



FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

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Holy Week During the Pandemic

‘Christ’s victory passes from person to person this Easter morning’

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—“Christ’s victory is our victory, a victory for all those willing to persevere and be patient in His life,” Bishop Frank J. Caggiano said in his Easter morning homily at St. Augustine Cathedral, where he celebrated all Holy Week Masses.

“This Easter it may be harder than any before to see the signs of this victory. Once again, I come here to celebrate Mass essentially alone. I miss all of you not being here as you are in your homes hunkered down in safety, trying to be free from an invisible enemy in our midst,” said the bishop in his life-streamed homily.

“Just as this deadly virus has passed from person to person, consider with me that Christ’s victory also passes from person to person this Easter morning,” he told the faithful as he asked them to think of all those who are in hospital beds, isolated in quarantine or on the front lines

struggling to serve people during the pandemic.

In his homily the bishop focused on the garden as an image of growth, beauty and eternal life but also a place of human suffering.

“The saga of Christ’s death began in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Lord surrendered to His

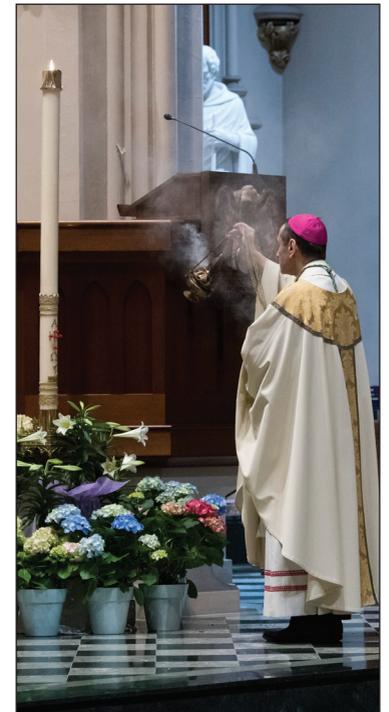
because Lord has risen in victory.”

“As we gather this Easter morning, this most unusual of Easters that you and I are celebrating together, let us recall the great in-breaking of Divine Life, the victory over death that occurred in a garden which featured a tomb hewn out of rock.

learn patience and perseverance, and during difficult times may ask, “What kind of garden? Where is life and beauty? What are the signs of Easter beauty?”

“The winter you and I are living during this pandemic seems not yet to be fully letting go. We see the first signs of seeds but need to be patient. Are we any different than Lord in Gethsemane being asked to sacrifice it all? We too are asked to persevere,” because in the garden of Eternal Life Christ asks us to plant the seeds of his powers, healing and presence.”

“As we run into empty tomb with heart renewed in perseverance and settled in patience, let us personally pass seeds of the light of Christ won for us this day and I promise you that winter will pass, spring will come, not the Spring of nature, but the springtime of eternal life and victory in Jesus Christ. And that springs and the plants and sees and flowers of that garden, no



father’s will and showed us how much he loved us.”

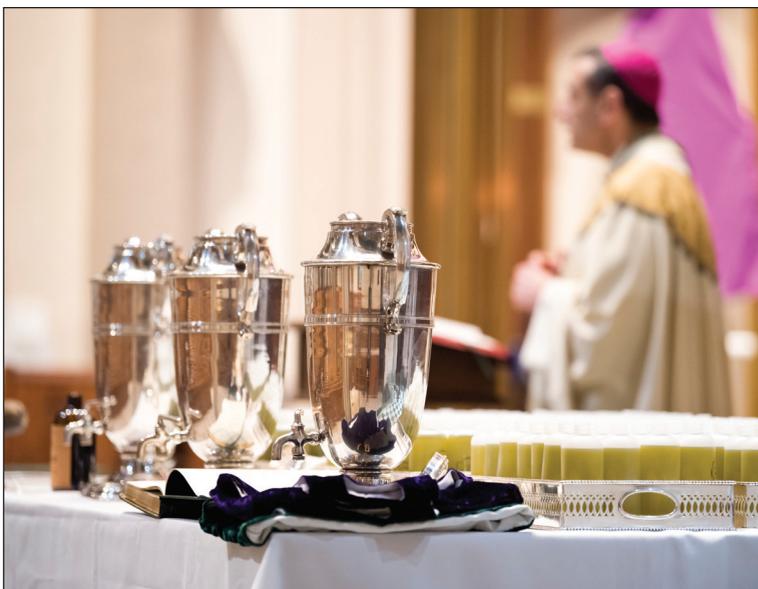
The bishop said that Christ’s resurrection created a new garden that has triumphed over sin and suffering and death. “The tomb is empty

In fact, the story of our salvation began in the first garden when Adam and Eve were tossed out in search of redemption.”

He said that every gardener longs for seeds to grow, but must

one and nothing will ever take away from you and me.

Before giving his final blessing the bishop wished all the faithful a “happy grace-filled, and joyous Easter,” and reassured them that “the Lord’s victory is already in our midst as we plant seeds in the garden we share together. I see it blossom before our eyes. The Lord is truly risen and we honor him with glory forever and ever.” ■



ON THE COVER

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano celebrates Easter Sunday Mass in the empty St. Augustine Cathedral as a result of the Coronavirus crisis. Thousands watched the Mass online through diocesan social media. Photos by Amy Mortensen

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Latest News

Bishop re-launches Annual Appeal

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—On April 20, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano sent an letter to the faithful throughout the diocese announcing the May re-launch of the 2020 Annual Catholic Appeal (ACA) and asking all to give as generously in an emergency situation.

The Appeal, which was launched in January, was temporarily halted because of the disruption caused by the coronavirus, which has led to the suspension of public Masses and the curtailment of all events throughout the diocese.

“In these days when we celebrate the promise of new life in Easter, I write to you now to ask your heroic help to re-launch the 2020 Annual Catholic Appeal in a moment of extreme, urgent need,” said the bishop.

In his letter, the bishop praises the heroic response of people at all levels of society who have put their own lives at risk to provide emergency response, healthcare, food, pastoral care and other essential services in Fairfield County.

“I ask that you join the efforts of these heroes and heroines in responding to this emergency appeal. Your contribution will help to allow the Church’s mission to endure so that we can respond effectively to the spiri-

tual, psychological and physical needs of our people.”

The bishop also indicates that during the crisis, many people have turned to the Church, and it has been able to respond because

together become the living stones of the Church by loving and serving one another by building a bridge that will carry our sisters and brothers safely through this crisis. And let us do so joy-

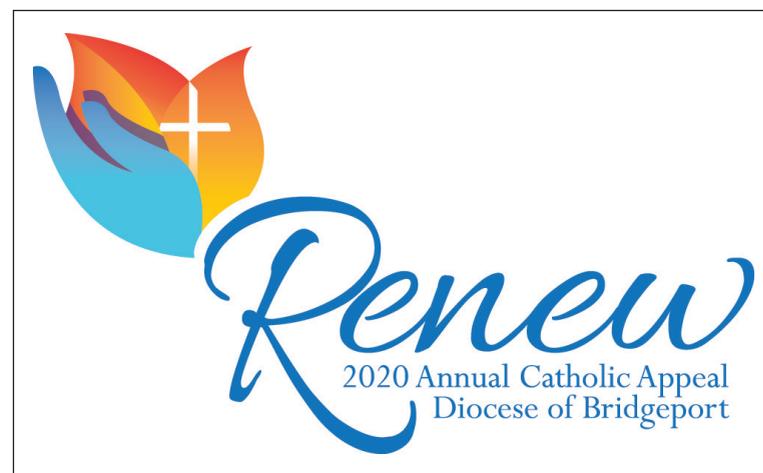
views with Bishop Caggiano and highlight people throughout the diocese who are in dire need and who have been hit especially hard by the financial repercussions of the coronavirus. The videos are being produced by Brian Russell of Fairfield.

Rittman said that now more than ever the ACA is responding to the emergency needs of people throughout the diocese and that a strong Spring response is crucial in providing resources to diocesan ministries in a time of crisis.

The bishop said that the challenges are considerable going forward, but he has confidence in the generosity of the faithful.

“As your bishop, I have seen first-hand your extraordinary generosity and I remain deeply grateful. Every time I have asked, you have responded with compassion, with sacrificial giving, and with deep and abiding faith in the Lord and the work of his Church.”

(Please use the envelope enclosed in this issue to make a donation to this year’s Appeal as generously as your means allow. You may also make your gift online at www.2020ACABridgeport.com or text the word APPEAL to 475.241.7849. All donations of whatever amount will help us to help those in need.) ■



of the past generosity of donors who have given to the ACA and supported the core ministries that serve the needy throughout the diocese.

“I come to you in this emergency to ask for your help to ensure that the Annual Catholic Appeal, which has provided basic human services of food, shelter, education and counseling to many in the past can be maintained and, to the extent possible, be expanded to the many others who are facing real hardship for the first time in their lives.”

“In this hour of need, let us

fully in the name of the Risen Lord who has triumphed over sin and death and who will never abandon us.

Pamela Rittman, director of the Annual Catholic Appeal, said the re-launch of the 2020 Appeal will be divided into two major phases. Phase one will run from May 4 through July 15. The second phase, from September 6 through October 31, may be altered or eliminated depending on the initial response.

Rittman said that the ACA re-launch will also be supported by three videos that feature inter-

Public Masses suspended through May 20

BRIDGEPORT—The extension of the suspension of the celebration of public Masses in the Diocese of Bridgeport will now continue through Wednesday, May 20, 2020.

In an April 21 memo to all pastors and priests, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano announced that in the interest of the health and safety of the faithful and consistent with the April 10 executive order of Governor Ned Lamont limiting public gatherings, the suspensions will stay in place through May 20.

The bishop told pastors that he is working with a small committee tasked with implementing a plan for resuming the public

celebration of Masses in phases once the State begins to loosen restrictions on public gatherings. He will also consult with all the Pastors before releasing a plan for resuming liturgical celebrations in the presence of the lay faithful as soon as it is safe.

“I am grateful to those pastors who are continuing to provide the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Anointing of the Sick, live-streamed Masses, open periods for prayer inside the church and Eucharistic Adoration,” he said.

Since the suspension of public Masses, the diocese has live-streamed Masses celebrated by Bishop Caggiano, and

most parishes have been able to live-stream Masses and prayer services to parishioners. The diocesan Leadership Institute has also live-streamed a novena and the Divine Mercy Chaplet in addition to making other prayer resources available.

In the absence of public Masses, the bishop has urged the faithful to deepen their sense of “spiritual communion” with the entire Church and to intensify personal prayer in addition to joining the live-streamed liturgies.

The bishop said that funerals and weddings may still be celebrated in churches outside of the context of Mass, as long as fewer than 50 people are in attendance

and proper social distancing is maintained.

Since the State will likely require the use of face masks even after large gatherings are once again permitted, the bishop asked pastors to consider providing masks, where possible, for the clergy, ministers and lay faithful when public Masses resume.

The bishop first suspended the celebration of public Mass in the Diocese of Bridgeport, effective March 16, 2020. That suspension was to be in effect through April 30, 2020. To view live-streamed Masses and find other prayer resources, visit the diocesan website and social media at www.bridgeportdiocese.com. ■

ACA Gifts support Emergency Response:

- All Bishop Caggiano’s Holy Week Masses are streamed live to the faithful throughout Fairfield County. Thousands visit the diocesan website and social media for Mass and prayer resources during crisis.
- All diocesan Catholic schools are continuing students’ education through distance learning, grades Pre-K – 12thGrade.
- Faith and Sacramental preparation continues through distance learning.
- Hospital Chaplains and Deacons minister to the sick and dying in area hospitals and assisted living facilities.
- Over 67 Parishes have online Masses and services.
- Diocesan Leadership Institute live-streams Novena, Rosary, and Divine Mercy Chaplet in addition to sponsoring Town Meeting for youth with Bishop Caggiano.
- Thomas Merton Center, Bridgeport, is serving an extra 500 meals each week in addition to serving excess food to the Bridgeport YMCA and local churches.
- Morning Glory Breakfast Program, Danbury, is providing food to homeless families and individuals who were recently moved to local Danbury motels.
- Meals on Wheels (Danbury, Darien, Greenwich, Norwalk, Stamford) serves 585 elderly clients via seven vans with doubled meal demand.
- New Covenant Center, Stamford, providing 450 to 700 take-out meals to guests each day and to Stamford Pacific House, Inspirica, and local homeless shelters not affiliated with Catholic Charities who do not have food resources.
- Counseling services—including online and tele-conferencing—continues due to increased stress, anxiety and depression. Substance abuse and relapses are more prevalent during crisis as is domestic violence due to abusive relationships while quarantined.

Holy Week Online

Thousands view live-streamed Masses

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—Thousands of people across the diocese went online during Holy Week to view the live-streamed Masses and liturgies celebrated by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano at St. Augustine Cathedral in Bridgeport.

During the pandemic crisis, diocesan social media and website have been a major lifeline to Catholics throughout Fairfield County who were unable to attend public Masses, which were suspended in the interest of the health and safety of the faithful.

An estimated 50,000 faithful tuned in at some point for the live-streamed Holy Week Masses, and 215,157 minutes viewed on Facebook from Holy Thursday through Easter Sunday. Likewise, there were 91,331 views on the diocesan

website during the same time.

In addition to being live-streamed, the liturgies were also available on the diocesan website (www.bridgeportdiocese.com) to be viewed at any time.

John Grosso, director of digital media for the diocese, said that social media analytics can be complicated when you try to break down the number of clicks and viewers, but the response to diocesan content over the past few weeks has set records for what was already a very active and far-reaching social media presence.

Grosso said that some viewers watched the Masses in their entirety, while others visited to hear Bishop Caggiano's homilies or to view the Consecration and the Eucharist. The total number of people reached on social media was 176,180.

"It's clear that our social



media and website helped to unify the diocese during a time of crisis. People wanted to hear from the bishop and be connected to the Blessed Sacrament. We reached literally tens of thousands of people in a meaningful way, and hundreds of thousands joined us briefly."

Grosso said while record-breaking numbers visited the website and view diocesan social media,

it's far from an overnight success. The significant reach and capability has been developed over the past five years with the introduction of social media through a generous grant from a donor to the Annual Catholic Appeal and to the steady work managing the social media accounts.

Catholics throughout the diocese can find information of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and

Flickr.

Bishop Caggiano said he was grateful that so many people went online during Holy Week to participate in the Triduum. He said that given the high level of interest and participation, he is considering continuing an online Masses, particularly for those who may be confined to their homes and unable to attend liturgies.

In addition to streaming Masses, the diocesan Leadership Institute live-streamed the "Nine Days of Prayer" online Novena and the Divine Mercy Chaplet. A town hall meeting for youth with the bishop also brought young people together online to deepen their faith.

