



FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

DECEMBER 2020 | VOLUME 37, NUMBER 10 | CHRISTMAS ISSUE

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Around the Diocese

Advent has begun!

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

FAIRFIELD COUNTY—Parishes and schools throughout the diocese have been embracing the Season of Advent in joyful waiting.



Coats and more...

NEWTOWN—Newtown Council 185 collected 500+ coats and received donations for many more. They delivered coats to the Thomas Merton Center in Bridgeport, the Danbury Family and Children's Aid and the Newtown school children that have been designated. Great work!



Assumption School, Fairfield

FAIRFIELD—At Assumption Catholic School in Fairfield, an Advent wreath adorns the hall in front of a statue of Our Blessed Mother.



Jesse Tree Ornaments

FAIRFIELD—The fifth-graders at St. Thomas Aquinas in Fairfield created their own Jesse Tree ornaments, used to help tell the story of the Bible from creation to the birth of Jesus. The students read a different Bible story each day before hanging their ornaments on the tree!

Lighting the Advent Wreath at St. Mary's School

BETHEL—At St. Mary School in Bethel, Father Corey lit the Advent wreath and shared a blessing with all the students and faculty.



Knights set up Creche

BRIDGEPORT—Knights of Columbus St. Frances X Cabrini Council 4096 helped their pastor at St. Andrew Church in Bridgeport by putting up the Christmas decorations in the Church and setting up the crèche! Great work to all!



Operation Christmas Child

NEW CANAAN—St. Aloysius School in New Canaan participated in Operation Christmas Child—graciously and generously filling boxes with toys, school supplies, personal hygiene products, and letters of love and care to 86 children in need!



A Class Blessing!

FAIRFIELD—Father Peter Cipriani blessed Assumption Fairfield students and faculty. Every prayer and blessing can make all the difference!

Joining Al's Angels

STRATFORD—Youth and adults from St. Mark Parish in Stratford recently helped assemble 1,600 bins of food for families in need with Al's Angels! Please keep these families in your prayers this holiday season!



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Diocesan News

Queen of Saints Hall is a COVID-19 testing site

By **BRIAN D. WALLACE**

BRIDGEPORT—To help combat the spread of COVID-19 in the greater Bridgeport area, the Queen of Saints Hall of the Catholic Center is now being used as an on-site location for both COVID-19 and antibody tests.

The Diocese of Bridgeport announced an agreement with Progressive Diagnostics, LLC of Trumbull, a clinical medical laboratory, which has begun providing high-volume, COVID-19 PCR (saliva) testing along with antibody blood tests (beginning next week) that are FDA EUA approved.

“We’re very proud of this initiative, which is offering an essential service to help flatten the curve and safeguard lives in our community,” said Deacon Patrick Toole, episcopal vicar for administration of the Diocese of Bridgeport.

“Masks, testing and contact tracing are essential until there is a widely available vaccine, and this offers a timely new option for people, particularly as the pandemic is expected to surge over the next few months,” said Deacon Toole.

Curt Kuliga, entrepreneur, CEO and founder of Progressive Diagnostics in Trumbull, said, “Our whole purpose is to expand access to quality affordable care.

We are simply blessed to be in partnership with the Diocese of Bridgeport and the forward-thinking leadership of Deacon Pat Toole, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano and many of the clergy and staff, who are committed to expanding care in their communities during the pandemic.”

“The collaboration with the Church will not only provide access to FDA EUA authorized PCR saliva testing, but it will also add jobs as we continue to expand patient collection centers throughout the diocese. The Church has an altruistic spirit, which aligns well with our company’s thinking.”

Brian Bellows, chief strategy officer of Progressive Diagnostics, who is a parishioner of St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull and has served for many years on the board of St. Joseph High School in Trumbull, has been instrumental in forging the partnership, which may bring additional test sites to other diocesan locations.

Deacon Toole said the decision to open Queen of Saints Hall for testing is consistent with the considerable health and safety protocols the diocese has introduced in its parishes and schools since the beginning of the pandemic.

He said that Progressive Diagnostics has designed a system



COVID-19 testing by appointment is open to all.

that ensures all patients are socially distant and professional specialized cleaning is performed between visits and every evening. As an added measure, the HVAC units that supply the heat/ac to the hall are being equipped with state of the art Air Scrubber ActivePure Technology to purify the air and reduce exposure to bacteria and viruses, FDA EUA approved.

“Their primary concern is the safety and health of their patients, Catholic Center employees and the community. Accordingly, they implemented policies and procedures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus,” Deacon Toole said.

Queen of Saints Hall provides a separate entrance for those who come to the building for testing. The side door to the hall, adjacent to the parking lot, also allows for easy access, while the

rest of the 75,000 square foot building remains off-limits.

All testing is by appointment only with times available between 9 am-5 pm Monday through Friday during the week and a separate drive-up testing on Saturdays 9 am-3 pm within the parking lot.

Testing results are generally available within 48 to 72 hours. Progressive Diagnostics accepts all forms of health insurance.

Catholic Center building unites two eras of pandemic

The repurposing of part of the 75,000 square foot Catholic Center campus to respond to a pandemic unites two eras in the Church and in Bridgeport history. While the facility now houses the Offices of the Bishop and many diocesan ministries and programs, much of the building history is related to its role as a contagious disease

hospital.

First opened in 1917 in response to the Spanish flu, it was hailed as a modern hospital, the structure was known to generations of area residents as Englewood Hospital, as it treated successive waves of scarlet fever, mumps, measles and polio.

The building was expanded again in 1962 when the Diocese of Bridgeport purchased the site as the home of Notre Dame Girls High School after the city closed the hospital.

According to officials at the University of Connecticut Health Center, the 1918 Spanish flu has been described as the catastrophe against which all modern pandemics are measured. Health experts believe that as many as 100 million people around the globe may have perished in the outbreak—which is believed to have infected up to 40 percent of the earth’s population.

The Spanish flu had a grim efficiency that rivaled the medieval plague. Many of the 1918-19 victims woke up in full health and were dead within 24 hours—dying of suffocation after their lungs filled with fluid. Eight thousand people died in Connecticut during the last four months of 1918.

The Catholic Center is located at 238 Jewett Avenue in Bridgeport. ■

Deacon Blawie to be ordained to the priesthood

By **ELIZABETH CLYONS**

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano will ordain Deacon Brendan Blawie to the priesthood on Saturday, January 2, 2021 at 11 am at St. Augustine’s Cathedral.

Blawie was ordained as a transitional deacon on June 20, 2020 alongside Guy Dormévil.

For transitional deacons, the following year included pastoral, liturgical and an educational preparation period for the priesthood.

Attendance at the ordination will be limited to immediate family members and other invited guests in order to conform to the public health recommendations for returning to indoor Mass during the pandemic.



DEACON BRENDAN BLAWIE

Brendan Blawie was born and raised in Newtown, Conn., and received all of his Sacraments at St. Rose of Lima Parish. He is the middle of three children, with an older brother, Jack, and a younger

sister, Marian. His parents, Karen and John Blawie, raised him in the faith, although he admits to not thinking much about being a priest as a young boy.

Brendan loves sports, having played football and basketball through high school and has earned the rank of Eagle Scout. “It was in high school that I began to actually learn about and love our faith,” he shares.

Brendan enrolled in the Corps of Cadets at Virginia Tech in the Marine Corps ROTC program, before transferring to Franciscan University of Steubenville where he earned his degree in accounting. While there, he still pursued a commission with the Marine Corps, graduating from Officer’s Candidate School in Quantico,

Va. the summer of 2012. This fulfilled a dream he had from his childhood of being a Marine Officer, but in the end, it was clear to him that it may have been his plan, but not the Lord’s.

Instead of commissioning as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Marine Corps, Brendan entered seminary for the Diocese of Bridgeport. He completed my two years of pre-theological studies at St. John Fisher seminary, before being sent to the Pontifical North American College in Rome where he spent three years. In 2019, he received his theology degree, magna cum laude, from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and was on pastoral assignment at St. Thomas More parish in Darien.

In the fall, he returned to the Pontifical North American College in Rome to continue his formation and begin his Licentiate of Sacred Theology in Dogmatics at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas.

“I am filled with gratitude and joy to have arrived at this point in my life, to lay down all that I am, to be configured fully to Christ as His priest,” says Blawie. “I heard the call to ‘leave my net and follow Him’ (Matthew 4:20), and this ordination is the fulfillment of years of discernment, prayer, and study. But it is only the beginning of what I pray will be a fruitful lifetime of service in Christ’s vineyard. Please pray for me as I prepare to approach the altar of our Lord!” ■

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be unto God
for his indescribable gift.

“As we celebrate the seasons of Advent and Christmas may we reflect on the beautiful and holy gift our Father gave us; the greatest gift to humankind. Let us share His goodness with others as we continue to face urgent needs.

The diocese has served thousands of people through the Annual Catholic Appeal, programs for food, housing, educational assistance, psychological support and spiritual consolation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Without the help of compassionate individuals like you, we would not be able to serve all those who turn to us for assistance.

As we share our gifts with friends and family, let us remember those less fortunate than us.

In this season of giving, please accept my profound gratitude for your great generosity throughout the year. Please know that you are in my prayers as I wish you and your families a most blessed, holy Christmas and a Happy New Year.”

— Bishop Frank Caggiano



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Thank you for your generous support, may God bless you during this most holy season.



Annual Catholic Appeal

Opportunities for year-end giving and tax savings

2020 has inspired unprecedented charitable giving throughout the nation and in the Diocese of Bridgeport despite the significant challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many answered God's call to help provide for those in severe need. The Annual Catholic Appeal supports the people of the diocese in the critical areas of charity, education and pastoral ministries. The faithful rose to the challenge and helped others through their financial contributions and volunteer work.

The final weeks of 2020 give us one more chance to express our generosity and support initiatives and charities whose work is a manifestation of our faith in action," said Joe Gallagher, chief development officer of the diocese. Gallagher said that as 2020 comes to a close, it is worth considering year-end giving opportunities. Despite the turmoil and crises that have characterized the past year,

it offers some of the best reasons to make charitable donations, according to financial experts.

Pamela S. Rittman, director of the Annual Catholic Appeal said that during the Advent and Christmas seasons, inspired by the giving spirit, many people not only share gifts with their families and friends but direct donations to organizations that hold meaning, gratitude and hope for others.

"Some wait until the end of the year when they review their philanthropic and financial plans and make decisions based on their annual incentive bonuses or appreciated stock to help with tax benefits," she said.

Rittman said the generosity and faith of parishioners in the diocese through the Annual Catholic Appeal helps change lives every day. When thinking about year-end giving and serving others, there are a number of programs and ministries in the

diocese through the Appeal that meet the greater needs of helping the poor through works of charity, proclaiming the Gospel through vibrant faith and pastoral formation and through Catholic education in our communities.

You should contact your financial planner, accountant or tax lawyer to discuss specific strategies, and now is the time to begin if you haven't already.

One of the most important reasons to give before the year ends is that the 2020 CARES Act tax incentives are due to expire. For those who take a standard deduction, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act allows a one-time, above-the-line deduction of up to \$300 for every cash contribution to a charitable organization. After this provision ends, you will be required to itemize in order to deduct charitable donations.

For people who itemize their deductions, CARES allows them

to deduct up to 100 percent of their adjusted gross income by making cash donations to qualified charitable organizations. When the act expires, the maximum allowable will return to 60 percent of your adjusted gross income. In both cases, in order to qualify, the gifts must be made directly to qualified charities.

In addition, despite the year's economic decline, the stock market is close to historic highs. The S&P 500 market index has almost tripled in the last ten years, which means investors have seen healthy gains in their portfolios.

Rather than sell appreciated stocks or investment assets, pay a capital gain tax and make a cash gift of the proceeds to a charity, you can instead donate the appreciated investment directly to the charity by transferring it "in kind" and not incur any tax on the gain while enjoying the full potential deductible value of the entire gift.

Tax reform several years ago did not eliminate charitable deductions, so donors may still offset portions of their income through cash donations. However, even though 2021 may continue to see an extraordinary need for charitable giving, future tax reform legislation could likely curtail some of the tax benefits that currently exist. Clearly, this year offers an opportunity that could end, so now is the time to take advantage of it.

Pamela Rittman in the Development Office is able to assist you and provide more information on the programs and ministries you may direct your gift to. She can be reached at prittman@diobpt.org or 203.416.1479. When planning a gift through financial strategies, the first step is to consult your tax advisor or financial representative for more information before you make your gift so you receive the benefits while supporting what means the most to you, she said. ■



Blessed Gifts

Diocese of Bridgeport

The Gift of Giving

1. Visit www.BlessedGifts.org to select a ministry area.
2. Dedicate a ministry to a friend or loved one.
3. The Diocese will send a card to your gift recipient or you may print one on your computer or send an e-card.
4. The Diocese will direct your gift to the selected ministry.

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CATHOLIC CHARITIES serves over 10,000 individuals each year through nutrition, counseling and housing programs.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION supports the overall good of Catholic schools, its students and programs through supplies, textbooks, technology and tuition assistance.

SAINT JOHN FISHER SEMINARY prepares college-aged men and young adults for ordination to the priesthood by providing tuition assistance, prayer books, groceries and local travel expenses.

QUEEN OF THE CLERGY PRIEST RETIREMENT HOME supports retired priests who continue to serve. Gifts provide meals, building maintenance, cleaning and utility services.

Blessed Gifts supports your faith in action through ministries across the Diocese of Bridgeport.

To make a gift, please visit www.BlessedGifts.org or call 203.416.1470

DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
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Catholic Charities

Essential work in the crisis

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—When Mike Donoghue took helm of Catholic Charities on December 1, last year, he barely had time to get to know staff and review the agency's many programs when the pandemic hit.

Within days of the state's shutdown orders, the number of people coming forward to Merton Center in Bridgeport and New Covenant Center in Stamford tripled—and that was just the beginning of the demand for service.

Donoghue, who retired from a successful Wall Street career in finance and investment, was no stranger to the non-profit world. He made sure to carve time out of his busy work schedule to volunteer in soup kitchens, serve on boards and give back to the community, but he walked into a crisis of historic proportions.

"It has been a real interesting, challenging and invigorating year. I was just getting settled in and a sense of the organization before the void hit and so many things had to be done at once. This is our super bowl," says Donoghue who along with his Catholic Charities team has more than risen to the challenge.

Priority number one was feeding the people who were suddenly jobless and hungry and were turning to Catholic Charities in record numbers soup kitchens for help.

Beyond dealing with the surging demand for meals and take-home groceries, Donoghue had to contend with the loss of the hundreds of volunteers who could no longer safely work at the nutrition sites. Many were elderly or semi-retired and at greatest risk for complications from the virus—which put incredible demand on the small professional staff.

The staff also had to deal with the challenge of moving all food serving operations outside in order to protect guests and observe appropriate social distancing with the long lines that were forming.

At the same time, many people were struggling with a depression and anxiety that escalated into the need for counseling and behavioral health services. Many poor and working families in particular had nowhere else to turn and relied on Catholic Charities, the largest private service agency in Fairfield County, for professional health, he said.

Donoghue, a Dartmouth graduate and parishioner of St. Aloysius, said he has witnessed first-hand how tough the pandem-

ic has been on the people least able to protect themselves and their children. Many are service workers who immediately lost their jobs in restaurants, hotels, and domestic settings. Some had to make the choice between paying rent or buying food.

He said the hardest hit group has been recent immigrants—many of whom are Catholics and members of parishes in Bridgeport, Stamford, Norwalk and Danbury. They pay taxes but do not qualify for many government service and as a result are very vulnerable

Holding it all together has been a staff of 130 people at work in 30 programs throughout Fairfield County, and Donoghue said he is incredibly proud of the work done being done by his staff under difficult conditions.

"We have a small but really dedicated team of employees at these facilities and they've been incredible. They've been running into the fire every day since pandemic started. While we were sequestered at home trying to be safe, they've put themselves at risk show up every day to feed the homeless, deliver meals to seniors, reach people on the streets through our Homeless outreach

team and provide case management and housing service."

Although the challenges are historic, Donoghue said he has been sustained by the commitment of his staff to mission and the generosity of donors at all levels.

