “multi-age” model at a meeting concerning the future of the school held on January 18. At that time, the bishop said that parents would play a key role in the process and the diocese would be transparent in its communications.

Since that time, a Taskforce of parents and educators, assisted by sub-committees of parents, have been studying the multi-age model, visiting other schools and working to shape it to the needs of St. Joseph students.

Much of what parents learned at the March meeting was not new, because they had been updated in weekly email newsletter and the information had been posted on the website. However, the evening did introduce final plans and additional details.

The new model will change the name of the school to St. Joseph Catholic Academy of Brookfield, consistent with other school reorganizations in the diocese. The new governance model will include a Board of Directors.

The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport and Reverend Paul N. Check Cordially Invite you to the

St. John Fisher Seminary 1st Annual Rector’s Dinner

Forming Fishers of Men

Honoring Msgr. Thomas Powers, Vicar General

Saturday, April 28, 2018

Trinity Catholic High School
926 Newfield Avenue, Stamford, CT
6:00 Cocktails
7:00 Dinner & Presentation

Please join us for an evening to benefit St. John Fisher Seminary. Pious formation requires the support and encouragement of many. Through your generous support, we can build the future of the Church together.

As He passed by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea, they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And they left their nets and followed Him. (Matt. 4:16-20)
Local News

Prison ministry offers hope

By PAT HENNESSY

“When people go against the mores of society they have to be corrected,” said John Santa, opening a talk on prison ministry sponsored by the Council of Religious of the Diocese of Bridgeport. “That’s a good thing, of itself. All societies have that.”

The problem, as he explained in a talk given at the Catholic Center in Bridgeport on March 5, is that our criminal justice system is out of whack. The prison population has quadrupled in the last 20 years. In the 1990s a new prison opened every two weeks—a total of 292 new prisons in that decade.

In a strange twist, this dysfunctional system provides an extraordinary way to live the Catholic faith, both in visiting the imprisoned and in advocating for a more just society.

“Living Our Faith Through Prison Ministry,” sponsored by the Council of Religious of the Diocese of Bridgeport, was presented by Santa, a Knight of Malta, and Richard Tunstall. Both men are members of the Malta Justice Initiative, an organization that offers spiritual encouragement to prisoners through a program of “Catholic Sharing,” and advocates for prison justice reform.

Santa, a corporate CEO in the energy business, was in formation with the Order of Malta when he had occasion to visit a friend in prison. “The Order of Malta works in behalf of sick and poor people, and calls for spirituality in action,” explained Santa. “I looked around me and saw the sick and the poor—a captive audience, literally. What a wonderful way to put our Catholic faith into action, visiting with people who can never repay you.”

During his prison visits, Santa learned of the minimal support prisoners receive. They have access to limited spiritual programs, with little addiction therapy, anger management or job training.

“They call it the Department of Correction, but prison isn’t about ‘correction,’” he said. “We don’t treat people in prison. They don’t have the funding or the people to do it, so barely 15 percent of the people who have these afflictions get treated for them.”

On their release, often without any identification—not even their driver’s license—and usually with no job, former prisoners face a bleak future. The end result?

“More prison means more crime, not less. What we manufacture in prison is poverty,” Santa told the group.

“What can anyone do in response? “We need volunteers to visit prisoners,” said Tunstall, who volunteers at Garner Correctional Institution in Newtown. “We get into this because Jesus told us to ‘visit the imprisoned.’ You don’t need to be versed in Scripture, you don’t need to be a trained facilitator. You just need to show up and show hope.”

Parish involvement in helping re-entry would also be valuable. “The only thing you have in prison is time—time for hope or despair,” said Stefano Santilli, a member of St. Pius X, Fairfield, who attended the talk. Santilli has been involved in prison ministry for the past three years. “To offer someone hope—this is the most fulfilling ministry I’ve ever done.”

Richard Earls, a member of the Knights of Columbus Council #8013 that meets at St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull, came to the talk to learn more and become more effective. Five Knights from St. Theresa are currently volunteering at the Bridgeport Correctional Center. “It’s a way to strengthen your faith by putting faith into practice,” he said.

OFFER HOPE—prison ministry volunteer Stafano Santilli (l) talks to John Santa and Richard Tunstall, who presented “Living Our Faith Through Prison Ministry” at the Catholic Center. “You just need to show up and show hope,” Tunstall (r) told the gathering.

New School Model from page 7

a Head of School and Director of Education, Dr. Cheeseman said.

The Board of Directors is expected to be in place in January 2019. In the meantime, the Superintendent of Schools and Bishop Caggiano will be the acting board members.

Dr. Cheeseman announced that Immaculate High School President Mary Maloney has agreed to serve as Head of School. She will also continue to lead the high school.

Current plans call for eight full-time teachers and nine part-time teaching aides and other employees to serve the estimated 100 students who will return in the fall.

Rather than traditional classrooms, the multi-age model calls for groupings of four or five students into larger “bands.” Placement within classes will be determined through teacher observations, student classroom assessments, standardized tests, and student progress in content areas.

“Band sizes” will not exceed 24 students. The new grouping, as determined by the Leadership Taskforce, calls for Pre-K (ages 3 and 4); K-2; grades 3-4; grades 5-6; and grades 7-8.

Dr. Cheeseman said that while the school will introduce a new education model, it would also enhance and strengthen its Catholic identity.

“The school will also provide a rigorous academic program for religious studies and catechesis in the Catholic faith,” Dr. Cheeseman said. “With Christ as the cornerstone, students experience an education founded on Catholic core values.”

Father George O’Neill, pastor of St. Joseph Parish, began the evening by leading a Rosary. He said that St. Joseph School students regularly attend Mass and develop a strong faith that will mature with them over a lifetime.

Although the new model will be supported by the latest computer and learning technology, the teacher plays a key role in guiding students.

“Technology will not lead the design of learning, but will support teachers with accelerating individual student mastery of critical content and skills. The teacher will be at the center of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29
Trinity Catholic High School
New Learning Academy for Special Needs

By PAT HENNESSY

“We wanted to do a different kind of support system,” said John Carrigan, director of counseling and student support at Trinity Catholic High School in Stamford. “The impetus for this new project had been in the works for many years. We were asking, ‘How can we better support kids with special needs whose parents wanted them in Catholic school?’”

In February, Trinity Catholic announced the result of that exploration, the opening of The Learning Academy at Trinity Catholic High School. The concept for the program originated with the collaborative work and research done by Carrigan, along with Tony Pavia, former principal at Trinity Catholic and at Stamford and New Canaan high schools, and Robin Pavia, former director of special education for the town of Darien. “All of us are Trinity alumni,” Carrigan noted with pride.

The Learning Academy, open to 9th grade students, will provide core academics in small classroom settings of five to eight students. Speaking of Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, Trinity’s principal, Dave Williams, said, “The bishop has talked about giving the opportunity for a Catholic education to every student who wants one. We want to make sure that we can meet that standard by providing them the academic, social, and spiritual support they need.”

The students have passed Trinity’s entrance exam. “Because an educational team had identified challenges during elementary school and given them an Individual Educational Plan (IEP), the students were given extra time on the placement test,” Carrigan explained. “When the kids join our school community, they’ll continue to have that extra time consideration.”

The Learning Academy students will take Trinity’s core academics of English, mathematics, science and social studies, along with the traditional TCHS classes such as religion, PE and elective courses. “They will follow the standard diocesan curriculum, not academically different from any other students, but with smaller classes to allow for specialized attention and assistance into the transition into high school,” Carrigan explained.

To accommodate their learning needs, the Academy is designed as a three-semester program, with one semester occurring during the upcoming month of July. Learning Academy students will take Earth Science, a content-heavy and challenging freshman science course, that semester.

That will free up the academic day for the students, who will continue with small-class instruction in core subjects such as English and algebra during their freshman year, joining slightly larger classes for social studies and religion.

“The fully complemented academic day will give them the opportunity to join clubs, activities and community service, be on the football team or the girls’ soccer team, or help tutor younger children. They’ll have the chance to grow as a person of faith, and their presence will make Trinity a more embracing community,” said Carrigan.

Following their freshman year, Learning Academy students will transition into the regular TCHS program. They will continue to have access to extra support and instruction to make their learning experience at Trinity successful.

Professional training and development for all Trinity’s educators, thanks to a grant from Foundations in Education, will help teachers develop strategies for success for all Trinity’s students.

