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Diocese of Bridgeport, 238 Jewett Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut 06606
Local News

Most vulnerable sliding through safety net

BY BRIAN D. WALLACE

A growing number of people who have never sought charitable support are showing up in soup kitchens, food pantries and counseling programs provided by Catholic Charities across the Diocese of Bridgeport.

The lingering effects of the recession and unemployment, the high cost of housing and the ongoing state and federal budget cuts have left people struggling to stay afloat while there are fewer resources available to help them.

“Many people have gone under in the past year,” says Catholic Charities Vice President Sandy Cole. “When times got tough, many of them went to their credit cards and then borrowed from friends and family to get by. Along the way, they’ve lost their jobs, homes and emotional stability.”

Michelle Conderino, director of the Morning Glory feeding program and Homeless Outreach Team in Danbury, says that she has seen a 15% increase in the number of adults coming to the Morning Glory breakfast program at Dorothy Day House this year.

“We were kind of surprised because we thought most people were over the hurdle,” says Conderino. “These are people who never needed help before, don’t know how to ask and are sometimes ashamed to come forward.”

After struggling with job loss and health care problems, many are simply tapped out and have nowhere else to turn.

“We are finding a lot of people who timed out of unemployment and have burnt out all other resources” Conderino says. “In the past, they would have been caught by our prevention programs before becoming homeless. The services just aren’t there anymore to keep them from falling through the cracks.

Many of the newly homeless are likely to be over 50 years old and to have worked their entire lives. Now, when they need help, there is very little, Conderino says. “They never thought they would be in the position to need services, and the state’s services haven’t really been targeted toward them.”

Conderino says that people misunderstand the nature of homelessness in Fairfield County. While many struggle with substance abuse and chronic mental health problems, others simply can’t find housing they can afford.

“The perception is that people aren’t working, but they are. They just don’t make enough to sustain themselves in an apartment and pay for everything else. You can’t find a one bedroom apartment in Danbury for under $900.”

In Bridgeport, Merton Center Director Mark Grasso says that he and the staff have seen a doubling of the number of people visiting the food pantry in the past year. “That’s been kind of a shocker for us. Now we have over 500 people coming in for bags of food. We’re just seeing a lot more people who simply can’t make ends meet, and the bad economy has finally hit them,” he says.

At New Covenant House of Hospitality in Stamford, Director Brian Jenkins reports that his food pantry has experienced an increase of about 75 new people a month coming in for bags for groceries to bring home and feed families. “Most of them are working people, many immigrant day laborers who we haven’t seen before and may not see on a regular basis,” says Jenkins, who explains that many come in on months when their hours are cut and they can’t make ends meet.

“We’re doing our job if they come here to save money on their food budget and that prevents them from becoming homeless,” says Jenkins, who notes that NCH serves almost 750 meals a day between its breakfast, lunch and dinner offerings and its after-school program for local children.

Cole says the recent $3 million budget cuts in mental health services announced by the Malloy administration will lead to a $57,000 decrease in Catholic Charities programs that directly serve the homeless and those suffering from chronic mental illness. She says the cutback in mental health services will be more expensive in the long run, because many people suffering from chronic illness who have functioned well with the proper medication are no longer receiving benefits and will ultimately end up in emergency rooms and care.

“Blessed Gifts” for Christmas and all occasions

BRIDGEPORT— Blessed Gifts launched a Gift of Giving Campaign for Christmas that enables donors to send cards to friends and loved ones while making gifts to support vital ministries and programs of the diocese.

“You can make a gift in honor of or in memory of someone, or simply let someone know you’re thinking of them and supporting good works in their name,” says Pam Rittman, who is coordinating the effort for the diocesan development office.

Rittman said that some of the most popular gifts cards this year are those that enable the diocese to feed the hungry. Many donors purchased $50 cards that provide Christmas dinner for two families at the Clergy Residence; $100 worth of groceries for families to take home from diocesan food pantries; and $250 to sponsor an evening meal for retired priests at the Catherine Dennis Keefe Queen of Clergy Residence in Stamford.

“The response has been enthusiastic,” Rittman says, “because people are looking for a way to make a meaningful and memorable gift that reflects the values and faith of those who are honored by it.”

Patricia Thomas, a parishioner at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Fairfield, recently purchased a Blessed Gift in honor of her father by purchasing grocery bags to serve hungry families who visit New Covenant House of Hospitality food pantry in Stamford.

Thomas says she likes Blessed Gifts because it gives her a way of personalizing the giving by selecting to support an act of charity that is important to her faith.

She made her first Blessed Gift when the program was launched last Christmas and was very pleased by the response, so this year she looked forward to the new gift opportunities.

“Christmas changes a lot as we get older and it’s nice to place the emphasis on giving rather than receiving—especially when we have so much,” says Thomas, who is vice president of the Ladies Guild, which made and sold Advent center pieces this year to support parish programs.

“This is a great way to help those in need by supporting ministries that reach out to them,” she says.

Donors simply visit the diocesan website, select a gift to put in their “shopping cart,” and they can print or email a card to someone they love and faith of those who are honored by it.

The card. Their gift is directed to the appropriate ministry. Donors can also shop through the envelope included in this issue of Fairfield County Catholic.

In addition to providing Christmas giving opportunities, Blessed Gifts offers giving opportunities for “All Occasions” throughout the year including birthdays, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, anniversaries, sympathy cards, weddings, First Communion, and Confirmation.

(To shop on the Blessed Gifts website, go to www.blessedgifts.org.)
Travel

Bethlehem, City of Bread and King of Kings

By FR. TERRY WALSH

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern Israel.” Matthew 2:6

Last month, the Bridgettine Sisters, whose convent is in Darien, arranged a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in honor of the 100th anniversary of the re-constitution of the Order of St. Bridget of Sweden, as well as the “Year of Faith” pronounced by our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI.

I was invited to attend and eagerly joined the group of 27 for what would be my first visit to Israel. We traversed the country for 10 days. From Jerusalem we visited Galilee, Nazareth, and Cana in the north, and Jericho in the east. We journeyed from the depths of the Dead Sea to the mountainous heights of Mount Tabor and Mount Carmel. Truly, it was an unforgettable experience.

Our overnight flight from New York to Tel Aviv landed on a Saturday afternoon and we went straight to Jerusalem. Upon entering the City of David, the city lights lit up the domes and the wall surrounding the Old City stretched around our view. Our bus turned up one of the five hills surrounding the city and we arrived at the Bridgettine Convent. Our pilgrimage began and ended with Holy Mass at the convent in the “City of Peace.” And yet, in these tumultuous times, peace in the Holy Land seems so fragile. Barrier walls have been constructed around the city, as well as in various other places around the country that serve to divide territory between Israelis and Palestinians. The Israelis call it the “Envelope of Jerusalem,” protecting the city from harm, while the Palestinians refer to it as the “Wall of Shame,” dividing families. Even in the Christian churches, there is division among the Catholic, Orthodox, and Armenian religions, dividing up “territory” within the churches themselves.

After Mass, we made our way to Bethlehem. We arrived at the checkpoint guarded by soldiers wielding machine guns. As we crossed the threshold into Palestinian territory, there was a notable decline in economic prosperity. Many have taken flight from Bethlehem in recent years. I quietly wondered what sort of “checkpoints” our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph might have had to endure as they made their way from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census decreed by Caesar Augustus. Did they have enough food to sustain them throughout their long and difficult journey? Were they able to have adequate shelter? Were the people along the way as cold-hearted as those they would later encounter in Bethlehem?