For example, many volunteers who could no longer safely work in the soup kitchens began making sandwiches and preparing food at home, which they could safely drop off at lunch time. And parishes came to the rescue by conducting their own food drives and partnering with Catholic Charities to feed the hungry.

Donoghue said that he has been overwhelmed by the generosity of large and small donors who have stepped up with direct financial support and by giving to the Annual Catholic Appeal (ACA). While the pandemic taken a bite out of traditional fund raisers, the agency has been creative with vir-



MIKE AND CECE DONOGHUE

tual events and has also benefitted from contributions that have significantly helped to narrow what he feared would be a \$2 million budget gap in the crisis.

Donoghue said he's grateful to all those who have supported the work of Catholic Charities, and he believes that many people across the diocese would be pleased to know how much good work is done in the name of the Catholic Church.

"It's a collaborative effort by a tremendous number of people. Certainly Catholics around the diocese should be proud of our work—a lot of people of all faiths working together for one purpose to help the least of our brothers and sisters through a really difficult time." ■

Mike Donoghue on Catholic Charities:

Concerns Going forward:

"Cold weather, keeping employees and clients safe...and finding the funding to provide services. People have been generous but COVID-19 is not over—the needs are greater than ever.

The great un-equalizer:

"Fairfield County is a place of have and have-nots. We're number one in the U.S in terms of income inequality and unfortunately COVID has been the great un-equalizer. People on the high end are doing fine economically and could just move home to work. Our staff is feeding people on the front line, risking their lives and health every day to do essential work."

Heartwarming response:

"It has been heart-warming from my position to see goodness of so many people at times of crisis like this. It's a beautiful thing to see how incredibly generous so many individuals and parishes. In fact, people of other faiths have also stepped up and we've received help in so many different ways."

Support

"What has really helped me get through the last year has been having my wife Cece with me, by my side, seven days a week, working as a volunteer right alongside me. She also chairs the Knights of Malta in Connecticut and they have stepped up to partner with us in feeding the poor.... I'm also grateful to the staff and to my predecessor Al Barber who is now chairing Foundations in Charity. Al is always ready to roll up his sleeves and help."

Dr. LaGratta receives award

DANBURY—During this year's annual Catholic Charities' Danbury Celebrity Breakfast, Dr. Roger LaGratta was honored for serving on the Advisory Board of Catholic Charities of Northern Fairfield County for 40 years.

"I deeply appreciate your recognition," remarked Dr. Roger LaGratta while accepting his honor. "I'm humbled by it and proud of the fact that I've been able to help to serve the greater Danbury area for the past 40 years."

"I would like to thank all the folks whom I've had the privilege to work with on the board and in the community who have generously supported all of the wonderful programs of Catholic Charities," Dr. LaGratta said. "It has been a real blessing for me and I thank them from the bottom of my heart."



DR. ROGER LAGRATTA

Dr. LaGratta serves as the president of the board and has accomplished incredible work on behalf of Catholic Charities and its programs in the Danbury area. Roger LaGratta, M.D., is a retired orthopedic surgeon who is the past president of Danbury Orthopedic Associates. He has also served as chief of orthopedics and as chairman of the department of

surgery at Danbury Hospital, in addition to serving as president of the orthopedic section of the Connecticut State Medical Society. He has been a board member for Catholic Charities of Danbury for approximately 40 years and has previously served as its president. He is a recipient of the Mary Dolce Memorial award and of the St. Augustine Medal of Service. Together with his wife, Constance, who is a trustee at St. Joseph Parish, Danbury, they believe strongly in the mission of Catholic Charities.

(If you would like to learn more about how you can become involved in the work of Catholic Charities and its mission, please email Mike Donoghue at mdonoghue@ccfc-ct.org. For more information on Catholic Charities, its programs and services, visit the agency website at www.ccfairfield.org.) ■

Parish News

A special welcoming committee greets faithful at St. Mary of Stamford

By **JOE PISANI**

STAMFORD—At St. Mary of Stamford Parish, they have a special way of letting people know everyone is welcome in the House of God.

Some 40 men and women, who are part of a Welcoming Committee ministry at St. Mary and St. Benedict-Our Lady of Monserrat, greet people at every Mass...but there's a lot more to it than just saying "hello" at the door, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They are the face of the parish," said pastor Father Gustavo Falla. "There is always someone there to welcome you, give you a bulletin and help if you need assistance. They pick up the collections and help set up before Mass."

With the regulations for protection during COVID-19, they also take temperatures and guide people through the process of registering, not to mention sanitizing the pews and kneelers after every Mass.

"They have been very effective and are dedicated and faithful to their tasks," Father said, adding that they even deal with disgruntled visitors. One Sunday, a family was upset when they discovered they were supposed to reg-

ister, so the ushers got involved and handled the situation before it escalated.

The members of the ministry, who come from both churches, have also been a force for unity following the recent merger. Father says that the language differences have not been a barrier to communicating because they share a common commitment to the parish and love to work together. The group also took it upon themselves to wear uniforms and are easily recognizable in their black suits and white shirts.

"They are a constant presence and spiritually committed to their work, and they truly love the church," Father said. "They are proud of the work they do and they do it well. They are a very good example for others in unifying our churches because they are seen in public working together."

In fact, they are so spiritually committed to their ministry that they gather after Mass and pray together and hold regular meetings to discuss spiritual matters. Father occasionally will give talks to them about the faith and makes time available to have personal conversations with members about issues concerning them. They have also invited guest



WELCOMING COMMITTEE—The 40-member Welcoming Committee of St. Mary Parish in Stamford are "the face of the parish" says pastor Father Gustavo Falla, and they are also a force for unity in bringing together parishes of St. Mary and St. Benedict-Our Lady of Monserrat who have come together to form the new parish after the recent merger.

speakers to come.

"It is interesting to see how they are very compassionate, and when one person in the group has a hardship, they join together and reach out to help," he said.

Both parishes have had a history of ushers, but since their merger and the pandemic, their ranks have grown, and they assist at every function of the parish.

At St. Benedict-Our Lady of Monserrat, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed from 8 am to 8 pm every Sunday, and the ushers are there before the church opens. They have rotating shifts throughout the day until after 8 pm, so

that someone is always there to adore the Blessed Sacrament.

"I could not open the doors of the church if I didn't have ushers," Father said. "They have a very important responsibility, and from the pulpit, I often ask people to acknowledge the essential work they do for us with applause."

Early in October, as a gesture of his appreciation, Father arranged a cookout for the group outside the rectory, with the appropriate social distancing.

The Welcoming Committee is present at every Mass—at St. Mary on Sunday at 8, 10 and

noon; and at St. Benedict on Saturday at 4 in English and 6 in Spanish. They will also participate at a new Mass in English for children that will begin on December 6 at 11 am at St. Benedict.

One other indispensable task they perform is to bring prayer petitions to Father from the people who come to Mass.

"Before Mass, some people will come with different requests for prayer, and they go to the ushers and say, 'Would you please tell Father I need a prayer for this or that,'" he said. "They write it out and bring it to me in the sacristy so that it can be included in the petitions. Someone may be having surgery or celebrating a birthday or even coming to the church for the first time."

On a recent Sunday, a family came to Mass with their newborn baby to observe a tradition common in Central America, where 40 days after the birth, the parents bring the baby to church as a "Presentation," just as Jesus was presented in the Temple.

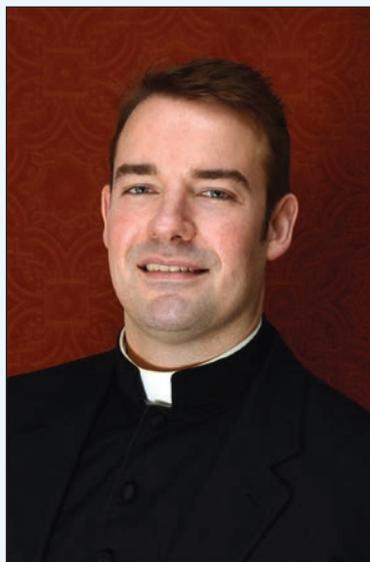
"The baby and the family came together and asked the priest to introduce their child before God," Father said. "The parishioners clapped and said the Hail Mary and Glory Be and then I blessed the family." ■

Father Lenox named Episcopal Vicar for Liturgy

BRIDGEPORT—Father Peter Lenox has been named episcopal vicar for liturgy and worship. The appointment was made by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, effective October 1, 2020.

"Father Lenox assumes this important new ministry well qualified to provide assistance both to me and to the pastors and pastoral leaders of our diocese," said Bishop Caggiano. He will be of great assistance to all in matters of liturgy, worship and sacred music."

In making the announcement, Bishop Caggiano said that Father Lenox will also continue to serve as adminis-



FATHER PETER LENOX

trator of Sacred Heart Parish in Georgetown.

Father Lenox recently returned from Rome, having completed two licentiates, both from the Athenaeum of Saint Anselm: a master's (second level) in Liturgical Music and a licentiate in Sacred Liturgy (SSL).

The bishop said that given the ongoing effects of the pandemic, he has asked Father Lenox to use the balance of the current pastoral year (through the summer of 2021) to assist with the revision of diocesan sacramental guidelines which is now underway, and to serve as one of the liturgical consultants in the work

of the Buildings and Sacred Arts Commission.

In Rome, Father Lenox enrolled at the Benedictine University, the Pontificio Ateneo Sant' Anselmo and at Pontifical Institute for Sacred Music. The bishop said he asked Father Lenox to pursue the degree because of his intellectual abilities, great skills as an accomplished musician and his unwavering fidelity to the Church and its teachings.

Father Lenox was ordained in 2000 in St. Augustine Cathedral by Bishop Edward M. Egan. He served at St. Andrew Parish in Bridgeport, St. Mary Parish in Ridgefield and St. Benedict-Our

Lady of Montserrat Parish in Stamford.

He was named administrator of St. Patrick Parish in Bridgeport in 2011, and became administrator of the Cathedral Parish when St. Patrick's and St. Augustine were combined into one parish in 2012. In June 30, 2014

After returning from his studies in Rome, Father Lenox was appointed pastor of St. Joseph Parish in South Norwalk and guided the parish through the merger with St. Ladislaus Parish, which Bishop Caggiano announced on June 19, 2020. ■

EDITORIAL

Christmas Vigil

In order to accommodate the large numbers expected to attend Mass over Christmas, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has issued a one-time exemption for Christmas Vigil Masses to start at 2 pm on Thursday December 24. The earlier time will enable pastors to schedule more Masses and give the faithful additional options to worship safely and with proper social distancing.

The bishop said that the pandemic has presented numerous challenges to worship, and that pastors throughout the diocese are working to invite the faithful to the celebration of the Nativity with a tone of hopefulness and joy. We are extremely grateful to all of our priests for their faithful and devout service throughout the year, and for their preparations for the coming Holy Days of Christmas.

"Some will return to church on Christmas for the first time, others will long for the pre-pandemic time when they could simply 'show up' for Mass without signing up or signing in," the bishop said, adding that the celebration of Christmas provides us with an opportunity to extend a sincere welcome and ensure an environment that is safe and reverent for all.

In announcing the earlier Christmas vigil time, the bishop reiterated that people should wear masks and register in advance for Mass to enable parishes to plan and safeguard health. Because of the added Masses, it's important to check your parish bulletin and website for the new Mass times and registration information.

A Covid Year

As the second surge of the pandemic takes hold, many of us are now beginning to know friends, families and neighbors who have tested positive or are suffering with the virus. Since March, the pandemic has disrupted our lives—closing churches and schools and relegating us to the onerous and discouraging state of living behind a mask. Yet up until this point, we have been fortunate enough to be able to work at home, have access to food and remain relatively untouched by the illness.

However, it has been a much more difficult—even tragic—story for many others. In his interview with Fairfield County Catholic (page 6) Mike Donoghue, executive director of Catholic Charities, points out that for the poor and most vulnerable, COVID-19 has brought immediate and lasting hardship: illness, loss of jobs, waiting in line for food, constant anxiety and increasing uncertainty about their future.

For the past ten months, COVID-19 has consumed the attention of our schools, parishes and diocesan ministries. (see timeline on page 20) Much planning and many resources have been directed to safeguarding people while keeping our Churches and schools open. The good news is that the protocols put in place by the diocese have protected lives and enabled us to continue with the vital work of the Church. To date there is no known transmission of the virus in any diocesan church or school.

Special thanks go to Deacon Pat Toole, Episcopal Vicar for Administration, who working closely with Bishop Caggiano has been the architect of diocesan policies that have saved lives while ensuring reverent worship and essential sacramental services, and to Dr. Steven Cheeseman who has worked around the clock to keep our schools open while safeguarding the health of children and families.

While responding to the crisis caused by the virus has been the focus of much of the year 2020, what is equally remarkable is the considerable achievement of the diocese and its parishes under extremely difficult and historically challenging conditions. The sacramental life of the Church has remained vibrant; faith formation, Catholic education, and other essential ministries have found innovative ways to continue their work, and the faithful in our parishes have reached out to the most vulnerable with extraordinary generosity and service.

As we move swiftly toward the end of the year and await the imminent arrival of the vaccine, let us also find great hope and joy in the coming of Christmas. And let us pray that the light of Christ will shine through the darkness of our present moment and guide us into a New Year of faith, health, and gratitude for our lives. ■

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Moved by the joy of the gift, little Child of Bethlehem, we ask that your crying may shake us from our indifference and open our eyes to those who are suffering.

May your tenderness awaken our sensitivity and recognize our call to see you in all those who arrive in our cities, in our histories, in our lives.

May your tenderness persuade us to feel our call to be agents of the hope of our people. Amen

— Pope Francis



CLERGY APPOINTMENTS

The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport, has made the following clergy appointments in the Diocese of Bridgeport:

VICAR GENERAL

REVEREND MONSIGNOR THOMAS W. POWERS, Reappointed as Vicar General for an additional five-year term. Effective date was November 15.

PASTOR

REVEREND MICHAEL K. JONES, from Pastor of Saint Lawrence Parish, Shelton, to Pastor, Saint Mary Parish, Greenwich. Effective date is January 31, 2021.

EPISCOPAL VICAR

REVEREND AUGUSTINE NGUYEN, appointed to continue as ex officio member of the Presbyteral Council representing the Episcopal Vicar for the Vietnamese Catholic Community. Effective date was November 4, for a term of three years.

PAROCHIAL VICAR

REVEREND FRANCIS ELDRIDGE, SA, from Saint Mary Parish, Stamford, to Saint Peter Parish, Danbury. Effective date was November 15.

RETIREMENT

REVEREND MONSIGNOR CHRISTOPHER J. WALSH, to Retirement. Monsignor will continue to reside at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bridgeport. Effective date is January 2, 2021

REVEREND BOSE RAJ SELVARAJ, to retirement. Father will reside at the Catherine Dennis Keefe Queen of The Clergy Residence in Stamford. Effective date is January 1, 2021.

OUT OF DIOCESE

REVEREND PAUL N. CHECK,

will begin full time ministry at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Effective date is January 1, 2021 for a term of five years.

DIOCESAN VOCATIONS TEAM

REVEREND CHRISTOPHER J. FORD, appointed to the Chair of Vocations. Father Ford will continue to minister as part-time Parochial Vicar at St. Gregory the Great Parish in Danbury. Effective date was December 1

SABBATICAL

REVEREND JOHN J. INSERRA, extended Sabbatical through January 31, 2021.

Reverend Francis T. Hoffmann
Vicar for Clergy
December, 2020

FAIRFIELD COUNTY
CATHOLICOffice
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
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

John Grosso
Social Media Leader jgrosso@diobpt.org

Ronnie Lazzaro
Copy Editor (Consultant)

Advertise

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Editorial



A childlike faith

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.

While teaching his disciples the importance of a humble heart, Jesus said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

I have noticed a lot of things about myself during the coronavirus pandemic, but one of them has been my tendency to revert back to things that promise comfort and simplicity during uncertain times.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I couldn't watch anything but funny, lighthearted cartoons. Give me slapstick humor and animation, I didn't need to think about anything more dramatic than that.

As time has passed, I've been able to cycle back in a steady amount of regular tv and movies (although you won't find me watching Contagion or Pandemic anytime soon), but I definitely find myself holding onto things that brought me comfort as a

child—whether that be the Amy Grant Christmas album we used to listen to while putting up the tree, or a walk to a familiar nearby orchard with my mom.