“This is who we are, this is what we do—developing the whole person,” said Principal Williams. “We’re meeting every child where they are and seeing that their needs are met.”

(For more information contact John Carrigan, director of counseling and student support: 203.487.8236.)

‘Enter the Journey’

BRIDGEPORT—All young people in the diocese and their families are invited to join Bishop Frank J. Caggiano for “Enter the Journey,” a day of music, prayer and catechesis on March 24, from 9 am-1 pm at St. Charles Borromeo Parish, 391 Ogen St., Bridgeport.

“This is a great opportunity for Confirmation classes, religious education and Catholic school students and families who wish to enter the journey of Holy Week in a unique way,” said Patrick Donovan, executive director of the diocesan Leadership Institute.

Internationally-known musician Steve Angrisano will be in concert, and Bishop Caggiano will offer a reflection on Holy Week. This event will also include an opportunity for Eucharistic Adoration.

“Watching Steve share the Good News of Jesus Christ through story and song is a gift to me and our Church. He is an authentic person of faith. I particularly appreciate the way he can reach audiences of all ages,” said Bishop Frank Caggiano.

A veteran musician and composer, Angrisano has been featured at six World Youth Days, the National Pastoral Musicians Conference (NPM), the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress, National Catholic Youth Conferences (NCYC), and many other national and international events.

In addition, young people will be invited to ask a question for The Face of Prayer campaign at a special booth set up for the event and to take part in a service opportunity by bringing a canned good as part of their registration.

Doors open for registration at 8:30 am. The cost is $10 per person, with a maximum cost of $30 per family. The day concludes at 1 pm. Snacks will be provided, and every recipient will receive a t-shirt.

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EDITORIAL

Letting go of Anger

Why are we so often on the brink of road rage, so eager to dash off angry, offensive emails? Our Facebook posts can be appalling. We call people names that should never be heard in public—and we say them in public, usually to an appreciative audience. Opposing viewpoints get shouted down. Righteous anger is satisfying. Freedom from it comes at a high price.

There’s a cure: “Do unto others.”... Asking God’s help and acknowledging that we have wronged other people is also not a bad idea. Seeking out the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Resentment at those “others,” the craving to fight back, the desire to feel justified, none of these go away all that easily. We have to continue to take personal inventory, and when we are wrong, admit it. Grit our teeth and apologize—we need God’s help to get through.

In his recent homily during morning Mass at Domus Sanctae Marthae, Pope Francis reminded us, “God’s forgiveness is felt strongly within us as long as we forgive others. And this isn’t easy because grudges make a nest in our heart and there is always that bitterness.”

“Accusing ourselves is the first step toward forgiveness,” the pope said. “To accuse one’s self is part of Christian wisdom. No, not accusing others; accuse ourselves. ‘I have sinned.’

“God, he added, “welcomes a contrite heart” and when Christians readily admit their faults, “the Lord covers our mouths like the father did in the prodigal son; he does not let him speak. His love covers it, he forgives all.”

Looking to Holy Week

Fairfield County Catholic is pleased to reprint Bishop Frank J. Caggiano’s reflection on Holy Week that first appeared on his Facebook page.

“We will soon begin Holy Week with the account of the jubilant reaction of the crowd that joyfully welcomed the Lord Jesus into the city of Jerusalem with palms and songs. However, in just a few short days, that reaction changed to one of anger, desertion and rejection. The reason for the change should give us pause for reflection.

“For while many in the crowd held out for a leader that would free them from Roman control by using the ways of the world, including violence, conquest and force, Jesus entered into Jerusalem to complete his divine mission of love, forgiveness and mercy by his free offering on the Cross. For many, Jesus’ climactic entrance into Jerusalem was a great disappointment and quickly turned their welcome into anger.

“Sadly, the love that Christ continues to offer the world is neither desired nor welcomed by many. Some would rather choose violence, division and fear over love, forgiveness and mercy. They continue to seek what many in the crowd sought nearly 2,000 years ago.

“So this Holy Week, we ask: How often do you and I find ourselves standing with the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem? “Our Easter challenge is clear. We are to embrace everyone as he did and love as generously and radically as Jesus does.

“Likewise, if we wish to follow Christ, we need to ask for the gift of joy, which our Father in heaven will give to each of us. With joy, we will be able to confront any challenge or difficulty, because God will lead us every step of the way.”

Joy in Christ

“Joy in Christ, Our Gift to Share” is the theme of this year’s Annual Catholic Appeal. The theme speaks to the many ways we are united in Christ’s love as member of the Church family of Fairfield County. Speaking at a reception in the Dailey’s to launch the campaign, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano said the Annual Catholic Appeal helps to make the diocese one large family by investing in people through education, charity and other ministries. “Families stick together, and when one is in need, all are in need. Our faith brings us together,” the bishop said. “There are many in need in our families right here in Fairfield County and through your love of neighbor and love of the Church, we are able to reach out to them.”

The bishop announced a $10 million goal for the 2018 appeal and urged people to give sacrificially. “Jesus made God’s love clearly evident. He as his disciples are asked to do the same, and it’s always a sacrifice,” he said. To make your gift: www.bridgeportdiocese.org/aca/donate/
Forgiveness

A Woman’s Voice

By Debra Tomaselli

Debra Tomaselli writes from Altamonte Springs, Florida. She can be reached at dtomaselli@cfl.rr.com

I sat outside the confessional, wringing my hands. Tiny beads of sweat collected about my forehead as I glanced nervously around the room. I had been carrying this sin for years. No matter where I went, what I did, or how much time elapsed, the gnawing guilt persisted. Nobody knew.

Finally, unable to bear the weight of the cross alone, I approached the confessional. It was the only safe place to voice my inexpressible shortcomings.

I knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that I needed the mercy of God.

Had I known my brother Jim was going to die, I would have handled the situation differently. I would have accepted him, atypical as he was, instead of nagging him to meet my standards. I would have helped him, knowing that he was fulfilling God’s unique purpose in life. I would have listened, visited, and loved him more.

His death woke me up to the Gospel message.

When it came to loving Jim, I fell short. Horribly short. The pain was so deep, and the realization so excruciating, that I couldn’t admit it to anyone. At least, not until this hot Saturday afternoon, sitting in the confessional.

I chose the seat behind the veil. The priest welcomed me, and I began, explaining it had been years since my last confession. I stumbled over the initial words but, once I got going, the floodgates opened. Racked with sorrow, every shame and every sorrow gushed forth. The priest listened quietly.

When I was finally done, I expected the prescribed words of absolution. Instead, my confessor asked, “Do you think God can forgive you?”

My head snapped to attention. What? I thought. Why was he asking me this? Was he, too, questioning whether I was worthy to receive God’s mercy? Breathless, I wondered why he didn’t just pardon me.

“I don’t know,” I stammered.

“I hope so….I mean, I guess that’s why I’m here…."

“He does,” the priest assured me, “and I absolve you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit…..”

Perhaps you think you could have made a better decision, chosen a more loving response, or turned the tide of someone’s life. Perhaps you too harbor regrets.

Come to the source of all mercy. Lay them down at the foot of the cross. Our God is an awesome God. Don’t be afraid to share the unspeakable. He already knows.

Do you believe he can forgive you?

Keep Pedaling

A Dad’s View

By Matthew Hennessey

Matthew Hennessey and his family are parishioners of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Stamford.

No one taught me how to ride a bike. I learned it on my own. At least that’s what my mother said. One day I just came cruising down the lane on a neighbor’s Huffy Thunder Road, sitting high in the saddle as if that bike had been made with me in mind. As if I’d been riding one all my life.

I’m one of those who learns by doing. If I’m not drawn to something by my own curiosity then chances are good I ain’t learning what it means or how to do it. The classroom environment was always a struggle.

“Young Matthew is not living up to his potential,” was a common report at school. “He can be a distraction to his classmates.” Guilty as charged. Distracting classmates was more fun than conjugating en español, and I sure put my back into it.

The things I enjoyed at school were the things I could do well, and the things I could do well were the things I enjoyed. Apologies to my former classmates on young Matthew’s behalf. I’m sorry for the distractions. I hope they didn’t contribute to your academic delinquency.

Luckily adults encouraged me to pursue the things I did well. Success gave me confidence and the will to keep plugging. But the easy road can only take you so far. Everybody hits a rough patch eventually.