Indeed, after their long and difficult journey from Nazareth, Mary and Joseph were greeted with the frosty Wall of Spiritual Poverty, closely guarded by uncaring people who were suffering the effects of hard-heartedness. Although Mary was very near her time to give birth, all they heard was, “No room at the Inn!”

Little did the people of Bethlehem know that the one who came to conquer the hard-heartedness of mankind was in their midst. Little did they realize he would be born into the world right here in Bethlehem so that cold hearts could become warm, so that love and kindness could, with the help of his grace, wash away fear and despair and thereby heal spiritual infirmity.

The same seems true today. Our Lord has come, he is in our midst, yet “walls” of spiritual poverty abound. Bethlehem reminds us that we need to prepare a worthy place for Him in the “ins” of our hearts and humbly beg Him to take up residence in our souls and so heal us.

Early the next morning, we traveled a short distance along the hillside down into a valley of fields where we arrived at a chapel constructed in the midst of several excavated caves, which had served as shelters for the humble shepherds and their sheep during the time of our Lord. It was here in these fields that man first heard the joyful exaltation, “Gloria in excelsis Deo!”

St. Luke writes: “And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch in the night. And the angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Be not afraid . . . for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2:8-11).

And there we were, standing in this holy place, seemingly unchanged from 2,000 years ago, pondering the joy of the shepherds. Indeed, the Prince of Peace had burst into the world to give life. He teaches us that we must be “poor in spirit” —acknowledging our spiritual poverty—in order to receive the healing graces that come to us most abundantly through sacramental Confession and the Eucharist.

We gathered in the chapel in the Shepherd’s Field for Mass and sang the Hymn of Praise, “Gloria in excelsis Deo!” in the very place where it was first proclaimed. We sang with the angels, as Jesus was about to become present in the Eucharist upon the altar here in the fields of Bethlehem, “The City of Bread!”

After Mass, we made our way up to the birthplace of our Lord, just as the shepherds had done after they were greeted by the angels on that first Christmas night. We met pilgrims from around the world who had, likewise, come to honor our Lord.

The Church of the Nativity, commissioned in 326 A.D. by St. Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, was built over the cave where Mary gave birth to Jesus. The Emperor Justinian replaced Constantine’s church in 530 A.D., building the larger church which still stands today. Roman Catholics, the Greek Orthodox, and the Armenians control various parts of the Church of the Nativity.

We entered the church through the “Door of Humility,” a small doorway that can only be entered on foot with one’s head bowed. It was a gentle reminder to “bow” one’s heart, too, in this holy place. We joined the long line of pilgrims who patiently waited to enter the grotto and venerate the very place where Jesus was born.

As the line moved through the church, inching its way closer to the steps that led into the cave, we passed beautiful icons depicting the Nativity. The most unique icon, the Virgin Mary of Bethlehem, depicted Mary smiling as she held her newborn Son. It is said to be the only icon in the world of Mary smiling. The icon standing by the narrow entrance directed pilgrims into the Grotto of the Nativity. There we knelt before the silver star-shaped marker in the floor and prayed for a few moments, contemplating how the whole . . .

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 19
Local News

St. Ann school on 60 Minutes

It started in a sixth-grade classroom and ended up on nationwide television. Students from St. Ann School in Bridgeport were the centerpiece of CBS’s 60 Minutes segment on a Free the Children project to build a school in Kenya.

Viewers couldn’t feel Africa’s stupendous heat, smell the dust, or feel the ache in young muscles after a day spent mixing cement and hauling concrete blocks. What they could see, though, was the depth of commitment the students from St. Ann’s brought to their project. That commitment extends to the entire school community, which financed the project through bake sales and handmade bracelets and a bevy of fundraising activities.

The journey from the Bridgeport classroom to Kenya and on to nationwide attention began when social studies teacher Dawn Pilotti showed her class Oprah Winfrey’s “Building a Dream” documentary about the school she opened for girls in South Africa. “Our sixth-grade curriculum compares cultures,” explains Pilotti. “Oprah’s response to the situation poor children suffer in Africa hit home. “People need to know that not everyone has a proper education. They need to know that not everyone has it easy the way we do,” says Javell Watson, who had grown up in poverty in Jamaica. “I started to cry because I could feel their pain,” recalls Javell, now 18 and a student at Bridgeport’s Central Magnet High School.

St. Ann’s has always aimed to encourage initiative in its students. Even so, Pilotti was surprised that, during recess, several students were back at her door. “They came to me and said, ‘We have to do something. We have to build a school,’” she recalls. “The school featured on 60 Minutes isn’t St. Ann’s first. The first one was in the African country of Sierra Leone. Following that, the students raised funds for their counterparts in earthquake-devastated Haiti. During the 2010-11 school year, the newest crop of leaders—Gabriella Torres, now a sophomore at Lauralton Hall in Milford, Cynthia Rivera, a freshman at Kolbe-Cathedral High School in Bridgeport, and seventh-graders Joey Hopkins and Magdalena Dutkowska—connected with Free the Children.

When Craig Kielburger, founder of Free the Children, spoke at the New Canaan Teen Center last November, he referred specifically to the “extraordinary St. Ann’s School of Bridgeport.” He told his listeners, “It’s students like these that give me hope for the future.”

“He told me, ‘You’re one of the most active clubs in the United States!’” says Pilotti. “This summer the students’ fundraising efforts paid off when Gabby found herself, boots on the ground in Kenya, leading the delegation to help build their latest school. More than heavy work, heat, dust—and the traditional Masai hut—these students brought home some hard lessons. ‘People need to know that poverty is a real thing,’ Joey told the television audience. ‘Kids starving at four or five years old is a real thing in the world. They need to know that not everyone can just go downstairs, turn on a tap, and get a glass of water. Not everyone has a proper education. You should really be thankful for the things you have.’

Most of all, Joey told the television audience—especially the young—’They need to know that they can be the change in the world.’

St. Pius X Dinner Dance

GALA EVENING—(l-r) Dr. Robert and Kathleen Russo, Grace and Ruben Rodriguez, and Grace and Eugene Fairfield were presented St. Pius X Service Awards at the St. Pius X Faith Center Dinner Dance Gala held at The Country Club of Fairfield. Parish Trustees Denis Sullivan and Ernest Pierson, along with their spouses, served as hosts for the evening. Fr. Paul Fitzgerald, S.J., senior vice president of Fairfield University was the featured speaker.

“The assistance that participants gave us by means of the Gala is of critical importance to the completion of our new Faith Center building,” says Fr. Michael Dogali, pastor of St. Pius (center above). The new, 14,000 square foot Faith Center includes a small chapel, a library, choir room, parish offices, and a large community room for various functions. The Faith Center is expected to be completed in Spring 2013.

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Local News

Pax Christi awarded to Prep senior

By PAT HENNESSY

David Maloof II, a senior at Fairfield Prep and a member of St. John Parish in Darien, has been awarded the Eileen Egan Peacemaker Award from Pax Christi. David received the prestigious award for his work in helping to create a basketball facility at a Palestinian Christian refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon.

Pax Christi (the words are Latin for “the peace of Christ”) is a global Catholic peace movement with branches in more than fifty countries. The United States branch has its headquarters in New York City. Nationally-renowned winners of Pax Christi Peacemaker Awards have included actor Martin Sheen, whose passion for social justice included the celebrated Jesuit priest author whose work in helping to create a basketball facility at a Palestinian Christian refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon.