Parishes throughout the diocese also turned to online Masses at a time when the faithful is unable to gather in person. ■



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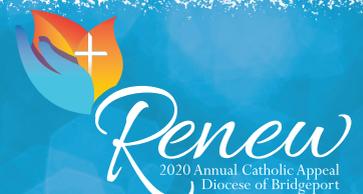
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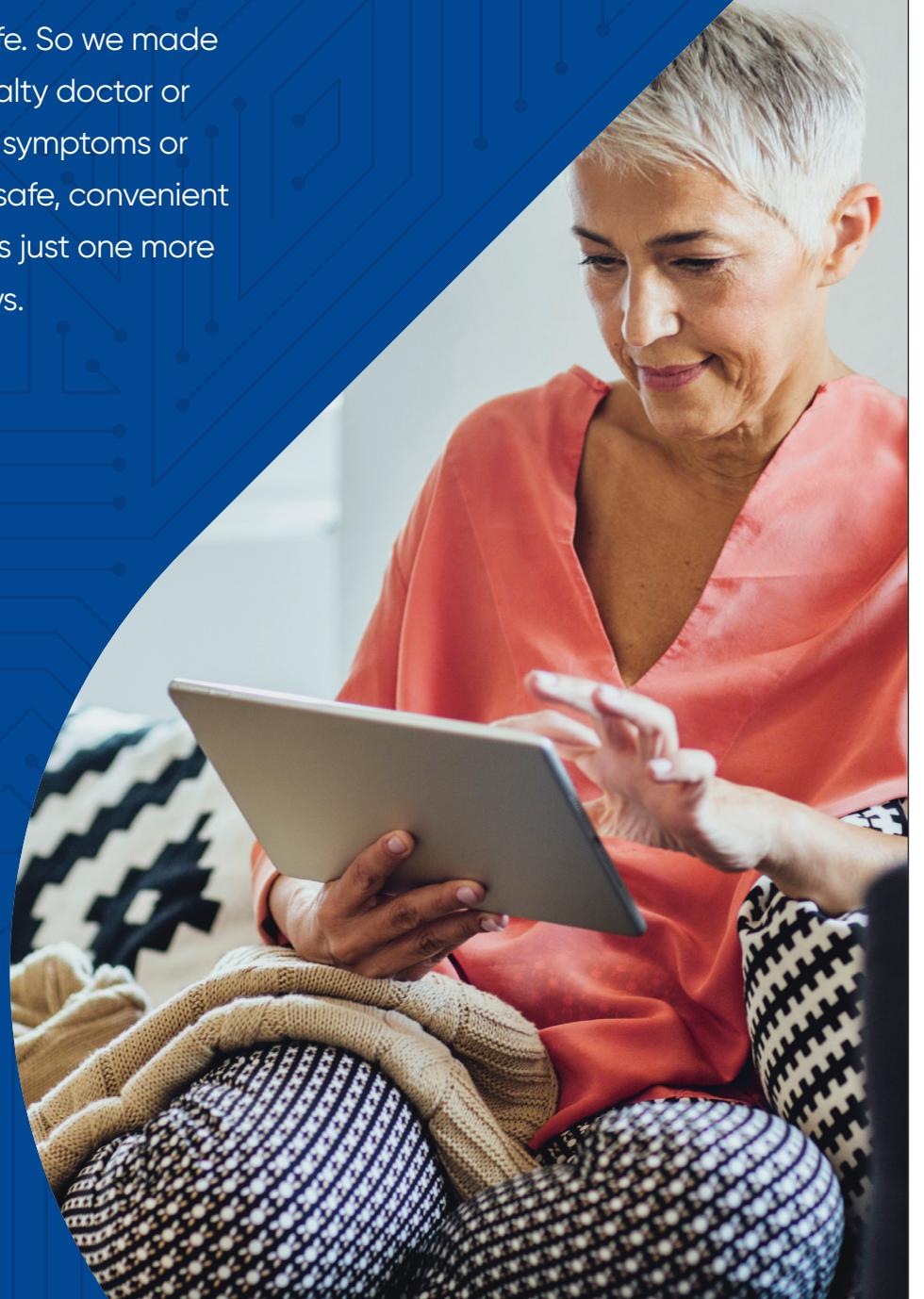


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Priests Reach Out

Taking Jesus to the streets

By **JOE PISANI**

(Editor's note: The coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we live our lives and how we worship God. Few can recall churches ever being closed, except during the worldwide outbreak of the Spanish Flu more than a century ago when public Masses were suspended. And yet during this time, the faithful of the diocese are facing the crisis with fervor and hope. The following are accounts of what several parishes are doing to stay connected to one another...and to God.)

On a cold and rainy March morning, Father Peter Cipriani left his church after celebrating 9 am Mass alone and went out into the streets of Fairfield...with Jesus.

The Creator of the Universe certainly wasn't worried about coronavirus and neither was Father Cipriani, pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, who conducted a Eucharistic procession with the Blessed Sacrament in a magnificent monstrance, followed by an acolyte ringing bells. The tradition, which dates back to the Middle Ages during periods of pestilence, reminds people that in the darkest times, God is with them.

"Someone was ringing the bells as we were walking down the streets to let people know that Jesus was coming," he said. "People came out as I blessed the houses. It was a powerful experience with a very important message because we need to remember that even though public Masses have been suspended, the power of Christ, especially in the Eucharist, is very much present." Every week, he has given the Eucharistic blessing on different neighborhood streets.

It is just one of many practices that parishes have begun since Bishop Frank J. Caggiano issued directives suspending public Mass and liturgical services. As a result, many parishes have adapted by live-streaming Sunday and weekday Masses, uploading videos to YouTube and connecting with one another on parish Facebook pages. In many churches, the attendance at virtual Mass has increased significantly as Catholics turn to God during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is important to keep people connected," Father Cipriani



says. "The word 'religion' means 'to connect,' so here we are, using social media, which is all about connecting. I am trying to think of any and every way to keep people connected. I have also been going down the list of parishioners and giving them a

call to tell them we are still here for them."

Every day, he has a videotaped announcement on the parish website. Mass is live-streamed. Vespers are said through Facebook. Stations of the Cross are prayed on Friday

along with the Chaplet of Divine Mercy at 3 pm. At the request of parishioners, he continues to prepare homilies for children, which are available on the website in the "Kids' Corner."

"Our faith is really being challenged, but I believe there will be a resurgence especially for those who have been on the fence a long time," Father said. "They'll realize, 'Maybe it's time for me to reconnect with my faith, reconnect with my church, reconnect with God.'"

When the crisis began, Father sent a letter to his parishioners, reminding them of the Gospel story about Jesus and the Apostles in a boat when a storm broke out on the lake as Jesus slept in the stern. Frantic and fearful, the Apostles woke Jesus, who went to the bow of the boat, rebuked the storm and then looked at the Apostles and asked,

"Why did you doubt?"

"When the sea is calm, a sailor is not being challenged, and not aware of his or her potential until a storm hits. That's when you begin to appreciate your training," Father said. "I tell people that we are carrying a particularly heavier than usual cross this Lent, which means it is going to be a particularly greater, more powerful Easter, similar in scope to that first Easter."

"The Lord has not abandoned us" Father Gustavo A. Falla, pastor of St. Mary of Stamford was concerned. The parish food pantry was running low, and with restrictions on public gatherings, he feared it would be depleted and those in need would have nowhere to turn.

"I said to myself, 'With the church closed, people are not going

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

'We had God's view':

Diocese blessed in flyover mission

By **EMILY CLARK**

TRUMBULL—Clear skies and light winds made Tuesday in March the perfect day for an inspiring mission of hope and healing—aboard a Cessna 172. Accompanied by the Blessed Sacrament encased in a monstrance and a statue of the Blessed Mother, Father Brian Gannon, pastor of St. Theresa Church in Trumbull, and associate pastor Father Flavian Bejan bestowed prayers of protection as the plane flew above the Diocese of Bridgeport, a spectacular flight meant to calm the faithful amid growing anxiety over the coronavirus.

Departing mid-morning from Sikorsky Memorial Airport, the four-seater traveled the border of Fairfield County, north through Newtown and Danbury, down to Stamford and the shoreline and over Trumbull, before returning to Stratford. This whole experience, Father Gannon said, was a call for God's grace to enter our souls.

"We offered blessings on all people of the diocese," he said.

"It wasn't just a bird's-eye view. We had God's view."

This mission, sponsored by the Knights of Columbus Council 8013, was the third of its kind for pilot John DeCastra, son-in-law of Tom Monks, a member of the St. Theresa Knights. A lieutenant in the U.S. Coast Guard, DeCastra earlier this month initiated similar flyovers in the dioceses of Camden, N.J. and Harrisburg, Penn., taking time out from his position at a base in Atlantic City to inspire others.

"He uses his talents for God," Monks said of his son-in-law. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, something you never forget."

Prior to take-off, Father Gannon led a brief ceremony in the airport's hanger, praying for a safe flight as those present knelt before the Eucharist. Dressed in the traditional black cassock and white surplice, he also wore a yellow gold cope, a cape-like vestment for special liturgies outside of Mass, and a biretta, a three-sided black cap. "I wanted to wear the proper vestments [for the occasion]," Father Gannon said. "We can never pay God back for



A BLESSED FLYOVER—Father Brian Gannon, pastor of St. Theresa Church in Trumbull, assisted Father Flavian Bejan as they await take-off with the Blessed Sacrament on the tarmac of Sikorsky Airport in Stratford. The flight was sponsored by the Knights of Columbus.

all He has given us, but we can give Him the best from us."

A thousand feet over Fairfield County, the priests held close the monstrance and Blessed Mother statue, continuously reciting prayers for people afflicted with COVID-19 as well as blessings on those striving to find a cure, healthcare workers and anyone facing anxiety.

"God has an avenue to reach us," said Dominick Angiolillo, Deputy Grand Knight from St. Theresa who was present when the Cessna took flight. "I believe

this 'flyover blessing' is comforting. This is a message of hope and peace."

Adding to their intentions for the protection and good health of God's people, Father Gannon encouraged everyone to turn to Him in these uncertain times.

"When we feel fear and suffering, we remember how the Lord suffered in the flesh," he said. "He walked as we do. We trust in Him—the source of all love and purpose—and feel His presence now." ■

Priests Reach Out

Pastors pull out all the stops

St. Jude's priests bring Reconciliation to parishioners

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

MONROE—As a reminder that God is always near, especially in times of trouble, our parishes are going to great lengths to provide parishioners with spiritual fulfillment.

Father Henry Hoffman, pastor of St. Jude in Monroe and Father Jim Bates, parochial vicar began offering a new way for parishioners to receive the sacrament of reconciliation in these times of social distancing.

"Lent is a penitential time in which we spend several weeks preparing ourselves for the Resurrection of the Lord. An essential element of that preparation is attending confessions," explained Father Hoffman. Father

Hoffman shared that seeing other parishes offer drive-through confessions inspired him and Father Bates to do the same. "In this way, the parishioners can still confess their sins and receive absolution while observing social distancing," he says.

In a message to the faithful, Father Jim Bates wrote, "At the designated time, rain or shine, the priests of St. Jude will be seated by the curb outside the church; you may pull your car up to the priest and make your confession from a safe distance while maintaining complete privacy. As with confession in the church, only one penitent and the priest can participate, so you must be in your car alone."

Father Hoffman and Bates set

up two outdoor stations on either side of the church, both of which filled up quickly. "At one point we had several cars in each of the lines, with the driver's allowing enough space between cars, to provide the necessary privacy for the penitent," explained Father Hoffman.

The threat of COVID-19 has presented us with many challenges, but these clergy members see an opportunity to continue to make the sacraments available to the faithful. "We need to find creative ways to make the Sacrament of Penance available while still observing social distancing," says Father Hoffman, recalling the story of Zacchaeus, who had to come up with a creative way to see Jesus (Luke 19:1).



DRIVE-THROUGH CONFESSIONS—Father Henry Hoffman, pastor of St. Jude Parish in Monroe, hears a drive-through Confession. He and parochial vicar, Father Jim Bates, have made the sacrament available while respecting the need for social distancing.

"In the face of this horrible pandemic, I see us as a human family coming together, and I believe that the bonds we forge will continue to hold us together well into the future," Father Hoffman says.

When asked how one can maintain their spiritual life during this time, Father Hoffman offers, "I have found that prayer, in particular addressed to Our Lady, is of paramount importance. I especially appreciate the Holy Father's recent words, 'Under your protection, we seek refuge, Mother of God. Do not

disdain the entreaties of we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and Blessed Virgin.'"

Father Bates offers these words of encouragement, "The Church is neither idle nor is it silent; while the current pandemic has threatened to separate and drive us apart as a nation and as a community of faith, the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass continues, we are united in prayer, and we are finding ways to offer the sacraments to the faithful while keeping all of us safe." ■

TAKING JESUS TO THE STREETS FROM PAGE 6

to come and drop off donations,' but I learned on Facebook that people were posting very moving messages like, 'Where there is food for one, there is food for two.' And 'If you know anyone who wouldn't mind sharing someone else's meal, please let me know.'"

His parishioners are preparing and delivering meals for others in need and communicating through Facebook and regular updates on the parish website.

St. Mary and St. Benedict-Our Lady of Montserrat are in the process of merging, and during the crisis, Father has been using St. Benedict because of its updated ventilation system. As a result, the two communities are coming together.

The church is open from 8 am to 8 pm for Eucharistic adoration and people have been maintaining social distancing, he said. Ushers are present to sanitize the door handles and ensure there are no more than 40 people in the church at a time.

His parish regularly has lines of 50 people for confession, so he has adapted in recent weeks by hearing confessions at the entrance to St. Benedict or having the penitent sit in nearby pew. He is also devising a system where reconciliation can take place from car to car in the parking lot.

"I have had a number of people call who are very concerned and frightened, and my message is that we are not alone," Father Falla said. "The Lord is with us. The Lord has not abandoned us. The Lord allows this to happen because of his love and mercy, and something good will come out of this. We can already see it in the positive stories about people risking their lives and dedicating their time to alleviate this difficult situation."

Someone sent Father Falla a poem that said, "What do you mean that Jesus is not going to walk the streets this year, when he is already tending to the sick and reaching out to everyone in need."

'Our parish family was with you'

Last year, hundreds of people packed the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull when Bishop Caggiano consecrated the church.

This year, Father Joseph A. Marcello celebrated the anniversary Mass alone on March 24 as the 12 consecration candles were burning. But in reality, he wasn't alone. Jesus was there, as always, in the tabernacle. And so were his parishioners—someone emailed him this message: "I wanted to say that I hoped you felt all of your parish family was right there with you."

In a letter to his faith community, Father Marcello said, "You are never far from my thoughts and prayers, and this is true even more so in these days of uncertainty. I want you to know that I am with you."

Recalling the anniversary Mass, he said, "I looked out at the 12 lighted consecration candles, points of brightness along the walls of the dimly lit church, and it brought to mind the words of the prologue of the Gospel of St. John, 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'"

Neither has St. Catherine been overcome by the darkness. The church is open for private prayer Monday to Friday from 8 am to 1 pm. There is Eucharistic adoration on Sunday from 1 to 3 pm in the church and Tuesday in the McClinch Family Center, along with confession from 6 to 8 pm. In addition, Sunday Mass, the Stations of the Cross and the Rosary are posted on the parish's YouTube channel.

There is no greater consolation during this crisis, Father Marcello said, than private prayer in the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

"The red flickering lamp high above the sanctuary reminds us

of Christ's enduring presence in the tabernacle, He who is with us always," he said. "His closeness to us, and his presence with us, are our greatest consolation during this perilous time."

'It's time to really start trusting in God'

This year St. Joseph Church in South Norwalk was preparing a major celebration for its 125th anniversary with a Mass on March 19, the feast of St. Joseph. Instead, pastor Father Peter F. Lenox and parochial vicar Father Otoniel Lizcano each celebrated the occasion with a private Mass.

Father Lenox looks hopefully to the future when the anniversary can be observed with his parish community, but until then, he has adopted a routine of reaching out to parishioners with regular letters, administering Anointing of the Sick, and providing opportunities for private prayer in the church.

"This past week, I wrote letters in English and Spanish to them because I want people to know we are not closed," he said. "Although the parish office is closed, our staff continues to work from home and the priests are available by phone. As a parish, we are still moving forward each and every day."

It has been a strange feeling for him to see what was typically a bustling and vibrant community suddenly so quiet.

"This virus offers us opportunities to return to God or become closer to God, and that proximity is based on our faith and how much we trust in him," Father Lenox said. "As a society, we have become so distanced from relying on him. We have become dependent on our own auspices, confident in our scientific knowledge, and often don't trust in him because we have found we can explain everything away. We can unwittingly and unknowingly limit what God can do for us."

Although there will be no public liturgical celebrations for Holy Week, the Triduum and Easter, Father is making plans to live-stream Masses and liturgies.

Every day, people stop by the church to pray. St. Joseph is open daily from 8 am to 7 pm. Confessions are offered twice a week, including Wednesday evening during Holy Hour with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

"This time is a challenge to us and our faith, and we have to remember to place our complete trust in God with confidence and love," he said. ■

Priests Reach Out

St. Rose parishioners surprise their priests

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

NEWTOWN—A picture recently went viral of a priest in the Midwest celebrating private Mass, looking out at pews filled with photos of his parishioners.

In a time when only private Mass is being celebrated, many priests are missing seeing the

faces of those they serve.

For parishioners at St. Rose of Lima in Newtown, this sparked a unique idea—recreating the viral photo to surprise both Msgr. Robert Weiss and Father Alphonse Arokiam.

On March 16, St. Rose of Lima Parish closed its doors to the lay faithful due to the corona-

virus pandemic which had finally reached the steps of the church. It is the first time the parish has taken such extraordinary measures since Msgr. Weiss, pastor, arrived in 1999. “As a priest this is a most unusual time for me,” said Msgr. Weiss. “We are faith-filled believers bound together by the celebration of our relation-



SOCIAL MEDIA FILLS CHURCH WITH FACES—Msgr. Robert Weiss, pastor of St. Rose Church in Newton, and Father Alphonse Arokiam, were delighted to celebrate Mass before 700 people who had sent in their photos as part of a social media campaign to unite the parish in prayer and worship.

ship with Jesus. Not having that sacred experience is overwhelming to me,” he said.