Mine came in my mid-20s. Things that once came easy didn’t anymore. The things I did well lost their spark. I fell off my bike a few times. I became a distraction to myself.

The only way out was to try some of the harder things I’d been avoiding, the things I couldn’t do well. Eventually I got the picture. Everything worth doing is hard.

Faith didn’t come easy. It took years before it became something I could do well and therefore something I enjoyed. Dorothy Day apparently called faith “an act of will.” It takes a little work. Maybe more than a little.

Nonbelievers often say they wish they had faith in God. They think Christians have it easy. They imagine we gloss over the tough questions, outsourcing every hard answer to the Bible.

If only. You don’t “get” faith then turn your brain off and go through life smiling as you dream of heaven’s rewards. Ask the Apostle Thomas. Even St. Teresa of Calcutta was tempted to doubt.

“Who among us—everybody, everybody—who among us has not experienced insecurity, loss and even doubts on their journey of faith?” Pope Francis has said.

“We’ve all experienced this, me too. It is part of the journey of faith; it is part of our lives. This should not surprise us, because we are human beings, marked by fragility and limitations. We are all weak, we all have limits: do not panic. We all have them.”

Some things you can be taught. Some you learn by doing. You’re going to fall off the bike. Do not panic.

And when it all comes together, check yourself out—sitting as high in the saddle as I did on that Huffy Thunder Road. As if you’ve been doing it all your life.
St. Theresa Parish, Trumbull

New Adoration Chapel is open 24-7

By JOSEPH PRONECHEN

What do you do when you want to honor Our Lady of Fatima for her 100th anniversary and at the same time bring perpetual adoration to a parish? You do as Father Brian Gannon, pastor of St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull, did.

He totally remodeled and transformed the former convent chapel into Our Lady of Fatima Perpetual Adoration Chapel. In October, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano dedicated this new sacred space.

This adoration chapel radiates beauty, draws attention to Jesus in the monstrance, and reminds visitors of Fatima and its messages of Eucharistic and Marian images and symbols abound in the beautiful liturgical artistry.

The adoration altar of honey-stained oak proclaims in gold-leaf “Ave Verum Corpus”— “Behold the True Body.” Behind it, a large triptych mural has seven separate paintings, like Renaissance works, with the Crucifixion surrounded by other Sorrowsful Mysteries, plus the Presentation opposite the Pietà.

Murals to the side highlight Fatima. One is of the first apparition as the three shepherd children kneel before Our Lady standing on a cloud. Another portrays Sister Lucia’s 1929 vision in the convent in Tuy, Spain which reveals the Holy Trinity, the Holy Eucharist, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and the words “Grace and Mercy.”

All the sanctuary walls and under the murals have rows of decorative roses to reflect Our Lady. Marian symbols remind everyone of Our Lady’s place in bringing us the Body of Christ, now given us in the Eucharist, and also of her messages at Fatima.

Along the walls, a continuous Rosary circles the chapel as each decade leads to a cross or Marian symbol.

Recently, Father Gannon had a conversation about this exceptional liturgical addition:

Why did you decide to turn the former convent chapel into an adoration chapel?

The ultimate goal is union with Christ. How can we achieve that as much as possible on earth? How can we bring people closer and closer to Christ? It’s always through the most Holy Eucharist, which is the most intense presence of Christ on earth. Adoration helps facilitate a deeper love of Christ through a deeper love of the Eucharist. The deeper love we have for Christ, the deeper love we will have for our neighbor.

I love to quote Mother Teresa when she spoke of her Sisters. She said, “When we started daily...”

To sail with Father Jones on this special Mediterranean voyage, contact Virginia DeDad - ACC

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FAIRFIELD—The Diocese of Bridgeport is saddened to learn of the sudden passing of Fairfield Probate Judge Daniel Caruso, 60, on February 25 at his home in Fairfield.

“The passing of Judge Daniel Caruso is a loss not only for the people he served so well as Probate Judge but for the entire diocese,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano. “Dan was known to many individuals and families as a man of deep faith and of service. His witness as a Catholic layman and public official inspired us all who numbered him as a friend. I ask for prayers for Dan and his family as we mourn the loss of a good man who served his Church and all those in need.”

Judge Caruso graduated from St. Pius X Elementary School and Roger Ludlowe High School. He received his bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Connecticut and his Juris Doctorate from Vermont Law School.

He was admitted to the CT Bar in 1983 and the U.S. District Court for the District of CT in 1984, and was elected Probate Judge of Fairfield in 1985. He also served in the CT General Assembly, 134th House District, from 1989-95.

A lifelong parishioner of St. Pius X Parish, Dan served as lay reader, participated in many of the church functions and was a member of the St. Pius X Council 16347 Knights of Columbus. He was a volunteer for the Salvation Army and always looked forward to ringing the bell during the holiday season.

Anne McCrory, chief legal officer of the diocese, praised Judge Caruso for his quiet support and fidelity to many diocesan ministries. “He was actively involved in so many events and programs of the diocese,” Atty. McCrory said. “I’m personally grateful for the support and counsel he provided with respect to probate issues in our parishes and the diocese. We’ve lost a man who worked quietly and faithfully to serve his Church and all those in need.”

“He was a man for all seasons,” said Al Barber, chief operating officer of Catholic Charities. “He was fun to be with and a great resource to our adoption program when legal counsel was required. Many on the board of St. Catherine Academy for special needs students were also grateful for his service to the school.”

Like many others, Notre Dame High School Principal Chris Cipriano was shaken by the sudden loss of Judge Caruso, who was a member of the Advisory Board of Notre Dame and could always be counted on as a go-to guy when the high school needed assistance.

“He was at every graduation that I can remember,” said Cipriano. “He was a big supporter, always there when we needed him.”

Judge Caruso was an outstanding legal counsel of the national Saint Pio Foundation, and among the first recipients of the Saint Pio Award. He was also a Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. He received the Notre Dame High School Community Spirit Award, attained the rank of Eagle Scout and received the Fairfield County Chapter Boy Scouts of America Good Scout Award.

Survivors include his three siblings, Frederick Caruso, Jr., and his wife Gale of Stratford, Michael Caruso and his wife Jill of Easton and Nancy Elizabeth Caruso of Stratford, and nine nieces and nephews.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated for Judge Caruso on March 3 at St. Pius X Church. Father Robert Kinnally, pastor of St. Aloysius Parish in New Canaan, was the celebrant. Father Michael Jones, pastor of St. Lawrence Parish in Shelton, was the homilist. Interment followed in Oak Lawn Cemetery.

In keeping with Judge Caruso’s dedication to his faith and his community, the family requested that, in lieu of flowers, memorial contributions be made to a local Boy Scout troop, Notre Dame High School or St. Pius X Parish.

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Wishing you and your family a Happy Easter.

The Choir For Youth spring concert will be held Sunday, April 29, at St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull. The hour-long, family friendly concert is free of charge. Come for an afternoon of joyful singing!

MAY THE BLESSINGS OF THE RISEN CHRIST BE WITH YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONES DURING THIS JOYFUL SEASON AND THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

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Our life here at Queen of the Clergy depends on the Annual Catholic Appeal. We are grateful for people with love in their heart and an understanding of the importance of the activities of the Diocese of Bridgeport.
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I come to you with a humble heart to ask for your support for our 2018 Annual Catholic Appeal. This year’s theme, Joy in Christ, Our Gift to Share, speaks to the many ways we are united in God’s love as His children and as members of the family that is the Diocese of Bridgeport.

Your gift enables our Church to continue its mission of renewal, to help youth develop their minds and grow in faith; feed and counsel the homeless and hungry who live among us; sustain our priests, active and retired; prepare men for the diaconate and the priesthood; provide Catholic education through scholarships; and much more.

Joy is a spiritual gift that comes from our journey with Christ. The gifts we receive from Him also give us an opportunity to joyfully share them with others. I am grateful for your past support. Thank you for sharing your joy in Christ with your neighbors, friends and those who are in most need in our community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. James 1:17
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Joy is a spiritual gift that comes from our journey with Christ. The gifts we receive from Him also give us an opportunity to joyfully share them with others. I am grateful for your past support. Thank you for sharing your joy in Christ with your neighbors, friends and those who are in most need in our community.