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David was awarded the Eileen Egan Peacemaker Award for his work in helping to create a basketball facility at a Palestinian Christian refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon. The camp, a former prison, has been home to thousands of Christian refugees since 1948, when they fled the Arab-Israeli war.

David’s efforts, over the past several years, to create a basketball court for children in the camp is a result of his passion for social justice, says Matt Tellis, who teaches theology to juniors and seniors at Prep. “We want them to be exposed to the values of teamwork and community.”

David’s journey to Lebanon and ultimately, to the Pax Christi award began when his father (also named David) became interested in tracing the family’s roots. David’s great-grandfather had come to America in an early wave of Lebanese immigration, arriving here in 1914. His father made contact with some cousins still living in Lebanon and arranged for a visit. At that time David was still in middle school.

“My dad felt that, with so many issues going on in the country, going just to the tourist part wouldn’t help us understand the country,” he explains.

So the elder Maloof contacted the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, a papal agency for humanitarian and pastoral support. They put together a tour that included both the country’s tourist attractions and locations that highlighted tensions in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East, including the Dbayeh camp for Christian refugees located just outside Beirut. The injustice implicit in the camp’s existence was an eye-opener for a young man about to enter eighth grade.

“They’re called refugees, but the Christian Palestinians have been there for about 80 years,” David explains. “The Lebanese have ruled that they can live in these camps, but they can’t become Lebanese citizens. They can’t build roofs on their houses, because under Lebanese law a roof would make them permanent residences. They can have a piece of tin over the top to keep out the rain, but that’s all.

David points out that he grew up in a generation that has seen practically everything, thanks to streaming video, the Internet and YouTube. Even so, “to meet people, to put myself in their shoes, to create a business or get a driver’s license is very difficult for them.”

Ignatian spirituality is sometimes referred to as the “spirituality of decision makers.” David couldn’t change Middle East politics, but in conversations with camp directors he learned that American basketball was becoming an international sport and was gaining a following in Lebanon. This was something he could work with.

With the help of a Garage Sale at St. John’s, and two New Year’s Day Polar Bear Swims in Newport, RI, (for one, David and his sister, Julia, did the swim as Power Rangers; this year he and his uncle did it at Batman and Robin), David raised enough funds to build a basketball hoop at the camp and supply the kids with basketballs, with money left over for a ping pong table and equipment.

David’s contribution snowballed. The Italian Embassy had invited David and his dad back to run a 10-day basketball clinic. Although his sport of choice at Prep is wrestling, David had played basketball at St. Aloysius, and plays at the YMCA in Darien. “We set up three teams, taught them defensive drills, had them practice free throws and run layup lines,” he explains.

Corey Dennis, a theology teacher at Prep and David’s wrestling coach, has known him well over his years at the school and is proud of his efforts to help the youngsters at the Dbayeh camp. “Dave doesn’t see this as service, he sees this as justice,” he says.

In the interest of making his contribution more consistent in the future, David will be contacting universities in Beirut in the hope of getting student volunteers interested in continuing the basketball clinics. The family hopes to return to Lebanon in 2014.

David hasn’t yet picked his college choice. He knows, though, that he would like to study international politics, with an eye to working in the State Department or the U.N. “Your whole life should be about helping others—it’s not something you do on weekends,” he says. “It started with my family, and Prep has really clarified this for me.”

David, along with other winners, will be presented with the Pax Christi award at a formal ceremony in the Spring.
Catholic Charities

Breakfast with Fr. Allen

NORWALK—Saying Mass every day and in many places around the world has been the “greatest joy” in his life, Fr. Charles Allen, S.J., said at the 21st Annual Celebrity Breakfast of Catholic Charities.

The event, held at Shorehaven Country Club in Norwalk, raised more than $12,000 for the behavioral health programs and Room to Grow Early Childhood Center sponsored by Catholic Charities in Norwalk. Betty Hunter of Norwalk, president of the Catholic Charities Advisory Board, served as chair, while board member Ed Bagulo of Westport was the master of ceremonies for the event.

“If I couldn’t offer Mass, I wouldn’t want to do anything,” Fr. Allen, who is special assistant to the president of Fairfield University, said. “The experience of the Mass unites us in love, charity and oneness with Christ.”

In a talk that was humorous and reflective, Fr. Allen mentioned that he never gets upset when people arrive late, because his father and family arrived late for Sunday Mass for years. “Our church had an upstairs Mass and a downstairs Mass,” he recalled, “And my father waited outside to see who was preaching at each one before he decided to go in.”

With his trademark humor, Fr. Allen said wedding Masses are among his favorite to celebrate, but he often warns the bride to “beware of the flower girls, who will upstage them every time.”

He described one recent wedding, where flowers were strewn beautifully down the center aisle by two flower girls while the youngest innocently followed behind picking them all up. The congregation reacted with laughter.

He discussed memorable Masses in his life, including one last summer at an orphanage for severely disabled young people in Nicaragua, and one in a remote Philippine village, where the people lived without any modern technology or conveniences yet sang American Christmas carols as part of their recessional hymn.

Fr. Allen said that while celebrating Mass for young people in other countries, he often finds himself thinking of the children served by Room to Grow in Norwalk and other diocesan programs that serve young people in Fairfield County.

Fr. Allen was introduced by Michael Tintrup, acting chief operating officer of Catholic Charities, who noted that Catholic Charities sponsors 33 social programs throughout the diocese. Tintrup thanked the men and women who came to support the agency’s work in Norwalk. “What’s being done in our name and in Our Lord’s name every day leads to a restoration of lives,” he told them. “I’ve seen the healing that takes place. We are grateful for your continued support for those who are marginalized in this society.”

Catholic Charities of Norwalk provides counseling, center-based childcare adoption, and mental health services to Norwalk, New Canaan, Wilton and Westport. The counseling and family service office is located at One Park St., Norwalk. Room to Grow Childcare Center is located at 208 East Ave., Norwalk.

(For more information on Catholic Charities services in Norwalk, call 203.750.9711 or email jgauthier@ccfc-ct.org.)
Concentrate on Jesus, not end-of-the-world prophecies

VATICAN CITY—Christians should not concern themselves with predictions of the end of the world, Pope Benedict XVI told his midday audience on November 18. The Pope’s comments focused on the day’s Gospel reading from Mark, chapter 13, particularly verse 32: “But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

The Pope said that Jesus, in speaking about the end times, “wishes to ensure that his disciples in every age remain unmoved by dates and predictions.” The essential thing for Christians, the Pope observed, is union with Christ.

In speaking about the end of the world, Jesus uses Old Testament imagery to describe “a future that exceeds our own categories of comprehension,” the Pope said. Most important, Jesus reminds his disciples that their focus should be on “a new center: Himself, the mystery of his person, his death and resurrection.”

Himself, the mystery of his person, his death and resurrection.

Testament imagery to describe union with Christ.

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one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

it takes on flesh and Jesus becomes the true firmament that guides man’s thoughts and actions on earth.”

Pope Benedict now tweets

VATICAN CITY—On December 3, the Vatican announced that Pope Benedict XVI will begin tweeting under the handle @Pontifex, a term for the pope that means “bridge builder” in Latin. Within hours of the announcement, he had more than 250,000 followers, and the number increases every time the screen is refreshed. The Pope launched his Twitter account on Wednesday, December 12, in his general audience. He had been taking questions in advance on matters of faith via the hashtag #askpontifex. Many of those may be touched on in those first tweets.