Instead of reaching for books of extreme literary prowess and complicated prose, I find myself reaching for the fun mystery or the lighthearted yet uncomplicated love story. They may not be the most influential works of literature ever produced, but after a steady stream of frightening news, it's nice to pick up something or do something that makes you remember what it was like to be a wide-eyed kid, with complete trust that everything was going to be alright.

For this same reason, some people (including myself) enjoy a good Hallmark Channel Christmas movie. We know the plot is simple, we know the characters are cheesy, and we absolutely know what will happen in the end—but, I think, that may

just be the draw of it. There is something comforting in knowing what is going to happen, in the familiarity of it all, especially at a time when we can't say that about very much.

Can we approach the Christmas season in a similar way? Let's lean into all the joy of it, just like we did as children. May our eyes grow wide at the imperfect perfectness of our freshly cut Christmas tree, and our hearts lift as each light comes to life.

When Jesus welcomed the children to Him in Matthew 19:13-15, he admired their complete trust. Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”

(Matthew 19:14).

Can we have the same trust, even during these uncertain times? And what does that childlike faith look like for us?

Perhaps it's that cartoon, or that movie, or that song that brings you back to a happy memory. There aren't parties to plan this year, and not as many eyes will be gazing

upon our lights display, so what will we use that time to focus on instead?

There is so much that is difficult and scary and complicated in the world today. We all know the Christmas story...and we know what is going to happen, in fact that is the very basis of our faith. That should bring us comfort and joy this season!

“For this same reason, some people (including myself) enjoy a good Hallmark Channel Christmas movie.”



Just in time for Christmas—political grudges

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

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

Some of my relatives and friends have put nasty warnings on social media that go something like this: “If you voted for—(fill in the blank), you're not worthy to be my friend or relative, so I'm disowning you. Don't ever talk to me again!”

Just in time for Christmas.

Even crazier, I've seen columnists and newscasters issue virtually the same ultimatum: “You're not worthy to be my mother, father, sister or brother because of what you did blah, blah, blah. I can never forgive you! Repent before it's too late!” Politics always brings out the worst in us, but now it seems

to have ignited a sort of mass hysteria that eerily reminds me of Dostoevsky's novel “The Possessed.” Everyone's screaming, “You're dead to me!”

For a while, I considered doing the same thing because I could have saved a lot of money by not sending out Christmas cards, but then I gave in to the better angels of our nature and sent out cards with a pro-life message.

I'm convinced many families canceled Thanksgiving get-togethers not because of COVID but because of political differences. Christmas could surely suffer the same fate even though it should be a time for

peace on Earth, good will toward Democrats and Republicans... and Independents.

The self-righteous across the land are doing a lot of finger pointing, and it reminds me of the story about the woman caught in adultery, where all the holier-than-thou people were ready to stone her to death until Jesus uttered his timeless challenge, “Let he (or she) without sin cast the first stone.” What's terrifying is they probably thought they were acting in the cause of social justice.

A debilitating spiritual virus is spreading across the land, which has the side-effect of turning people into Pharisees, many of whom think they're without sin and are ready and willing to cast the first stone. I don't ever recall a time so troubled when people condemned anyone and everyone who didn't think the way they do—not even during the Vietnam era.

Jesus didn't have much patience for people who went around passing judgement on everyone else. Why? Because judgement is reserved for God

alone—not political activists, not televangelists, not college professors and certainly not commentators and columnists.

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged,” he said.

He also said that before we start looking for the splinter in our brother's eye, we should go to the ophthalmologist and have him check out the beam in our own eye.

I still remember my father dressing me down when I was passing judgment on my sister for some indiscretion or other. “Take your own inventory,” he growled. It was a piece of wisdom he got in Alcoholics Anonymous.

We're Christians first, not Democrats or Republicans. Politics is the problem...not the solution. At least that's my opinion, and I'm freely expressing it until the thought police come to take me away or Facebook or Twitter censor me.

We should always pray for the grace to put Christ the King before any civic authority.

Turmoil erupts when

Catholics put politics before what our religion teaches. Political agendas are no substitute for faith.

Over the years, I've told my kids that when they go face to face with Christ and have to explain what they did, it won't strengthen their case to say, “But the New York Times said it was OK!” or “A lot of people are doing it!”

If you want a Christmas with peace on Earth and in your family, then put Christ first and concentrate on your own flaws, not everyone else's.

One last thought. Look for the good in people, not the bad. In his first inaugural address, newly elected President Abraham Lincoln offered this consolation to the defeated Democrats, many of whom supported slavery: “We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

It's time to call out to those angels for help.

We Stand With Christ

\$30 million back to parishes and foundations

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Caggiano recently announced that the We Stand With Christ capital campaign has already distributed \$30 million back to parishes and the three diocesan foundations for faith, education and charity.

As of September 30, 2020, the We Stand With Christ Board of Directors had authorized \$16.1 million to be disbursed to parishes, while \$13.4 million was approved to return to the foundations. All the campaign funds are processed by a third-party vendor, and the We Stand With Christ board approves distributions to parishes and foundations on a quarterly basis.

The campaign, which is the most successful in the 67-year history of the Diocese of Bridgeport, was envisioned by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano after the 2015 diocesan synod to sustain the work of the Catholic Church in Fairfield County for future generations.

“When we launched the We Stand With Christ Campaign, I

don't think that any of us could have anticipated the extraordinary situation we have faced during the past year and the impact it has had on so many lives in our diocese,” said Bishop Caggiano. “The pandemic illuminated the need for long-term funding for our diocesan ministries, especially those that support those most vulnerable in our midst.”

Seventy parishes are in the redemption phase of the We Stand With Christ campaign, while five others are actively fundraising this year. Three additional parishes will conduct their capital campaigns in 2021.

Many parishes in the redemption phase began construction on their capital projects earlier this spring, as they began receiving funds back from We Stand With Christ.

“Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March, We Stand With Christ has received over \$10 million in payments on campaign pledges,” said Robert O'Brien,

capital campaign director. “This extraordinary generosity has allowed parishes to continue the capital projects they had planned. But in order to continue, parishes are relying upon donors to fulfill their We Stand With Christ commitments.”

According to O'Brien, funds pledged to We Stand With Christ are being redeemed according to their projected schedule. This has allowed parishes to begin their capital projects, but also for the endowments to begin generating interest. “While 2020 has been a challenge, we're seeing a firm commitment to our bishop's vision and our pastors' plans.”

“The five-year pledges gave pastors the ability to plan for their parishes' future,” O'Brien said. “It also gave the Catholic Church in Fairfield County an innovative way to sustain itself for generations to come.”

While donors can spread payment of their pledges over five

years, some donors have chosen to pre-pay their pledges so that their parishes can begin their projects sooner, he said. Donors should also be aware of the charitable giving incentive created by the CARES Act, passed in Congress earlier this year. For those who have the means, it may be possible to deduct up to 100 percent of their adjusted gross income in 2020 for charitable giving, up from 60 percent last year. This may create an opportunity to pre-pay their pledges and receive a 2020 tax benefit. All donors should consult their tax advisor to see if this applies to them.

Pastors receive monthly reports on the redemption progress of their parishes, and some have designated a staff member or volunteer to oversee pledge redemption. One example is the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist in Stamford, where volunteer Margarita Ucero assists parishioners in the process.

Msgr. Stephen DiGiovanni asked her to oversee the redemption of the We Stand With Christ capital campaign, and she designed and implemented a process for the parish that enables close monitoring of the redemption. It has routines in place for tracking delinquency and triggering remediation actions to keep it low, she said.

“At a practical operational level, Msgr. DiGiovanni's leadership and vision enabled the creation of

the adequate infrastructure at the parish to manage the redemption process of the pledges from the WSWC campaign,” she said.

“Thanks to him, we remained united in the collective effort of achieving the necessary financial goals and continued with our pledge commitments.”

She also said that during his more than 20 years as pastor, Msgr. DiGiovanni, who was recently named pastor emeritus, has inspired parishioners to come together and do as much as possible for the Church.

“Our beautiful Basilica has been renovated, enhanced and kept up to shine as a center of faith in Stamford,” she said. “His integrity, dedication, and care for the spiritual well-being of St. John's parishioners is what gets translated into leadership to drive the success of projects like the We Stand With Christ campaign and the Basilica's Rectory renovation project.”

St. Rose of Lima Parish in Newtown, is another parish that has benefited from a strong redemption plan. St. Rose, which began their capital campaign in 2018, has already redeemed 70 percent of their campaign pledges. Msgr. Weiss stated “This has not been an easy year, but I am tremendously grateful for our parishioners continued support for our church throughout the pandemic.”



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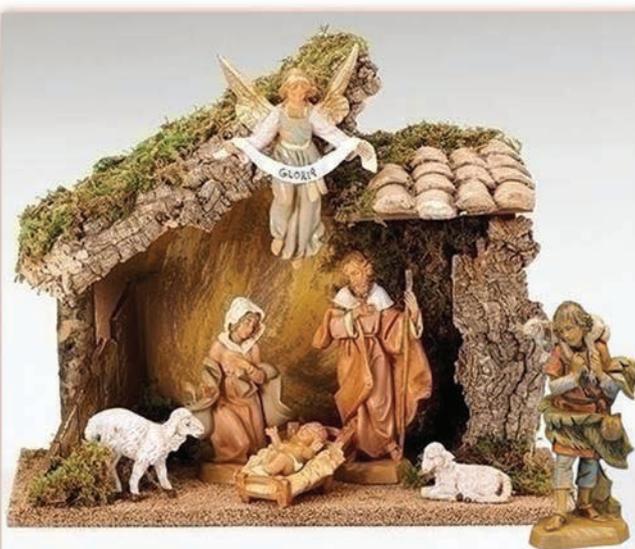
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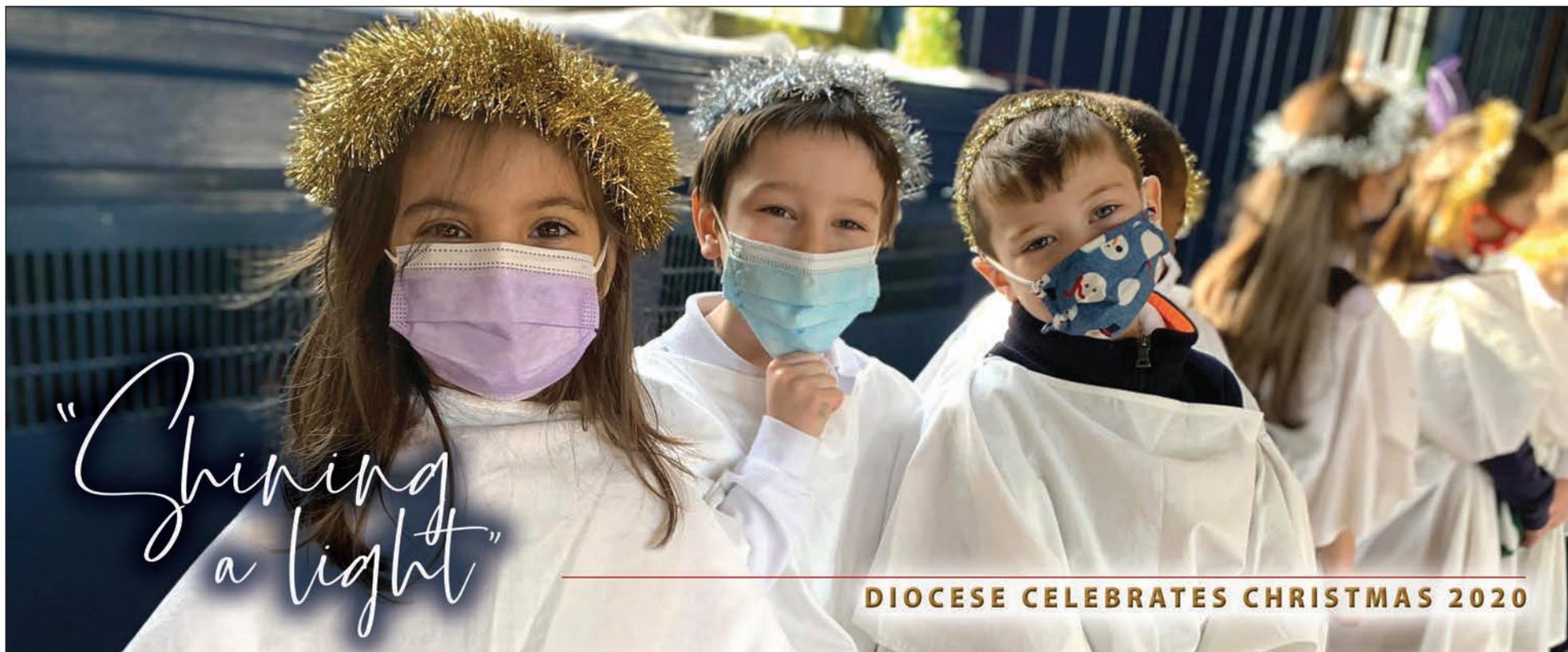
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Are you one of the over 15,000 donors to the We Stand With Christ campaign?

Well here's what you need to know...

- **WHERE ARE WE NOW?** 70 parishes have completed their We Stand With Christ capital campaigns. Five parishes are completing their campaigns in 2020 and three parishes will run their campaigns in 2021.
- **DISTRIBUTIONS?** \$30 million of capital campaign contributions have been distributed to parishes and the three foundations to date as of 9/30/2020 as approved by the We Stand With Christ Board of Directors.
- **HOW CAN YOU HELP?** Choose to fulfill your pledge online to save the costs of mailed remittances. **Payments via credit card and direct debit can be made by visiting www.GiveCentral.org/WSWC.**
- **QUESTIONS?** We want to hear from you with any concerns or issues you are experiencing. Contact the campaign at 203.648.9050 or at Campaign@WeStandWithChrist.org.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to this campaign and the many wonderful programs and projects that will benefit from your support!



Immaculate H.S. Students: A Shining Light

DANBURY—Local residents in the Danbury area have been deeply touched by the student-initiated efforts made for those living in the community who have been facing economic and personal challenges that have been magnified by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing that many within their own high school community were experiencing difficulties as a result of the pandemic, Immaculate students began working together to help each other bring dignity and comfort through acts of kindness. “This year, the season of giving thanks and preparing for Christmas has ignited a special spiritual and personal energy among our students. They have been reflecting on their own blessings and have been a shining light by actively reaching out to others during a time when so many feel a sense of darkness,” says school President Mary Maloney.

Students decorated over 400 pumpkins donated by Hollandia Nursery in Bethel and Halas Farms in Danbury. Some of the pumpkins were distributed to local homes located on streets that were closed for children to trick or treat. The remaining pumpkins were distributed with a Thanksgiving blessing note to neighbors living close to the school’s campus, including the residents at the St. John Paul II Center. Principal Wendy Neil shares that “The simple gesture of students being present for others by providing an inspirational note and a pumpkin brought immeasurable joy to those who received one. What a wonderful way for students to show an appreciation



to God for all that He has done for them.”

Two students, Micheala Martin, Abbe Radigan and their Campus Ministry team, collected and delivered coats, snow pants and pairs of snow boots to the Family and Children’s Aid Center in Danbury. “I am beyond happy with the outcome of the drive, collecting over 500 coats! None of that could have been done without the help of Immaculate, friends and family coming together to help the community,” Says Abbe. “It made me so happy that all the donations were going to those in need and that our efforts would help Family and Children’s Aid in Danbury make a difference in many people’s lives this winter,” says Michaela. To further support the Mayor of Danbury’s efforts to house and Catholic Charities to feed the 75 known homeless, the Campus Ministry and Key Club members joined together and collected over 1,000 breakfast-to-go items including boxed cereal, cereal bars and oatmeal. In addition, students Kate Mitchell, Matthew Butera, Niocole Radliff, Melanie Seaman and Jennifer Hanley combined their efforts earlier in the year and made over 150 sandwiches for the Dorothy Day Hospitality House in Danbury.