The value of the Annual Catholic Appeal is felt in my formation. It is because of the support of the Annual Catholic Appeal that I am here and that my brothers are here. We're able to really dedicate ourselves to the Diocese of Bridgeport as a family of faith to support diocesan-sponsored programs that no single parish can provide on its own.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

Your gift enables our Church to continue its mission of renewal, to help youth develop their minds and grow in faith; feed and counsel the homeless and hungry who live among us; sustain our priests, active and retired; prepare men for the diaconate and the priesthood; provide Catholic education through scholarships; and much more.

The Annual Catholic Appeal funds a broad range of essential ministries, programs and agencies that deliver spiritual assistance for students attending diocesan Catholic education. The Office of the Superintendent helps physically, spiritually and morally.

Joy in Christ, Our Gift to Share

St. Joseph Seminary, Yonkers, NY

• The Office of Lifelong Faith Formation supports parishes and schools in forming missionary disciples of Jesus Christ through sacramental and marriage preparation and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

• Youth and young adults are offered opportunities and programs to grow in their faith through the Catholic Service Corps, Diocesan Youth Choir, youth rallies, retreats and pilgrimages, as well as the High School Apostles, Convivio and more.

• The Leadership Institute provides formation to all those who serve in ministry in our parishes and discover new ways to shape the next generation of disciples in Fairfield County. It includes online learning, face-to-face workshops, independent study and the new Face of Prayer campaign.

• Pastoral life and ministry involving priests and men and women Religious, foster and develop catechesis and evangelization programs in areas of need.

• Communications: Fairfield County Catholic and the diocesan website share the “Good News.”

Clergy and Seminarians

Seminarians discern their vocation and receive training to prepare to be effective priests for the future of the Church at St. John Fisher and Redemptoris Mater Seminaries, both in Stamford, and major seminaries.

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ALLOCATION OF FUNDS IN 2018

Each year, the Diocese of Bridgeport assesses its financial resources, the needs of parishioners and its ability to respond effectively and with compassion. This illustration is an overview of how Appeal contributions will be distributed:

CATHOLIC EDUCATION .......................................................... $1,750,000
  • Bishop’s Scholarship Fund .......................................... $1,150,000
  • Catholic Academy of Bridgeport ................................ $ 600,000

WORKS OF CHARITY AND PASTORAL SERVICES ............. $2,578,000
  • Catholic Charities of Fairfield County ......................... $1,250,000
  • Pastoral Care of the Sick and Elderly ....................... $ 775,000
  • Saint Catherine Center for Special Needs ................... $ 250,000
  • Ethnic Ministries and Strategic Planning ................. $ 303,000

CATECHESIS AND EVANGELIZATION ................................. $1,689,000
  • The Office of Lifelong Faith Formation ....................... $ 250,000
  • Youth ................................................................. $ 340,000
  • The Leadership Institute ....................................... $ 81,000
  • Pastoral Life and Ministries ................................ $ 383,000
  • Communications ............................................... $ 635,000

CLERGY AND SEMINARIANS .............................................. $3,456,000
  • Formation of Priests and Deacons ......................... $1,242,000
  • Pastoral Care of Retired Priests ......................... $1,760,000
  • Vocations ......................................................... $ 454,000

In the spirit of financial transparency, the cost to conduct the Annual Catholic Appeal totals less than 5.5 cents on the dollar based on the 2018 ACA goal. Fundraising expenses may also provide additional support to a number of these areas.

WAYS TO GIVE

When contemplating your level of sacrificial giving, please consider using the Pledge Plan. Pledging will allow a greater sacrifice by extending the payment of your gift through December 31, 2018.

GIFTS - Checks may be made payable to the Annual Catholic Appeal. Please do not send cash.

CREDIT CARD - A credit card may be payable online or by pledge card.


MATCHING GIFTS - Many organizations will match gifts to Catholic Charities and Catholic Schools. Please contact 203-416-1312 for more information.

GIFTS OF SECURITIES - If you own securities that have appreciated in value, they can be given to the Appeal and their full market value becomes a tax-deductible gift. Please contact 203-416-1470 for more information.

TEXT TO GIVE - To make a gift via text messaging, text SHARING to 50555. SMS subscription service. Up to 4msg/mo. Msg&Data Rates May Apply. Text STOP to 50555 to Stop.

For more information, please email 2018ACA@diobpt.org or call us at: 203-416-1470.

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Empowering Women

Caroline House to honor Cindi Bigelow

BRIDGEPORT—When Cindi Bigelow visited Caroline House in Bridgeport, she saw a group of volunteers changing the world in a small way—with monumental results. She saw young people learning to read and she saw their mothers being taught English and given skills that would help them move their lives forward.

It was the same goal the president and CEO of Bigelow Tea has promoted throughout her career. Bigelow, who is a frequent speaker at women’s summits, universities and business groups, understands women’s leadership and the importance of developing it on a local level.

On April 6, Bigelow will receive the 2018 Caroline House Award for her long-time support of programs that help low-income women and their families by providing literacy training and life skills.

Caroline House is one of 21 local non-profit organizations that receive funds raised through the annual Bigelow Tea Community Challenge. Since it began 30 years ago, the Bigelow Community Challenge has raised more than $1.5 million for organizations that provide shelter, food, educational services, counseling, crisis management, after-school tutoring and recreational programs.

Lucy Freeman, executive director of the Bridgeport education center, said, “Many Caroline House women and children have benefited from Cindi Bigelow’s support. Not only does she continue to donate to Caroline House, but she helps to bring awareness to our mission.”

Founded in 1995 by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Caroline House has a mission of helping immigrant women and children to reach their full potential through education in the English language and life skills. To date, more than 1,600 women and children have been served.

“I’m very honored to receive this award,” Bigelow said. “So many people do such fine work at Caroline House. I’m inspired by their efforts to help women succeed in the workplace and the tutoring programs that pair students one-on-one with mentors.”

“My family has always understood the importance of education and that it must be accessible to everyone,” Bigelow said. “As a company, it is where we put our effort and energy. We know education makes a huge difference in a person’s life.”

Caroline House, she says, takes women who do not have a voice and helps them learn what it means to be women.

ON APRIL 6—CEO Cindi Bigelow will receive the 2018 Caroline House Award for her long-time support of programs that help low-income women and their families.

> CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

The Parish of St. Catherine of Siena

Father Joseph A. Marcella, Pastor
Father Luke P. Suarez, Parochial Vicar
Father Philip G. Bochanski, In Residence
Deacon Patrick Tooze, Deacon of the Parish

HOLY WEEK & EASTER 2018

Palm Sunday, March 25, 2018
Saturday Vigil Mass ~ 4:00 p.m., 7:15 p.m.
Sunday Mass ~ 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 12:00 Noon

Tuesday, March 27, 2018
7:00 p.m. ~ Lenten Confessions including Admission of the Blessed Sacrament

Holy Thursday, March 29, 2018
8:00 a.m. ~ Morning Prayer
7:00 p.m. ~ The Solemn Mass of the Lord’s Supper, followed by Adoration at the Repository until Midnight

Good Friday, March 30, 2018
8:00 a.m. ~ Morning Prayer
10:00 a.m. ~ 12:00 p.m. ~ Confessions
3:00 p.m. ~ The Liturgy of the Passion and Death of the Lord
5:00 p.m. ~ Viewing of The Passion of the Christ
8:00 p.m. ~ Stations of the Cross

Holy Saturday, March 31, 2018
8:00 a.m. ~ Morning Prayer
12:00 Noon & 3:00 p.m. ~ Blessing of Food (Church Hall)
8:00 p.m. ~ The Great Vigil of Easter

Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018
*Note the special Mass schedule
Masses at: 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 12 Noon

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they need to succeed in the workplace.

“I’m constantly speaking to women about leadership, balance and finding their voice, which is very important,” said Bigelow, who will present at the Kellogg Global Women’s Summit in Chicago in May. “Women can’t try to be men or think of how people want them to be. They must develop a genuine voice because that is what will help them get to the next level and stay true to themselves.”

She points out that a high percentage of new businesses are started by women. This is what her grandmother Ruth Campbell Bigelow did 75 years ago when she developed “Constant Comment” tea and began a company that would eventually become a leader in specialty teas.

“There were significant hurdles that she had to overcome,” Bigelow said. “But today there is help available for women who are willing to take a risk. We have to support one another.”

Last year Bigelow Tea registered to become a Benefits Corporation, which allows the company’s leadership to pursue goals that will benefit the community in tangible, socially responsible ways. Unlike traditional corporations that are operated solely to make profits, Benefits Corporations are required to work toward a positive impact on society and the environment.