The Pope’s presence on Twitter is the latest initiative aimed to reach the Church’s 1.2 billion followers, especially young people. “The Pope’s presence on Twitter can be seen as the ‘tip of the iceberg’ that is the Church’s presence in the world of new media,” the Vatican said in a statement.

Pope Benedict XVI started tweeting in six languages from his own personal handle @Pontifex on December 12.

42 years,” Rev. Gipson said. “I can’t imagine not being a priest. I’m anxious to get back to priestly work.”

Access to needs, not dollars, is standard for defining poverty

VATICAN CITY—Poverty must be understood not only in terms of a shortage of money, but also in terms of a lack of access to education, health care, and other assets, Peter Cardinal Turkson, the president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, told Vatican Radio. He spoke to Vatican Radio ahead of the ‘Why Poverty’ initiative that took place adding, “Lately we have begun to include the right to energy and clean water. Basically, we’re invited to widen this concept to what makes for healthy living, as it’s not just what you have in your pocket.”

He called Catholic Social Teaching one of the most powerful tools for human development. It provides, he says, “the basic sense of human dignity which generates various forms of human rights.”

Rising number of Catholics in U.S. Congress

WASHINGTON, DC—Following the 2012 election, the number of Catholics in Congress will rise from 156 (29%) to 161 (30%). 56% of members of the new Congress are Democrats. 44% are Republicans. In addition, 6% of members of the new Congress are Jews, and 3% are Mormons.

In the 113th Congress, 54% of Catholics in the House of Representatives, and 67% of Catholics in the Senate, will be Democrats.

Swiss Guards release Christmas CD

VATICAN CITY—The Swiss Guards, in conjunction with harpist Daniela Lorenz, have released a Christmas CD, “Weihnachten mit der Schweizergarde” (Christmas with the Swiss Guard). The CD, released on November 29, features a variety of sacred Christmas carols performed by the Swiss Guards and their families.

“Most of them are German Christmas songs, so they are well known in the German part of Europe, but they are just instrumental, without singing, without lyrics,” said one of the five Swiss Guards who joined
in recording the CD, which was recorded at the studios of Vatican Radio. It features five Swiss Guards and Paraguayan harpist Daniela Lorenz performing well-known favorites such as “Little Drummer Boy,” Silent Night and Adeste Fideles as well as a number of other German and Italian carols.

The CD is available at iTunes and at several European online vendors.

Church urges ‘circle of protection’ for poor in budget debate
WASHINGTON, DC—

Catholic social teaching’s concern for human life and dignity stood front and center as the role of the federal spending was debated by political leaders and assessed by the electorate in a presidential election year.

Throughout the debate, the chairmen of two committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) renewed their call for a “circle of protection” around federally funded programs benefiting poor and vulnerable people.

“Our ongoing concerns remain centered on the care for the poor and most vulnerable in society,” said Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, CA, chairman of the bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace, called for continued funding of poverty-focused international assistance, which encompasses programs such as HIV/AIDS treatment, disaster aid, refugee services, health care, support for small farmers and aid to orphaned children.

Such spending—totaling $20.2 billion in fiscal year 2012, comprising about 0.6 percent of the federal budget—helps promote human development and builds peace among nations, he said.

At the same time, Fr. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA, focused his agency’s message to Congress during the budget negotiations on preventing drastic cuts in funding for social service programs as well as protecting the charitable tax deduction that has existed since 1917. “Our concern is that they don’t try to take the easy way out, which is seen as cutting the services to the poor,” Fr. Snyder told Catholic News Service. “That’s too easy, and too often the poor become the folks on whose backs the budget gets balanced.”

Man hurls paint cans at Poland’s Black Madonna
WARSAW, Poland—On December 9, a man hurled cans of paint at Poland’s most sacred icon in an attack that failed to damage the Black Madonna of Jasna Gora but shocked many in the staunchly Catholic country.

The 58-year-old attacker was kept his 1983 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to exert political control by Pope Benedict XVI as clear government, have been denounced by Cardinal Stanislaus Dziwisz, who was ordained with the approval of the Vatican’s approval.

Bishop Ma had originally been ordained without the approval of the Patriotic Association, and he announced that he was leaving the Patriotic Association and the bishops’ conference, established by the government, have been denounced by Pope Benedict XVI as clear efforts to exert political control over the Church.

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St. Emery celebrates 80th anniversary

On November 11, St. Emery Parish in Fairfield held its 80th anniversary celebration, an occasion which also observed their patron saint’s Feast Day, November 5.

The celebration included a Sunday Mass enriched by an honor guard from the Knights of Columbus. A luncheon followed in the parish hall. In honor of the parish’s Hungarian heritage, a typical stuffed cabbage dinner was served, including bread and butter, stuffed cabbage, kielbasa and mashed potatoes, and ending with honey cookies, tea and coffee.

Fr. Steven Balint, pastor of St. Ladislaus Parish in South Norwalk, the other parish in the Diocese of Bridgeport boasting of Hungarian heritage, said the grace in Hungarian. The history of St. Emery’s is the tale of Hungarian immigrants who settled in this area determined to build a church, a parish, and a community of their beloved Catholic faith. Under the guidance of the Franciscan Friars and founding pastor, Fr. Benedict Biro, O.F.M., the parish was formed in 1932 and placed under the patronage of Saint Emery (Emery) of Hungary. St. Emery’s Church was dedicated on November 5 of that year.

While St. Emery’s continues to treasure its Hungarian roots, over the years it has welcomed new parishioners of every ethnic heritage. Its association with the Franciscan Order ended in 2011, and St. Emery’s became a parish community under the Diocese of Bridgeport, in close association with the Church of Holy Family in Fairfield. Fr. Guido Montanaro, pastor of Holy Family, is St. Emery’s parish administrator.
Chinese students add new perspective to Trinity

By PAT HENNESSY

“It’s hard to be away from home at such a young age,” says Anthony Pavia, principal of Trinity Catholic High School in Stamford, speaking of the Chinese exchange students at Trinity. “You have to admire their courage and their determination.”

Eleven Chinese students arrived at Trinity this semester through a program sponsored by Eduboston, which specializes in providing educational opportunities in the U.S. for middle and high school age students from all over the world. Begun in Massachusetts, the company has expanded to Connecticut for the first time this school year.

This semester, Eduboston has placed students not only at Trinity but at Notre Dame Catholic High School in Fairfield and St. Joseph High School in Trumbull. There are currently 15 Chinese students studying in diocesan high schools through the program, with more to join them in the upcoming semester.

“America is the most powerful country in the world,” says Wengan Zheng, who is a senior at Trinity this year, explaining why he made the sacrifice to bring that back to China.

Wengan and the other exchange students at Trinity also want to go on to higher education here. “Universities in the United States are the best,” he says. “It’s easier not only to get into an American university but to succeed there with a few years in high school behind them.”

“As little kids in China we learned English but it was different from American English, and it wasn’t useful,” explains freshman Gabby Cui. “We learned grammar, and there was a lot of reading.”

She adds with a laugh, “Sometimes, in class, we know the grammar better than the American kids.”

Gabby’s dream is to attend Columbia University in New York. Beyond that, her ambition will come as a surprise to those who suppose all Chinese students to be interested in math and science. “I love all things about fashion,” she says. “My mom wants me to be a designer.”