Father Alphonse, parochial

vicar at St. Rose feels similarly. “Celebrating Mass in a large church such as ours with no parishioners is quite unsettling during this difficult time.”

Stephanie DeBartolomeo, digital media specialist at St. Rose, developed a simple social media campaign which included Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and an email blast, to spread the word about the surprise and get parishioners on board.

DeBartolomeo says she began the campaign mid-morning on Sunday and the response was immediate.

“We have well over a hundred pictures representing hundreds of people (most are family shots) and expect to reach the hundreds if we continue to appeal to our community,” says DeBartolomeo.

And that they have, with the number of faces in the pews reaching over 600!

“Their response is always enthusiastic and heartfelt toward our priests and community and will do virtually anything we ask of them,” DeBartolomeo says of parishioners.

DeBartolomeo planned on setting up the church and leaving the pictures up throughout Holy Week and Easter, “because no priest should celebrate Easter Mass alone.”

Upon walking into the church on April 7, both Msgr. Weiss and Father Arokiam were surprised and emotionally touched by the site they encountered.

“I was deeply moved when I saw more than 700 faces, familiar faces, staring back at me from the Altar,” Monsignor said. “This is a true testament to the deeply rooted faith and love our community has for its parish. It means so much to me.”

Father Arokiam concurred and also said, “I feel very blessed to be part of this community. It is calming to see smiling faces looking up at me as I celebrate morning Mass.”

A parish nurse's mission of physical and spiritual healing

By JOE PISANI

SHELTON—Rayna Salemmé has a special ministry, a ministry that provides physical healing and spiritual healing. As parish nurse at St. Margaret Mary Church, she offers free consultations and health education at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has upended lives and caused anxiety.

Working with pastor Father Ciprian Bejan, she is available to answer questions about the virus and check up on elderly who are confined or ill. Parishioners have her cell-phone number and know they can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, she said. While her scope of practice is not like that of a home-care or hospital nurse, she serves as a resource and helps people navigate through the healthcare system and can provide what she calls “spiritual healing.”

She recently brought an elderly woman who had a broken leg back to her assisted living facility and has been regularly checking on her. Rayna and her husband Lou also offer their services to get food for people in need.

Since 2013 she has been the parish nurse at St. Margaret Mary through a program at Griffin Hospital, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year and is the longest running parish nursing program in the world, serving 48 churches of different



denominations in the area.

“I am an educator and an advocate for the parish, and more than 2,000 parishioners have access to my services,” she said. “One of my biggest roles is that of counselor, and I listen to the health concerns of people and offer advice. Once a month I do health screening and a few years ago, I conducted a fall prevention program.”

She recently assisted three women of the parish, all over 80, who suffered terrible falls.

“Our goal is always to keep people out of the hospital,” she said, through preventive care and her expertise in integrative health and healing.

“Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to be a nurse and help other people, so I feel very blessed to be able to do this. I have always been passionate about my nursing profession and my spirituality to help and guide others.”

She previously was assistant director of nursing at the Lincoln Technical Institute in Shelton and worked in pediatrics at the Yale New Haven Children’s Hospital. For ten years, she was family-school

liaison for the Shelton Public School System. Rayna currently serves as Vice President of the Board of St. Vincent de Paul of the Valley Thrift Shop and Food Bank.

In addition to her work as parish nurse, she is a lector and Extraordinary Eucharistic Minister at St. Margaret Mary. Rayna emphasizes the importance of faith in the healing process and says that requires building a strong personal relationship with Jesus, the Divine Healer.

In 2015, she and her husband Lou, who have belonged to the parish for more than 20 years, received the diocesan St. Augustine Medal of Service, which recognizes “unsung heroes” who unselfishly give of their time and talents to build up their parish communities.

At the request of Father Bejan, both of them were active in the We Stand With Christ capital campaign and served on the parish executive committee.

“We prayerfully considered what they were asking, and we felt fortunate that we were able to give not only of our money but

also of our time,” she said.

St. Margaret Mary surpassed its goal of \$750,000 and raised more than \$1 million and was able to build a much-needed Sacred Heart Parish Center that will benefit the church for years to come by providing a place for CCD classes, youth groups, parish ministries and community organizations. There are other projects that will be needed in the future, such as a new roof, a heating and air conditioning system, and a new parking lot, she said.

As a builder, Lou played a strategic role in the church renovation project. A member of the Men’s League, he also lends his culinary expertise by cooking for people who come to weekly Bingo.

Both of them also volunteer to bring food to the members of the parish who may be confined to their homes or ill.

“We Stand With Christ was based in money, but it is giving to others and to the community. It’s not just about the money but about what the money can do,” she said. “It will help with education, services for people in need, mothers and children, and the working poor. There are so many people in our area who suffer and can’t make ends meet, and we have to be there for them. A lot of people are embarrassed if they can’t afford what they need, and this is a way they can get what they need through our diocese. That is why we are Catholics.”

Priests Reach Out

Priests encourage taking time to deepen our faith

By **JOE PISANI**

(Editor's note: During this unprecedented coronavirus crisis, the priests of the Diocese of Bridgeport may be separated from their flocks physically but they are connected with them spiritually. Their message is a simple one: Christ is with us even in the storm...and He will never leave us. Here are some of their stories.)

Serving the sick during an epidemic

NEW CANAAN—

Parishioners at St. Aloysius have been lighting candles in front of the statue of the church's patron and praying to the saint who was a servant to the sick. An Italian aristocrat, Aloysius Gonzaga left behind his life of affluence and entered the Society of Jesus, and he died at 23, caring for victims of an epidemic that ravaged Rome in 1591.

"He served during the plague and he died during the plague, and his life has brought many of our parishioners closer to our church and to our faith," said

Father Robert Kinnally, pastor and diocesan chancellor. "We have been asking everyone to pray for his intercession during the coronavirus pandemic."

One parishioner who brought her grandson to light a candle said to Father, "Aren't we blessed to have St. Aloysius as our patron right now because he is such a friend and servant of the sick."

For Father, it was one of many "grace-filled moments" he has experienced in recent weeks since the parish turned to technology to fill the void that developed when the faith community could no longer gather.

"I am very proud of our parishioners because they are doing the best they can under these circumstances," he said. But the longing for Christ in the sacraments is great.

Father Bob Uzzilio, a retired priest in residence, was recently walking around the block near the church when a couple from the parish spotted him and called



A GRACE-FILLED MOMENT—While the faithful long to return to public Mass and the sacraments, Fr. Robert Kinnally, Pastor of St. Aloysius Parish in New Canaan, has urged parishioners to seek out "Grace-filled moments" in their solitude that allow them to draw closer to God in their hour of need.

out, "We miss the Eucharist!" When he mentioned the encounter during the staff meeting, Father Rob said their eyes filled with tears.

"For us, this Lent was a time in the desert, a time of longing to go back to what we love—Jesus in the Eucharist," he said. "And I hope this brings a stronger desire

for him. I think that is where God is leading us."

Despite the challenges the separation has caused, the parish is working hard to keep people connected. The youth group and their families have been reaching out to the well over 100 seniors of St. Aloysius.

"They pray with them on the

phone, they laugh with them and they listen to them," Father Rob said. "It makes me think about my own ministry, and I find myself asking how I can rearrange what I do so that I spend more time with parishioners."

Of course, technology has its limitations when it comes to the pastoral ministry of priests.

"Sometimes the best we can do is talk to someone on the phone but even with those who don't have the virus and are dying because of natural causes, we can't get to," he said. "We talk to them while nurses are holding phones up to their ears. But God does what God does, and we are confident in his mercy."

In the first reading at Mass on a Sunday when the crisis was in the early stages, the Israelites asked, "Is God in our midst?" For Father Rob, that question has been a recurring theme in recent weeks.

"We should be able to answer
▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

'Carfessions' gain popularity in diocese

By **JOE PISANI**

(Editor's note: During the coronavirus crisis, unprecedented in modern times, priests of the Diocese of Bridgeport have used their faith, their ingenuity and their technology to stay connected with parishioners, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Here are some of their stories.)

'The Lentiest Lent ever Lented'

TRUMBULL—On Palm Sunday, Father Joseph Marcello and Father Philip Bochanski were stationed on the traffic islands in the parking lot of the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena, waiting for penitents to come for "drive-thru" confession while the Knights of Columbus provided traffic control.

Throughout the afternoon, many arrived in their cars, eager to confess their sins in what one parishioner told Father was "the Lentiest Lent I've ever Lented."

Many parishes throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport have



begun "drive-thru" confessions in an effort to maintain social distancing during the coronavirus crisis and still administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation at a time when the faithful feel a great need to draw closer to Christ despite the distance they're obligated to maintain from one another.

"Even though we cannot celebrate Mass together or the liturgy of the Triduum, we are still providing the sacraments," said Father Marcello, pastor. "During these uncharted times, like so many of my brother priests in the diocese, around the country and around the world, we have to get creative as

to how we offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation safely."

Confessions were held again on Good Friday from 10 am to 2 pm, and his hope is that once the self-imposed quarantine is over and public Mass resumes, he will be reunited with his parishioners, who have kept the flame of faith alive.

Throughout these months, Father has sat at his desk and called parishioners to check up on them. He and his staff went through the list of 1700 families and divided it up among themselves and are attempting to reach out to everyone in the parish.

"I have really been encouraged

by people's tenacity and their spirit," he said. "No one is unacquainted with suffering in their life, and people are really doing all they can to transform this quarantine into a retreat and keep the flame of faith alive during this time of darkness."

He said an important message that he wants to convey to his parish is best articulated in a quote from St. John Paul II, from a homily at Camden Yards in Baltimore on October 8, 1995:

"There is no evil to be faced that Christ does not face with us. There is no enemy that Christ has not already conquered. There is no cross to bear that Christ has not already borne for us, and does not now bear with us. And on the far side of every cross, we find the newness of life in the Holy Spirit, that new life which will reach its fulfillment in the Resurrection. This is our faith. This is our witness before the world."

Under an umbrella, hearing confessions

STRATFORD—A few Saturdays ago, Father Peter

Adamski, pastor of St. James Church, sat in the parish parking lot under an umbrella, hearing confessions as a light rain fell. It didn't dampen his spirits, though.

"Given my zeal for the Lord, I believe that if anyone is not in the state of grace, I have to do everything I can to get them back," he said. "The Lord does not 'Krazy Glue' us to him, we're not 'Duct Taped' to him. He will never pull himself away, but so often every one of us turns to the Lord and says, 'You know I love you in my heart, but I am going to do this—this sinful thought, this sinful word, this sinful action.'"

In order for the priest and the penitent to stay safe during the coronavirus crisis, he followed a practice that a priest in Maryland used for "drive-thru confessions," he said.

St. James adapted the idea with its own modifications. Traffic cones were placed in the parking lot to manage the

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EDITORIAL

**The Lord is Risen.
He is Truly Risen!**

April 2020

My Dear Friends in Christ,

I invite you to join with me in proclaiming these joyful words to a suffering and fearful world.

Even if we cannot fully understand the mystery of Christ's love for us, our unique observance of this past Holy Week assured us in quiet and ordinary ways that Christ has triumphed over suffering, sin and death itself. He will never abandon us in the hour of our greatest need. For His victory is our victory. His resurrected life is our promise of new life.

As we continue to live through these difficult days, you have been much in my prayers and in the prayers of our priests, deacons, and religious, just as you and I have prayed for all those who have been afflicted by this pandemic. We pray for families who have lost loved ones, those who are sick and remain in isolation and for all those suffering from the anxiety of the moment. As we remember them, I also commend you and your families to the power of the Risen Lord. May He watch over you and grant you safety, protection and continued good health.

During these past weeks, I am much reminded of the letters of Saint Paul to the early Christian communities. Saint Paul reminded his fellow Christians, many of whom suffered great trials because of their allegiance to Christ, to trust in the Lord's promises, to love each other more deeply and to support one another in faith. On this Easter day, Saint Paul offers you and me this same message of hope. As we spend this day in the safety of our homes, let us draw courage from the example of those who came before us.

With Easter joy, let us express our deep gratitude for all those heroes and heroines in our midst who continue to risk their lives to care for us and our neighbors. We recall our healthcare and rescue workers who cared for the sick, our police and fire fighters who went where others feared to go, for the quiet courage of the grocery and pharmacy employees, and transportation and service industry workers who have carried on the dangerous work of feeding, clothing and sustaining the most vulnerable among us. In our world, the mighty and powerful often wish to claim the mantle of heroism. Easter teaches us that the true heroines and heroes in our midst are those who are servants of love and live among us each day.

Here in our own diocese, I have been moved by the dedication of our priests who have given sacrificially and found creative ways to minister to the spiritual needs of their parish families; by the teachers and catechists who are reaching out to the young online to continue their education, and by the personal courage of Catholic Charities workers and volunteers who have kept our soup kitchens open to feed those who have nowhere else to turn in the crisis. I am also deeply grateful to our many donors and all who continue to make sacrificial financial gifts to help continue the good work of our parishes, charitable organizations, and the diocese during this time of increasing need. So much good and faithful work has been performed by many diocesan and parish staff, and so many other good works will undoubtedly go untold. They too are fearless heralds of the Easter message of love's victory over suffering and fear.

My sisters and brothers, as we proclaim the message of Easter, let us draw together in prayer, faith and service, and look forward to the time that we can worship together again as members of Christ's Mystical Body and proclaim together the victorious message of Easter.

May the Risen Lord bless you and your families, and may we be strengthened in His love and the joyful promise of eternal life.

With every best wish, I am
Sincerely yours in Christ,

Frank J. Caggiano

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Divine Mercy Chaplet prayed during pandemic

BRIDGEPORT—On Divine Mercy Sunday, parishioners of St. Mary Parish in Bridgeport prayed the Divine Mercy Chaplet in their cars in the parish parking lot.

The 50 people that gathered remained in their cars the entire time. The cars were spaced out, and all social distancing guidelines were observed.

In the photo, Father Rolando Torres, pastor of St. Mary Parish, live-streams the Divine Mercy Chaplet to St. Mary parishioners who joined in from home. Pastors and parishioners throughout the diocese have found creative ways to pray and practice Spiritual Communion during the pandemic.

*St. Rose Easter Parade*

NEWTOWN—As a way to celebrate Easter, while still practicing social distancing, St. Rose School families organized an Easter car parade to greet pastor Msgr. Robert Weiss with messages of hope, support and love.

A St. Rose parent put the offer out and received so many positive responses.

More than 50 cars lined the parking lot decorated with Easter messages and filled with enthusiastic children and families who called out loving messages to Monsignor as they passed by the rectory porch where he stood waving back to them and calling out "Thank you and God bless."

The St. Rose School spirit is strong!



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**Office
of Communications
Diocese of Bridgeport**

238 Jewett Avenue
Bridgeport, Connecticut 06606-2892
telephone | 203.416.1461
fax | 203.374.2044
email | fcc@diobpt.org

Web | www.bridgeportdiocese.com
Facebook | [BridgeportDiocese](https://www.facebook.com/BridgeportDiocese)
Twitter | @diobpt

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Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Publisher

Brian D. Wallace
Executive Editor bdwallace@diobpt.org

Elizabeth Clyons
Writer/Editor elizabeth.clyons@diobpt.org

Renée Stamatis
Art Director rstamatis@diobpt.org

Ralph Lazzaro
Advertising Manager rlazzaro@diobpt.org

Brian A. Wallace
Graphic Designer bwallace@diobpt.org

John Grosso
Social Media Leader jgrosso@diobpt.org

Ronnie Lazzaro
Copy Editor (Consultant)

Advertise

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Ralph Lazzaro: 203.667.1622

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Editorial



Will we ever take these things for granted again?

A YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE

BY ELIZABETH CLYONS

Libby Clyons is Communications Associate for the Diocese of Bridgeport. She can be reached at elizabeth.clyons@diobpt.org.

I'm an introvert. I love my alone time and I love my personal space. I enjoy having time in solitude to be introspective. But what I have learned during this time of social distancing is that the more I isolate, the harder it is to socialize when the time comes. I think that's one of my worries in all of this, besides the virus itself. It's a great challenge—to know when to push myself and when to give myself time to grieve what we've lost—the sense of normalcy.