Cindi Bigelow is the third-generation president and CEO of family-owned Bigelow Tea, the U.S. market leader of specialty teas that produces more than two billion tea bags annually. She holds a BS degree from Boston College, an MBA from Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management, and honorary doctorates from the University of New Haven and Fairfield University.

She frequently speaks to students and industry leaders, sharing insights on business ethics and career development. She has received numerous awards for her community service.

(Bigelow will be honored at the center’s annual fundraiser, Starry Night Gala on April 6 at the Inn at Longshore in Westport from 6:30 to 11 pm. The evening will include cocktails, live and silent auctions, dinner, music and dancing. Tickets are $195. For more information, visit www.thecarolinehouse.org or contact Christine Paine at cpaine@thecarolinehouse.org.)
Youth FoodFast to end hunger

NORWALK—On February 24, St. Philip Parish hosted a Catholic Relief Services FoodFast, a hunger awareness experience for Catholic youth. The theme of the event was “Be the Change,” and young people fasted from food throughout the day while participating in activities including prayer, reflection, educational games and service projects before concluding the day with Mass.

More than 65 middle school and high school students attended the FoodFast, representing fifteen schools, nine parishes, and several towns including Norwalk, Stamford, Greenwich, Trumbull and Milford. About 40 adult volunteers helped during the event.

The St. Philip parish community is passionate about the issue of world hunger, and they have worked to alleviate hunger throughout the world by raising $350,000 over the past fifteen years for World Vision International before partnering with Catholic Relief Services for this year’s event.

Catholic Relief Services is the international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States, and many Catholics are familiar with their work because of the CRS Rice Bowl Lenten almsgiving program. Two weeks before the FoodFast, a representative from CRS named Thomas Awiapo visited St. Philip and other parishes and schools in the diocese to speak about his personal experience receiving food and education from a CRS program funded by Rice Bowl donations when he was a child growing up in Ghana.

Father Sudhir D’Souza, St. Philip’s pastor, spearheaded the planning of the FoodFast along with the FoodFast team, Jessica Nayden from Catholic Service St. Joseph Parish

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Reverend Michael Dogali, Pastor

Palm Sunday (The Passion of the Lord)
Vigil Mass, Saturday, March 24—4:00 pm
5:00 pm—Passion Play (English)
Sunday, March 25—
7:30, 9:00, 10:30 am, 12:00 noon (Spanish),
5:00 pm, 6:00 pm Passion Play (English)

Holy Thursday—March 29
7:00 pm—Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper
10:00 pm—Prayer Service (Spanish)

Good Friday—March 30
3:00 pm—Liturgy of Good Friday
4:45 pm—Stations of the Cross (Spanish)
7:30 pm—Passion Play (English)
10:00 pm—Prayer Service (Spanish)

Holy Saturday—March 31
1:00 pm—Blessing of Easter Baskets
3:00-4:00 pm—Confessions
8:00 pm—Easter Vigil

Easter Sunday—April 1
Masses at 7:30, 9:00, 10:30 am and 12:00 noon (Spanish)

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 23
St. Theresa Adoration Chapel

Adoration Chapel from page 12

Eucharist adoration, the more and more we saw Christ in the Eucharist, the more and more we saw Christ in the poor.”

How did you decide on the name and design?

Number one, we were coming up on the 100th anniversary of Fatima. Number two, there’s a deep connection between Our Lady of Fatima and the Holy Eucharist because of the children at Fatima’s reception of the Eucharist from an angel, and also Sister Lucia’s vision of the Holy Trinity, which included Christ in the Eucharist and his precious blood pouring into the chalice.

How did the beautiful connection come about in this chapel?

We chose the John Canning Company, which is famous for exceptional artistic ability and quality. The Bible asks us to give our first fruits to God. We want to give the very best we can to beautify the holy and sacred place for the holiest presence in the world, our Lord in the most Holy Eucharist.

Why does all this fit into the parish’s spiritual life?

I see the perpetual adoration chapel as a supernatural power grid! Adoration infuses us with so much supernatural grace that it acts as a power grid fortifying our souls with the interior life of the Trinity, enabling us to love God more and therefore our neighbor more. Thus, perpetual adoration deeply affects our relationships with one another and builds up authentic Catholic culture in homes and in our communities. I see men and women desire more than anything else a time and a place to meet God. With 24 hours a day, they can meet God in the flesh anytime.

How are the parishioners reacting?

The reactions have been overwhelmingly positive. Many people have told me how it’s been such a great source of nourishment, of healing and of peace. One of the most joyful aspects for me is that people are in the chapel at 10 pm, at 1 am, at 4 am, worshiping Christ and bringing his presence more deeply into the world. Hundreds of lives are now being slowly transformed by God’s supernatural power grid in that chapel.

You surely had help in this effort.

We are especially grateful to our wonderful head coordinator, Dr. Amy Nepomuceno, who helped open a perpetual adoration chapel in Staten Island 25 years ago.

What are your hopes now that the old chapel has been reborn as an adoration chapel?

My ultimate hope is that more people and more of our families come to know the incredible love of God for them, his deepest desire to have them know the happiness that only comes from a deeper relationship with him through the Holy Eucharist. From there, the family will only grow stronger with the supernatural infusion of God’s love and bring about greater works of love, of peace, of forgiveness and of healing for so many people in our very fallen world today.

FoodFast from page 22

Corps and many dedicated volunteers. Father Sudhir explained, “Hunger is not just far away in third world countries, it’s right here in our neighborhoods.”

The team noted that the presentation given by Tina Kramer, a New Canaan resident who founded the non-profit “Filling in the Blanks,” was important for many of the participants, who discovered that hunger could be affecting the student sitting next to them. “It opened their eyes to a new reality,” shared Paul Sullivan, a team member.

The young people had the opportunity to spend several hours volunteering during the afternoon of the FoodFast. A group went to New Covenant Center in Stamford to work in the food pantry, while other groups conducted food drives outside of local businesses and visited retirement homes. The team noted that the service opportunities were an essential part of the day because it’s important to “make the teens aware of the different opportunities they have to serve and to reach out” beyond the one day event.

Father D’Souza encouraged the FoodFast participants, and all young people, to continue serving others and growing in their Catholic faith beyond the one-day event. He directed the students to check out the Catholic Service Corps, a ministry which provides opportunities for all the faithful, especially young people, to serve others and grow in their Catholic faith. Service opportunities as well as prayer and reflection resources can be found at www.catholicservicecorps.org.

St. Philip’s will continue to collect donations for CRS throughout the month of March, and donations can be made by visiting their parish website at www.stphilipnorwalk.org. The parish hopes that even more young people from parishes and schools throughout the diocese will join for next year’s FoodFast.

If any parish or school is interested in learning more about hosting a FoodFast, contact Jessica Nayden: JNayden@diopt.org, or Father Sudhir: vnsudhir@gmail.com.)

St. James Parish
Community of Faith
2110 Main Street, Stratford, Connecticut • 203-375-5887
Rev. Thomas Lynch, Pastor

2018
Palm Sunday - March 25
Mass Schedule - Saturday, March 24 7:30 pm Vigil for Palm Sunday at 5:15 pm Sunday Masses at 7:30 am, 9:00 am, 11:30 am, and 5:00 pm Monday, March 26 Mass at 7:00 am and 5:30 pm Adoration from 6:00-9:00 pm Tuesday, March 27 Mass at 7:00 am and 5:30 pm Confessions from 6:00-9:00 pm

St. Thomas the Apostle RC Church
203 East Avenue, Norwalk, Connecticut 06855 • 203-866-3141

Palm Sunday Weekend March 24/25 Confessions: Saturday: 4:30-5:00 pm Vigil for Palm Sunday at 5:15 pm Sunday Masses at 7:30 am, 9:00 am (Family Mass), 11:30 am, and 5:00 pm Monday, March 26 Mass at 7:00 am and 5:30 pm Adoration from 6:00-9:00 pm Tuesday, March 27 Mass at 7:00 am and 5:30 pm Confessions from 6:00-9:00 pm

Holy Thursday - March 29 7:30 pm - Mass of the Lord’s Supper and the washing of feet 8:00 am - Morning Prayer

Good Friday - March 30 9:00 am - Celebration of the Lord’s Passion 8:00 am - Morning Prayer

Holy Saturday - March 31 7:30 pm - The Easter Vigil 8:00 am - Morning Prayer 10:00 am - Blessing of Easter Food

Easter Sunday - April 1 Mass Schedule 7:00 am*, 9:00 am, 11:00 am There will be no 6:00 pm Mass

(* Please note our Easter Sunday Mass will be at 7:00 am)

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Blessed Oscar Romero, revolutionary Saint

By JOE PISANI

FAIRFIELD—Almost four decades after he was assassinated, Blessed Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, is venerated throughout his country, where there are murals and images of him in cities and rural villages. Community groups and San Salvador’s airport are named after him. To the poor, he is a symbol of persecution, hope and the Gospel.