“Due to the pandemic, the Immaculate High School Campus Ministry and Key Club had to modify their annual cereal drive for Dorothy Day. Each year these

two clubs collect and donate over 1000 boxes of cereal to serve the Morning Glory Breakfast Program at the Dorothy Day Hospitality House for an entire year. This year Immaculate was asked to donate the small, individual-sized cereal boxes and oatmeal packets to the facility so that the Morning Glory program could then package individual bagged breakfasts for their clients. With the help of many students, faculty, staff, alumni and families we were able to provide over 1000 individual cereals to this great program. The students enjoy putting this event together and get great fulfillment in knowing that they are able to help people start their day by providing breakfast for them and in serving

the greater Danbury area.”

The shortage of food in the Danbury food pantries has been ongoing since the beginning of the pandemic. Focusing on supporting the issues related to the at-risk Danbury community students, staff and families joined together with Jericho Partnership to assist them with transforming lives through monetary donations as well as sponsoring two drive-by “Stuff the Vans” food drives to collect dry goods.

At the end of their very inconsistent yet successful fall sports season, student-athletes from all teams came together to help support Ann’s Place in Danbury. In place of their traditional Play for the Cure games to raise funds, teams created themed raffle baskets for a virtual raffle drawing which raised \$2,380. Athletic Director and 1989 alumnus of Immaculate, Nelson Mingachos, expresses that he is very proud of the athletic teams for coming together to continue the tradition of Play For the Cure games and putting together a successful virtual version of the event.

There are many things that we cannot change in our world but during this penitential season, Immaculate students know that spreading joy, almsgiving and prayer brightens our world. In the last week of Advent, students will be collecting toys for approximately 50 children who live at the Food First Family Project Shelter and will be hosting their annual Christmas Concert which will be held virtually for all those who wish to celebrate the season on December 20 from 4 pm to 5:30 pm.

Cross Catholic Outreach

'More than just a box' bringing joy to children

By EMILY CLARK

For Elizabeth Lancaster, packing a shoebox-size container with soap, toothbrushes, socks and pencils put the material side of Christmas in perspective. The realization that those simple items, ones that most people take for granted, may be the only gifts a child a world away receives this holiday made the Cardinal Kung Academy senior pause and reflect.

"I know Christmas isn't all about presents but imagining [it] with absolutely no gifts whatsoever is startling," said Lancaster, commenting on the "Box of Joy" service project in which her school recently took part.

Amidst the worldwide pandemic, when building community and creating awareness of serving others seem to be more important than

ever, many of the faithful from the Diocese of Bridgeport are reaching across the globe to provide what all children want at Christmas: special gifts and the knowledge that someone loves them. Cross Catholic Outreach, a relief and development ministry, has partnered with St. Pius X Church in Fairfield, St. Theresa Church in Trumbull and Cardinal Kung Academy in Stamford, as well as scores of other locations around the United States, to send packages filled with small toys, school supplies and hygiene items to children living in extreme poverty so they can experience both the tangible and spiritual joys of Christmas. Those who volunteer to pack a Box of Joy can choose the age and gender of the child, enabling them to personalize the experience and envision who will receive it.



"This is a chance for schools and parishes to bless children who otherwise wouldn't get a

gift," said Leeanna Holmes, international development associate for Cross Catholic. "It is a wonderful way to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ with dignity and allows our country to be involved with other countries, creating a deeper sense of com-

munity," Lannigan said.

In many locations, that sense of community has extended to an entire parish, as seen at St. Pius X which distributed 500 Boxes of Joy. Organized by the Life Teen youth group and assisted by families from the church, this project left a lasting impact on individuals who were looking for a way to reach out despite the restrictions from COVID-19. During the collection weekend in early November, parishioners filled the vestibule with not only stacks of boxes but also the excitement that comes from doing for others.

Like those at St. Pius, members of St. Theresa Church recognized the growing need for donations this year as compared to years past with both young and old supporting the efforts to fill these boxes. Now in its fourth year as a drop-off location for Box of Joy, St. Theresa's outreach continues to expand from a project originally completed by Confirmation classes but, which



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Monday, December 21st, Tuesday, December 22nd,
& Wednesday, December 23rd

4:00 pm - 5:00 pm & 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Mass Schedule

Christmas Eve: 4:00 pm 6:00 pm 10:00 pm 12 am Midnight

Christmas Day: 7:30 am 9:00 am 11:30 am 1:00 pm



munity within the Church."

These Boxes of Joy once distributed, packed and shipped to a screening center in Miami, are delivered to children around the world, including those in South America, the Middle East and the Bahamas. In 2019, over 70,000 boxes were opened on Christmas Day, a testament to the generosity of those who wish to serve.

But the initiative—and the fun—begin locally. Karen Lannigan, the parent coordinator for Cardinal Kung's project, said the students enjoyed shopping for gifts at the Dollar Store, writing personal letters to each recipient and coming together at the school for a socially-distanced "packing party" before Thanksgiving. "They're sharing the love of their faith and bringing Christ to these children around the world. It's a willingness to give of themselves within a shared sense of commu-

now encompasses the whole church community.

"It's all about bringing joy to those who might not have it while bringing us together as a parish," said Walter Withrow, a freshman at St. Joseph High School and a member of the youth group at St. Theresa who filled several boxes with his parents and younger sister Maggie. "There are more people suffering around the world, especially now with COVID-19, but there's also more people helping them out."

This project, a personal opportunity to bring the joy of Christmas to some of God's most vulnerable children, impacts both those creating and receiving these Boxes of Joy. "This is more than just a box," said Holmes. "It is the sharing of Jesus Christ with others, letting them know they are cared for and loved in a very special way." ■

Christmas 2020

Shopping for Christmas

By **KATHY ANN GOBIN**

BROOKFIELD—Online shopping is helping some parishes effortlessly increase donations through a partnership with AmazonSmile.

“It’s a great way to do some easy fundraising without getting too complicated,” said Mary Ellen Tiernan, faith formation director at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Parish in Brookfield.

St. Marguerite parish registered with AmazonSmile about two years ago and promotes the program on its social media channels and in its weekly printed and online bulletin.

“It’s a simple no brainer,” Tiernan said. “When people are shopping they go to AmazonSmile and Amazon will automatically send a portion.”

Through the AmazonSmile pro-

gram, Amazon donates 0.5 percent of the price of eligible purchases to the charity of the purchaser’s choice. Parishes must register with AmazonSmile to be included on a list of non-profit organizations for people to choose from.

“It’s an easy way the faithful can use their shopping to help their parish or diocese,” said Patrick Donovan, director of The Leadership Institute. “Everyone is living online anyway.”

In fact, recent surveys show a steady increase in the number of consumers purchasing items online. The shuttering or restricted times of operation for brick and mortar stores and concerns about limiting exposure to others, to try to stem the spread of the coronavirus, has compelled people to order goods online.

Everyday online shopping has become an opportunity for

fundraising. Donations are down at parishes throughout the diocese due to limited attendance at Mass, so fundraising in this manner is helpful.

“It’s not a huge amount of money but it is constant money, with people shopping on AmazonSmile,” Tiernan said. Launched in 2013, Amazon and its customers have contributed \$215 million globally to charities through AmazonSmile.

Tiernan said she was familiar with the program for another organization and she and Jean Piccorelli, communications coordinator, wanted to introduce it to parishioners at St. Marguerite.

For the past two years, the parish has generated almost \$200 from the program.

They have also expanded the use of the program by adding

items to the parish’s “Wish List.”

“If we need something that’s going to be a little pricey, for example, right now we need a paper shredder, I list it on the ‘Wish List,’ Tiernan said.

“People want to buy things,” Piccorelli said. “A lot of times they don’t necessarily want to give money but they want to donate items. Our parishioners are extremely generous.”

Tiernan agreed that many parishioners want to donate something tangible and will opt for purchasing the items in need instead of or in addition to their regular weekly contributions.

“That helps save the parish some money,” she said, noting they do not have the space to store a lot of items, so the request only goes out when they need something.

“AmazonSmile doesn’t cost

us anything and it brings money in,” said Piccorelli. “Everybody is already shopping on Amazon. It’s gotten a very positive response.”

It is a win-win for the parish when people buy things through AmazonSmile to get the donation percentage and also donate that item to the parish.

“It’s an untapped market,” Donovan said. “With Christmas ahead, Amazon is going to be busier. Why not take advantage of the fact that many people will be shopping.”

For instance, Donovan said participating in toy drives and purchasing items for people in need through AmazonSmile allows people to donate twice, once to the toy drive and once to the parish.

“It allows us to collectively share in supporting the larger mission of the Church.”

amazon smile

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Thursday, December 24—3:00pm (on the roof), 5:00pm (in church), 10:00pm (in church)
Friday, December 25—7:30am (in church), 9:30am (on the roof)

NOTE

A reservation must be made in order to attend a Christmas Eve/Day Mass, whether it be for a spot in church, in the parking lot (for a roof-top Mass), or in the gym. You can make a reservation on the St. James web-site >>>>> www.stjamesstratford.com.

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Week of Christmas (12/21, 12/22, 12/23) - 7:00pm—8:00pm

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Thursday, December 31—5:30pm (in church)
Friday, January 1, 2021—7:30am (in church), 9:30am (on the roof)

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

Saturday, January 2, 2021—4:30pm (in church)
Sunday, January 3, 2021—8:30am (on the roof),
11:30am (on the roof), 6:00pm (in church)

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Newborn
King

Christmas 2020

Interfaith concert praises God

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

NORWALK—The coronavirus pandemic couldn't stop a 40-year-old tradition, as the clergies and choirs of Temple Shalom, United Congregational Church and St. Matthew Parish gathered virtually for an interfaith Thanksgiving celebration of song and worship on the evening of November 24.

"This gathering joins together different faith traditions to both praise God and pray to God. It reminds us that there are good people everywhere, and that we have more that unites us than divides us," shared Msgr. Orłowski, pastor of St. Matthew Parish.

This tradition in the West Norwalk faith communities began 40 years ago. "It's a second-to-

none gathering that always brings a smile to your face and peace to your heart," said Monsignor. "It is a marvelous opportunity for people of all faiths to gather to give thanks to our one, true God."

Rabbi Mark Lipson of Temple Shalom expressed that even though the interfaith community could not all gather in person, they would still be able to create a bridge between faiths through a virtual celebration.

Video footage from past years gatherings featured hits such as, "Bridge Over Troubled Water," "Reach Out and Touch," "A Million Dreams" (from the Greatest Showman) and even the combined clergy singing "A Little Help From My Friends" by The Beatles.

Mayor of Norwalk Harry

Rilling and his wife Lucia brought greetings. "We can never lose sight of the important things in our life—our God, family, friends and the faith that will get us through these difficult times," said Mayor Rilling.

"We are keeping everyone in mind this time of year," said Lucia Rilling. "We are wishing the best holiday season to all. Let's hold on to what this time of year means to all of us."

"In the midst of fear, uncertainty, suffering pain and even death—the question we ask is how do we cope? What is there that we can hold onto? The answer is faith," said Father Sunil, parochial vicar of St. Matthew Parish. "The Word of God offers strength and the courage to remain positive. He tells us



to not let our hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. We are the children of hope, our God does not abandon us."

"The vaccines seem promising, we do see a light at the end of the tunnel," assured Father Sunil. "While we are in the midst of suffering, we should look to him to give us patience, strength and the ability to endure. Through this interfaith service we ask God for the healing of our world and to send peace upon all his children."

Members of United Congregational Church shared

"A Prayer for the World" and the Southworth Family shared a lovely acoustic song.

One of the most memorable moments of the evening came when the Temple Shalom Choir gathered over Zoom to sing "Let There Be Peace on Earth."

"How fortunate we are to live as friends and neighbors and how much we share in common," said Rabbi Cantor Shirah Sklar from Temple Shalom. "Creativity, teamwork and technology helped us to share this service again even in the most difficult of circumstances." ■



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Christmas 2020

A woman's journey to the Catholic faith and joy

By **JOE PISANI**

When Anna Bendiksen looks back on her faith journey, she realizes that every step of the way, Jesus was putting people in her path who would lead her to the Catholic Church.

A writer, poet and author of hymn texts, Anna is a convert to Catholicism from Anglicanism and a member of the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull. Since she was received into full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil last year, she has written several dozen hymns set to traditional melodies, including some that were performed at the parish and one titled "We Stand With Christ" in recognition of the Diocese of Bridgeport's capital

campaign. Her hymns, especially those for the Christmas season, have been performed in churches around the country.

Anna grew up singing and playing the piano, and her creativity blossomed when she entered the RCIA program. "I think what happened is that as a musician and Anglican, I needed to make sense of my experience coming into the Catholic Church," she said. "The music at St. Catherine's is lovely and I wanted to add my own voice to the world of Catholic music."

Since she began writing texts for hymns, she has compiled a notebook of more than two dozen compositions. The beauty of the faith has been a catalyst for her creative work and she hopes her compositions express the joy she



ANNA BENDIKSEN

feels over becoming a Catholic.

It was a long journey for her to reach what she describes as "the cathedral in the garden," but she is certain that every step of the way Jesus was leading her, putting the right people in her path. It began more than 40 years ago, when she was growing up in the Midwest.

She was baptized in a Methodist church in Detroit and has wonderful memories of attending Sunday school. During those years, she developed several meaningful friendships with Catholics, but one in particular stands out.

"The first Catholic household I knew was our next-door neighbors'

in South Dakota," she recalls. "They had five children, and they made it clear to my brother and me that we were welcome in their home, so we would go there and run in and out with the crowd."

She still has a vivid memory of the family trimming their Christmas tree and the father lifting the youngest daughter up to put the angel on top. "There was something warm about that house that really attracted me, and 40 years later, I am absolutely confident of the foundation they laid for me," she says.

Anna stopped going to church at 10, when her parents were divorced. At 13, she moved to Rochester with her mother, who had been awarded a fellowship at the University of Rochester in the

➤ *CONTINUED ON PAGE 18*



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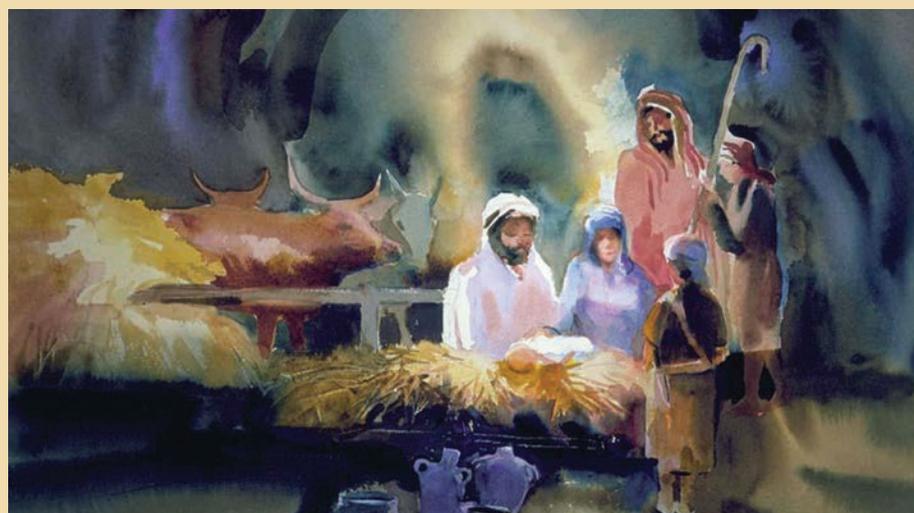
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Christmas 2020

Knights bring coats for kids

NORWALK—Assisting those most in need is one of the many goals of the Knights of Columbus St. Matthew Council 14360.

As part of tradition, the council recently joined forces with six local councils from Norwalk, Darien, New Canaan, Westport and Weston on Saturday, October 24, at the Family & Children's Agency Community Connections Center in South Norwalk.

More than 300 brand new coats were distributed during the Knights of Columbus Coats for Kids event. This event helps keep kids warm over the winter months by providing this necessity. The local event is part of the Knights of Columbus national Neighbors Helping Neighbors initiative and, since the program

launched in 2009, more than 600,000 coats have been distributed in 49 states and all 10 Canadian provinces.

"While our society is pushing us to purchase items for the Christmas season, we don't want to forget those that need basic necessities for the upcoming cold winter season," said Project Chairman and District Deputy George Ribellino, Jr. "It's great to see brother Knights come together from different councils to combine resources to help more people in need. I started this collaboration within my district back in 2015."