Other Trinity classmates are still finding their footing, learning to fit in with the encouragement of their host families. “I have a good family,” says Tom Deng. “They want to learn about China and Chinese tradition. I was surprised about that.”

Tom and classmate Calvin Shi enjoy the additional benefit of friendships they’ve made as members of Trinity’s football team.

“I’ve made many friends because of the team,” says Calvin. “Some of them have the same classes I do and the same homeroom. One of my friends lives near our house. Sometimes his father will pick me up and bring me over there.”

“In many ways it’s easier for the boys,” observes Pavia. “They’re less inhibited. You see them with their teammates, giving high fives and slapping each other on the back. Socially, it’s a little harder on the girls. I think that, over time, their academic success will help their social confidence.”

The students and their host families get strong support from Eduboston. “We try to see that they’re blending in socially and academically,” says Rose Nanista, a member of St. Matthew Parish in Norwalk, who is in charge of the Connecticut exchange program. A support group for students and their host families provides outings that can focus on cultural enrichment or something fun—like an afternoon racing Go Karts. Students and their families may go to New York City during the holidays or visit Washington, DC. Upcoming events might include a Christmas Party.

“All of it is new to them,” says Nanista, whose family is hosting two students in addition to their own teenage daughters.

Pavia believes that the exchange students are not the only ones who benefit from the exchange program. “They bring a different perspective to the classroom. Just by being here, they make all our students more open to different cultures. They make Trinity a classroom of life, a classroom of the world.”

(Eduboston is looking for host families who can give an international student a warm family atmosphere for the upcoming semester. Interested families can call Nanista: 203.984.6541.)
Local News

Vaccaro inducted into Vets Hall of Fame

Vaccaro served as a U.S. Navy hospital corpsman during the Korean War. State leaders headed by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy and Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman paid tribute to the veterans during the induction ceremony, which was attended by Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Linda Schwartz and state Senator Carlo Leone of Stamford, the co-chairman of the legislature’s veterans committee.

The Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame was established to increase the awareness of the lifetime contributions of veterans after completion of their military service. It is not a military hall of fame, the Commissioner’s Office emphasizes. “Those selected for the honor of induction are veterans who honorably served their country through military service and who continue to serve and inspire their fellow man,” their nomination form states. “They all have made significant impacts on the lives of others and their communities.”

Vaccaro graduated from New Haven State Teachers College, and earned three separate master’s degrees: from New Haven State, Fordham University and Fairfield University. He served as a teacher in the Stamford Public School system for 36 years, teaching science and physical education.

His love of sports—he had played football in college—led to him to work as a referee, officiating games for high school football, soccer, wrestling, volleyball, basketball, baseball and softball. At 82 years young, he still works as the official timekeeper for sports at Darien High School.

Much as he loves sports, Vaccaro’s first love is his Catholic
Local News

faith and his home parish, Holy Spirit. Living the Gospel message, he not only volunteers at Holy Spirit but with the Knights of Columbus, American Legion, Food Bank, New Covenant House of Hospitality, Toys for Tots and other charitable organizations.

He told The Stamford Times that one of his biggest joys is the time he spends at Smith House Nursing and Rehabilitation Center working as a Eucharistic minister, holding prayer services and doing the readings at Mass. “Whenever they need some kind of religious help, I offer my services,” he told the Times.

Recognition of veterans through the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame began in 2005. The first group on inductees that year included the 41st President of the United States, George Herbert Walker Bush. To date, sixty-one veterans of Connecticut have been honored.

“I was willing to serve, and if I had to serve again, I would,” Vaccaro told the Times. “I want to be remembered as one who gave back and was unselfish. My community gave me so much that I want to give back to my community. I want to be known as one who did not take, but who gave.”

CARMINE VACCARO IS CONGRATULATED by Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman at the induction ceremony for the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame, established to recognize the lifetime contributions of veterans to their community.

Know-how is supporting the communities where we live and work.

We are proud to support the Fairfield County Catholic.

Wishing you and your families a joyful and peaceful holiday.

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Tough Choices

Advent was days away and Christmas lights were already lending cheer to dark streets when the State of Connecticut announced a budget that would cut food stamps, aid to needy families, and mental health programs. (See the story on page 3.) Large deficits have left the state to face difficult choices, and the cutbacks challenge Catholics and all people of goodwill as we prepare to celebrate this most joyous season.

We decorate our homes at Christmas, defying the darkest time of year. We visit and exchange gifts, sharing warmth and love. In every church at every Mass around the entire world, Catholics will pray for the poor and afflicted, and most importantly we will celebrate the birth of the “King of Kings,” who humbled himself to be born a little baby: homeless, cold, and vulnerable.

There are other babies out there. If Christmas means anything, it means we can’t ignore them—not yet-born babies carried in their mothers’ wombs, little ones still needing baby food, kids in troubled families that need a little counseling to keep things together.

Christmas carries a challenge this year. The Babe of Bethlehem calls Catholics to read the news, plow through the statistics, become involved in the budget process, make our voices heard. It’s not fun, it’s not sinister. It is a part of the real work of Christmas as we celebrate the light of Christ in the world.

Christmas Blessings

The diocese comes to life in a very special way at Christmas each year. People are busy making preparations; parishes are hosting advent prayer services and concerts; social concerns committees are ready to reach out by feeding the hungry and delivering presents to the poor; and our priests are in full swing with the myriad of parish activities that make our lives more fulfilling and joyful.

Blessings abound in our diocese, and we have so many gifts to put under our tree: vibrant parishes, remarkable schools, compassionate social services, devoted priests, deacons, sisters and religious, and the shared expression of our deep and abiding faith together—all the makings of a great Christmas.

Perhaps Christmas has even more meaning because it is nurtured by the generous and faithful giving by so many throughout the year. People are busy making preparations; parishes are hosting advent prayer services and concerts; social concerns committees are ready to reach out by feeding the hungry and delivering presents to the poor; and our priests are in full swing with the myriad of parish activities that make our lives more fulfilling and joyful.

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Perhaps Christmas has even more meaning because it is nurtured by the generous and faithful giving by so many throughout the year. On behalf of the diocese, we thank you for your support, and wish our readers and their families a very happy and holy Christmas.

Silent Night/Evening News

In the continuous loop of Christmas standards on the radio, the 1966 version of “Silent Night” by Simon and Garfunkel is seldom played, perhaps in part because its message dims the Christmas spirit. The rendition begins with their sweet infusion of harmonies over a music track that is played, perhaps in part because its message dims the Christmas spirit. The effect is disturbing, because it jolts us out of a warm whispering of the evening news. As the carol builds, their voices grow fainter, almost spectral, while the news report gets louder, just short of strident. The effect is disturbing, because it jolts us out of a warm feeling to face the reality of the harsh and ugly news we live by. As adults we know the world does not change from one Christmas to the next, and that peace on earth remains elusive. But the child in us wants to believe otherwise, and as people of faith, we must. In his stories, Charles Dickens gave us Christmas as a change of heart, opening the spirit, and a renewed sense of generosity, but the Church gives us even greater expectations: that we can share in the light of Christ and fulfill our deepest longing for union with God. Perhaps it’s time we turn down the volume of the nightly news and find peace in the true gift of Christmas.
Advent symbols link the Old and New Testaments

A WOMAN’S VIEW
BY ANTOINETTE BOSCO

Antoinette Bosco is a member of St. Margaret Bourgeois Parish in Brookfield.

The fine art of delayed gratification

A DAD’S VIEW
BY MATTHEW HENNESSEY

Matthew Hennessey and his family are parishioners of St. Aloysius in New Canaan.