On March 7, the Vatican announced that Archbishop Romero is on the path to canonization. Although no date has yet been announced, both he and Pope Paul VI are expected to be canonized together during the Synod of Bishops this coming October.

As his canonization approaches, what lesson does this martyred priest, who has been compared to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr., have for people of faith in the 21st century?

“How might Christians think and live differently because of Oscar Romero?” This is a question posed by Dr. Michael Lee, whose newly published biography Revolutionary Saint: The Theological Legacy of Oscar Romero, (Orbis Books) explores the legacy of a man who underwent a profound transformation and became a vocal activist against the outrages in El Salvador as it tottered on the brink of civil war.

He was a priest who decried poverty, injustice, torture and assassinations, and because of his denunciation of the established order, he was assassinated by a right-wing death squad while saying Mass in the chapel of the Hospital of Divine Providence on March 24, 1980.

Lee recently gave a lecture at Sacred Heart University titled “The Liberation Spirituality of Oscar Romero” as part of the Curtis Center’s Contemporary Catholic Conversations and the Human Journey Colloquia Series. An associate professor of theology affiliated with Fordham University’s Latin America and Latino Studies Institute, he has researched and worked with the Salvadoran people for more than 15 years. “In their faith, their struggles, their joy, their solidarity and their endurance,” he said, “they give witness to a stubborn hope rooted in their land’s name—El Salvador, the Savior.”

El Salvador is among the most impoverished countries in South America, where the poorest 20 percent receive only three percent of the income. It is a land plagued by environmental crises and one of the highest murder rates in the world.

Lee came to adulthood during the Salvadoran civil war from 1980 to 1992, which the Reagan administration identified as a central focus in the fight against Soviet communism. In much the same way the Vietnam War defined a previous generation, Lee said, “My generation came to see El Salvador not just as a foreign policy debate, but an entrenched battle that shaped political identity.

To him, the assassination of Archbishop Romero and the subsequent murders of four U.S. churchwomen symbolized the “evils of U.S. intervention in the bloody civil war.”

Monsignor Romero, he said, went through a transformation during his 40 years as a priest. He was extremely pious and devout and “severely scrupulous” in his personal behavior. He also demonstrated an openness in dealing with world problems. “Romero is an exemplar of the faith-that-does-justice, standing alongside contemporary figures such as Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King Jr.,” Lee said, “and his memory is linked to a particular way of seeing faith today as indispensably linked to efforts toward peace and justice.”

During Archbishop Romero’s 2015 beatification, Pope Francis said, “His ministry was distinguished by his particular attention to the most poor and marginalized.”

“For those who admire the openness and humility in the ministry of Pope Francis,” Lee said, “Romero’s priority toward the marginalized resonates deeply. Rather than advocating an embattled church, Romero is understood as an exemplar of the field hospital church that cares for the wounded, defending them and not its own place in the world.”

When in 1977, Romero was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador at 60 years old, he was considered a social conservative, who was ultimately transformed by the social unrest of the time. A few weeks later, his close friend Father Rutilio Grande, SJ, was murdered, and this was a defining moment in Romero’s becoming an outspoken defender of human rights.

Many believe that Romero was the last hope of avoiding civil war in El Salvador; however, after his death, the political crisis spiraled out of control.

To Lee, Archbishop Romero “lived his theological convictions, and he offers us a moving exam—

> CONTINUED ON PAGE 25
Johnson accepts challenge at Notre Dame

By DON HARRISON

The name is John Charles Johnson III, of the Cranston, Rhode Island Johnsons. At first glance, it seems old guard, upper crust.

Well, John Johnson, as he’s commonly known, IS an imposing figure—on the football field, first as a player and more recently as a coach. And it is in the latter capacity that Notre Dame Catholic High School in Fairfield is banking on Johnson to restore the luster of the Lancers’ football program. He was appointed Notre Dame’s head coach just weeks ago.

“It’s a good opportunity,” Johnson said. “With the administrative help we’ll have over there, we’ll take the program to the next level.”

He succeeds Chris Sadler, who in his three seasons at the helm brought respectability to the program. The 2017 Lancers won three of their first four games and finished 4-6 overall, while the previous fall, Notre Dame went 5-5. His cumulative record was 12-18.

As head coach of Bullard-Havens Technical High School’s highly successful football team for the past decade—a period in which the Tigers captured three Constitution State Conference titles and won 68 games versus 29 losses—Johnson had a first-hand look at Notre Dame teams. He was impressed.

“We scrimmaged Notre Dame the 10 years I was head coach. You could see Sadler did a great job the last few years. They were competitive on a weekly basis,” he explained.

For Johnson, his arrival at Notre Dame brings him back to familiar territory. On the opposite side of Jefferson Street is the burgeoning Sacred Heart University campus, and it was there that he earned both bachelor’s (criminal justice) and master’s (education) degrees. He also played four seasons (1996-99) of varsity football for the Pioneers, primarily as a wide receiver.

“He was a man of the Gospel, a revolutionary saint.”
Father Martin J. Nikodem, 78

Father Martin J. Nikodem, 78, of Trumbull passed away peacefully on March 8, at Lord Chamberlain Nursing Home in Stratford after a courageous battle with cancer.

He was born in Bridgeport to the late John and Mary Nikodem. He attended St. Ann School in Bridgeport and graduated from Fairfield Prep. He studied philosophy and theology at Christ the King Seminary and St. Bonaventure in New York.

Father Nik, as he was affectionately known, was ordained in 1967 in St. Augustine Cathedral by Bishop Walter W. Curtis. He celebrated his Golden Jubilee last May. His first appointment was as parochial vicar a St. Mary Parish in Ridgefield. He later served in that capacity at St. Mary Parish in Stamford and St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull, where he was also temporary administrator.

Father Nik was appointed pastor of Our Lady of Good Council in Bridgeport in 1987, serving there until 2008. He was a member of the Diocesan Priests’ Council from 1973-74.

A kind and generous man, he always made the needs of others a priority. He was named chaplain at St. Joseph’s Manor, Trumbull, in 2008 and spent several years caring for and meeting the spiritual needs of the residents of St. Joseph’s Manor, while also serving as part-time parochial vicar at Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Fairfield. He was an avid Steelers fan and took great pleasure in watching every game and wearing “all things Steelers.” He will also be remembered for his motorcycle rides and sailing on Fairfield Beach on his Sallfish.

He is survived by his sister, Carol Halpinney of Shelton and his brother, Edward Nikodem and his wife Beth of Michigan.

Father Nikodem was received into Our Lady of the Assumption Church on March 12. A Vigil Mass of Christ the High Priest was celebrated that evening by Msgr. Thomas Powers, vicar general of the Diocese of Bridgeport with Father Peter Cipriani, Assumption’s pastor, as homilist. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at Assumption on March 14, by Father O. Gregori. Deacon Raymond Chervenak of Assumption Parish was the homilist. Interment was private.

Sister Marie Cafferty, CND

Sister Marie Cafferty (Sister St. Edward of Mary) a Sister of the Congregation of Notre Dame died peacefully on February 12 at Lourdes Health Care Center in Wilton.

Marie Cafferty was born in Cranston, Rhode Island. After high school, she entered the Congregation of Notre Dame in Montreal Canada, pronouncing her vows there in August 1943.

She then lived almost 75 years of deep commitment to young people in Catholic Schools as teacher, guidance counselor and principal. In Connecticut, Sister Marie taught sociology and worked in the guidance office at Stamford Catholic High School (now Trinity Catholic) from 1959-64. She also served in Manchester at St. Bartholomew School and at St. John the Baptist School in New Haven. In addition, she ministered in schools in Rhode Island, New York and Illinois.