FCA's president & CEO, Rob Cashel adds, "Personally, and on behalf of Family & Children's Agency, I cannot thank the Knights of Columbus enough for

their generous efforts to secure 300 new coats for our clients through their Coats for Kids Initiative. During these challenging times, I am truly grateful that there are groups like the Knights of Columbus that dedicate their time and efforts to meeting critical needs in our community."

On the weekend on November 21 and 22, Council 14360 held a Food for Families Food Drive with students from The Society of St. Theresa at Cardinal Kung Academy. The food drive was held at St. Mary's Church in Norwalk and the response was incredible. More than 3,000 pounds of food and \$400 in donations/gift cards was collected for Catholic Charities' Room to Grow preschool and their fami-

lies. The food collected will help feed 35-40 families over the holiday season.

"While food insecurity has become an ever-increasing issue in the area due to the impact of the pandemic, it is our responsibility to help lessen that burden. This is what Knights do—where there is a need, there are Knights close-by ready to jump in and do what we can," said Council 14360 Grand Knight Anthony Armentano.

On Thanksgiving Day, after Council 14360 members helped usher, read and clean after Thanksgiving Masses, they teamed up with Bishop Fenwick Assembly 100 and the Catholic Daughters of the America's St. Matthew Court 2640 to provide

and deliver individually packaged Thanksgiving meals for the residents of Homes for the Brave for the eighth consecutive year.

"Our men and women both loved the food and we could not be more appreciative. What a blessing St. Matthew Council #14360, Bishop Fenwick Assembly 100 and Catholic Daughters Court 2640 have been to us. All of us at Homes for the Brave are extremely grateful as you made the day very special for our residents" said Homes for the Brave CEO/Executive Director, Vince Santilli.

In addition, District Deputy Ribellino's daughter Mia made cards for the veterans and asked students at Notre Dame Fairfield

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 17



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Christmas 2020

KNIGHTS FROM PAGE 16

High School to write notes thanking them for their service.

The Council wrapped up the long weekend by delivering several bins of non-perishable food to Blessed Sacrament in Bridgeport. The food was collected at the St. Matthew Annual Thanksgiving Masses. Four carloads were organized by the council and given to Blessed Sacrament Pastor Father Skip Karcinski "Giving back to those in need during the Thanksgiving season is a blessing for our council. One of the most profound ways we can truly give thanksgiving to God is through serving others," said Grand Knight Anthony Armentano.

The Council has hosted and assisted with many food drives since the start of the pandemic and will continue to do this indefinitely.

In addition, the council has assisted with providing food for those on the frontlines, getting masks to Notre Health and Rehab Center, donating funds and supplies for our veterans at Homes for the Brave and distributing brand new coats for children in need. The Knights of Columbus are called to step into the breach and leave no neighbor behind—especially in this time of crisis. As the coronavirus pandemic continues, it is our duty and responsibility to lead our families, protect our parishes and serve our communities, remembering always that where there's a need, there's a Knight. Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson has challenged Knights to take this moment as an opportunity to deepen the commitment to the very principles which define the Order: charity, unity and fraternity.



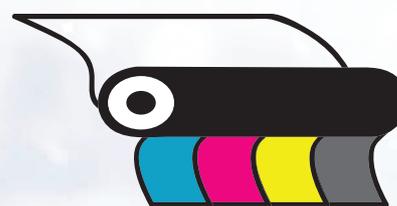
(l to r) K of C District Deputy George Ribellino and Council 14360 Grand Knight Anthony Armentano distribute coats at the Annual Coats for Kids distribution at the Family & Children's Agency in Norwalk.

The goal of the Knights of Columbus Council at Saint Matthew Church in Norwalk are to perform acts of charity. Providing those in need with a range of support from financial to tactical help in dealing with a wide variety of challenges. Council members work together to foster the founding principles of our order: charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism. Our goal as a council is to continue to identify specific needs in our community and muster support and help to alleviate these challenges and hardships to the best of our abilities and resources.

(For more information, please go to kofc14360.net. If you are Catholic man interested in putting your faith in action, join the Knights of Columbus online for free at kofc.org/joinus and use promo code MCGIVNEY2020.)



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Christmas 2020

A WOMAN'S JOURNEY FROM PAGE 15

graduate nursing program.

Anna was an editor on her high school newspaper and recalls that the faculty advisor was a very devout Catholic who had a profound influence on her. She began taking Russian after reading Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina," and in 1986 the teacher in charge of the Russian club led students on a trip to the former Soviet Union.

"Among the things I saw were the most beautiful Orthodox churches in the world," she says.

When her mother took a teaching position at the University of Scranton, they began searching for a spiritual home and found an Episcopal church. By that time, it was apparent to Anna that "God was up to something with me."

She began college at Bryn Mawr, where she pursued Russian studies, and while she was there,

she would go to services at a Presbyterian church. In her sophomore year, she lived in a Russian-speaking dormitory with young Russian Orthodox women, who exposed her to the feasts of the liturgical year and took her to services with them. After graduation, she was accepted at Yale University, where she studied Slavic languages and literature. It was there that she met her future husband Aage, who was studying computer science.

Over Christmas vacation, she went to visit her mother who was living in Champaign, Illinois and attending an Episcopal church that was influenced by John Henry Newman, an Anglican churchman who converted to Catholicism and was canonized by Pope Francis last year.

"That year I went to Christmas services with my mother at midnight Mass and fell in love with God and

liturgy," Anna said. "Not long after I was confirmed as an Episcopalian and spent the next 20 years as a happy member of that church."

"Every church is like a language, and I became fluent in Episcopalian and learned what I needed to know," she said. "I was a choir member, a vestry member and did work with the newcomer's ministry at Grace and Saint Peter's Episcopal Church in Hamden. There was just one problem—God kept tugging at me."

As she progressed spiritually, she was overtaken by a desire to have face-to-face confession, and even though it was available at her church, not many people took advantage of it.

She might have continued on that path if it weren't for a bad storm in March 2018, when a large tree came down in her neighbor's yard and knocked out power for three days. She went to Walmart

in Norwalk for supplies, and while driving home, she was playing the hymn "Come Down, O Love Divine" over and over on the radio.

"I remember I was coming back from Walmart on the Merritt and as I was praying, I said, 'God, please show me my sins,'" she recalled. "And all of a sudden, I felt this intense feeling of nausea and revulsion like there was a horrible smell in the car and I had to roll down the window."

The experience led her to the realization, she says, that the Catholic Church was not a prison, as she once thought, but that the real prison was her own sins.

"The Church was a cathedral in a garden and God had been seeking me all that time, pursuing me and trying to get me to say 'yes,' and despite all my objections and all the headlines, I began to seek a place to go," she said.

She explored several churches

and then found St. Catherine of Siena, where she began attending daily Mass with Father Joseph Marcello, pastor, then parochial vicar Father Luke Suarez and Father Philip Bochanski, a priest in residence.

Her need for one-on-one confession is what originally attracted her to the Church, but the greatest joy of her faith is the Real Presence of Jesus—Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity—in the Eucharist.

Early on, a parishioner encouraged Anna to go to Eucharistic adoration and she asked, "Why would I do that?"

The woman responded, "You just sit there and feel the love as you would feel the warmth from the sun."

Anna, who lives in Fairfield with her husband Aage and son Johan, was confirmed at the Easter Vigil Mass in 2019, when she entered into full communion with the Catholic Church. ■



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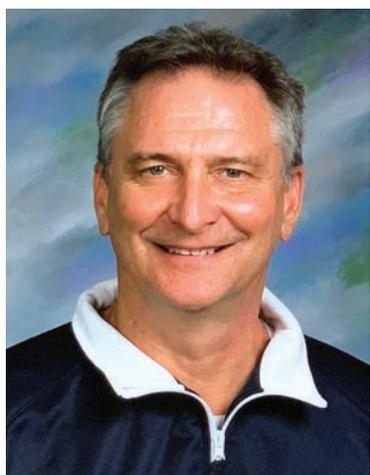
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Books on Sports and Values

Montelli, Olayos: From basketball to books

By **DON HARRISON**

The ties between Vito Montelli, the legendary St. Joseph High School basketball coach, and Jim Olayos run surprisingly deep. Olayos was a junior guard on Montelli's first state championship team at St. Joe's (1974-75) and he served as the Cadets' captain the following winter. Much later, the



JIM OLAYOS

oldest of Jim and Kim Olayos' four sons, Jimmy, captained Montelli's 2005-06 squad.

When Montelli announced his retirement following the 2011-12 season—after guiding St. Joe's to its 11th CIAC state title—Jim Olayos had become the school's athletic director and, yes, his former mentor's supervisor.

So, it seems surreal that today both coach and former player are in the book mode. Montelli's 50-year career at St. Joe's—encompassing a Connecticut-record 11 state titles and 878 victories—is captured in "God, Family & Basketball" (167 pages, Hilltop30 Publishing Group, LLC). Chris Elsberry, the former Connecticut Post sports columnist and writer, is the author.

Jim Olayos has written "The Kindness Formula: Caring + Character = Success" (197 pages, Regent Press), a book inspired by, and dedicated to, his son Jimmy, who died in June 2019 while competing in a triathlon. He was just 31 years old.

"He was in the best shape of any person I knew," Olayos explained. "He was living in Brooklyn, New York, and ran three physical therapy clinics."

Montelli is justifiably proud of his coaching accomplishments at St. Joe's. The back-to-back Class

LL state championships in his final two seasons and aforementioned 11 titles overall. His three National Coach of the Year awards. His induction into the national and Connecticut coaches halls of

fame. The fact that 27 of his Cadet players achieved McDonald's All-American recognition and 30 were selected to All-State teams. That the majority went on to college and several played at the NCAA

Division-I level.

Mere numbers tell only part of the Montelli story, though. He's led a faith-filled life, which took root with his parents, Salvatore and Lucrezia Montelli—Italian

immigrants with limited formal education—in upstate Bristol.

"My parents were very spiritual. My father worked two jobs, and my mother dragged me to

▶ *CONTINUED ON PAGE 27*

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Year in Review

A COVID-19 timeline in the Diocese of Bridgeport

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—On March 13, 2020, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano issued a letter to the faithful announcing the extraordinary step of temporarily suspending public Masses in the diocese.

“I understand the deep spiritual hardship that this absence has created in the minds and heart of many, yet recognizing that our churches have served as places of refuge in times of need, we will do all that is possible to see that

hang in the balance. Pray for miracles both medical and spiritual. Pray for the conversion of many hearts. Pray for an end to this scourge in our midst. Pray that the Lord will see us to safety and renewed life. In Him.”

The following timeline offers a brief overview of the diocesan response to COVID-19 and the many steps it has taken to safeguard the faithful while ensuring reverent liturgies and essential Church activities.

March

March 3—Bishop Frank J.

Bridgeport from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass to remain in effect March 16-April 3 (It is later extended through May 20)

- All diocesan schools and academies are closed for a period of two weeks
- Confirmations are postponed
- Catholic Center meetings of more than five people are postponed, cancelled, or conducted via teleconferencing
- Masses celebrated by the bishop are made available on the diocesan website, and parishes also begin live-streaming

Paycheck Protection (PPP) loans, which make it possible to largely avoid layoffs and furloughs for teachers and parish employees providing bookkeeping, office management, and maintenance services.

March 31—Catholic Schools launch their distance learning programs to ensure continuity of education, and teachers and staff are working remotely using various technological tools. Virtual office hours and a video help desk are set up for teachers and parents who need assistance

through confessions, curbside adoration and other outreach during the state shutdown.

Catholic Cemeteries respond to the crisis by donning protective gear and taking other measures to safeguard mourner. More than 40 percent of the burials are COVID-19 related.

May

May 11—The bishop announces plans for the gradual return to public Mass beginning with the outdoor public celebration of Mass on the Ascension of



our churches remain safely open for private prayer, for exposition of the Eucharist and to serve as places to seek solace with the Lord,” he said.

With a second surge taking hold and the state experiences an increase in the positivity rate and hospitalizations, it good to revisit the bishop’s March 13 letter:

“As Christians, we know that suffering will always be a part of our life. We understand and accept this mystery at the foot of the Cross of Christ. Yet we also know that the Lord suffered and died so that we might live and share in His victory over fear, suffering and death itself. We are never alone in our sufferings. Christ is here to lead us along paths unknown to victory and life.”

“This is the time to do as Jesus commanded: to be brave despite fear, to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of others and to pray. Especially pray. The health and life of so many now

Caggiano issues first statement about coronavirus, asking pastors to take preventative measures to avoid any potential spread of illness. Parishes temporarily suspend spending offering the Precious Blood of Christ at all Masses, shaking hands at the sign of peace, and holding hands during the Our Father.

Parishes make sure that handrails, restrooms and the tops of pews are properly disinfected and that hand sanitizer is available at all church entrances.

March 9—As the first cases in Connecticut are reported, Bishop Caggiano releases a second set of directives to respond to the crisis. These directives include the encouragement of an act of spiritual communion, and the consideration of cancellation or postponement of non-liturgical events and encouraging those who are feeling ill to stay home.

March 13—Bishop Caggiano temporarily dispenses all Catholics of the Diocese of

Masses

- Diocesan updates made available on the web at bridgeportdiocese.org/coronavirus

March 18—Bishop Caggiano updates sacramental guidelines and practices in response to the Coronavirus crisis. He offers further instructions and suggestions regarding the pastoral care of parishioners during this unique period of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) crisis.

March 20—The bishop issues a letter to the faithful announcing that Churches will remain safely open for private prayer, for Exposition of the Eucharist, and to serve as places to seek solace with the Lord.

March 23—The bishop outlines a number of steps the diocese will be taking to assist parishes with online giving and establishing a universal offertory program.

The Diocesan Finance Office provides consultations with parishes to help them secure

and each individual school sets times when they will be open to address any student, family and faculty needs.

April

Bishop Caggiano celebrates Holy Week liturgies and Easter Sunday Mass in an empty St. Augustine Cathedral.

More than 50,000 thousand faithful watch at home through live-streaming made available throughout the diocese. Total number reached on social media was 176,180.

Foundations in Faith launches the St. Francis Xavier Fund to assist parishes in financial difficulty as a result of the pandemic.

Bishop Caggiano re-launches the 2020 Annual Catholic Appeal as an emergency response to the crisis and the growing needs throughout the diocese.

Many priests develop creative and innovative way to bring Christ to the faithful through Eucharistic processions, drive-

our Lord.

May 21—The Diocese of Bridgeport becomes the first diocese in the state to resume public worship at outdoor Masses. Pastors and priests throughout the diocese continue to offer drive-through blessing, car confessions and outdoor adoration.

May 29—The bishop announces phase II return to public Mass inside or Churches.

June

June 13—Parishes throughout the diocese welcome people back to indoor Masses and establishes full safety protocols including wearing of masks, social distancing, sanitizing of the building and other measures.

The celebration of weekday Masses, Funeral Masses, and Nuptial Weddings within our churches also resume after the weekend of June 13.

June 17—Foundations in Education extends the Bishop

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

Year in Review

COVID-19 TIMELINE FROM PAGE 20

Scholarship Fund deadline in order to make it possible for more students to attend Catholic schools.

Catholic elementary schools and high schools throughout the diocese are unable to enjoy traditional graduation ceremonies but develop innovative ways to honor graduate and their achievements.

August

A gift from an anonymous donor to Foundations in Education provides funding for COVID-19 Emergency Tuition Assistance for elementary school families in the Diocese of Bridgeport Catholic Schools who are suffering from the negative economic impact of the pandemic.

The board of Foundations in faith approves \$200,000 to be disbursed to the parishes as part of the COVID-19 Emergency Fund from the St. Francis Xavier

Mission Church Fund, supported by We Stand With Christ capital campaign.

August 31—Diocese of Bridgeport Catholic Schools releases re-opening plan for 2020/21 school year.

September

September 1—In response to an increase in coronavirus cases in Fairfield County, Bishop Caggiano issues an update on September 1 regarding the public celebration of Mass:

- Outdoor Masses (weather permitting)
- The suspension of Liturgical music
- Temperature checks as people arrive for Mass
- Anyone with a temperature greater than 100.3 degrees should not be admitted.

If there is a significant increase in the infection rate in



a town, then parishioners must be notified of the increased risk through social media and the parish website.

October

October 26—Bishop Caggiano issues a decree permitting the earlier celebration of Christmas Vigil Masses in order to safely accommodate the larger number expected to attend.