As a creative, there is also this pressure to be extra productive

in this time. But I'm finding that these conditions aren't exactly conducive to healthy creativity. The more I ruminate, the further into desolation I slide—so I find that sometimes distraction is the healthiest thing at the moment.

I want to offer words of hope but I don't really have any. So I search for the message in the smallest of things—affirmations written in chalk on our daily walks, finding positive stories to tell in the community, discovering a swing set we never knew was there.

I am left wondering, "What

could we have done to have made the outcome different?" and "What can we do to ensure that this never happens again?" I want action, I want answers, I am uncomfortable in this waiting.

What we've lost in this pandemic is our sense of the ordinary; we are bereft of the loss of the myriad social and personal interactions that form our day and our sense of wellbeing, even our spirituality. There is a numbness, where there should be curiosity and engagement. Does it sometimes take something being taken away from us to realize how much it really meant to us?

Will we ever take for granted these things again?

The simple touch of a hand, a hug.

Having the choice to stay or go. A sporting event, a movie, your grandparents' house.

Now that all we have is time to reflect, to spend with one another,

Will the life we knew before be enough?

Will we remember that there

was a time when we did have time...

To go for a walk.

The work still got done,

The world still went on.

It's bittersweet, this time.

Because in one respect,

It makes us stop and take stock

Of the things that are important and the things that really aren't.

But will we remember what it was like?

Will we let it change us,

The way we do things,

The way we live our lives,

The things we hold in importance.

Or will we simply return to the way we were,

Until something else makes

us stop

And go for a walk.

But I have to hope that, because all times of waiting are uncomfortable, and because out of discomfort comes growth, something good will come out of this. Maybe it will bring the change we've all been

yearning for.

We've seen people playing instruments outside their windows as a form of entertainment, we've seen creatives release comforting content, we've seen food drives and donations, and people stepping up to fill a need wherever they see one. Is it possible to hope that perhaps this is the reminder that we needed?

To see the good in each other.

To have no other choice but to take a pause in our own busy lives to check on our neighbor, offer a helping hand or remember how much value is held in a simple hug.

Sometimes we get so busy in our lives that we forget to pause and connect. My hope is that, for however long this time ends up being, I don't let it go to waste.

What is the thing that I had been waiting to do but "didn't have the time?" I have to hope that God is somehow guiding my search to find the good in all this, and that maybe He will help me notice the ways He works in my life once again. ■



A man you don't meet everyday

A DAD'S VIEW

BY MATTHEW HENNESSEY

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

They called him Hambone. His real name was James, but few called him that. The priests at Assumption Church did, as did the teachers at the Maple Avenue School. At home he was Jimmy. Everywhere else he was Hambone.

As a child I resented my dad's nickname. I thought it made him seem small, like he was a joke, like they were all having a laugh at his expense. Over time, I came to realize that it was a good nickname. It was a great nickname, in fact, capturing something about Jim Hennessey's personality that got to the heart of who he really was.

He was a ham. He loved to be the center of attention, whether it

was cracking wise in the back of a classroom or holding court in the little bar business he and my mother built over 30 years. His voice could boom like an opera singer's when he wanted it to. He could quiet a crowd. He could hold a room.

The bar business is tricky. To succeed you need to have people skills. Jim did well because he cared about the drinkers and seekers who gathered in his place. Many considered it a second home. Some treated it as their primary residence.

But it was Hambone's joint and he ran it his way. If he wanted to give an elderly patron a permanent discount, he did it. The break wasn't transferable. If,

in your generosity, you wanted to buy an old timer a drink, you paid full price for it.

And Hennessey's wasn't a place where welcomes were overstayed. When dad felt you'd had enough, he sent you on your way, often calling the cab himself.

"Bye now," he'd say while washing your glass and mopping up your spot at the bar. "Safe home."

Some drinkers consider it an injustice when they've been cut off. They argue. You didn't argue with Hambone. It would've been like arguing with the priest about your penance. What good could come of it?

If your drinking was becoming a problem, Hambone was someone who could help. He called alcoholism "the Irish Disease." He knew the cure because he'd taken it himself. He'd sobered up before he bought the bar.

For all his success, my dad went to work six and often seven days a week. He didn't do it because he loved cutting lemons and pulling pints. He did it because he loved his family. He'd rather have been a historian or an archaeologist, maybe even a

draftsman like his own father. He was an insatiable reader and a skilled sketch artist.

"Matt," he said. "Sometimes when people are talking to me across the bar my mind is a million miles away."

When I got behind the bar myself I knew exactly what he meant. It's a long day's work when you're paid to be a captive audience. Only then did I understand what he sacrificed for us.

Hambone wasn't the only Morristown original with a nickname. His running buddies were all called things like Itsy or Snuffy or Doc or Muzz. He spoke of neighborhood guys like "Fooley" Cullen and "Dingy" Foran. All the brothers in the Kenny family were for some reason called "Darb." The entire Pelligrino family was known as "Green Bananas." One fellow in town was nicknamed "Bungalow."

"You know why they called him that?" my dad asked me once.

"No."

"Because there was nothing upstairs."

Hambone loved a good wake. He was what you might call a

regular. When he wasn't hanging out at Hennessey's, he was hanging out at Doyle's, the local funeral home that his cousins owned. He loved wakes because he loved people.

He never missed an evening of remembrance for someone he knew, and there weren't many people in Morristown he didn't know.

When someone died, dad usually got the news before everyone else. He had the catbird seat in the upstairs office at Doyle's. Bartenders and undertakers, he liked to say, rarely hurt for customers. People drink in good times and bad. Death comes for us all.

It came for Hambone on April 17. He was 85. As much as he loved a good wake, he won't be getting one. You know the reason why. It's a pity. He would've had no problem holding the downstairs room at Doyle's. I wonder if it would've held him.

Jim Hennessey was a local legend, a ham for all seasons, a man you don't meet every day. I was blessed to call him my father.

Bye now, dad. Safe home. ■

Foundations in Faith

Covid-19 Emergency Fund

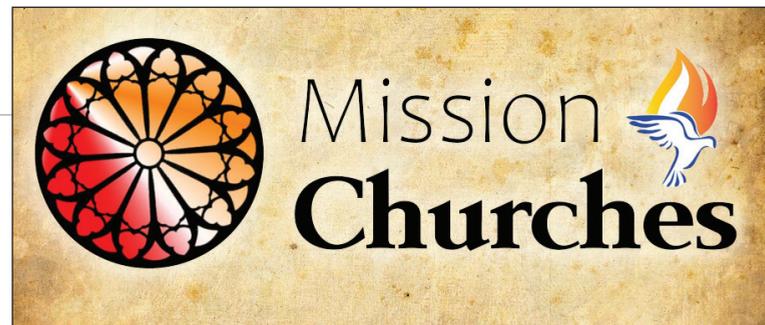
BRIDGEPORT—Foundations in Faith recently launched the COVID-19 Emergency Fund within the St. Francis Xavier (SFX) Mission Church Fund.

Through the generosity and flexibility of a leadership donor to the We Stand With Christ campaign, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, together with the donor, pro-

posed that during this extraordinary crisis “a portion of the St. Francis Xavier Fund for Mission Churches be made available to grant limited emergency financial assistance to those parishes that face an immediate cash liquidity problem due to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Because churches have been closed, there have been no regular weekly collections. Offertory money pays basic costs such as utilities, staff salaries, and groceries for priests. As a result, many parishes are being forced to take drastic cost-cutting measures, according to Kelly Weldon, director of the foundation. This emergency fund will help the worst-hit parishes confront the crisis and continue operating.

Members of the St. Francis Xavier Fund for mission church



committee, known as “SFX” for short, are passionate about the emergency fund. “We have an opportunity to provide essential support to parishes during this time frame, as they look to pay the bills to keep their doors open for the future, and as they pivot to reach out to parishioners in a new environment,” said Patrick Turner, chair of the St. Francis Xavier Fund. A short list of criteria was created to identify parishes who qualify to apply for funding and a user-friendly online application process was established. As of Friday, April 17, the Committee has approved five grants totaling \$100,000 for distribution. We expect that number to double in the coming days. There is a limited amount of resources and parishes who qualify to apply are encouraged to submit their applications by April 24.

“If there is a silver lining to this crisis, it is the generosity of the people in our diocese,” Weldon said. “Our major donor, leading by example, made this emergency fund available because he wants to make sure churches can get through this crisis period. This is about social justice and

helping our brethren. We cannot stand by as a diocese and let a unprecedented situation like this destroy a part of our family. We are all in this together and we have to help each other out.”

Foundations in Faith supports significant pastoral work throughout Fairfield County through a number of mission-specific funds. Distributions from We Stand With Christ is enabling these funds to grow and support ministries now and into the future. The St. Francis Xavier Mission Church Fund was established to support parishes with pastoral vitality, vibrancy in fellowship and ministries, but strained finances. This fund will support much needed capital repairs and expanded pastoral resources that may be beyond the financial capacity of these parishes which are located in the most economically challenged communities in the diocese.

(To donate to the SFX COVID-19 Emergency Fund for Mission Churches, or to learn more, please visit www.foundationsinfaith.org. You may contact Kelly.weldon@foundationsinfaith.org for more detailed information.)

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April 2020

Faithful Find Ways to Serve and Learn

Parish food drives inspire hope, motivate others

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

'Mixing childhood experience with mission'

FAIRFIELD—Paola Peña, one of the youth ministers of Fairfield Life Teen and an employee at St. Pius X in Fairfield, saw a need in the community and saw a way that she could fill that need.

"I saw a post on social media about how families would be experiencing heightened food insecurity due to school and business closings and it brought me back to my childhood," shared Peña. "I grew up on food pantries. I know what it's like to be food insecure. As a kid you're always hungry, but you can't eat what you want when you want."

Peña got the OK from Father Sam Kachuba, pastor of St. Pius, and began her outreach. She made graphics and social media posts to get the word out.

"Many families in Bridgeport



FAIRFIELD LIFE TEEN—Paola Peña (second from left), a youth minister from St. Pius X Parish in Fairfield, joins teen leaders who helped to package food for those in need. Peña organized the online effort to reach out to individuals and families that are hungry and food-insecure.

will be experiencing food insecurities due to recent school closures," Peña wrote online. "If you overbought food or would like to donate, please drop off food at the Faith Center Chapel so we can donate to pantries in need. If you know someone who is homebound and can't leave to buy groceries or supplies and

they need assistance, please email ppena@st-pius.org."

Peña raised \$500 within 24 hours and \$1,650 all within three days. "More people were willing to give money than food donations," explained Peña, especially with many not wanting to venture out to the store. This gave Peña new insight into ways

to modernize evangelization and communicate to the Church.

"The Holy Spirit was telling me to do something," said Peña. "I found a way to mix my childhood experience with mission. My story was totally worth it, God is using it to serve His Church."

Teens and young adults, now home from school, gathered to help sort food and supplies...and many stayed to pray for our community and the world during this time of uncertainty. "The Lord just wanted to pour out His peace on us," Peña said, stating that the experience was meaningful for all involved.

In one day alone, four deliveries were made, including Thomas Merton Center, Operation Hope and Blessed Sacrament.

Peña says she plans on continuing this drive while schools are closed.

When asked what this experience has taught her, Peña explained, "God's desire is for each of us to be a saint, and it is

a unique call for each and every one of us. We have to ask ourselves, 'Am I open to the Holy Spirit?' If everyone was aware of the Spirit in their lives, the world would be so different."

Along with listening to His unique call for each one of us, Peña suggests, "If you can find a chapel that's open—go—if not, read the Scriptures. Fall in love with the love letter from heaven."

Her hope, "that the solace and quiet will draw more Catholics to the Scriptures."

'God really is in everything'

DANBURY—St. Gregory the Great Parish in Danbury is also conducting a food and supply drive for those in need.

Devon McCormick, pastoral assistant at St. Gregory the Great saw what Peña and St. Pius were doing and loved the idea. "We were kind of scrambling here at St. Greg's to figure out what our response should be, and I thought

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

Religious Education continues online

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

FAIRFIELD COUNTY—With public Mass suspended indefinitely and children home from school, many are wondering what is being done about religious education.

Rose Talbot-Babey, director of Faith Formation here in the diocese reassures readers that directors of religious education and catechists are doing everything in their power to ensure that students will still receive instruction.

Maryjean DaSilva of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Stratford has been sending out weekly emails to families that include Pflaum lessons of the week. Pflaum is a Faith Formation program, which, due to coronavirus concerns, has made digital versions of their work available to families. DRE's can download each week's lesson and email them to parents or give parents access to the site so that they can print lessons from home (more information can be found at www.pflaum.com.)

DaSilva explains that families can access the Catechism handbook, weekly videos, seasonal activities and parent guides on how to teach. If the family cannot access the materials online, families are encouraged to pick up hardcopy lessons and packets in the church vestibule when it is open for private prayer. "If the family is unable to leave their home we have mailed the packet," says DaSilva.

"With the weekly family email we also send our parish bulletin that includes links to Mass, our parish website, a variety of resources, activities and links from The Leadership Institute... and we always ask if there is anything they need during this difficult time," DaSilva says.

Although there are some difficulties regarding access to technology, DRE's are doing their best to keep families and students informed.

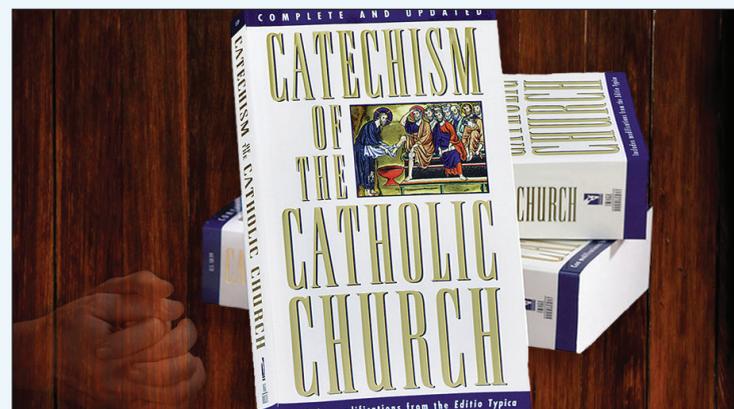
Michelle Curman, of Holy Trinity Parish in Sherman is in regular contact with all families suggesting ways to stay engaged in the faith by watching Mass on TV, praying the Rosary as a

family and doing family service projects to help those in need.

Shari Garcia, director of religious education at St. Pius X in Fairfield has been sending home resources and materials to continue sacramental preparation at home, using Decision Point for Confirmation prep and curating different resources each week for First Communion students. Decision Point is a Confirmation program through Dynamic Catholic, specifically developed to engage young Catholics in a meaningful conversation about the genius of Catholicism (more information can be found at dynamic-catholic.com/confirmation.)

"The trick I've noticed is to keep the 'homework' minimal, explains Garcia. "A lot of our families are overwhelmed trying to get into the swing of the home-school routine, so they've really enjoyed the video format—it does the bulk of the classroom-type catechesis for them and they are able to follow along and discuss the videos as a family."

"I've also had the kids responding with 2-3 sentences of questions/comments about the



FAITH FORMATION—Challenging times haven't dimmed Faith Formation in the diocese. "By being asked to practice social distancing, with more quiet time and less distractions, our Lord may be asking us to refocus on what is important and possibly has been missing in our lives...a deeper relationship with Him and our families!" says Rose Talbot Babey.

videos each week as their assignment so they don't feel too overwhelmed," she says.

Garcia has been using Flocknote to send the materials each week because it allows for her to embed the YouTube links into the email easily, keeping everything in one place.

"Although these are challenging times for evangelizing the faith with our families and children for our directors and coordinators of Faith Formation, there

is a great opportunity, now more than ever, with our plates being cleared by the Covid-19 virus, says Talbot-Babey. "By being asked to practice social distancing, with more quiet time and less distractions, our Lord may be asking us to refocus on what is important and possibly has been missing in our lives...a deeper relationship with Him and our families! What a perfect time...the Lenten Season!" ■

Thoughts on Spiritual Communion

Finding spiritual sustenance in the crisis

BRIDGEPORT—In order to inform and console the faithful throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport who are temporarily unable to avail themselves of the Sacraments of the Catholic Church and having a “desert experience,” Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has created the following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the faithful. It is hoped that the Questions and Answers provide a succinct response to many of the questions raised by parishioners about the sacraments during this time of crisis.