Editorial


The first reference to Advent “occurs in Spain in about 380 A.D. Christians were told that from December 17 to the Epiphany (January 6), they shouldn’t miss church,” Brother Aelred told me. By the sixth century, when Pope Gregory assembled the O Antiphons, these were, in a way, a patchwork quilt of references from Hebrew scriptures. They are drawn from Exodus, Isaiah, Genesis, Habakkuk, Wisdom and others.

“In the Middle ages, churches in Germany and Paris sometimes added two or four more O Antiphons, like O Virgin of Virgins… O Gabriel, Messenger of Heaven… O Jerusalem… O King and Peacemaker… O Lady of the World,” Brother Aelred added, saying his own belief that the O Antiphons are “wonderful because they derive their imagery from both our Jewish and Christian heritage.”

—continued on page 17

December 18: O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who
Advent/Christmas

Knights of Columbus Canadian Crèche Exhibit

By JOSEPH PRONECHEN

Advent and Christmastide in Connecticut this year brings the eighth annual Christmas Crèche exhibit at the Knights of Columbus Museum in New Haven. This time the museum is presenting over 80 examples of crèches from our neighbor to the north in a show called “Joyeux Noel Christmas in Canada.”

As ever, the crèches bring a sense of joy, wonder, and in some cases, awe. Some bring unexpected smiles for a number of reasons, such as the simple scene with figures made from potato paste.

It’s one of the most unusual examples; many other crèches or representations of the Holy Family are made of much more standard materials, such as wood, cloth and ceramics, not to mention resin that appears to be stone, porcelain, painted plaster—and even a stable made of moose horns.

The crèches come in different sizes. Some can easily fit a space the size of a dinner plate, while the largest spans an entire wall of over 15 feet in one of the four gallery rooms filled with the crèches.

It’s no surprise there are quite a few examples of crèche figures carved from wood. Canadian woodcarvers represented in this show are masterful artists, working mostly in their preferred pine. But don’t envision the typical knotty pine here. The kind of pine they use gives the Holy Family and all the accompanying figures a honey tone and an incredible smoothness. A few individual examples even resemble ivory.

Among these sets are ones from Antonio Caruso. Italian-born and now a resident of Canada, Caruso is one of Canada’s finest professional artists. It’s no wonder when you see his exquisite and intricately carved figures that look as if they’re ready to move about.

One of Caruso’s prime examples is the scene with shepherds and sheep in awe of baby Jesus and presenting gifts of fruit to the Holy Family. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph appear to be carved from a single piece of the wood. His even more elaborate 25-figure scene is carved meticulously in every detail and set in and around a cave of driftwood.

Yet another artist’s “Shepherd Boy Visits the Holy Family” is as masterful a carving in pine as you can find. The simple wonder of the shepherd boy and joy of the occasion is captured without lots of intricate details.

A few quite large sculptures of the Holy Family—they stand three or more feet high—come from another of Canada’s top artists, Timothy Schmalz. His stylistic Holy Family groupings show the closeness, the unbreakable bond of the Holy Family in the way Joseph puts his arms around Mary who encircles or holds the baby Jesus in her arms. Such a circular grouping radiates protection and the feeling of serenity and the peace of Christmas.

Most of his sculptures form a circular grouping radiates protection and the feeling of serenity and the peace of Christmas.

The Apostolate of African Americans is hosting a day to celebrate our Cultural Diversity and Gifts

Saturday, December 29 starting at 3:00pm
Blessed Sacrament Church
275 Union Avenue, Bridgeport

The day will feature:
Kwanzaa Celebration
African Drummers
Celebration of our elders
MAAFA21
A talk about Our Lady of Kibeho
and many fun activities for the kids

We will end the day with a light traditional meal.

To join us in the celebration please R.S.V.P. to Fr. Reggie pastor@blessedsacramentbpt.org

(Reservation is required so that enough food can be prepared)

Kwanzaa celebrates seven core principals (Nguzo Saba):
Unity, Self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

The largest display is the panorama of Christmas in a Canadian Village that stretches the entire wall of one exhibit room. All the townspeople, small ceramic figures known as santons, seem to be celebrating the birth of Christ at Christmas. They represent all kind of people and occupations in the village.

This diorama is one of many on loan from Riviere-Erernite’s crèche museum in Northern Quebec. The town is known as Canada’s “Bethlehem.”

Another major portion of the crèches is on loan from the Oratory on St. Joseph’s on Mont Royal in Montreal.

(A fine show for the Christmas season, Joyeux Noel Christmas in Canada runs through February 3, 2013. Bonus exhibits include the 12th annual Christmas Tree Festival featuring Christmas Trees decorated by school children. For details, call the Knights of Columbus Museum: 203.865.0408.)
Advent/Christmas

Ally’s Angel Card reaches the Pope

By PAT HENNESSY

When Pope Benedict opens his Christmas cards this year, he’ll see one that was designed by Ally Fallon, now a seventh-grader at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School in Fairfield.

Ally’s design of the guardian angel hovering over the stable in Bethlehem won a nationwide contest sponsored by the Holy Childhood Association, part of the Pontifical Mission Society. “I like angels because they’re pretty and, like—powerful,” says Ally, explaining her choice of subject. “They look after you and show up when you need help.”

“This is a huge honor,” says Fr. Frederick Saviano, diocesan director of the Propagation of the Faith, another branch of the Missionary Childhood Association, part of the Pontifical Mission Societies, Fr. Andrew Small, OMI, is using as his personal Christmas card, including the one he sends to the Pope.”

Although Ally (the oldest of triplets) is interested in art, drawing was not the central focus of the project. The heart of her sixth-grade service program was concern for poor children worldwide. Her class cooperated throughout the year with The Holy Childhood Association to learn about and help children in mission countries throughout the world. The association recently changed its name to the Missionary Childhood Association. The change emphasizes its care for the childhood in mission areas with stress given to those areas of greatest poverty. The association has developed activities to teach youngsters in the United States about the needs of the world’s poorest children and invites them to pray and to offer financial help. In this way, students in the U.S. as well as children in the missions learn that they are all part of the one Body of Christ.

“We had little boxes to put money in,” Ally explains. “It would go to the missions for milk or pencils. A dollar could buy, maybe, 75 pencils in countries that are really poor.”

A year spent thinking about poor children made Ally look at her own life through new eyes. “I don’t really like milk that much,” she admits. “My mom puts it on the table every night at dinner, and I force myself to drink it. I know she puts it there because you need milk; it’s nutritional. In some countries, kids have only dirty water to drink.”

Just as Ally’s prize-winning card did not happen in isolation, her awareness of the plight of other children comes as part of a planned development that begins very young. “At St. Thomas, service begins in kindergarten,” says Principal Patricia Brady. “Our kids understand that service is not merely a program, it’s a call from our baptism.”

Kindergartners learn the value of the elderly, starting with their own grandparents. First-graders grow in compassion by corresponding with elderly parishioners. By the second grade, they are creating decorations for the residents at local nursing homes, and visiting them for a social.

Through the years the awareness of St. Thomas students expands, taking in retired priests and religious, sick children, and the poor in their community. By eighth grade, they will understand their baptismal call to respond to the needs of the world through social justice activities, including making a dinner for nearby Project Hope soup kitchen and helping at the local YMCA.