Parishes continue Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion

The Leadership Institute announces the launch of the Sunday Family Rosary every Sunday at 7:30 pm beginning in October

Catholic schools develop an online academy for student who wish to require distance learning during the school year... the schools also introduce a new Telehealth System to better serve students and families

November

November 18— Bishop

Caggiano issues a decree permitting the celebration of Christmas Vigil Masses beginning at 2 pm in parishes throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport on December 24, in order to provide more options to the faithful seeking to safely attend Mass on Christmas.

November 19—To help combat the spread of COVID-19 in the greater Bridgeport area, the Queen of Saints Hall of the Catholic Center becomes an on-site location for both COVID-19 and antibody tests.




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A Survivor's Story

Encountering God in the ups and downs

By JOE PISANI

GREENWICH—Dave D'Andrea describes himself as an ordinary man, perhaps that's why he tells the story of his life in fewer than 100 pages even though the circumstances of his life are extraordinary—he is a survivor of polio, a survivor of stage-three cancer and a survivor of sexual abuse. And by his reckoning, he has had two, perhaps three, miracles in his life.

The Greenwich native has held different positions, including operations manager for the town's golf course, landscape consultant, basketball coach, former member of the town's legislative body and several other volunteer memberships.

You could say that "Tear Drops" isn't the story of his life, but more appropriately the story of God at work in his life. It recounts the tragic episodes and crises where he often had no recourse other than to turn to God...and God was there. It is the story of the evolution of a strong faith in God and Our Lady.

D'Andrea started life with some hurdles, he says, coming from

a low-income family with three older brothers, who lived in a small apartment in one of the world's wealthiest towns. At the time, his father worked as a landscaper on an estate where President Herbert Hoover's son lived.

He was cured of polio as a child, but five years later, the pastor of the church in the Chickahominy neighbor of Greenwich molested him in the rectory while he was there to help move boxes in his office.

For 40 years, D'Andrea kept that secret from the rest of the world, a secret so dark and spiritually corrosive that it affected his health and led to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Although his mother knew, she never told her husband for fear of what he might do. Only recently has D'Andrea found peace, hope and fellowship in a survivors group formed by the Diocese of Bridgeport.

"Bishop Frank J. Caggiano reached out to me, and it was absolutely the best thing that ever happened," D'Andrea said. "We had a long meeting, more than 2-1/2 hours, and I was amazed at his ability to listen and offer

me his deepest apology and whatever else he could do. I learned a lot when he came into my life because he is a strong believer in prayer and Mother Mary."

Erin Neil, director of Safe Environments and victim assistance coordinator of the Diocese of Bridgeport, has worked with D'Andrea and says: "David gives courageous witness to the terrifying ordeal of childhood sexual abuse, physical pain and human suffering. His story is inspirational and hopeful. He brings awareness to the issue of child sexual abuse and helps survivors to feel safe coming forward in our diocese. David's journey demonstrates at every turn of the page that true healing comes from God and from our faith."

On May 21, 2013, D'Andrea was diagnosed with stage-three rectal cancer, and it was one of the darkest, most painful periods of his life.

"The radiation and chemo were brutally excruciating," he recalled. "I suffered such great loneliness, and I would pray so much and so hard and cry and wonder why this was happening to me. That's when you have to



DAVE D'ANDREA

trust God the most. The power of prayer is beyond belief."

When he talks about his recovery, he always credits Our Lady of Lourdes through the efforts of his cousin, Monsignor Joseph Giandurco, pastor of St. Patrick's in Yorktown Heights, N.Y., who celebrated a healing Mass for him and brought holy water from Lourdes to bless him when he began his cancer treatment.

D'Andrea still has that bottle of holy water and continues to share it with others who are suffering or ill. And while he has never gone on a pilgrimage to Lourdes, he knows Our Lady was instrumental in his recovery.

Last year, D'Andrea reached out to bring the Lourdes experience to the Diocese of Bridgeport through a "Lourdes Virtual Pilgrimage Experience" at St. Mary Church in Stamford at which Bishop Caggiano offered a

Eucharistic blessing.

Today, D'Andrea lives his life looking for God's guidance and professing a strong devotion to Our Lady.

"My faith is deeper than ever," he says. "Did I ever doubt God? On the dark days, I would say, 'Why? Why are you letting me suffer like this?' But even during the abuse, I never doubted God or my religion, especially because of my connection to Mother Mary. It is Mother Mary I would always turn to."

Dave decided to write his story and share it because he believes that everyone who puts faith and trust in God can enjoy life, regardless of what happens. That, he says, is the secret of an ordinary man...and it will work for everyone.

("Tear Drops" by David D'Andrea is available at Amazon and Barnes and Noble.)

Drive-through light parade brings joy



DARIEN—On the evening of December 6, the Feast of St. Nicholas, St. Thomas More Parish in Darien hosted a wonderful St. Nicholas Day drive-through light parade, since they could not gather for their annual Christmas Tree Lighting due to the pandemic.

Over 100 families drove through the campus to wave to St. Nicholas, receive a blessing from their pastor Father Paul G. Murphy and drop off a letter to Santa. Within the safety and warmth of their cars, families also saw the parish Christmas tree lit, the beautiful manger, giant holiday inflatables along with a lights and sound show provided by Sound Chasers.

(St. Thomas More Parish is located at 374 Middlesex Rd. in Darien Conn. Its mission is to lead, sanctify, educate, serve and evangelize parishioners, their families and the greater Darien community in accord with the Good News of Jesus Christ. For more information visit stdari-enct.org.)

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Parish News

St. Marguerite Parish holds virtual Fall Festival

By **KATHY-ANN GOBIN**

BROOKFIELD – Parishes throughout the diocese have found creative and socially distant safe ways to continue fundraising efforts during the coronavirus pandemic.

The St. Marguerite Parish Annual Fall Festival, a tradition for the past three decades, went virtual for the first time this year.

“It started as a small craft fair by ladies at the parish and it has kept growing and growing,” said Mary Ellen Tiernan, Faith Formation director. “There were 45 vendors last year and we ran out of space.”



This year, space was not a problem since vendors agreed to participate virtually.

“It’s not a big fundraiser for us but we wanted to keep the connection with our parish members,” Tiernan said. “We want them to know we are here and we want them to stay involved.”

Over the past 30 years, the Fall Festival has become quite an event for the community and she and others didn’t want to skip a year because of the pandemic.

Tiernan said she sent a letter to vendors who participated for the past two years and asked if they would be amenable to trying something different and showcasing their wares virtually.

Parish families lent a helping hand by making signs for front lawns to alert people to the virtual fair.

Vendors donated \$30 to participate and sent a description of what they would like on the flyer

and Tiernan went to work creating the flyers to post online.

The flyers, posted on the parish website and social media, con-

tained a hyperlink for shoppers to see what vendors had to offer and potentially purchase items.

The virtual Fall Festival

Vendor Fair has turned out to be a bit of a blessing in disguise. “We are able to get information out to hundreds of people,” said

Tiernan, adding that people beyond the immediate community can participate.

➤ *CONTINUED ON PAGE 25*

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Catholic Cemeteries

Bishop promulgates Funeral Norms

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has issued a decree formally promulgating the new Funeral Norms and the Norms for the Order of Christian Funerals in the Diocese of Bridgeport, which are now available in their entirety online.

The norms will go into effect

as the Liturgical Law of the Diocese of Bridgeport on the First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2020. They will be subject to future revision five years from the date of publication.

The bishop issued the decree on November 22, 2020, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus

Christ, King of the Universe. Prior to the promulgation, the new norms were presented to the presbyterate of the diocese for review and have been duly approved by the Council of Priests.

The 22-page document was created after a two-year process coordinated by the diocesan

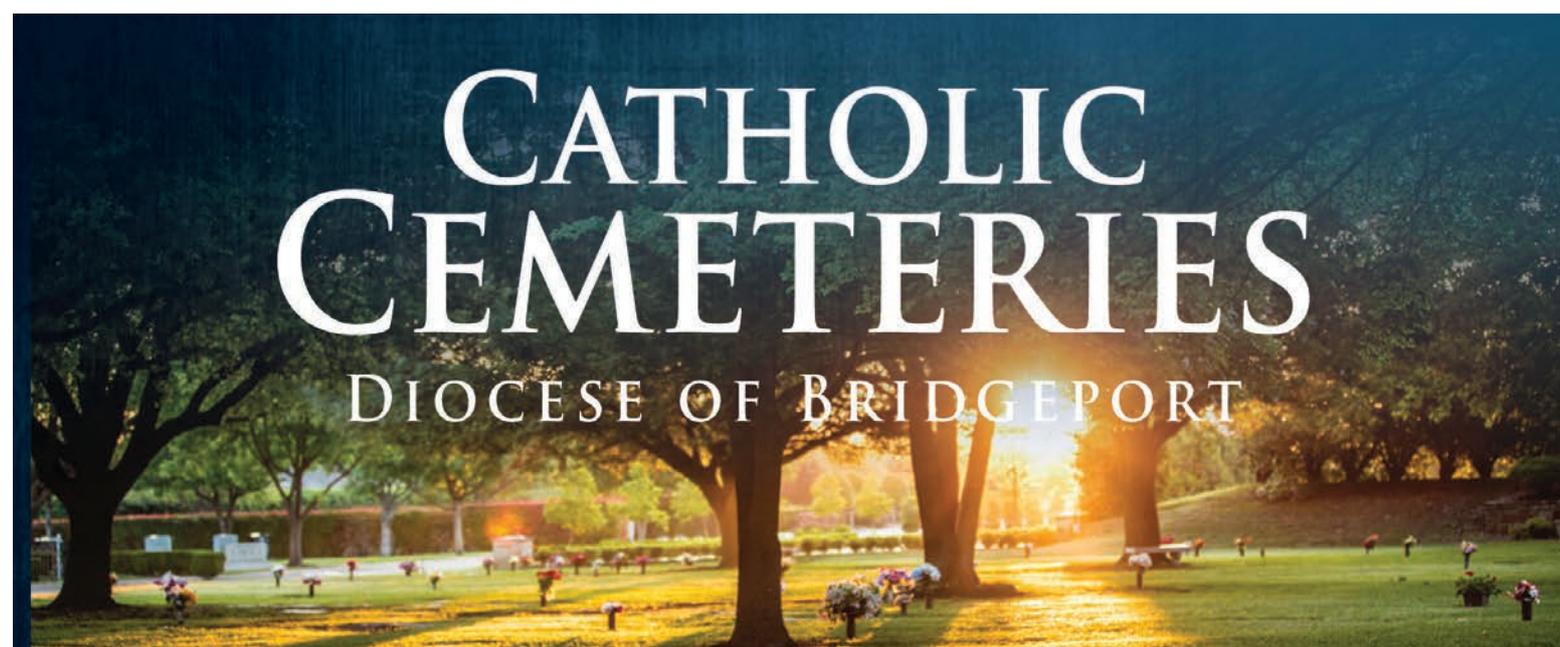
Leadership Institute and the Liturgical Commission. It offers a comprehensive guide to all norms and considerations in a Catholic funeral including music, the homily, flowers, words of praise, the participation of family members and the responsibility of clergy and funeral directors, and all

those involved in the funeral rites.

The introduction to the newly revised norms states, "From the beginning of the Church, Christian funeral rites and burial have been an important spiritual and pastoral practice. Our Catholic faith understands death as the entrance into eternity. It expresses a hope in the resurrection of the dead won for us in Christ's Death and Resurrection. We also recognize the value of prayer for the deceased and show reverence for the body which remain. Since the Christian response to death stands as a witness to Christian belief regarding life here and hereafter, our rites and ceremonies connected with Christian death and burial unite us to the paschal mystery of Christ's victory over sin and death and must remain consonant with this belief."

The decree states that with the provision of the new norms, any and all customs until now practiced, as well as all existing liturgical norms regarding funerals are abrogated.

(To view the new norms visit: www.bridgeportdiocese.org/cemeteries/home. For more information on the norms, educational resources and more, visit: www.formationreimagined.org/funeral-norms.)



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Parish News

Danbury Car parade

By KATHY ANN GOBIN

DANBURY—A consistent stream of cars—a hallmark signature of socially-distant get-togethers during the coronavirus pandemic—paraded through the St. Joseph Church parking lot on Main St., giving parishioners an opportunity to share heartfelt well-wishes to a beloved priest moving on to a new assignment.

Hundreds of parishioners gave Father David Franklin a memorable send-off to his new assignment at St. Aloysius in New Canaan. A stalwart member of the community he served; Father Franklin leaves cherished memories with a congregation he spent

ST. MARGUERITE
FROM PAGE 23

Some vendors automatically shipped to buyers, others with large items that may be too costly to ship, agreed to send the items to the school where they may be picked up.

"The buyers came to the parking lot to an assigned spot and a runner went to deliver the item to the buyer," Tiernan said. "Everything was socially distant."

The virtual fair also had another benefit. The one-day SAVERS drive, held in conjunction with the fair, was able to be expanded.

"Since we were not meeting on the premises (due to coronavirus concerns), we had a lot of space," Tiernan said. "Instead of doing a one-day drive we set aside a month."

Bags of clothing were dropped off at the Candlewood Lake Road parish and parish families sorted the items into categories. Tiernan said parishioners with large vehicles volunteered to drive back and forth to bring the hundreds of bags and dozens of boxes of items to SAVERS on Federal Road. SAVERS support the Big Brothers, Big Sisters organization.

"There's no way we could have done it this way, if we had the fair," Tiernan said, adding that the children of the parish were an integral part of the process. Many of the children are Confirmation candidates and incorporating Corporal Works of Mercy into their lives is essential.

"It's an important message for kids to see parents involved, too." ■

13 years shepherding.

"He has enriched all of our lives," said Lisa Schneider, as she waited in her car in line to speak with Father Franklin. "I will miss his meaningful Masses and homilies."

Many parishioners mentioned Father Franklin's memorable homilies as they reminisced about the time spent together.

"He has the best homilies that directly relate to the people in the pews," said Leigh Fiorito, who organized the socially distant car parade in the parish parking lot and a dinner at Anthony's Lake Club for Father Franklin earlier that week.

Festive white and purple balloons, St. Joseph School colors, were attached to orange traffic cones outlining the path to Father Franklin, who was standing near a tented area where cars would stop for a 2-3 minutes to chat with him.

"I am overwhelmed with the number of people who came to say goodbye," Father Franklin said. "It's not goodbye, I will be back." Father Franklin joins Father David Roman, who served and celebrated his first Mass at St. Joseph Church before being assigned to St. Aloysius, about 20 miles away.

The Council of Catholic Women donated snacks and water to give to everyone stopping by to share their well-wishes with Father

Franklin. Commemorative pens were also handed out to mark his 35th Anniversary of Ordination, which was earlier this year.

Parishioner Irene Ragatz, who wore an orange and green vest to help direct traffic, said she enjoyed the way Father Franklin would relate the homilies and stories to her life.

She also appreciated his sense of humor.

"As a friend, he's just fun!" Ragatz said. "He's very even-tempered."

Parishioner Rose Ross recounted how she met Father Franklin by accident. Ross said after attending mass one day she noticed a priest greeting each person as they exited the church and thought, "Who is so kind, shaking hands with everyone at the end of Mass?"

"That was the beginning of our relationship," she said. "I invited him to dinner that night." Ross and Father Franklin became good friends. "Every night that he was free we had dinner together," Ross said, adding that Father Franklin is fond of pasta dishes and would sometimes take the lead in the kitchen and make dinner for the two of them.

"He's just a beautiful man," Ross said. "He's a giving man."



During the coronavirus pandemic Father Franklin would visit Ross and often sit socially-distanced outside for a casual chat. Neighbors would sometimes stop by to join in the conversation. Ross said he made everyone feel welcome during these pandemic-induced isolating times.

"It was like medicine," she said of their outdoor afternoon talks. "He is very kind," she said, recalling how he would bring dog treats to her Shih Tzu, Lilly.

Father Franklin orchestrated many of the happenings at the parish behind the scenes, often working on his days off. He was an integral part of the annual parish tag sale, that was canceled this year because of the pandemic.

"He has worked so hard at St. Joseph Church," Fiorito said. "He has always been there for all of us. He's a phenomenal priest."