Excerpts from Bishop’s Letter

“Some of the lay faithful, understandably, are deeply concerned that they are unable to receive Holy Communion while public Masses are suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following responses are meant to provide a succinct answer and not offer an exhaustive teaching on each subject raised.

I treasure the spiritual nourishment I receive in Holy Communion. What can I do now?

Throughout the Church’s history there were times when the

Sacraments were not available because of persecution, lack of priests, calamity, war or illness.

Even in the Bible we hear of times of Exile when God’s people were taken far from their homeland and far from the Lord’s temple. But God, in His goodness, provides grace and strength to those who seek Him even in these times of trial. His love for us is demonstrated most perfectly in the Eucharist. But even when we are separated from our churches because of illness, His love for us remains “always, until the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20).

In her wisdom, the Church encourages those who cannot receive the Eucharist to make an Act of Spiritual Communion. Saint John Paul II reminded us of the value of this, citing the words of Saint Teresa of Jesus: “When you do not receive communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial



“I LOVE YOU above all things and desire to receive you into my soul.”

practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you” (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, n. 34).

How do I make an Act of Spiritual Communion?

If you are viewing an electronic version of the Mass, you would say this or a similar prayer at the time of Holy Communion: “My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.”

If you cannot view the Mass electronically, you may set aside

some quiet time in your home for the prayer. Make the Sign of the Cross, reflect on God’s word with a reading from Sacred Scripture (the Mass readings for the day if available to you), call to mind your prayer intentions, pray the Our Father and the prayer of Spiritual Communion and close with the Sign of the Cross.

What can I do to grow in the spiritual life while the Eucharist is not available to me?

This extraordinary time in our lives offers each one of us an opportunity to read and meditate more on Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels, or to do some spiritual reading from the great writers of the Church’s history or the lives of the saints. Also, we could take up—again or for the first time—prayerful devotions, such as the Rosary, Novenas and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

(To read the entire letter, visit www.bridgeportdiocese.com/spiritualsustenance.)

Serving as spiritual father during the pandemic

STAMFORD—When Father Matthew Mauriello arrives for work at 8 am at St. Camillus Center, the ambulance is often there to take a patient to the hospital. And so it was two weeks ago, when an 81-year-old resident was being wheeled out of the facility while her distraught family members watched from a distance. They not seen her in weeks because of the coronavirus quarantine.

But what they did see was Father Matt doing the work of Christ and administering what he respectfully refers to as “the Triple Crown—the Sacrament of the Sick, absolution of sins and the Apostolic Blessing to the woman with COVID-19.

“I’ve always been honored to be a priest, but it is a privileged time during this crisis,” he said. “Her family couldn’t even kiss her or hug her, but I was there, giving her the sacrament, and they were very consoled to see that.”

When asked about his ministry as chaplain on the pastoral care team at the 124-bed



nursing facility, he says, “I am just doing my job. This is my job, and I’m not looking for recognition. I just hope the Lord helps us out, so we can go back to some normalcy soon.”

Especially now, during a pandemic that has hampered pastoral ministries, Father embraces the message of St. Paul who said, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”

“We have to be there, rejoicing with those who rejoice,” he said, “and weeping with those who weep.”

In his work, he is assisted by Sister Elizabeth Rani

Antony Samy and Sister Annarani Annapandi, two Franciscans of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who live at Star of the Sea in Stamford.

“They are wonderful, kind women and very dedicated, and I am very happy to work with them.” Before the COVID-19 restrictions, they brought Communion to residents who are unable to attend Mass. Now, only Father celebrates Mass in the St. Camillus chapel.

Because residents are not allowed to have visitors, he feels his role as their spiritual father is particularly important.

“Since being there, I have truly felt as the spiritual father of the family,” he said. “My service in Stamford has actually come full circle, and I’ve known some of the residents since the 1990s, as well as their families. There is a comfort zone for them and me. I keep in touch with their families either by phone or texting since my ministry extends to both them and the staff, who regularly stop by the chapel for a prayer or a word of encouragement.”

Because the residents were not

allowed to have visitors at Easter, Father gave them packages of treats that included chocolate eggs and candy, in addition to decorating the chapel with lilies and hyacinths.

“I wanted to cheer them up because their families couldn’t be there with them, and they haven’t seen their children and grandchildren in weeks,” he said. “We are substituting for family.”

Father, who is in residence at St. John Church in Darien, helps out with Sunday Mass at St. Ladislaus Church in South Norwalk. His day at St. Camillus begins at 8 am when he unlocks the chapel door, puts on the lights and turns on a tape of Gregorian chant to promote a prayerful atmosphere for the staff. He prays his breviary and at 9:45 celebrates Mass by himself.

Then, he puts on what he calls his “astronaut outfit,” which consists of protective gear that includes a gown, mask, eye shield and gloves, and visits the residents. To avoid contamination, he stays at the doorway and gives them a few words of encouragement, which he calls

“a spiritual pep talk.” They pray and then he blesses them. Residents who have tested positive for COVID-19, receive the Sacrament of the Sick, absolution and the Apostolic Blessing. Catholic residents receive the anointing of the sick every three months.

In recent weeks, three have died from complications due to COVID-19, and two are in Stamford Hospital. Those who have tested positive remain in isolation, he said.

For a number of years, he prayed that he might be able to serve as a hospital chaplain, and then in 2016, the position at St. Camillus was offered to him by Bishop Caggiano.

“I saw it as a blessing from the Lord,” he said. “When I walked in the door, I knew it was God’s plan for me. I consider my assignment at St. Camillus to be a wonderful privilege, especially during the pandemic...By the good Lord’s abundant mercy, more than I ever expected or deserved, I have been there when most needed at a time of great difficulty.”

Catholic Charities

Bishop and Rabbi to go online for NCC

By AMY ZAJAC

STAMFORD—In addition to adapting program services to meet emergency needs, New Covenant Center has had to modify its spring benefit which was originally scheduled to be held at Woodway Country Club in Darien. Since large gatherings are not permitted under COVID-19 restrictions, the 16th Annual Celebrity Breakfast is being transformed into a virtual event which will be held on the morning of May 8. This meaningful event will support the New Covenant Center Virtual Celebrity Breakfast & COVID-19 Response Fund.

At this time last year, New Covenant Center was serving 175 meals per day. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, Stamford's one and only soup kitchen is now serving 450-700 meals per day. To ensure everyone's safety during the pandemic, New Covenant Center has implemented a new strategy of bringing food to the hungry. Lunch and dinner are served Monday through Saturday and one meal on Sunday in a "take-out" format. The program now also prepares meals for the clients of several other Stamford non-profits, including homeless shelters

Pacific House and Inspirica, Building One Community and ARI Center for Special Needs.

New Covenant Center's food pantry remains open as well. The food pantry operates three days per week, providing 10 days of groceries to low income families. According to Catholic Charities Executive Director Mike Donoghue, this is all being accomplished with reduced staff and no more than three volunteers in the kitchen and pantry at one time for everyone's safety. "Typically, New Covenant Center relies on the services of over 800 volunteers each year but the vast majority of volunteers have had to cancel due to the pandemic. We will likely need to hire some additional employees to meet the increased demand as current staff are incredibly stretched."

"The Covid-19 crisis has placed New Covenant Center as the charitable food insecurity leader of the crisis' response in the Lower Fairfield County area," states New Covenant Center Executive Director John Gutman. "The Center has been handing out much needed food to the unemployed, the homeless, and local families. This is especially true now that many of our area's citizens have lost their jobs."

The New Covenant Center virtual event will feature a one hour presentation by the event's original distinguished keynote guest speakers: Bishop Frank J. Caggiano of the Diocese of Bridgeport and Rabbi Jay TelRav of Temple Sinai in Stamford. The bishop and rabbi will discuss how our Judeo-Christian community is dealing with this crisis and other critical topics. Anyone who would like to present a question to be included in the discussion can send them to John Gutman at jgutman@ccfc-ct.org.

The mission of New Covenant Center is to provide a nutritious meal to all those who are hungry. This is accomplished from their 8,000 sq. ft. facility located at 174 Richmond Hill in Stamford. The facility includes an efficient and modern kitchen, a welcoming dining area, expanded food storage area and refrigeration, a spacious food pantry area and additional space for other services. Founded 41 years ago, New Covenant Center is an inter-faith project of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, serving the homeless, elderly, disabled, working poor and children. "As the mission states, 'No one is turned away. There are no requirements to enter the New Covenant Center doors, except a



NEW COVENANT CENTER—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano and Rabbi Jay Telrav of Temple Sinai of Stamford, will be the featured speakers at the May 8, "Virtual Breakfast" to benefit New Covenant Center in Stamford. The bishop and the Rabbi will discuss the Judeo-Christian community is dealing with the crisis. Guests will provide their own coffee and join together online to help feed the hungry.

mutual exchange of respect and dignity.' These words have never been more true as they are now." States event co-chair Nils Dahl. "While the number of volunteers helping us on-site have declined due to safety precautions, there has been a huge increase in the number of people and companies donating food and meals to New Covenant Center's soup kitchen and food pantry to help feed the most vulnerable in our area."

"New Covenant Center feels a strong need to support all their partners during this crisis, yet available resources remain stretched to the limits," states Sarita Hanley, event co-chair. "This program is a primary utility for the City of Stamford and remains the largest combined

daily soup kitchen and food pantry serving Stamford and the surrounding Lower Fairfield County communities. It is the reason why the event had to go on and donations are so very much needed at this time."

(Final preparations for the virtual event taking place on the morning of May 8 are still being made. All details, including a link to the event, will be announced on the New Covenant Center website at www.newcovenantcenter.org. If you would like to help support New Covenant Center during this time of extreme need, please consider making an online donation at www.newcovenantcenter.org/donate. Checks can also be mailed to: New Covenant Center, 174 Richmond Hill Ave., Stamford, CT. 06902.)

Catholic Charities resources stressed as crisis grows

FAIRFIELD COUNTY—The demand for food resources at Catholic Charities of Fairfield County has increased 50 percent in recent weeks and may double because of the COVID-19 crisis, according to Executive Director Michael Donoghue.

The three soup kitchens that serve the county have seen a significant rise in demand as more people turn to them at a time when other food pantries and cafes have closed, he said. The need is so great that entire families have been showing up and waiting

in long lines for meals.

"Just about all of our 30-plus programs are open," Donoghue said. "This is when our clients really need us. The working poor, the homeless and the elderly are the ones being hurt the most by this crisis, and our mission has always been to take care of our most vulnerable neighbors in Fairfield County."

The food services teams of Catholic Charities have been dealing with increasing demand at New Covenant Center in Stamford, Thomas Merton Center in Bridgeport and Morning Glory Breakfast

Program in Danbury.

In Stamford, where there is no other food cafe for eight miles, the staff at New Covenant Center is serving 300 meals a day, up from 200 last year, and the total could pass 400, Donoghue said.

Because food pantries and services in the area have shut down, Catholic Charities is assisting other non-profits that serve the homeless and immigrant communities, including Pacific House shelter, he said.

New Covenant Center also runs a food pantry three days a

➤ *CONTINUED ON PAGE 22*

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Diocesan Catholic Schools

Distance learning engages students

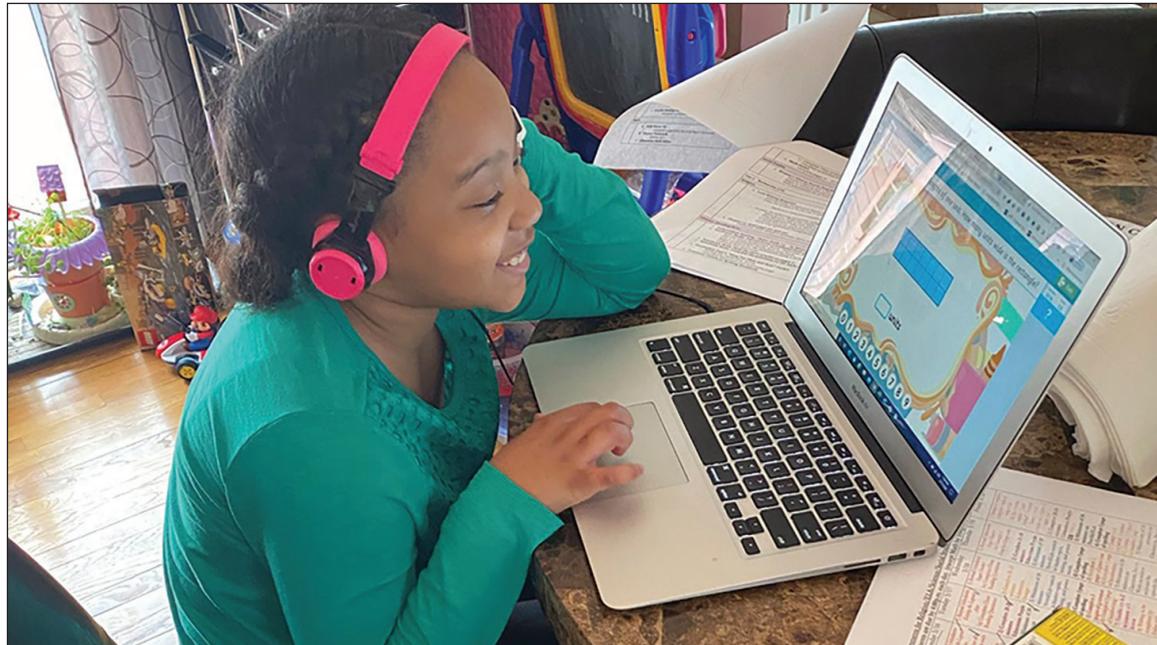
By PAT HENNESSEY

FAIRFIELD COUNTY— While all diocesan school academy buildings are closed, they will continue to serve the educational needs of their students.

“Schools have launched their distance learning programs to ensure continuity of education, and teachers and staff are working remotely using various technological tools,” said Dr. Steven Cheeseman, Superintendent of Schools.

Virtual office hours and a video help desk have been set up for teachers and parents who need assistance, and each individual school will set times when they will be open to address any student, family and faculty needs. Dr. Cheeseman noted that the introduction of Personalized Learning in diocesan schools over the past two years has better prepared teachers and students for online learning platforms.

“I’m really encouraged by how prepared our teachers are to meet this challenge. While other school systems around us are closed for now, we are most definitely open” said Alan Barnicle, diocesan Personalized



Learning Coordinator. “Our principals were alerted that a shutdown might happen, and we asked them to work with teachers to prepare long distance lesson plans. I want to give Superintendent Steve Cheeseman praise for his leadership in getting ahead of this situation.”

Because the Personalized Learning Initiative has been in place for two years, principals and teachers are comfortable working

as a team with the Office of the Superintendent of Schools (OSS). “This has provided the structure and confidence teachers need to be ahead of the curve,” noted Project Manager Debra Mitchell.

Coordinator Barnicle agreed. “Our teachers are prepared. Instead of asking, ‘What on earth are we going to do,’ we get calls from teachers for specific information on best practices. “They might ask ‘what the best way to engage students during a video lesson’ or ‘what is the best way to

assess student learning online.” He noted that principals and teachers are aware that some families do not have computers at home. “We have both high-tech and low-tech components,” he said, with opportunities to send parents lesson packets with follow-up assessments by phone. Schools are also loaning out Chromebooks to families who need one.

The result is that every school is prepared to meet its students’ needs. In common with

other diocesan high schools, Immaculate High School in Danbury has moved its curriculum into the cloud and is teaching everything online so that students have full-schedule days from home.

For the young students at St. Raphael Academy in the heart of Bridgeport, part of the Catholic Academy of Bridgeport, teachers used the advance notice to prepare a packet of work for students to take home. They are checking in with families by email, phone or video conferencing during the extended school closure. “We are hoping to connect with each family at least three times a week,” Sister Christine, St. Raphael’s Principal, told parents.

Dr. Cheeseman is grateful for the full cooperation of principals, faculty, and staff. “I appreciate your leadership as we set out into these uncharted waters. It is at times like this that I am especially grateful for the collegial spirit that exists among you,” he wrote in a letter to principals.

(For the latest updates on school policies, visit the diocesan Catholic Schools website special coronavirus page: www.dioceseofbridgeportcatholic-schools.com/coronavirus-updates. For tweets from individual schools, visit twitter.com/CathSchoolsDOB)

PARISH FOOD DRIVES FROM PAGE 13

that their model was absolutely perfect,” McCormick explained.