Sister Marie’s unique gifts were to find those whom others had given up on and to treat them with respect and compassion. She will be deeply missed by her Sisters in the Congregation of Notre Dame, her friends, and the many people she influenced.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated for Sister Marie at the Villa Notre Dame Chapel in Wilton on February 16. Burial followed in St. Peter Cemetery in Danbury.
El ‘V Encuentro’: volver a las calles a evangelizar

POR MARICARMEN GODOY

El encuentro diocesano del V Encuentro Nacional llevó a cabo en la Iglesia de Santa María en Stamford como antiesala al encuentro regional del noreste, rumbo al encuentro nacional en donde se abogará por la iglesia latina en los Estados Unidos. El Encuentro leó a la conclusión de que la evangelización a las católicas hispanas que están alejadas de la iglesia debe volver a las calles, tal como fue al inicio de la era Cristiana, con el fin de trae nuevamente a los alejados por diversos factores.

Según el Padre Gustavo Falla, el V (quinto) Encuentro Nacional es un proceso de consulta y misión para evangelizar, que se inició para comprender la forma que la iglesia en los Estados Unidos debe ayudar a los hispanos católicos a fortalecer su respuesta como discípulos misioneros.

El V Encuentro, acuerdo al Padre Falla, párroco de Santa María y director del departamento de diversidad cultural de la Diócesis de Bridgeport, nativo de Colombia, tiene entre sus primeras experiencias formar 25,000 nuevos líderes católicos entre líderes laicos y religiosos comprometidos, para salir a las calles y ayudar a evangelizar a la generación de hispanos que se han alejado de la iglesia y ayudarles lograr una experiencia personal de conexión con Dios, a través de módulos sencillos que vienen marcados en base al camino de Emaús que recorrió Jesús.

Según el Padre Falla, las estadísticas, basadas en un estudio de la Universidad de Georgetown publicado en CARAS, muestran la realidad de la iglesia católica hispana, y las cifras de abandono son alarmantes en este momento, tal como sucedió al inicio de las oleadas migratorias de los italianos católicos en estos momentos, como las que fueron perseguidos cuando migratorias de los italianos católicos en estos momentos, como las que fueron perseguidos cuando migraron a los Estados Unidos en los años 50, 60 y 70, según el Padre Falla, son dedicados a su fe, apoyados a la iglesia. La segunda generación se ha desapegado de la fe, y la tercera se ha ausentado en su totalidad, y es a esa generación que el V Encuentro quiere apuntar.

El V Encuentro, de acuerdo con Julio Sánchez, laico comprometido de la Parroquia San Benito-Nuestra Señora de Montserrat y facilitador parroquial, se viene preparando desde hace varios meses con reuniones entre feligreses de les que habló a las calles a realizar encuestas en donde claramente se comprobará que la gente está alejado de su criador por varios factores; pero que, en su mayor parte, quieren volver y no saben cómo hacerlo o sencillamente solo buscan una palabra de aliento.

“Decir en la calle: ¡Jesús te ama! ¡Jesús espera por ti!” son palabras que a nadie le son indiferentes porque nacen de una verdad de la iglesia”, dice el Señor Sánchez.

Meses después de que el Papa Francisco revivió la expresión “Discípulo Misionero” en su carta encíclica La Alegría del Evangelio, una nueva oleada de iniciativas misioneras llegó a la iglesia en el mundo entero. Y en los Estados Unidos este trabajo misionero está implementándose con el V Encuentro, desde la oficina de Diversidad Cultural de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos estadounidenses.

La Diócesis de Bridgeport ha estado involucrada en el proceso Encuentro desde el Primer Encuentro Nacional en el 2000 celebrado en Los Ángeles, California, del 6 al 9 de julio. Fue la oportunidad que más oportunidad que la iglesia tuvo para descubrir las formas en que la comunidad católica hispana puede ser parte de una sola iglesia, aunque provenga de diversas culturas y etnias.

Para este V Encuentro Nacional, se están preparando 163 diócesis a nivel nacional, de los cuales el 38 por ciento de los católicos adultos identifican su origen étnico como hispano. En la Diócesis de Bridgeport el porcentaje es del 30 por ciento. En el país, el cuarenta por ciento de todo el crecimiento de feligreses registrados en las parroquias católicas entre 2005 y 2010 fue de hispanos católicos. En encuestas, la gran mayoría dice que su fe es una parte importante de su vida cotidiana y se sienten orgullosos de ser católicos.

Según el Padre Falla, para comprender de qué se trata el V Encuentro, hay que revisar la Encíclica del Papa y leer lo que dice sobre el discipulado misionero. En palabras del Papa Francisco: “En virtud de su bautismo, todos los miembros del Pueblo de Dios se han convertido en discípulos misioneros (Mt 28:19). Todos los bautizados, cualquiera que sea su posición en la Iglesia o su nivel de instrucción en la fe, son agentes de evangelización y sería insuficiente prever un plan de evangelización para ser llevado a cabo por profesionales, mientras que el resto de los fieles simplemente serían receptores pasivos. La nueva evangelización exige la participación personal de cada uno de los bautizados”.

Los feligreses de la Diócesis de Bridgeport asistieron al Encuentro Regional en Hartford el 10 de marzo y están preparando para la Conferencia Nacional V Encuentro que se llevará a cabo del 20 al 23 de septiembre en el Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center, en Grapevine, Texas. (Para más información sobre el V Encuentro, visite https://vencuentro.org.)

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THE FIFTH NATIONAL ENCUENTRO is a process of evangelization launched to help Hispanic Catholics become missionary disciples for the entire Church. The Diocesan Encuentro took place in February and a Regional Encuentro was recently completed in Hartford. Delegates are preparing for the National Encuentro meeting to be held this September in Texas.
Column: Thomas Hicks

A few thoughts on life and God

“No matter child the name/ sorrows' springs are the same/ It is the plight man was born for/ it is Margaret you mourn for” ("Spring and Fall: To a Young Girl," Gerard Manley Hopkins).

But again, life is not merely coping, but enjoying life. Life is also about goodness and kindness, about friendship and belonging, about love, enduring love. Let us take what we can, every moment of it, every drop of it. There’s that wonderful rabinic statement: “A person will have to give an account on judgment day for every good thing he or she might have enjoyed but didn’t.” Pope Francis said that life is about “rowing beauty and joy in a world sometimes gloomy and sad.”

With time, one becomes much concerned about God and his ways. One can do a lot of rethinking about this. One comes to recognize the truth of Isaiah’s words: “As the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9). And Isaiah also has God ask: “Is it for you to dictate to me what my hands should do?” (Isaiah 45:11).

St. Paul wrote that God’s ways are inscrutable. No one can read God’s mind. No mortal is God’s advisor (Romans 11:33).

Sometimes I wonder about the basic question: Why does God seek contact with human beings in the first place? What is he pursuing in us? The Scriptural answer is he wants to be loved. As Soren Kierkegaard said, it is almost as though it were a weakness in God. It seems to me that we may have a certain degree of love for God, but most of us love created things as much or more; few give God the first place.

That’s how it seems to me.

The Catholic theologian Karl Rahner was always talking about the mystery and incomprehensibility of God, telling us that God is inexhaustible mystery, unfathomable.

No voice has ever spoken to me in unmistakable, unambiguous terms, but through years of encounter with God’s mysterious ways I’ve gathered a few glimpses about God’s way of acting.

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No voice has ever spoken to me in unmistakable, unambiguous terms, but through years of encounter with God’s mysterious ways I’ve gathered a few glimpses about God’s way of acting.
For many years, I took part in perpetual Eucharistic Adoration at a church near the town where I grew up. I volunteered to do 2 am to 3 am Saturday, which was a difficult hour to fill. Every Friday night after work, I’d put my head on the pillow at 8 pm, hoping for a few hours of sound sleep so I could be sufficiently rested by the time the alarm went off and I had to leave. As the song says, strange things happen “after midnight.” While the rest of the world is in peaceful slumber, there’s a segment of society that’s celebrating the start of the weekend with bar-hopping and merrymaking—engaged in what I can only describe as drunken revelry. The world came alive in a creepy way as I set out on my nocturnal odyssey through three towns to reach the adoration chapel, where I would spend an hour alone with Christ. Enroute to that sanctuary, I’d pass speed traps, where police cars were lying in wait for tipsy drivers returning from bars at the witching hour when the world became a landscape that could have been inspired by Dante, Dali and Fellini all in one. Twirling red and blue police lights illuminated the sky, and cars were pulled over on highways and streets, while men and women took sobriety tests and struggled to walk in a straight line. As I approached the town where the church was, I drove by several bars that were closing, and patrons would be staggering to their cars, laughing boisterously or arguing. For many years, I had been one of them. No more. What a relief to arrive at the chapel and be welcomed by the Eucharistic Sacrament in a gold monstrance on the altar. It was a silent and serene place where I could be alone with my best friend in the world, a friend who was infinitely patient and listened to my problems, complaints, joys and sorrows. You can’t find a friend like that anywhere else—and you certainly can’t find him on a barstool.