Fiorito said she was always

impressed with how he was never hesitant to roll-up his sleeves and get things done.

Father Franklin embodies what it is to give back.

"I'm going to miss him," Ross said. "He is an example of what every priest should be like."

Many parishioners agreed.

"Father Franklin is a very big part of our lives," said Ania Szurawski. "He's important to our family. Because of him, we grew closer to God," she said, as she waited in line with her husband Marek and two poodles Oskar and Kasper. "We love him and his homilies."

Father Franklin said he was touched by the many people who stopped by to wish him well.

"I'll miss here. This is my family. It's hard to leave, however, it's time to move on and start a new chapter in my life. Change is growth. Sometimes change is good." ■

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Obituaries

Deacon Lance Fredricks, 81

STRATFORD—Deacon Lance C. Fredricks, loving husband, father and grandfather, passed away after a brief illness on Friday November 20 2020.

Due to the continued COVID-19 restrictions, all of the arrangements were private. A Memorial Mass will be celebrated at a later date.

Deacon Fredricks was a man



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Ralph Lazzaro
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of deep faith, which led him to being ordained as a deacon of the Diocese of Bridgeport for more than 25 years.

Ordained on June 27, 1998 by Bishop Edward M. Egan, he was assigned to St. Luke Parish in Westport, where he served as youth education program coordinator. A gifted homilist, he loved to officiate weddings and baptize children, and was happiest to officiate the weddings of his three daughters, as well as baptize his grandchildren.

Lance Fredricks was born on November 11, 1939 in Duluth, Minnesota. He was proud of his midwestern roots and visited often throughout his life. He was a gifted musician and was the first chair violinist for the Minneapolis Junior Symphony and was awarded a scholarship to Juilliard. Ultimately, he served in the Navy for five years and ran the Naval radio and TV program from his stations in NYC and Cuba. He eventually settled in Westport, Conn., where he and his wife, Jean, raised their four children.

His career as a management consultant for many years allowed him to travel the world. He was also a skilled pilot, gifted athlete and avid golfer who won



DEACON LANCE C. FREDRICKS

the Longshore Country Club Member-Guest events a number of times.

Lance was preceded in death by his parents, Miriam and Laura. He is survived by his wife of 51 years, Jean; his three daughters and their husbands Krista and Mike Dean, Cara and Steve Clark, and Lindsay and Daniel Weekes; his son and daughter-in-law Brad and Devon Fredricks; his grandchildren, Chase and Ryan Dean, Bellamy Clark, Catherine and James Weekes, and Sienna and Hunter Fredricks; his five siblings; his in-laws, as well as many nieces and nephews.

Condolence cards can be sent to the family at 1308 Huntington Road, Stratford, CT 06614. ■

Remembering those lost at Sandy Hook

As the world pauses to observe the 8th Anniversary of the Sandy Hook shootings on December 14, we return to the words that Bishop Frank J. Caggiano spoke on the 5th anniversary of the tragedy that touched the entire world and also affected so many lives in St. Rose of Lima Parish.

"Today is truly a somber anniversary for us in the Diocese of Bridgeport community. Five years ago on this day, the town of Newtown experienced one of the worst evils imaginable at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Five years later, the pain and the shock that we hold in our hearts is still fresh. We ache on this day in particular, and every day since the shooting, for the parents, teachers, students and first responders who endured such senseless and horrific tragedy. Let us remember the victims, survivors and their families in our prayers today especially, and every day."

In the face of the unspeakable horror of the Sandy Hook shootings, it is difficult to see the good of humanity. That is why now, more than ever, we must pray for the mercy, healing, and peace that only the Lord can provide. May we find consolation in the fact that each of the 26 people we lost five years ago are cradled in God's loving embrace, each with a share of the paradise that only he can provide. Today we pray for them, their families, and ourselves. Let us resolve ourselves today to work towards a world where such horror will never occur again and to pray for the Lord's peace for all mankind."

Those who wish to offer outside prayer on the anniversary may want to visit the Sandy Hook Memorial at St. Margaret Shrine, 2523 Park Avenue in Bridgeport. Artist Armando Palumbo created the painting of Jesus and the children, which is set in a brick and cement surround. The granite engraving at the base of the memorial reads: "In Loving Memory of the 26 Innocent Lives Taken in Newton, Conn., December 14, 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School." ■

DECEASED CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT DECEMBER 13—JANUARY 16

DECEMBER

13	Rev. Alfred E. Russo	2009
15	Msgr. Lawrence J. McMahon	2009
17	Rev. Kieran T. Ahearn	1997
19	Rev. Philip Morrissey	2008
20	Rev. Msgr. Thomas J. Driscoll, P.A.	2018
21	Msgr. Constantine R. Caldas	2015
26	Rev. Vincent P. Cleary	1965
27	Rev. Ignatius Baraniak, OFM Conv.	1980
29	Msgr. James H. Grady	1967
30	Rev. M. Joseph McCarthy	2006

JANUARY

1	Rev. Michael J. Flynn, C.S.Sa.	1995
2	Rev. Joseph J. Malloy	2016
	Rev. Robert J. McDermott	1989
3	Msgr. Pierre A. Botton	2010
4	Msgr. Francis Medynski	2008
6	Msgr. William J. Fox	1962
	Rev. Msgr. John C. Sanders	2019
7	Rev. Walter E. Bozek	1995
8	Rev. Mr. Edward R. Kovacs	1999
	Rev. Joseph P. Biondino	2001
9	Rev. Gerald T. Devore	2011
	Rev. Mr. Hugh Sweeney	1990
	Rev. Robert Nemeth, O.F.M. Conv.	1998
13	Rev. Daniel J. Deehan	1976
14	Rev. M. Joseph Joaquin	2013
	Msgr. Joseph A. Sullivan	2001
15	Rev. Msgr. Ernest T. Esposito	2019
	Msgr. Harry L. Hale	2003
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Sports

Highlights from the abbreviated Fall season

By DON HARRISON

On the high school sports front, the fall of 2020 will be remembered for its quarantines, postponements, cancellations – and, yes, the accomplishments of the student athletes who nonetheless persevered and excelled during the coronavirus pandemic.

Consider St. Joseph High School's girls soccer team, which captured the FCIAC's East Region regular-season title with a 9-1 record and shared the post-season championship with cross-town rival Trumbull following their 1-1 tie in the title game. Maddie Fried, the Cadets' All-American forward, concluded her scholastic career with 15 goals and 11 assists in the abbreviated season.

"When you look at all the great players we've had here—Jenna Bike, Jessica Mazo, so many others—she's the most talented player ever at St. Joe's," says Cadets coach Jack Nogueira. "Maddie is our all-time goals scorer (83) and she'll be going to Villanova on scholarship next fall."

Consider Notre Dame of Fairfield's girls soccer team, which was undefeated (10-0) during the South West Conference season to earn the top seed in the SWC's South Division playoffs. The Lancers were upset by Weston, 2-0, in the title game.

Toni Domingos, the Lancers'



NOTRE DAME'S All-New England senior Toni Domingos.



ST. JOSEPH'S All-American senior Maddie Fried.

All-New England star, wrapped up her scholastic career by registering 23 goals in her abbreviated fall season. Her career total of 108 goals surpassed the Notre Dame record (100) set by Sam LaValle.

"During 43 years of coaching, I put Toni as the best pure goal-scorer I've ever seen," declared Notre Dame coach Wayne Mones. "She's earned a four-year athletic scholarship to the University of Maryland."

Consider Immaculate High School's field hockey team, which overcame a pair of early-season two-week shutdowns due to COVID-19 quarantine to win the South West Conference's

South Division championship with a 3-0 playoff decision over Joel Barlow.

With the Mustangs' top goalies in quarantine with the virus (although neither tested positive) entering the playoffs, freshman forward Lyla Mellen stepped into goal and posted shutouts over Bethel (1-0) in the semi-finals and Barlow in the title game.

"This was our third SWC title," said Immaculate coach Shannon Horosky. "They are all special, but to see where we are after all these challenges, this one is unique."

Consider Fairfield Prep's soccer team, which edged St. Joe's, 3-2, in overtime to advance to

the FCIAC's East Region championship match where it hung tough before bowing to Fairfield Ludlowe, 1-0.

Prep coach Brian Neumeyer said he wished the Jesuits had prevailed in their only shot at an

FCIAC title – they compete in the SCC but played in the FCIAC pod due to COVID restrictions – but he was pleased with the season overall. Prep entered the game with a 10-1 record, its only loss to Ludlowe, while the Falcons came in at 9-1-2, with their only defeat to Prep.

Consider St. Joe's sophomore Daniele Tanaka Sales, who won the FCIAC East freestyle (55.69) and placed second in the 100-yard breaststroke (1:09.66).

Consider the following student athletes who were chosen to their respective all-star teams:

FCIAC All-East boys soccer: Jack Hickey, Connor Moore, Luciano Paoletta and John Reidy, all of Fairfield Prep; Jack Anastasio and Manny Santos, St. Joseph.

FCIAC All-East girls soccer: Maddie Fried, Laci Lewis, Andriana Cabral, Mary Lundregan, Caroline Sheehan and Annie Stook, all of St. Joseph.

MONTELLI, OLAYOS FROM PAGE 19

everything in church," he recalled.

Elsberry conducted some 20 interviews with the 88-year-old coach, invariably "sitting at his kitchen table with my tape recorder." Montelli's collection of voluminous scrapbooks, personal notes on his players and other data made life easier for the author.

"It's all about the relationships," Elsberry said. "If you talk to Chris Watts (the former player and assistant coach who succeeded Montelli as head coach) or anyone else involved with Vito, they will say the same thing. Xs and Os are way down the list with what he tried to do with his players."

Montelli's greatest team? He selected his 1987-88 squad, which featured four stars (Doremus Bennerman, Marvin Sadler, Cary Wilson, Johnnie Jones) who possessed the skills to play at the collegiate D-I level, and the coach's son, Tommy, who played at D-II Bentley.

"They'd won their third straight state title, but the first two were in Class M, and now they had to do it in Class L," Elsberry said. "They beat Harding (69-66) in the championship game."

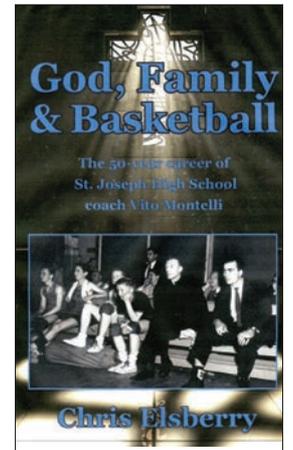
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Olayos, now the executive athletic director at Notre Dame of Fairfield, describes the book's theme thusly:

"Your legacy and how you will be remembered is determined by how you treat people. Being nice to people and being kind and having good character are the true measure of your success.

"The book honors Jimmy as a person. Although he never got the chance to read the book, he lived it by the way he treated everyone. The book honors his great legacy."

(To order: "The Kindness Formula" (\$19.95): Visit: kindnessformula.com. "God, Family & Basketball" (\$20): email godfamilyandbasketball@gmail.com.)



Vicki Soto run at St. Mark's

STRATFORD—Each year, the Vicki Soto Memorial Fund organizes a family friendly 5K race. Supporters are invited to gather on the first Saturday of November in the picturesque Lordship section of Stratford, Vicki's hometown.

Like most events this year, the 8th Annual Vicki Soto 5K went virtual. However, that did not stop Stratford's St. Mark School from embarking upon a new way to celebrate the life of Vicki, the 27-year old first grade teacher who lost her life in the Sandy Hook mass shooting.

The St. Mark School Community, who assembled a team of 84 runners last year, quickly brainstormed on ways to support this worthy cause.



Students purchased Limited Edition Race T-Shirts for \$10 and the school initiated a \$5 "dress down day," where in lieu of their uniform, students could wear to school pink, green or anything decorated with flamingos, Vicki's favorite animal.

As a former first grade teacher, I often reflect on how Vicki Soto's selfless actions embody the life of Christ," shared St. Mark Principal Melissa Warner. "I am

so proud that our school community continues to honor her legacy."

This year, St. Mark School raised \$600 for the Vicki Soto Memorial Fund. The fund awards scholarships to students pursuing careers in education. To date, they have awarded \$180,000 in educational scholarships and provided \$100,000 in literacy, educated and community enrichment.

(St. Mark School, Stratford's only Blue Ribbon School, provides an academically rigorous, faith-based education to students in grades Pre-K through 8. St. Mark School is currently accepting applications for the 2021-2022 academic year. For more information, please visit www.stmarkschool.org.)

Column: Thomas Hicks



Life is Sweet

POTPOURRI

By THOMAS H. HICKS

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

There is a little-known song titled "Sad Heart." As far as I know, the only performer who recorded this song is Harry Belafonte. A lyric from the song states: "Misfortunes come, but life is sweet. I can't have a sad heart."

No one who thinks hard finds life easy. Much of life hurts. Life includes hardships, illness, grief. There's loneliness and worry, tears and fears, disappointments and misunderstandings.

It may surprise you to hear that the great Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, told us that the life of a Christian is characterized by a pessimistic realism. Christianity does not oblige us to see reality in an optimistic light. On the contrary, it obliges one to see this existence as dark and bitter and hard." (Foundations of Christian Faith, 1978, p.403). John Updike, in a NY Times interview, declared that "the natural state of the sentient adult is a qualitative unhappiness."

However, one who thinks hard also knows that life has good things in it too. It's got love and kindness in it, people doing brave and honest things. It's got the sound of rain on the roof, the magical light of late afternoon. It's got dawn and dusk in it. There's pouring coffee in the morning and breakfast. There's friendship.

Life has certain inevitabilities: the disappointments, embarrassments, reprimands. There are the small humiliations and little defeats. Life also has many deeds of charity. Good will and love are constantly in evidence, so much decency radiates.

Life brings the griefs and deaths, and maybe above all the separations and losses. There's so much unredeemable loss. Life becomes a series of losses survived. There can be so much loneliness in living. However, amid the treadmill of worries and vexations, sweetness endures. Reality, with all its sufferings can still be sweet. There are the daily quiet joys: eating a good meal, or just eating a cookie, there's the taste of fresh bread, taking naps, there are the jokes, the feel of the sun, a summer breeze, the first snowfall, the laughter of children.

There can be the awful melancholy of life. It is a sad earth where flowers fade. Still, earthly life is beautiful despite its limitations and sufferings. Beauty is everywhere, just as suffering is everywhere.

The longer I live, routine things take on a renewed beauty. I often sense the hidden treasures that occur in daily life. Life is made up of little things, and small things can become treasures. One can learn to love the little everyday things. There are the words of a poem by Faith Baldwin: "I have come back to quiet ways; to things of silent wonder; to dusk, to primrose dawns and the still simplicity of gentle days." Despite its misfortunes, I've grown to love it here, and I won't be able to leave without tears.

Pope John Paul II wrote that "the gift of life, for all the effort and pain it involves, is too beautiful and precious for us ever to grow tired of it (Letter to the Elderly, Oct.26, 1999). Reality, with all its evil and suffering, can

still be sweet. There are epiphanies of beauty: an elderly woman playing shuffleboard in the sun, the face of a man walking his child in the park, a person listening to a Bach concert, or a man just having a beer at a Saturday baseball game.

There's that marvelous scene in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* where Emily, who has died, is allowed to return to earth to watch herself as a twelve-year old going through an ordinary day.

Emily is overcome by her observation that humans go through life without savoring their time on earth. There is so much "ignorance and blindness." The scene becomes unbearable to

Emily, seeing how people do not make much effort to cherish life while they still have it. She says to the Stage Manager, "They don't understand, do they?" Then she asks: "Does anyone ever realize life while they live it,

every, every minute?" The Stage Manager replies: "No, saints and poets maybe, they do, some." Emily concludes: "Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you."

Psalm 34:12: "Who among you delights in life?"

To someone for whom the experience of suffering negated God's existence, Rahner countered, "Have you ever tried to make your experience of happiness, of meaning, of joy, or shelteredness be an argument for the existence of God?" We tend to take for granted the blessings of living.

We need to try to keep ourselves in wonder at the daily miracles of life. Life is terminal. We want to make the most of it. Try to instill in a child a love for living, give him/her the feeling it is good to be alive, it is good to be on this earth; it is good to be here. ■

St. Jude's Novena

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved and preserved throughout the world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us.