“We knew that our community needed something like this,” said McCormick, explaining that many parishioners are elderly and unable to leave their houses to shop for necessities. In addition, St. Greg’s School has many families that would struggle to provide adequately for their kids with the recent closures. “I knew that we needed to help in some way, and our parishioners are always so incredibly generous.”

Their Facebook post reads, “If you overbought food/supplies, or would just like to donate, please bring canned/boxed food, toiletries, hand sanitizer, etc. to the St. Greg’s Parish Office (behind the basketball courts) between 9 am and 12 pm every Monday through Friday until 3/31. If you, or someone you know, is homebound and in need, please contact Devon McCormick at dmccorm-17stgregs@gmail.com.”

McCormick and St. Greg’s have raised almost \$500 in the past 24 hours, utilizing the money sharing app Venmo, as well.

McCormick explains that they are expecting a surge in material donations in the days to come. Many young people have also reached out and offered to do contact-free delivery.

“I truly believe that our universal calling is to love one another,” shared McCormick. “To me, to love means to put others before myself. This is a really scary and confusing time, and it can be so easy to turn inward and focus on our own needs. But I think that God could be working through this crisis to show us what it means to truly love one another and care for the most vulnerable of our society. These days are really teaching me that, as a young person, I should put aside my own needs, fears and anxieties, and turn those into positive action for others.”

McCormick, a mom to a 16-month-old, considers this a teachable moment. She asks what her son can learn from looking back at this time. “In general, I just hope that all of us come together in support of one another in order to bring us all through this scary time. It really is a life and death situation out there, so my only hope is that we come out on the other side of this more unified in love, compassion and care for one another,” she says.

As for suggestions on how to maintain one’s prayer life during this time, McCormick says there are tons of resources available online—whether it be streaming Mass, online meditations, or spending time reading Scripture as a family.

Her hope—for a thriving spiritual life, by being intentional about time with those in the house. “God really is in everything—every encounter, interaction, crisis, or blessing—including this dark time,” says McCormick.



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New Saint Mary Parish

St. Mary, St. Benedict/Our Lady of Montserrat merge

STAMFORD—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has announced the merger of Saint Mary Parish and Saint Benedict-Our Lady of Montserrat Parish in Stamford into the single parish of Saint Mary, which was effective on April 19 2020, the Octave of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday.

In a formal decree issued on April 19, 2020, the bishop formally declared the merger and that “The territorial boundaries of the aforementioned parishes, by this canonical decree, shall be amalgamated to become the boundaries of Saint Mary Parish.”

“The above two parishes be merged through an extinctive union so as to form one parish. This determination has been made to strengthen the pastoral care of the people of God in this area of my diocese, and to

address several trends that are of serious concern, including: diminished Mass attendance, lack of sustainability in the face of diminishing income, declining sacramental celebrations, and clergy availability,” the bishop wrote in the decree.

The bishop met with parish leaders on January 12, 2020 and with all parishioners during an open meeting on February 9, 2020. The merger was also brought before the Council of Priests on January 23.

In an earlier letter to parishioners, the bishop noted that after having consulted with the pastor, Father Gustavo Falla, the parish staff and lay leaders of both communities, he made the decision to canonically merge the two parishes.

“I wish to express my sincere

thanks to Father Falla, the clergy and your parish lay leaders for their great cooperation and support of this process,” the bishop said. “I believe the merger will be an occasion of great grace for both parish communities, allowing them to come together in greater unity and vitality for years to come.”

The parishes have already shared the same pastor, Father Falla, and some parish leaders for the last five years, which should further facilitate the transition to a single parish.

The merger had initially been scheduled to take effect on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, March 25, during the celebration of a bi-lingual Mass which the bishop will celebrate with the priests of both parishes. However, the health and safety precautions put in place for the Coronavirus



FATHER GUSTAVO FALLA—Father Falla will continue to lead the newly merged parish. The two parishes have worked closely together for the past five years and all existing spiritual activities at both churches will remain unchanged.

pandemic, delayed the final decree.

The bishop said that at a practical level, the merger of the two parishes will not greatly affect the daily life of either community. Both churches will remain open. All existing spiritual activities at both churches will essentially remain unchanged.

Some of the major committees including the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council that advise and assist the pastor will be consolidated over time to help alleviate some of the administrative burden that the clergy carry in their administrative and financial duties towards the parish, he said.

“The merger will also allow both communities to join forces in tackling some of the great challenges we are facing, including the need to involve our youth in the life of our parish, seeking and nurturing vocations to priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life, and our common desire to bring back to active faith those Catholics who have stopped coming to Sunday Mass,” he said.

In 2019, Bishop Caggiano issued canonical decrees merging

The Parish of St. Gabriel with the Parish of St. Cecilia in Stamford to create the newly named Parish of St. Cecilia-St. Gabriel; merging the Parish of St. Agnes in Greenwich with St. Catherine of Siena in Riverside to create the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena and St. Agnes; and merging of Holy Family Parish in Fairfield and St. Emery Parish in Fairfield into the new Holy Family and St. Emery Parish.

The successful parish consolidations have grown out of the work of the diocesan synod 2014 and the mandate to create welcoming, vibrant and stronger faith communities.

The mergers are intended to address pastoral trends including diminishing Mass attendance, fiscal sustainability, decreasing sacramental celebrations and clergy availability. All parishes formed collaborative committees with equal representation to discuss the parish consolidations.

All of the parishes involved formed collaborative committees with equal representation to discuss the parish consolidations and to undertake the mergers through a consultative and collaborative process with parishioners. ■

Palm Sunday to Pentecost helps keep the faith alive

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—To help members of our diocese keep the faith alive while the churches are closed, The Leadership Institute has partnered with the NFCYM (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry) and independent Catholic artists to bring compact faith formation sessions to your living room.

“My hope is that families throughout the diocese—and indeed the country—will take advantage of this chance to spend some time in prayer and conversation, while enjoying the musical talents of musicians whose music we sing at Mass each week,” says Dr. Patrick Donovan, director of The Leadership Institute, as each session includes a reflection on the weekly readings, music and a challenge families can take on during the coming week.

Videos will be posted as they are made available, and will feature artists such as John

Angotti, Tony Melendez, Sara Kroeger, Steve Angrisano and Paul J. Kim.

“As soon as we knew people would be working from home and gathered events would be limited, we knew it would be important to offer families the opportunity to continue formation at home,” says Donovan.

Donovan explained that many of his friends are itinerate ministers that he knew would likely be facing hardships due to canceled events. From Palm Sunday to Pentecost was a marriage of both needs, allowing for the “expertise of Catholic musicians in the living rooms of families around the diocese,” says Donovan.

Three weeks in and the response has been overwhelming. Donovan says several hundred families have participated in the formation sessions each week. By collaborating with the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, the potential audience has been expanded to the rest of the country. The NFCYM,

a member organization for youth ministry leaders, funded half of this initiative and is a sponsor in this endeavor.

When asked how one can maintain their spiritual life during this time, Donovan explains that it is important to set up a schedule as if you were going into the office or school each day.

“Set a time for morning prayer or evening prayer and stick to it. I think that’s why the Nine Days of Prayer that the Institute hosted was so successful—it allowed people to have a set time each evening to gather in prayer. We will be doing the same thing throughout the month of May as we invite people to gather each night at 7:30 pm for the recitation of the Rosary,” says Donovan, adding, “daily time to meditate, a set time to pray, and family time together each day is essential as we navigate these difficult days.”

(For more information visit formationreimagined.org.) ■

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Local News

Catholic Cemeteries respond to crisis

BRIDGEPORT—With the number of deaths in Fairfield County climbing as a result of Covid-19 pandemic, Catholic Cemetery workers are taking added precautions to protect themselves and mourners from spreading the virus.

Dean Gestal, director of diocesan Catholic Cemeteries, said that over the last two-week period, twelve of the last 21 burials have been from Coronavirus-related deaths.

Gestal said that the 40 diocesan employees who manage and maintain the nine active cemeteries are now wearing protective clothing, gloves and masks and taking additional safety measures at each burial.

“It takes our burial workers five minutes to get into their protective suits and five minutes to get out of them, but it has added another layer of protection for all involved,” Gestal said.

He said that in response to crisis and consistent with the guidelines developed by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, diocesan cemeteries have issued new funeral guidelines for staff and for the public

for all In-ground burials and mausoleum entombments (from COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 deaths).

The graveside service will be open only to Immediate family with a maximum of ten in attendance. All committal rites will be conducted outside without tents or chairs (except for the elderly or infirmed). Mausoleums will be closed to all but cemetery workers.

The burial will be completed after the service when the family has departed.

Gestal said most families have understood and appreciated the safety precautions, which are done with dignity for all involved. However, he acknowledged that it is a difficult time for those who have lost a loved ones.

He said the crisis has underscored the need for pre-planning for individuals and families, who may not think of burial arrangements in good times. He said that cemeteries throughout the diocese have received inquiries and requests for information, which his staff is able to handle.

“We all have to get through the worst of this before we can move forward. As the deaths from the virus spikes, we are stressed but not overwhelmed. I’m grateful to our staff who have responded to the crisis and brought this ministry to families in need,” Gestal said.

On March 16, in response to the health and safety threat posed by the Coronavirus and the concern of civil authorities, Bishop Caggiano suspended all public Masses, including funeral Masses in the diocese. However, the crisis guidelines permit priests to celebrate the Rite of Committal with Final Commendation at the graveside. The bishop suggested to pastors that at a later date, a public memorial Mass be celebrated for the repose of the soul of the deceased and the consolation of the family. Similar practices have been put in place by dioceses across the country.

(For further information on Catholic Cemeteries, visit online: www.bridgeportdiocese.org/cemeteries/home; Phone: 203.416.1494.)

Msgr. Roger Watts, 91

As *Fairfield County Catholic* goes to press, it is with great sadness that the diocese has learned of the passing of Msgr. Roger J. Watts on April 22, at Stamford Hospital. He was 91 years old. Msgr. Watts was a talented man who loved his life as a priest and worked joyfully to serve others in his ministry.

Bishop Caggiano has asked for prayers for the repose of the soul of Msgr. Watts and the consolation of his family, especially his brother, Reverend Canon Albert W. Watts. Information regarding funeral plans will be forthcoming, and a complete obituary will be printed in the May issue of *Fairfield County Catholic*.

Toni Bosco, 91

BROOKFIELD—Antoinette Gloria Bosco, 91, of Brookfield, died peacefully in her home on March 20, 2020 with her devoted daughter, Margee Minier by her side.

Toni, as she was known by her many friends in the Diocese of Bridgeport, was a prize-winning journalist, magazine writer and author of 17 books, and for more than three decades a syndicated columnist for the national Catholic News Service and other national publications. She served as Editor at The Long Island Catholic and as Executive Editor of The Litchfield County Times in Connecticut for 13 years. She was also a contributor to *Fairfield County Catholic*.



A 1950 graduate of the College of Saint Rose with a bachelor’s degree in Science and Chemistry, Bosco went on to earn a master’s degree in Liberal Studies from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1970. From 1972 to 1982, she served as Associate Director of Community Relations and Assistant Professor of Clinical Health Sciences at SUNY Stony Brook. In 1992 she completed a course of religious studies at Oxford University. She served for five years as Suffolk County Human Rights Commissioner on Long Island.

She was born in Rome, New York on September 18, 1928, daughter of the late Joseph and Mary (Sgambellone) Oppedisano of Albany, N.Y. She is survived by two brothers and two sisters, four children, 15 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren, and 8 great-great-grandchildren. A Celebration of Antoinette’s life will take place at a later date.

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DECEASED CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT APRIL 26—MAY 23

APRIL	
29	Rev. Joseph F. Cleary1971 Rev. Andrew Dube2006 Rev. Austin R. Saunders1986
MAY	
1	Rev. Gregory J. Huminski2010
2	Msgr. James F. Murphy1958
3	Msgr. Michael J. Carnicke, P.A.1980
6	Msgr. John Bernard Hossan2018
9	Rev. John B. Fonseca2002
10	Rev. Robert J. Hyl2015
13	Deacon Joseph M. Melita2018
17	Rev. Miroslav L. Sultus1992
18	Msgr. Charles B. Ratajczak, O.F.M.1957
19	Rev. William H. Sullivan1980
23	Rev. Thomas M. Garrick1955 Deacon Hans Jakob Gram2010

Sports

It took a pandemic to stop these diocesan teams

By DON HARRISON

The coronavirus pandemic has affected the lives of millions across the globe, forcing people to step back from their day-to-day lives and remain indoors, away from family and friends, working from home or working not at all. Many lives may never return to “normal.”

During the second week of March, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) cancelled the remainder of the state basketball tournaments due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Within the Diocese of Bridgeport, several outstanding high school teams saw their dreams of a state championship short-circuited, among them:

Girls Basketball: Notre Dame-Fairfield (23-1), Kolbe Cathedral (16-6).

Boys Basketball: Immaculate (21-2), Kolbe Cathedral (17-6), Trinity Catholic (17-6), St. Joseph (15-6), Fairfield Prep (12-9).

“It (the cancellation) caught all of us off guard. (But) they made the right call,” said Notre Dame Athletic Director Rob Bleggi. “When we told our kids in the school library, it was so somber;

it was as if somebody had passed away.”

Indeed, the Lancers’ girls basketball team was ranked No. 1 in the GameTime state poll and scheduled to face Windsor in the Class L quarterfinals on March 12 prior to the CIAC’s decision to cancel the remainder of the tournaments. First-year coach Maria Conlon echoed Bleggi’s sentiments.

“It was so disappointing that we didn’t get the chance to run the table,” she stated. “I really think we were hitting our stride. We had a really talented team.”

A 5-foot-9 sophomore, Aizhanique Mayo, emerged as Notre Dame’s go-to player this season, leading the team in scoring (18.2) and assists (6.5). She was selected to the Coaches’ Class L All-State Team.

Tri-captain Yamani McCollough, a 5-9 junior, averaged 13.5 points and five steals per game, while Kayla Tilus, a 5-11 sophomore, topped the Lancers in rebounding (9.5) and supplied 11.5 points per game.

Notre Dame’s lone loss came against formidable Hudson Catholic, 61-48, in New Jersey

on Jan. 25. And only two of the Lancers’ 23 victories were close—at Newtown (56-53) and 2019 state runner-up Daniel Hand (68-64)—although Conlon pointed out that “a girl hit a half-court shot at the buzzer” in the latter game.

In the South-West Conference title game on Feb. 26, the Lancers easily disposed of Newtown, the No. 3 team in the state and SWC defending champion, 70-40. Mayo and junior guard and tri-captain Mac Stone-Folmar each scored 18 points, while tri-captain Erin Harris, the lone senior in the Notre Dame starting lineup, was voted tourney MVP.

“The cool part,” Conlon noted, “was that our most talented kids were the most coachable kids.”

On the boys’ side, Immaculate of Danbury, coached by Nelson Mingachos, won 21 straight games—a school record—en route to assembling a 21-2 mark. But the streak came to a resounding end against Kolbe Cathedral, 63-57, in the SWC championship game on March 5.

Jalen Sullivan, a 6-4 sophomore, provided much of the spark for the Mustangs, who earned



their first SWC title since 2006, and was named tournament MVP. Sullivan and classmate Ty

Staples-Santos each contributed 14 points to the victory.

Both Mingachos and his Kolbe counterpart, John Pfohl, have captured three state titles at their respective schools, and both, understandably, were disheartened by the CIAC’s tournament termination.

Mingachos: “I called our kids out of class and told them the news. It wasn’t an easy thing to do—especially for the seniors. They were all disappointed and shocked.”

“I met with my team and I told them how proud I was of them,” Pfohl said. “You want to win your last game, and they did win this very, very important game. But I felt bad for our seniors.”

Four other Diocesan players were selected to 2019-20 All-State first teams: Coaches: Immaculate’s Sean Guiry, 6-6 senior captain and high honors student; St. Joe’s Paul Fabbri, 5-10 senior guard; and Kolbe Cathedral’s Brianna Meekins, 5-9 senior forward and honors student.

GameTime: Trinity Catholic’s Malcolm Newman, 6-2 senior guard.

‘CARFESSIONS’ FROM PAGE 9

flow of cars and keep them in line. A deacon was stationed 50 feet away and asked the driver whether he or she wanted to receive the sacrament face-to-face or privately. For those who wanted anonymity, Father Peter would put on a blindfold. If there were a few passengers, the driver pulled up and the others got out and waited their turn.