In the seventh grade this year, Ally and her classmates learn about the work of Catholic Charities from Richard Madwid, director of behavioral health in the Bridgeport office (and a St. Thomas alum), and organize a mitten and hat drive for the families served by Sr. Theresa Tremblay in Bridgeport.

Meantime, this holiday season has been an extraordinary one for Ally and her family. The entire family, including her sisters Kelly and Molly, was invited by the Pontifical Mission Societies to a special celebration held December 8 at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC. Ally’s card was prominently displayed in the Shrine.

Through this Christmas and beyond, Ally’s guardian angel will be a visible presence when she goes to bed each night. “I keep a picture of my drawing in my room, and I look at it before I go to sleep. It gives me comfort, knowing that my angel is watching over me.”

Advent Symbols from page 15
The young Sister and the iconic Chinese Cardinal

By FRANK DiROSA

The thirty-something Chinese Sister, wearing a modified habit, was eager to chat as my wife and I settled into our seats behind hers in the Vatican’s Pope VI Audience Hall about a half-hour before Pope Benedict XVI’s weekly audience. Attracted by our speaking English in the midst of a multi-lingual sea, she quickly struck up a conversation. Her own English was impeccable as she explained that she was in Rome en route to her homeland for ministry in a parish after studying theology in the United States for a couple of years.

An engaging and cheerful model of a happy woman religious, she occasionally interrupted our back-and-forth, while we awaited the Holy Father’s entry, by standing up to aim her digital camera and click off images of the stage decorations and the faces of pilgrims to show her folks back home.

Our exchanges triggered thoughts in my mind of how the faith is practiced in China, what with six million Catholics torn with six million Catholics torn between the illegal underground Church and those who defy it as members of the illegal underground Church. Where, I wondered, did the Sister fit?

I’ve had a long curiosity about the Church in China, from the brilliant and prophetic way the 16th-century Italian Jesuit missionary Fr. Matteo Ricci laid the foundation for Catholicism there and whose cause for canonization began in 1984, to the pioneering Maryknoll missionaries like Brooklyn-born Bishop Francis X. Ford, who preached the faith there for three decades before dying in a Chinese Communist prison in 1952 and whose canonization cause has also begun.

Likewise, I’ve been fascinated by the riveting story of the courageous Cardinal Ignatius Kung Pin-Mei, the Bishop of Shanghai, who was arrested in 1955 and spent three decades in prison for refusing Communist demands to renounce the pope, sever ties with Rome and give allegiance to the Catholic Patriotic Association.

Before he was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1960, he defiantly told the chief prosecutor: “I am a Roman Catholic bishop. If I denounce the Holy Father, not only would I not be a bishop, I would not even be a Catholic. You can cut off my head, but you can never take away my duties.”

After his release from an ordeal that included stretches of time in isolation, he was freed in 1988 to come to the U.S. for medical reasons, with the help of the late Bishop Walter Curtis. He lived his declining years in Stamford, dying there in 2000 at age 98.

I thought about Cardinal Kung as we talked with the Chinese Sister about her work. Did she minister within the Patriotic Association or the outlawed underground Church? I think I knew, but I didn’t want to make her uncomfortable with a pointed question. So I asked generally about the two strains in China’s Catholicism. Diplomatically, she replied, “We all pray to the same God.” I asked one more question: “Have you ever heard of Cardinal Kung?” After a pause, she said no. I left it at that.

I repeated the exchange for Joseph Kung, the Cardinal’s nephew, who maintains contact with the Catholics who practice underground in China and in whose Stamford home his uncle lived until his death. “I’m disappointed,” he said, “but I’m not surprised.”

But the persecution the Cardinal endured under the Communists isn’t forgotten among those who practice surreptitiously, says Msgr. Nicholas Griez, the retired pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Weston and founding editor of Fairfield County Catholic. “There, he’s an icon.”

Efforts have been made so that the memory of the deceased prelate wouldn’t fade. Joseph Kung formed the Cardinal Kung Foundation several years ago to provide spiritual and financial support for underground priests, seminarians and religious. Msgr. Griez is a board member. Remarkably, it currently assists materially almost 100 seminarians who are studying for advanced degrees at universities in Rome, Spain and France.

And his name is being kept alive spiritually. Archbishop William E. Lori, now in Baltimore, when he was still Bishop of Bridgeport asked Msgr. Stephen DiGiovanni, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Basilica in Stamford, to take initial steps toward beginning the cause for Cardinal Kung’s canonization. It began this year with three days of prayer, on October 11-13. The hope is that the next diocesan bishop will officially open the cause, Msgr. DiGiovanni says.

There’s a further connection between Cardinal Kung and St. John’s. It was there that his funeral Mass was celebrated March 18, 2000. At the end of the days of prayer in October, the parish was consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as the Cardinal had done for the Diocese of Shanghai.

While the Chinese Sister in Rome claimed not to recognize Cardinal Kung’s name, we found her devotion to her vocation clear and impressive. What a challenge it must be to work in an environment so hostile and restrictive that would attempt to extinguish the memory of a brave man of faith.
Travel

_**BETHLEHEM FROM PAGE 4**_

world changed the moment Jesus was born in this sacred place.

There was a smaller niche adjacent to the spot where the manger was kept. Imagine the Blessed Virgin Mary kneeling there, adoring her son. “And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). Jesus has come to feed the world—if only man would receive him.

From there, we visited the “Grotto of the Lady Mary” or “Milk Grotto,” where it is believed the Holy Family stayed on their flight into Egypt during the slaughter of the Innocents. While Mary was nursing Jesus, a drop of milk fell to the ground. A white powder then covered the cave. Since then, many infertile couples have come to consume the powder and have gone on to have children. Others have been cured of various diseases. Indeed, through the intercession of Our Lady of the Milk, there have been more than 2,000 testimonies of miracles in recent years. A church was built over the cave in 385 A.D.

As twilight approached, we visited the Bridgettine Convent in Bethlehem, and from its rooftop gazed upon the city, wondering when the walls of division would finally be conquered.

(Fr. Walsh is parochial vicar and DRE at the Basilica of Saint John the Evangelist in Stamford. His pilgrimage memoir continues in THE EAGLE, the monthly journal of the Basilica. Read it online at www.stjohnsstamford.com/the-eagle.)

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_Saint Thomas Aquinas Church_  
1719 Post Road • Fairfield, Connecticut 06824 • 203.255.1097

_Rev. Victor T Martin, Pastor_

**Christmas 2012 Schedule**

**Advent Penance Service**

Tuesday, December 18 – 7:30 pm

Daily Mass on Monday, December 24, 7:00 am ONLY

**Christmas Eve Masses**

Monday, December 24
4 pm - Children’s Mass; 6 pm - Children’s Mass
8:00 pm Christmas Eve Mass; Adult Choir Concert 11:30 pm; and 12:00 am - Midnight Mass

**Christmas Day Masses**

Tuesday, December 25
7 am, 10:30 am, and 12 noon

No 7 am Mass on Wednesday - December 26th

**Feast of Mary, Mother of God**

New Year’s Eve - December 31 – 5 pm Mass

**New Year’s Day Masses**

Tuesday - January 1, 2013
7 am, 10:30 am, and 12 noon

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**HOLIDAY SCHEDULE 2012-2013**

**CHRISTMAS MASSES**

**Christmas Eve, Monday**

Vigil at 4:00 and 5:30 pm  
Mass in Spanish, 7:30 pm  
Christmas Mass, 10:00 pm  
Christmas Day, Tuesday  
7:00, 9:00, 10:30 am, 12:15, 5:30 pm