St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us.
St. Jude, help of the hopeless, pray for us.

Say this prayer nine times a day. By the ninth day your prayer will be answered. Say it for nine days. It has never been known to fail. Publication must be promised. Thank you St. Jude.

SJK

St. Jude's Novena

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved and preserved throughout the world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us.

St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us.
St. Jude, help of the hopeless, pray for us.

Say this prayer nine times a day. By the ninth day your prayer will be answered. Say it for nine days. It has never been known to fail. Publication must be promised. Thank you St. Jude.

LM

St. Jude's Novena

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved and preserved throughout the world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us.

St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us.
St. Jude, help of the hopeless, pray for us.

Say this prayer nine times a day. By the ninth day your prayer will be answered. Say it for nine days. It has never been known to fail. Publication must be promised. Thank you St. Jude.

AM

St. Jude's Novena

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved and preserved throughout the world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us.

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St. Jude, help of the hopeless, pray for us.

Say this prayer nine times a day. By the ninth day your prayer will be answered. Say it for nine days. It has never been known to fail. Publication must be promised. Thank you St. Jude.

SP

St. Jude's Novena

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved and preserved throughout the world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us.

St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us.
St. Jude, help of the hopeless, pray for us.

Say this prayer nine times a day. By the ninth day your prayer will be answered. Say it for nine days. It has never been known to fail. Publication must be promised. Thank you St. Jude.

CAD

St. Jude's Novena

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved and preserved throughout the world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us.

St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us.
St. Jude, help of the hopeless, pray for us.

Say this prayer nine times a day. By the ninth day your prayer will be answered. Say it for nine days. It has never been known to fail. Publication must be promised. Thank you St. Jude.

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Nuestra Voz

‘Noche Guadalupana’ desde Norwalk y México: ¡al mundo!

POR MARICARMEN GODOY

NORWALK—El Grupo Guadalupano de Norwalk, que cumple más de dos décadas de rezarle y ofrecerle las Mañanitas a la Virgen de Guadalupe, tiene dos motivos para celebrar este año la aparición de la Virgen Morena al Santo Juan Diego. El primero, la unificación de las fiestas marianas entre las iglesias de Saint Joseph y Saint Ladislaus y la clasificación a la Noche Guadalupana desde la Basílica de la Virgen de Guadalupe de Ciudad de México de Katherine Cifuentes-Martínez, una joven artista de Norwalk, que desde niña cantaba a la virgen en las fiestas que prepara año con año la agrupación.

Katherine Cifuentes-Martínez, nativa de Guayaquil con residencia en la base aérea estadounidense de Italia, fue seleccionada para representar a los Estados Unidos con su composición en ritmo de Gospel: “No te Olvides de mí; en la ‘Noche Guadalupana desde la Basílica de Guadalupe’”, en el concierto virtual preparado por

la Coordinación General de la Pastoral del Santuario de Ciudad de México, que será transmitido online este 11 de diciembre a partir de las 11 pm.

Desde el Tepeyac al mundo, es el lema con que la Diócesis de México a través del Departamento de Pastoral del Santuario, regido por Monseñor Jorge Pacencia Ramírez de Orellana; pide a través de una convocatoria pública al mundo participar en el concurso anual de canciones inéditas dedicadas a la Virgen María en la advocación de la Guadalupana, declarada como la Patrona y Emperatriz de las Américas.

Katherine Cifuentes-Martínez, es una joven artista, inmigrante, nacida en Guayaquil-Ecuador, que desde niña acudía con su familia a cantar Las Mañanitas a la iglesia de Santa María de Norwalk, en el evento anual que el Grupo Guadalupano de Norwalk prepara desde hace veinte años consecutivos.

Los temas que Katherine interpretaba a la Guadalupana en Saint Mary, eran desde El Ave María, Las Salves (Ecuador)



KATHERINE CIFUENTES-MARTÍNEZ, original de Ecuador, residente de Norwalk, fue seleccionada para representar a los Estados Unidos desde la Base Militar de Italia, en la serenata dedicada a la Virgen de Guadalupe del Tepeyac. La joven artista desde niña viene cantando Las Mañanitas a la Morena de México en las iglesias de Norwalk.

acompañada en el acordeón de su abuelito, Don Gonzalo, cuando él se encontraba de vacaciones en Norwalk. En otras ocasiones, su tío Paco Godoy, le enviaba partituras y guías melódicas para que ella y sus primas toquen las Mañanitas en violines y chelo.

Con el pasar de los años, Katherine, quien se graduó en la secundaria Norwalk High, estudió y se graduó en Arte Dramático Musical en New York (Musical Theater en American Musical and Dramatic Academy) e hizo un internado en California en Disney; a pesar de eso, nunca dejó de cantar a la Virgen Morena y aunque en el 2019 se mudó a Italia por asuntos de trabajo, desde ahí compuso la canción y envió a México al concurso.

Bajo su música y letra con el tema: No te olvides de mí, Katherine Cifuentes-Martínez, le dice con su voz a manera de oración a la Virgen Morena, “que NO la olvide. Que cuide a su familia y que cubra al mundo de amor y fe”. Canción que también dedicó a su padre, Don Marcelo Cifuentes, quien le inculcó la devoción mariana y desde el Cielo hoy vela sus pasos.

Para que su canción pueda llegar a ser seleccionada en México,

la joven artista ecuatoriana, criada en Norwalk, pidió el aval de la Arquidiócesis del Servicio Militar de los Estados Unidos con sede en Washington DC., (Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA), asentada en la Base Militar de Aviano, Italia, con una vicaría en Europa y Asia.

Mientras tramitaba el permiso en su Diócesis, la pieza musical empezó a grabar, editar y masterizar en RAM Recording Studio, Italia, junto a un ensamble de músicos italianos que le ayudaron a darle vida a una mezcla de sonidos Gospel, balada pop, con matices de lo que se escucharía en Broadway.

El pasado 30 de noviembre a través de un correo electrónico firmado por el mismísimo Obispo de la Diócesis de Ciudad de México, se le fue notificada que quedó clasificada y por ende su tema estará entre los seleccionados para ser cantados en el homenaje a la Virgen de México que será transmitido este 11 de diciembre desde las 11 de la noche por la página oficial de la Basílica de la Virgen de Guadalupe: www.virgendeguadalupe.org.mx

Por otro lado, El Grupo Guadalupano de Norwalk, realizará las fiestas de la Virgen

Morena en las dos iglesias unificadas. Las Mañanitas se realizarán en la iglesia de Saint Joseph este viernes 11 de diciembre a partir de las 10 de la noche, con un aforo de cien personas y con las medidas de sanitación protocolares.

El sábado, en cambio, el Grupo Guadalupano de Norwalk asentado en la iglesia de Saint Ladislaus, realizará la fiesta con el inicio del Santo Rosario a partir de las siete de la noche y luego, la Misa de Acción de Gracias. El aforo es de cien personas que serán repartidas, con seis pies de distancia, tanto en la iglesia principal como en el sótano parroquial.

El Grupo Guadalupano, decidió colocar pantallas gigantes para que los fieles que estarán en el sótano puedan seguir el rezo y la misa, así como puedan disfrutar del mariachi. Así como se prevé que todos los festejos sean transmitidos vía online desde las paginas de las iglesias de Saint Joseph y Saint Ladislaus.

“Es muy difícil todo esto, pero estamos tratando de que podamos festejar a la Virgen como ella se merece”, dijo Aracely De la Rosa, integrante de la Junta Directiva del Grupo Guadalupano de Norwalk. ■

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Vocations

When analogies fall short

By **FATHER ERIC SILVA**

A few miles north of the city of Bridgeport, 138 years ago, a young 30-year-old priest visits a man named James “Chip” Smith outside the walls of the jail where Chip had been imprisoned, awaiting his sentence of death by hanging. The fateful night when his sentence would be carried out had finally arrived. Just four days prior, a Solemn High Mass was celebrated for the intentions of Chip and in reparation for the sin and the crime of murder that he had committed. On the night that his execution would be carried out, a sentence that New Haven had not seen in decades, Chip was seen receiving last rites from this young priest, who after imparting his final blessing, turned away from Chip, wiping tears from his eyes. Just before Chip passed, he uttered one final line of comfort to this priest who spent the last few weeks making visits to the jail to help him more aptly prepare himself for his final hour. It was in no uncertain terms that he owed his life to this priest and just before passing from this life to the next he said, “Father, your saintly ministrations have enabled me to meet death without a tremor. Do not fear for me, I must not break down now.”

For too long, many in the Church and the Catholic cul-

ture have tried to explain the priesthood by well-meaning but albeit inadequate analogies. Undoubtedly deriving the pedagogical tactic from Jesus Himself who was apt to teach by way of parables, the truth of the matter is that these analogies still do not fully encapsulate a vocation that lies in, but not of this world. Countless books, videos and podcasts compare the vocation of marriage to the vocation to the priesthood in an attempt to help understand the supernatural vocation and while these analogies help make sense of what we do know, they also seek to try to explain away the mystery that lies at the heart of the sacred priesthood. The reality is this: the vocation to the priesthood and the vocation to the married life are two different vocations. It is understandable that young people in today’s Catholic world continue to find it difficult to see the vocation of the priesthood as it truly is, not a compilation of duties mixed with prohibitions but rather as spiritual fatherhood in the midst of a world so desperate for it. Constantly striving to know more about our world, about our surroundings and about ourselves, we must rely on analogies to make sense of that which would be foolishness; but what is lost by relying solely on analogy? An honest return to an under-

standing of true spiritual fatherhood may be exactly what this culture needs to inspire young men to answer God’s subtle whisper to “Follow Me.” It is in understanding how powerful, how real and how absolutely necessary spiritual fatherhood is that we have our eyes opened to what it means to be a spiritual child. In Matthew 18, when Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” those words must be taken seriously. The actor Sir Alec Guinness dressed like a priest in France for his role in the Father Brown series was walking from the set to the hotel just as it began getting dark outside when suddenly a young boy ran up to him and grabbed his hand, skipping along until the young boy bid him farewell. The young boy had mistaken him for a priest and Sir Alec wrote that “a Church which could inspire such confidence in a child, making its priests, even when unknown, so easily approachable could not be as scheming and creepy as so often made out. I began to shake off my long-taught, long-absorbed prejudices.” Sir Alec converted to Catholicism just two years later. A brief encounter...a taste of spiritual fatherhood moved one of the world’s greatest actors to conversion, not because he saw a vocation likened to his own but because he was moved by

a profoundly different experience than his own.

Innumerable canonized priests found in their hearts a commonality, in that they did not view their parishioners as a faceless flock but rather as a multitude of spiritual children. This young priest who found himself ministering to a man who stood prepared for certain death, wept not because of his love for his fellow man who would soon depart from this life. He wept because James “Chip” Smith was not like a child to him but was really and truly his son. Blessed Michael J. McGivney whose beatification



FATHER ERIC SILVA

touches close to home both geographically as well as spiritually is a beautiful reminder that in seeking to solely compare one vocation to the next, how easy it is to miss out on what the vocation of the priesthood truly is. The world and certainly the priesthood does not need an analogous love, it needs spiritual fatherhood. ■

Priest serves the sick and dying during pandemic

By **ELIZABETH CLYONS**

STAMFORD—During the COVID-19 pandemic, Father Matthew Mauriello, chaplain of the Knights of Columbus Orinoco Assembly #126, has been serving the sick and dying at St. Camillus Center in Stamford.



FATHER MATTHEW MAURIELLO

“We are so fortunate to have him during this pandemic,” says Marjorie Simpson, senior executive director at the St. Camillus Center, explaining how Father Mauriello would go room to room to visit residents.

“With this coronavirus situation, families of the residents were not allowed to hold their hand as they were dying,” says Father Mauriello, explaining how, after serving at the center for years, he had acquired contact information of resident’s older children and built up relationships with them.

Thomas Kolenberg, a member of St. Augustine Council #41 in Stamford tells a story of how he found out his mother was COVID-positive. “I really thought it was the last time I would see my mother,” he says.

Kolenberg describes arriving at the center at the same time as the ambulance. Father Mauriello ran back to the sacristy, put on his protective gear, and heard Kolenberg’s mother’s confession, gave her holy communion and anointed her.

Kolenberg’s mother was the very first patient at St. Camillus to go from COVID-positive to COVID-negative. “Father Matt was there the whole time to make sure that she continued to receive the sacraments, because of his charism as a priest and as a Knight of Columbus.”

“It has made all the difference that there is such a comforting soul here, who is 100 percent there for us, praying for us” says Simpson. ■

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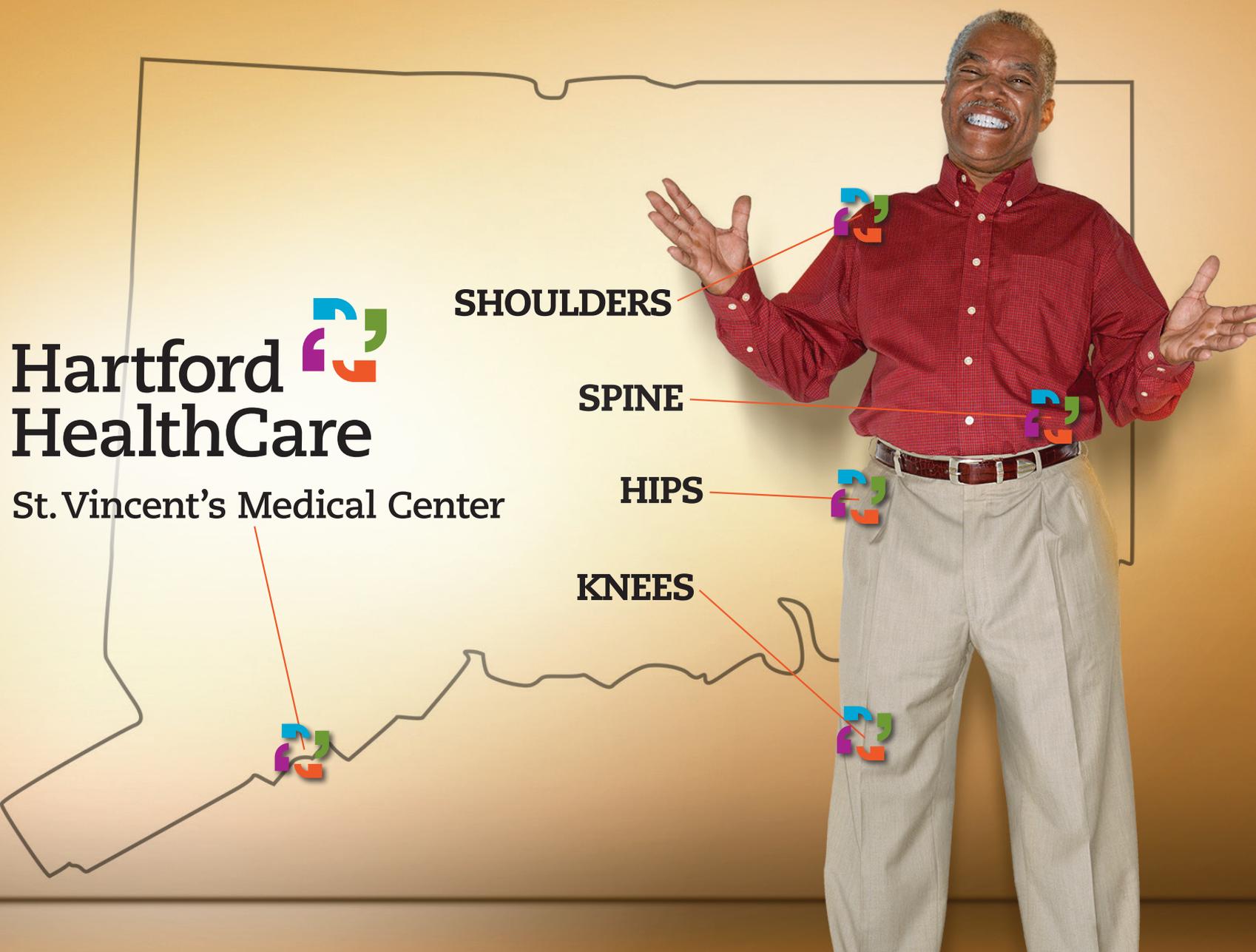
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