There were even several walk-ups, who maintained the required social distance. Week to week, the attendance has increased.

The system follows the necessary regulations, but most importantly, Father said, “It lets people be reconciled with the Lord and receive the peace that only he can give—true peace—and Lord knows we need peace in our hearts at this time.”

‘Carfessions’ attract crowd at St. Benedict’s

STAMFORD—Father Gustavo Falla decided to impro-

vide and create a portable confessional so he could offer his parish what he called “carfessions.”

The pastor of St. Mary of Stamford, which recently merged with St. Benedict-Our Lady of Monserrat, said that more than 15 penitents showed up on Sunday, mostly on foot, and walked over to the “carfessional” under the rectory car port, where he was seated in the driver’s seat with a crucifix on the dashboard and a table separating him from the penitent. Just in case, he also had a can of Lysol spray disinfectant.

For the sake of anonymity and protection, a white cloth covered the window opening.

“People were very excited to know that the sacrament was available to them,” Father said. “They were waiting for me, and within an hour, I heard ten confessions. When I was ready to close up shop, six more showed up. I am expecting more people on Sunday from 3 to 4, and I will

extend the time to 5 if necessary.”

Father Gustavo was especially gratified to hear his parishioners express their gratitude to be able to receive the sacrament. He said it has been a trying time for them because they are not able to take part in the celebration of the Mass and receive Holy Communion.

“To hear their gratitude really helps us as priests because so many times when we celebrate Mass or are serving God, we wonder how much people are really getting out of it,” he said. “Then, we find ourselves in these circumstances and realize it is real and that they really love and need the sacraments. So many people thanked us, and that is a humbling experience for us priests.”

The man in the sycamore tree

MONROE—When Father Henry Hoffman, pastor of St. Jude Parish in Monroe, describes the experience of hearing confessions while sitting on the curb as parishioners drive up, he recalls the story of the tax collector

Zacchaeus, who used his ingenuity and persistence to get a glimpse of Jesus.

The Lord was passing through the town of Jericho, surrounded by a throng of people, pressing in on every side. As Luke wrote in his Gospel, “Zacchaeus could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way.”

And he was rewarded for his determination. Jesus looked up, saw Zacchaeus, told him to come down, and said, “Today I must stay at your house.”

“Hearing confession in this way has taught us the need to be creative,” Father Hoffman said. “I think of Zacchaeus. He came up with a creative way to see Jesus. We need to find creative ways to make the Sacrament of Penance available while still observing social distancing.”

At St. Jude, two outdoor stations are set up on either side of the church for Father Hoffman and

Father Jim Bates, the parochial vicar. The cars line up, leaving enough distance between them to ensure privacy. Rain or shine, the priests are seated by the curb, waiting for penitents.

Father Bates says that during this crisis, “The Church is neither idle nor is it silent; while the current pandemic has threatened to separate and drive us apart as a nation and as a community of faith, the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass continues, we are united in prayer, and we are finding ways to offer the sacraments to the faithful while keeping all of us safe.”

Father Hoffman especially encourages the faithful to pray to the Blessed Mother, who throughout history has interceded for her children during times of pestilence. He is hopeful that tremendous good will come out of this time of trial and says, “In the face of this horrible pandemic, I see us as a human family coming together.”

Column: Thomas Hicks



Disssolution into the Universe

POTPOURRI

BY THOMAS H. HICKS

Thomas Hicks is a member of St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull.

Atheism has emerged in our times as an outlook held by many people from diverse backgrounds, especially the young. The claim is made that atheism equips people to live life more freely and fully.

A common idea among atheists is that death is a return to Nature. Death involves a dissolution into the universe. One becomes one with the stars, the plants, the animals, the whole cosmos. In 1819, the German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, published a book titled *The World as Will and Idea*. Schopenhauer wrote that in death the "Universal Mother Earth" receives humans into her arms. Also, according to Schopenhauer:

"if one knocked on graves, and asked the dead whether they wished to rise again, they would shake their heads".

More specifically, the view is that, after death, the atoms of one's body will eventually reveal themselves perhaps in the brilliant yellow of a dandelion, in the wetness of a rain drop, or in the throat of a giraffe, and certainly in the hearts of some people as well. It is therefore appropriate to scatter one's ashes in the wind or on the sea, or to bury them in the forest at the roots of an ancient tree, ideally in a biodegradable urn. There are owners of some forested areas who, for a price, allow people to bury remains on their property. The family and friends of the deceased can con-

sole themselves with the thought that the organic remains of the deceased person will one day reach out to the sun in the whispering leaves of the trees.

Thus, today ashes are strewed over the sea, or swept from the top of a mountain by the wind, or buried in "forest cemeteries."

The Vietnamese Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh, in his book *No Death No Fear* writes: "everyday I look deep at everything around me: the trees, the hills. I see myself in them and I know I shall not die, I will continue in many other forms."

In the movie *Houseboat*, Cary Grant, in a scene where a boy asks him what happens when people die, Grant gives a dissolution into the universe response.

Today's obituaries commonly express the idea of the self's return to nature. Above the obituary is not the cross, but a broad-branched tree.

I am not the least bit consoled by the idea that my physical energy may live on in strawberries or Rhinos. Nor am I satisfied that "something" goes on and that I will continue in many other forms. I want to live on in my own person. I have no interest in

being recycled in a cosmic way, like plastic bottles. The meaning of "dissolution into the universe" would seem to be that we live, we, die, we become compost, and all those vitamins, minerals, and nutrients help a path of ragweed grow big and strong and cause allergy problems for countless sufferers. Is that consolation?

The Christian Creed says: "I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." Our bodies are destined for resurrection. John 6:40: "Everyone who believes in me has everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day." The resurrection is not a metaphor, for example, that the dead live on in the memory of their loved ones. The resurrection of Jesus was the beginning of the General Resurrection (cf. Acts 26:28).

Christ is the first fruits of the great harvest that is to follow and

there will be the annihilation of death itself. The omnipotence of God "will swallow up death for ever and will wipe away the tears for all faces" (Isaiah 25:18).

I will be made into "Immortal

Diamond", not some fertilizer for the universal greenhouse.

Let me leave you with something to think about. Karl Rahner, the

elite theologian of the 20th century, stated: "No one is in danger of defending as a heresy if he maintains the view that the single and total perfection of a human being in body and soul takes place immediately after death"

(*Theological Investigations*, XVII, 120). In other words, Rahner is saying that being a human being calls for the union of body and soul. This calls for a body immediately after death. This body will be perfected at the General Resurrection. I can't think of anything that I would like less than to be a disembodied spirit. ■

"Christ is the first fruits of the great harvest that is to follow and there will be the annihilation of death itself."

==== PRIESTS ENCOURAGE FROM PAGE 9 =====

a hearty 'yes' to that. He is in our midst and challenging us to go deeper in our faith," Father said. "We should ask ourselves, 'What does this mean for me as a Christian, for my family, for my parish, for the Church and for the world?' We have time to think about that now. It is an opportunity to find God in our own lives and recognize that he is present and that, yes, he is in our midst."

The coronavirus crisis is a call from the Lord for the faithful to look inward, to sit and think and pray about our relationship with God and get to know him better amid the challenges we are experiencing.

"All this happened in Lent, which is a time for us to go deeper in our spirituality and look for Christ in a very intentional way, so we can draw closer to the Paschal mystery of suffering, dying and rising with Christ," he said. "I tell

people to just be with God and ask, 'What are you trying to tell me?' And in asking that, know that God loves us through all this. Not that God is angry with us or disappointed with us, but loving us. This time has made us more aware of God and of our need to change and be more aware of the other person."

God is always in control

DARIEN—Several days before the coronavirus pandemic began to ramp up, Father Christopher Perrella, parochial vicar of St. John Church, was called to Stamford Hospital to give the Anointing of the Sick to a woman who was dying. Several days later, she passed away, and it emphasized for him once again the importance of administering the sacraments to people when they are sick or in danger of dying.

This crisis has made his ministry more difficult. Serving others is the life of a priest, and being separated from the sacraments is

particularly challenging for faithful Catholics, he said.

Nevertheless, he has been focusing on trying to connect with people on a personal level through Zoom and social media. He has also been regularly calling parishioners to say hello and ask if they need groceries, and he continues to do pastoral counseling and spiritual direction through the available technology.

"I miss my people, and I really look forward to the day when we can get back to the church again. It has taken some time to realize how much it weighs on me and other people too," he said. "I would love to be able to take this burden away from people and solve this, but I have to recognize that is far beyond my ability. It is pulling down some of the illusions of control that I had and that a lot of us had, when we were laboring under that illusion that we have control."

God is the only one in complete control, he said, and he has always been in control.

"What do we do when we are forced to confront our helplessness?" Father Chris said. "We can despair. We can give up. Or we can say, 'Lord, I am scared. I am anxious. I am lonely...and I am going to trust you.' It is easy when our anxiety is high to think that God is absent. God has always been in control, and he is in control of the situation now. He is a loving father who won't leave us or let us carry our burden alone. He wants to use this present situation to draw us closer to him. There are so many things we get attached to even when we are following God, and sometimes it takes something serious to help us reprioritize."

Father Chris recalls the Gospel story in which Jesus calls a little child to himself and tells the disciples, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

This is one of Christ's most powerful statements, he said, because it points to the impor-

tance of childlike dependence on God in all things. Nothing is outside of God's plan, Father Chris says.

"God is a loving, wise father, and he wants the best for his children," he said. "God has never punished us according to what we deserve, and he always tries to be lenient and forgiving, but sometimes when we become obstinate, we need a wake-up call. All things are under his control, and he will bring good out of every situation, including the one we are in right now."

'I haven't forgotten you. I'm praying for you'

TRUMBULL—In his Easter videotaped message to the St. Joseph High School community, Father Eric Silva, the episcopal chaplain, reminded them to celebrate during this time of great joy and great challenges.

"The Lord is risen, alleluia, alleluia. Happy Easter, St.

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

Column: Joe Pisani



Nana, Papa, everybody up there, pray for us!

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

Joe Pisani has been a writer and editor for 30 years.

Sometimes I look up to heaven in frustration and grumble about the way things are in the world, my country and—let me not forget—my family.

I have relatives and family members who are so far from Christ that I find myself complaining, “Mom! Dad! What the heck are you doing up there? Stop enjoying yourself and think about us down here! How about some prayers! Get to work, PLEASE!”

Ok, maybe I’m exaggerating... but not much. I’m sure they’re praying for the rest of us, but just in case they’re asleep on the

job or not giving 150 percent, I want to remind them to get going because if there’s anything our world needs now more than ever, it’s prayer. Don’t believe what the secularists and the media say. Pray works.

Down in this vale of tears, we need all the help we can get, which is why I try to spend as much time as possible appealing to the saints for their intercession because they understand firsthand how much life can be a struggle and they have a direct line to God.

I’m always asking the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph for help, along with my own group of

personal favorites, who include my guardian angel, St. Michael, St. John Paul II, St. Ann and St. Joachim, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Joseph Barsabbas, Blessed Margaret of Castello, St. Martha, Venerable Fr. McGivney, Blessed Solanus Casey, Servant of God Vincent Capodanno, St. Padre Pio, Servant of God Chiara Corbella Petrillo, St. Jeanne Jugan, St. Josephine Bakhita, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, Blessed Mother Clelia, St. Joanna, St. Mother Teresa, Servant of God Dorothy Day and St. Kateri Tekakwitha, who lost her family in a small pox epidemic.

I try to pray the Litany of Saints every day and petition everyone from Saints Peter and Paul to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Mary Magdalen to “pray for us.” Last week, I had another idea that I thought might help during this time of crisis. I sat down at my typewriter and started to put together what I call a “Litany of Family and Friends” to my deceased loved ones.

The private litany I compiled

included grandmothers, grandfathers, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, classmates, coworkers, nuns, and priests like Father Ed Coyne, who helped countless people in recovery when he was alive. Pray for us!

My litany also included teachers, professors and friends who made a difference in my life, including the most devout journalist I ever knew, the late Hugh Mulligan of Ridgefield. Pray for us!

If they did so much while they were alive, just imagine what they can do now. I’m convinced they’re waiting for us to call on them, so I encourage you to compile your own list and appeal to them by name for their intercession...every day.

I ask for help not just from saintly people I knew, but also from the less than perfect ones, and there are many. I figure they’re like the bungling angel Clarence in “It’s a Wonderful Life” and are always looking for opportunities to earn their wings.

The veil between heaven and earth is a thin one, and our

beloved deceased family members and friends are always praying for us. While I never doubt that, it gives me enormous consolation to ask them for prayers.

Like Jesus and Our Lady, they’re watching over us, directing us and praying for the graces we need during these troubled times. Only when we see them again in heaven will we understand all they did for us during our earthly exile, and we’ll owe them a great debt of gratitude.

One last thought. Don’t forget your grandmothers. I’m convinced a grandmother’s prayers are one of the greatest forces in the universe. Don’t believe what the scientists, the secularists, the media and the atheists tell you. Politics, science and the press are nowhere near as powerful.

Someday when Jesus is handing out the Most Valuable Player awards, I bet there will be a long line of mothers and grandmothers standing in line to be honored. For all eternity, they’ll be recognized for what they accomplished for us with their prayers.

==== PRIESTS ENCOURAGE FROM PAGE 20 =====

Joe’s,” he said from the school chapel. “We know that the end of a story changes the meaning of every page, and Lent only makes sense in the light of what’s to come and in the light of what we celebrate today....Celebrate. Eat ice cream, have cake, watch a movie with your family. It’s spring break now, so just enjoy yourselves and really celebrate, remembering that this time is supposed to be a time of great joy...”

Since the school closed because of the pandemic, he has been sending regular video clips to the 820 students and the rest of high school community, along with links to resources that will help them pray the rosary and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and live-stream liturgies and prayer services.

“I want to encourage them and make sure they have the resources they need during this time,” he said. “And sometimes my message is simple: ‘I am praying for you. I haven’t forgotten you.’”

His ministry is primarily one of “presence,” and to maintain that presence, he has been relying on social media platforms

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Testimonio de esperanza en momentos de pandemia

POR EL P. ROLANDO TORRES

BRIDGEPORT—Hace exactamente 15 años atrás cuando todavía estaba en formación en St. John Fisher, acabando de integrarme a la familia de la Diócesis de Bridgeport, tuve una experiencia íntima en el silencio de la noche con Jesucristo Sacramentado.

Recuerdo, como si fuera hoy que había sido una semana muy fuerte para mí. Con 25 años tenía que renunciar a mi trabajo, comenzar de nuevo un camino de formación ya que había estudiado por nueve años en algunos seminarios en Puerto Rico y sabía que iba a comenzar de nuevo mi lucha.

Uno de mis miedos más grandes era la barrera del idioma ya que desde pequeño siempre le tuve miedo al inglés y realmente no sabía cómo iba a poder lograr pasar todas las materias de estu-

dio sin dominar este idioma.

Una noche, eran como la 1 o 2 de la mañana, luego de haber pasado el día entre pláticas y encuentros con los demás seminaristas, aunque sabía que al otro día me tocaba levantarme temprano, tenía una inquietud intensa en mi alma. Estaba desolado y tenía miedo, no sabía que hacer y decidí entonces a esa hora, silenciosamente, ir al Santísimo que se encontraba en la capilla de St. John Fisher.

Estaba completamente solito con el Señor. Todo estaba alumbrado por la luz de la luna y por la lucecita de al lado del Sagrario. Me puse de rodillas y oré con todo mi corazón, con todas las fuerzas de mi alma.

Recuerdo, que el tiempo pasó sin darme cuenta. Fue un momento muy profundo, muy intenso, muy fuerte para mí. Le hablaba a Jesús con toda sin-

ceridad y le decía que no iba a poder, que yo no iba a dar el nivel académico, sobre todo por el inglés. Le dije que el inglés se me iba a hacer imposible.

Ya pasado un tiempo y dispuesto a finalizar mi plática con Jesús Sacramentado comencé a ver que la capilla se oscureció totalmente. ¿Pero de pronto?, la luz del Sagrario estaba más brillante que nunca y todo se alumbró en el Altar con esa luz, ¡y entonces!, sentí una voz hermosa, suave, tierna. Una voz que le hablaba a mi corazón. Una alocución que le dijo a mi alma unas palabras que nunca jamás olvidaré: “Rolando?, ¡no tengas miedo!, yo estoy contigo y te ayudaré. ¿tranquilo?., escuché tus ruegos y todo va a estar bien”.