My Holy Hour usually began with the exasperated cry, “Jesus, you’re not going to believe the week I had!” which was followed by the plaintive cry, “Help me, Lord!” Once I got it all off my chest, everything changed. I could relax, pray, sit in silence and, most importantly, listen. The answer to every problem lies in the tabernacle. Only there will you find what you need. You’ll receive divine consolation, encouragement and love sitting before the Eucharistic Face of Jesus. At the bar, everyone has an opinion about what you should do in life, but only Jesus has the answer. Did your girlfriend leave you? Sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament... Did a family member or friend die? Sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament... Are you having problems at work? Sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament... Are you facing financial difficulties or illness? Sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament... Are you feeling depressed? Guilty? Lonely? Angry? Useless? Unloved? Sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament...

When I worked in Manhattan, I’d occasionally sneak out of the office and slip into St. Agnes Church on 43rd Street, where there was Eucharistic Adoration after the 1:10 Mass. I’m convinced that people who weren’t even Catholic came into church to talk to Christ because they believed something that many Catholics don’t—Jesus is really and truly present in the Eucharist. Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Accept no substitutes. In his quiet presence, all wounds are healed, all fears allayed, all doubts dismissed, all grief comforted. There is joy, mercy, compassion, peace and love for the taking. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament were once a regular part of Catholic life. Believing hearts were drawn to the tabernacle, where this Prisoner of Love sits and waits for us to share our lives with him, to adore him and to offer gratitude and reparation. For more than 2000 years, Christ has attracted souls to himself in the Blessed Sacrament so that he can share an intimate friendship with them. If you spend time before his Eucharistic Face, you’ll become a different person, a better person. Amazing changes will immediately take place in your soul.

The tragic irony, I realized years later, is that those young people coming out of bars were looking for answers, friendship and love, too. They were just looking in all the wrong places.
BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP meets at St. Stephen Parish, Trumbull, for 10 weekly meetings with experienced counselors. Sessions began Thurs., March 15, from 4:30 pm; new registrants still welcomed. To register or for more info, call the parish: 203.268.6217.

MASS OF HEALING AND HOPE: the Charismatic Renewal Services announces a Mass of Healing and Hope: Wed., March 21, at 7 pm at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Church, Brookfield, and are available at St. Catherine’s rectory: 203.637.3661. Children under 12 are free.

CATHOLIC YOUNG ADULTS of Greater Danbury (18-35) will meet Sat., March 24, from 5:30-8 pm at Escape 101, 69 Kenosia Ave., Danbury. Enjoy a night of puzzles and mystery at the escape room. For more info, check their Facebook page or email catholic.ya.danbury@gmail.com.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS will take place at St. Margaret’s Shrine, Bridgeport, on Palm Sunday, March 25, at 1 pm. For more information, call the Shrine: 203.333.9627.

LEARN ABOUT WALKING WITH PURPOSE Tues., April 3, at St. Rose of Lima Parish, Newtown. Do you have a heart for other women and a desire to draw them closer to Christ? Attend an information session about Walking with Purpose women’s Catholic Bible study. Lunch provided. There is no cost to attend. For more info and to register, contact Laura Phelps: lauralphelpswwp@gmail.com.

CATHOLIC YOUNG ADULTS of Greater Danbury, (18-35), will meet Tues., April 3, at 6:45 pm for a Praise and Worship Holy Hour at Sacred Heart Parish, Danbury, followed by a social at a local eatery. For more info, check their Facebook page or email catholic.ya.danbury@gmail.com.

BEREAVEMENT MINISTRY: Our Lady of Peace Parish, Stratford, will be conducting a free program from April 4-June 6. The group will meet every Wed., from 12 noon-2 pm or 6-8 pm in the parish center. Open to all; advanced registration required. For more info and to register, call Janet Gillick, certified facilitator: 203.377.4817, or call the parish: 203.377.4863.

CELEBRITY BREAKFAST for New Covenant Center will be held Wed., April 4, at 7 am at the Woodway Country Club, 540 Hoyt St., Darien. Jeff Fager, executive producer of 60 Minutes, will be the featured speaker. For more info and for tickets, call 203.964.8228, ext. 409, or visit NewCovenantCenter.org.

NEW DAY bereavement seminar will meet at St. Thomas More Parish, Darien, beginning Thurs., April 5, at 7:30 pm and continuing through May 31. Registration necessary; no charge. For more information, call Lillian Toll: 203.966.9367 or the parish office: 203.655.3303.

JOKES MY IRISH FATHER TOLD ME, sponsored by the Columbettes at St. Jude Parish, Monroe, on Sat., April 7. Doors open at 7 pm; showtime: 8 pm. Cost: $20; BYOB and snacks; coffee and dessert provided. For tickets, call Elizabeth Edgerton: 203.258.3354.

FINANCIAL PEACE UNIVERSITY: A 9-week Christian-based money management class teaches how to create a budget, pay off debt and save for the future. Offered at St. James Parish, Stratford starting Wed., April 11, at 7 pm. Cost: $119. To enroll online, go to fpu.com/1062462. For more info, call 203.258.3354.
Bits and Pieces

David Zamachaj: 203.375.5887.

Catholic Young Adults of Greater Danbury (18-35) will meet Thurs., April 12, from 7:30-9:30 pm at WCSU Newman Center, 7th Ave, Danbury, for a talk by Kevin Roys. For more info, check their Facebook page or email catholic.ya.danbury@gmail.com.

Gospel of Life Society meets at St. Mary Parish, Norwalk, the second Sat. of each month at 10 am following the 9 am Respect Life Mass. Alexandra and Paul McLaughlin will present perspectives on the beauty of fertility awareness-based family planning. On-site child care provided. For more info, contact John Juhasz: 203.762.3661 or juhaszjw@optonline.net.

Veterans’ Memorial Bricks: deadline for donating a veteran’s brick to the St. Margaret Shrine Veterans Memorial on Park Ave., Bridgeport, is Sun., April 15. For more info and to donate a brick for a veteran from the U.S. military and our allies, living, deceased, wartime, peacetime, reserves, regulars or currently serving, contact Art Falco: 203.345.3244 or artfalco@optonline.net.

Women’s Group at Christ the King Parish, Trumbull, will meet Mon., April 16, at 10 am in the parish hall. All are welcome. For more info, call Esther: 203.268.8011.

Lectio Divina Workshop sponsored by the Centering Prayer Group of St. Paul Parish, Greenwich, will be presented by Diane Harkin, Wed., April 18, from 7-9 pm. Registration opens at 6:30 pm. Donation: $20. For more info or to register, email Monica Lenci: mlenci@aol.com.

Mom+Dad Prayer/Support Group for those with Down syndrome, their family and friends meets the third Thurs. of every month (April 19), at 7:30 pm at St. Mary Parish, Norwalk. For more info, contact strapostolates@optimum.net.

Secular Franciscan Holy Spirit Fraternity invites everyone to St. Anthony of Padua Church, Fairfield, on Sat., April 21, at 9:30 am to celebrate Mass with Msgr. Ernest Esposito. Social and meeting follow. For more info, call Pat Heile, OFS: 203.255.8801 or pheile5713@aol.com.

IN THE HEIGHTS presented by the Theatre Arts Program at Sacred Heart University is a fundraiser to help those impacted by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Performances will be held Thurs.-Sat., April 12-14, at 8 pm and Sun., April 15, at 3 pm. Cost: $22; Seniors, $15; students, $10. For more info or for tickets, call the Edgerton Center box office, 203.371.7908 Mon.-Fri.


For reservations, contact Mary Sabato: 914.714.5806 or marys0718@gmail.com.

Thrift Shop at Our Lady of Peace Parish Center in the Lordship section of Stratford is open each Sat., from 10 am-12 noon. Housewares, glassware and accessories, clothing, jewelry, linens and small furniture pieces, all reasonably priced. For more info, call the parish: 203.377.4863.

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