Recuerdo, en mi ignorancia que dije: “¿Pero y el inglés?”; en ese momento sentí una sonrisa



¡tan hermosa!, ¡tan sublime!, ¡tan suave! y luego escuché que me dijo: “¡no dudes! y ten fe, ¡yo te ayudaré!”. En ese momento todo se aclaró y volvió la normalidad la capilla.

Luego de haber estado un buen rato llorando de la emoción y de haberme quedado allí con Jesús acompañándome; decidí ir a descansar el poco tiempo que me quedaba. Cuando miré el reloj eran las 4 de la mañana. Sentí una emoción tan grande que no pude dormir y al otro día quería contar a todos lo que había pasado; pero lo guardé en mi corazón

y confié en él (Dios) totalmente, dejando todo en sus manos.

Hoy comparto con ustedes esta experiencia porque hoy más que nunca estamos sintiendo esta desolación del alma. Esta noche está tan oscura a causa del Corona virus.

Muchos de nuestros feligreses están viviendo un desierto espiritual y probablemente se preguntan lo mismo que yo me preguntaba aquella noche: “¿Señor qué va a ser de nosotros?”

Estamos viviendo tiempos difíciles de prueba y desconuelo, estamos tristes por la falta de encontrarnos y recibirle a Él. Estamos clamando que todo esto pase, ¿pero?, como en aquella noche, Cristo nos escucha, está atento. Él nos reconstruye.

Si de algo estoy seguro es que luego que salí de la capilla aquella noche, Dios reconstruyó mi camino y puso en mi corazón esperanza, fe, fortaleza y amor. Todo después de ese encuentro con Cristo Sacramentado fue su voluntad. Pude terminar mis estudios y en dos años fui ordenado diácono y luego sacerdote el 19 de mayo del 2007. Fue simplemente así cómo Cristo me dijo que no tuviera miedo y que me ayudaría.

Esta Pascua de Resurrección tiene que ser diferente. ¡Definitivamente!, tenemos que ser conscientes de que por más que la tormenta azote la barca de Pedro, la barca se sostiene por la fe y que luego viene la calma. La Iglesia permanece porque todos somos ella.

Aprovechemos este momento para acercarnos más, para confiar más, para ser más humanos y caritativos. Tengamos la capacidad de ver más allá del problema y no causar pánico, sino paz y consuelo. Si confiamos en Cristo, él nos dice: “no tengan miedo yo estoy con ustedes siempre, solo confíen en mí y todo pasará rápido”.

Visitemos el Santísimo y digamos al Señor: ¡Aquí estoy para hacer tu voluntad!

CATHOLIC CHARITIES FROM PAGE 15

week for low-income residents, who can receive up to 10 days of groceries a month.

“That demand has gone up substantially, and we expect it to rise even more,” he said. “This is a once-in-a-century pandemic, and if there is any time the services of Catholic Charities are needed, it is right now.”

Because of the regulations that require social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus, people are not permitted to congregate in the cafeteria, and the Center has been offering takeout for clients.

Similar restrictions are in place at Thomas Merton Center in Bridgeport, which previously served breakfast and lunch and is now providing some 250 takeout meals a day, up from 150. Because other soup kitchens in Bridgeport have closed, Catholic Charities is providing assistance to them, along with several shelters.

In Danbury, which is served by the Morning Glory Breakfast Program, Catholic Charities has an outreach team that is working with the city to provide food and blankets for the homeless after the shelter was

forced to close and residents were relocated to a nearby gymnasium, Donoghue said.

“In an environment like this, anyone who is homeless certainly needs food, along with those who have lost their jobs and are trying

“Supporters of Catholic Charities are helping out in other ways, and many people have been buying extra groceries and dropping them off at the soup kitchens.”

to make ends meet to pay their rent,” Donoghue said.

Catholic Charities also operates a Meals on Wheels program in lower Fairfield County, which provides 275 meals a day to the home-bound elderly. A network of eight drivers delivers prepackaged meals to shut-ins.

“In many cases, our driver is the only person these elderly people will see on a given day,” Donoghue said. “They will go to the door to make sure they are OK and drop off the meal.”

That demand has also

increased significantly, he said.

“I can’t say enough about the employees of Catholic Charities who put themselves in harm’s way every single day,” he said. “They are showing up to work every day. I am so proud to be

part of this organization, which helps the poor and vulnerable, especially at a time like this.”

The demand on employees is particularly difficult now because many of the 2000 local volunteers who assisted the staff are over 65 years old, retired and in high-risk categories. They have been advised to stay home to avoid contracting COVID-19, he said.

At the same time, Donoghue said, supporters of Catholic Charities are helping out in other ways, and many people have been buying extra groceries and dropping them off at the soup kitchens.

Room to Grow Pre-School is temporarily closed due to the Governor’s orders on school closures. However, the teachers and director have been doing food

collections at the school once a week and developed a system that lets families drive by and pick up a bag of groceries.

Donoghue said the crisis has also strained services that support immigrants and provide behavioral health counseling, particularly among those suffering depression and anxiety.

“This is the time we need the help and support of the community,” Donoghue said. “We need donations because our costs have gone up as we serve people in need and offer assistance to other non-profits.”

To make a donation or use Amazon Wish List to purchase supplies such as food containers, bottled water and bags for the soup kitchens, go to the website of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, www.ccfairfield.org and click on the link “How you can help us respond to the Covid-19 crisis.”

“Catholic Charities is doing everything we can to step up and step into the void that has been created,” Donoghue said. “We need donations now more than ever to serve the least of our brothers as we’re asked to do in Matthew 25.”

April 2020

Responding to the Pandemic

SHU makes resources available to fight pandemic

FAIRFIELD—When Sacred Heart University’s faculty and staff learned they would be working from home during the coronavirus pandemic, they chose to be proactive, rather than sit back and watch the world struggle. They started asking each other, “How can we help?” And they came up with answers.

Within days, faculty came together and devised plans to help those who are fighting the crisis on the front lines.

Neighboring communities have been seeking shelters for first responders who may have been exposed to COVID-19 and need to self-isolate for 14 days away from their families. Sacred Heart is providing these responders, as well as health-care workers and other displaced persons requested by local authorities, with a place to stay.

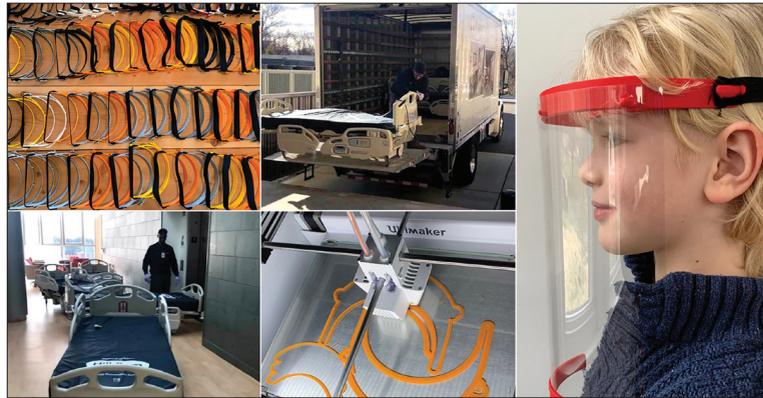
“No one wants to bring this infection home, but they’re put on that front line to fight this pandemic,” said Gary MacNamara, SHU’s executive director of public safety and governmental affairs. “We hope all local emergency responders and health professionals know they have a home at Sacred Heart for as long as they need it.”

MacNamara, former Fairfield police chief, is encouraging all emergency responders to pack a travel bag and bring it with them to work each day. If they are exposed, they won’t have to go home for personal belongings; they can just come to the University.

When administrators from Bridgeport Hospital reached out to SHU looking for equipment to set up a temporary patient-housing tent, Mary Alice Donius, dean of the Dr. Susan L. Davis, RN, & Richard J. Henley College of Nursing, didn’t think twice. Within an hour, she let the administrators know the Center for Healthcare Education could provide 12 set-ups for the hospital’s tent. Each includes a bed or cot, trash can, side table or cart with drawers, over-bed table and an IV pole.

“If we can help, we will,” Donius said. “We are happy to provide any services we can to the health-care workers fighting this fight.”

The University also distributed additional medical supplies



to area hospitals. This included surgical masks, N95 masks, gloves and hand sanitizer, all which would normally be used by students in SHU’s nursing and health professions programs. Sacred Heart also offered to house tents on its campus for hospitals in need of extra space for its COVID-19 patients.

SHU President John J. Petillo

shared his thoughts in an editorial for the Hartford Courant requesting that the state lift regulations and allow medical students and students in health professions who are about to graduate to be allowed to work as soon as possible. Governor Lamont has since made that decision.

In light of the nationwide shortage of personal protective

equipment (PPE), professor Tolga Kaya and IDEA Lab manager Cedric Bleimling of the Jack Welch College of Business & Technology (WCBT) took home 3D printers from the University’s IDEA Lab to manufacture face shields for health-care workers. “We filled my minivan with the printers and dropped them off at our houses, all while practicing social distancing,” said Kaya, who is also director of the engineering program in the School of Computer Science & Engineering. “We are going to do whatever we can do to help the world.”

To make the shields, these professors ordered plastic and elastic fabric online. The 3D printers manufacture two pieces for the masks: the top part of the shield, which holds the elastic fabric or headband, and a bottom

piece that enables the plastic to stay curved around the user’s face. Kaya estimated each shield costs about \$5.

The printers produce materials to make one mask per hour. The faculty members have made more than 100 masks so far.

Kaya and Bleimling are also taking part in an initiative to create ventilators, a device that helps patients breathe. Hospitals across the country are struggling with ventilator shortages. The IDEA Lab team took part in a local initiative led by MakeHaven, a makerspace in New Haven, to prototype a ventilator based on an existing Israeli design called “AmboVent.” If the coalition is successful, Bleimling said a production batch could help fight the shortages in local hospitals.

“Think of all the people who could be saved,” Kaya said. ■

Young Adults meet virtually

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—Young adults ages 18-35 recently joined Bishop Frank J. Caggiano for a virtual town hall meeting.

The event, co-sponsored by The Leadership Institute and the Diocesan Youth Advisory Council, was an opportunity for young adults to share their prayers, their anxieties and their hopes with their bishop as we all navigate these uncertain days.

“The purpose is to walk in faith together, that’s really our goal tonight,” the bishop assured those who were gathered.

Mike Falbo and Devon McCormick, co-chairs of the Diocesan Youth Advisory Council facilitated the event.

Facilitators posed the questions: In what ways are you being shaped by God right now in your life? What new spirit is being formed in you, especially in this time of anxiety and uneasiness?

“This period that we have lived in,” the bishop used the Scripture as an example, “we are on the boat with the apostles amidst the storm, not

a clue where the boat is going... we know the Lord is here but he is not giving clear direction as to where it is going.”

The bishop explained that to make the decision for the public suspension of Mass was the most difficult decision he had to make. “Even though I am the bishop, I am not in charge...the Lord is.” For me it is a learning process... learning to trust the Lord,” the bishop said.

The bishop gave assurance that the health and safety of the clergy and the faithful are of the utmost concern at this time. “My great fear is that we will have to do this all over again,” he said. “We have gone through an incredibly fearful time...if we were to be shut down a second time, that would be a catastrophe.”

Young adults praised Bishop Caggiano’s transparency and how he is open to hearing and answering questions of the faithful.

When asked what we can learn from this time “in the desert” young adults gave uplifting answers. Cait explained that the fact that we have so much more free time presents us with the opportunity to grow closer to God and spend more time with him

in prayer. Javier commented that this time has made us all the more hungry for time in prayer and ado-

can come to know God more deeply in these ways...together, those three help us to learn



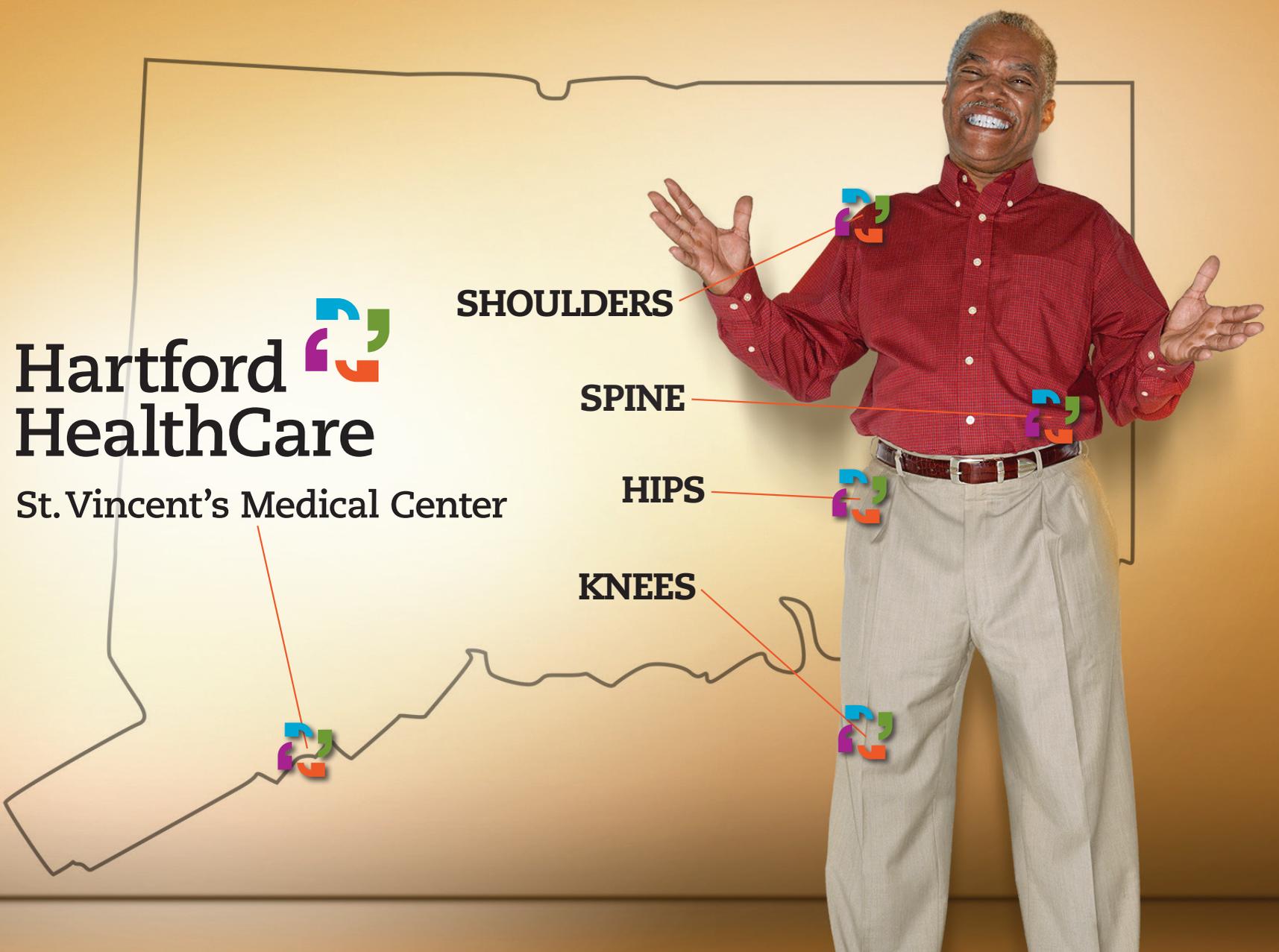
ration, for the Eucharist and the Mass, and has helped us realize the need for community

Tiffany compared this time of uncertainty and the unknown to that of Holy Saturday. The bishop expanded upon this saying that Mary Magdala stayed when everyone else left. “She knew the Lord would keep His promise and she is one of the patron saints that we can draw close to in this time of waiting,” he said.

“St. Thomas speaks of three paths—truth, beauty and goodness,” said the bishop. “Everyone has to ask themselves how they

the faith.”

Young adults discussed their appreciation for all essential workers without whose jobs we could not live—grocery store workers, doctors and nurses, and delivery workers... just to name a few. The gathered shared stories of loved ones who are working in the medical field and the things they are experiencing, reflecting on the importance that we all stay home and do what we can now out of respect for all life, and prayers were promised for all. ■



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