**NEW YEAR'S MASSES**

**Solemnity of Mary**

Monday, December 31, 2012

Vigil, at 5:30 pm and 7:30 pm Vigil Mass in Spanish  
Tuesday, January 1, 2013

7:00, 8:00 am and 12:05, 5:30 pm

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_**Prayers and Blessings to our Friends and Parishioners during the Christmas season and for the New Year**_

Rev. Msgr. Frank C. Wissel, Pastor  
Rev. Richard J. Gemza, Parochial Vicar  
Rev. John Gomez, Parochial Vicar  
Rev. John Inserra, Parochial Vicar  
and the Staff of St. Mary Parish

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_ST. MARY CHOIR CHRISTMAS CONCERT_

Adult and Youth Choruses  
Sunday, December 16 at 3:00 pm  
(Suggested admission $10 - Children Free)

178 Greenwich Avenue • Greenwich, CT 06830 • 203.869.9393 • FAX 203.625.4760
Advent/Christmas

Feed My people

MONROE—“Just over two years ago my buddy was working part time at Stop & Shop,” recalls Hank Banville, a member of St. Jude Parish. “He told me that they had to throw away a lot of food every day if the bakery items didn’t sell from the day-old shelf.” Banville checked with the manager, and found that his friend’s account was indeed accurate. The manager was happy to let Banville have the baked goods to bring to soup kitchens. At first, Banville started doing it by himself about three times a week, going to The Thomas Merton Center and Bridgeport Rescue Mission among others. “Talking it up—which I can do,” the gregarious Banville says, “I was able to get several guys from St. Jude’s to help out. Now we have enough men to cover the whole week! One of them comes in from Milford, in gratitude for being able to receive a kidney transplant from his wife who just happens to be visiting my wife downstairs with the other ‘girls.’”

The men’s favorite stop is a visit to Homes for the Brave on lower Park Avenue. The organization provides housing,
Advent/Christmas

vocational training and job placement and others services to help veterans, leave homelessness behind. “The vets especially enjoy the pastries,” Banville reports.

The men have also donated bakery items to eight churches of different denominations, including the Church of the Blessed Sacrament, St. Charles Borromeo and St. George, all of which have needy families among their parishioners.

The men call their program Feed My People. “All the guys get great satisfaction doing it,” Banville says. When he bags the bread and pastries at Stop and Shop, Banville explains to shoppers that these items would be thrown away if the men weren’t picking them up.

“Then I tell them about Sr. Theresa Tremblay at the day care center as she saw two large sheet cakes that I brought her,” he goes on. “She said, ‘Oh, that’s wonderful! We’re having a birthday party for one of the children tomorrow…. And the family is too poor to afford a birthday cake!’

“Many of the shoppers choke up on that, as do I.”

The Cathedral Parish
170 Thompson Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604
203.368.6777 and 203.335.0106 - Parish Offices • 203.690.1491 - Rectory • 203.368.6386 and 203.335.0107 - Fax

Saint Augustine Cathedral Church
359 Washington Avenue
Rev. Peter F. Lenox, Administrator
Rev. Peter Ha Dinh-Dang, Rev. Sean R. Kulacz, Rev. John Pius Mwago Parishional Visitors
Rev. Gustavo A. Falla, Rev. Jean-Ridly Julien, Rev. F. John Ringley, In Residence
Rev. Mr. Alix Africot, Rev. Mr. William J. Bissenden, Rev. Mr. Santos Garcia, and Rev. Mr. William A. Koniers, Deacons
David F. McCaffrey, Director of Music

Christmas Season Mass Schedule

Regular Sunday Mass Schedule

Vigil Masses:
4:00pm English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
4:00pm English Mass: St. Patrick Lower Church

Sunday Masses:
7:00am English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
8:30am English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
9:00am English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
10:00am English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
12:10pm English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
12:15pm Spanish Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church

Vigil Masses of Christmas
Monday, December 24th
4:00pm English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
5:30pm English Mass with Organ and String Quartet/Mass with the Living Gospel portrayed by the children of the Parish: St. Patrick Upper Church
7:00pm Vietnamese Christmas Pageant: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
8:00pm Vietnamese Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
9:00pm Christmas Carols and Organ works: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
9:30pm English Mass with Organ and Choir: St. Patrick Upper Church
11:15pm Christmas Carols and Organ works: St. Augustine Cathedral Church

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)
Tuesday, December 25th:
12:00am Solemn Midnight Mass with Organ and Choir: Rev. Mgr. Jerald Doyle, celebrant. St. Augustine Cathedral Church
This Mass will be broadcast by radio on WSHU 91.1FM and on WICC 600AM
9:00am English Mass: St. Patrick Upper Church
10:00am English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church

Vigil Masses of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
Monday, December 31st:
8:00pm Vietnamese Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
10:00pm to 11:00pm Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament: St. Patrick Upper Church
11:00pm English Mass: St. Patrick Upper Church

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
Tuesday, January 1st:
9:00am English Mass: St. Patrick Upper Church
10:00am English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
12:10pm Spanish Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
12:15pm English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church
5:30pm English Mass: St. Augustine Cathedral Church

Merry Christmas to one and all!
Joyful healing

BRIDGEPORT—“Tuesdays are days of joy and healing for the residents of Bridgeport Manor,” says Cristine Francoeur, the director of the recreation department of the nursing home. Every Tuesday, residents eagerly await the celebration of the 9:30 am Mass with music, songs, and readings. It gives them a sense of life, comfort, hope and above all a closeness to the Lord.

The Mass is celebrated by Fr. John Punnakunnel, who resides at Christ the King Parish in Trumbull. A retired priest, Fr. John is always on the go. You will find him visiting the sick in hospitals, in nursing homes, hearing confession, with the youth, and above all at the celebration of the Mass.

Fr. John holds close to his heart the words Blessed Pope John Paul II (then Cardinal Wojty) wrote to the poor, the sick, and the suffering at the close of Vatican II: “Know that you are not alone, separated, abandoned or useless. You have been called by Christ and are his living and transparent image.”

Anne Parish in the Black Rock section of Bridgeport (at right), and Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity, whose convent is in St. Peter Parish in Bridgeport.

Together they, and all who care for the sick and elderly, embody the words of the familiar saying: “Those who give love gather love.”
Lobby mural brings out school spirit

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

Who would have thought that a new lobby mural could energize an entire school and leave people feeling even better about their faith and about Catholic education!

That’s what happened recently at St. Joseph School in Shelton when artist Armando Palumbo unveiled his painting, “Jesus and the Little Children,” based on the passage from the Gospel of Matthew, “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14).

Msgr. Chris Walsh, pastor of St. Joseph Parish, is delighted with the gift from Palumbo and the excitement it has caused in the school community. “It was really a gift out of nowhere,” Msgr. Walsh says. “We always say it’s hard for an 80-year-old school to compete with the flashy new buildings of public schools, but when you walk in now and look at the painting, it sums up Catholic education with our Lord at the center of the lives of the children.”

The life-size mural, measuring 70 by 80 inches, was completed using tempera and pastels on plaster. Jesus and the children are pictured in a beautiful field of wildflowers, birds and ripe apples tumbling off a tree symbolizing the fruits of knowledge.

Msgr. Walsh says that the diverse group of children pictured in the mural reflects the multicultural heritage of the school. Palumbo also worked two of his grandchildren into the mural.

St. Joseph Principal Victoria Rossi said the mural moved her to tears when she first saw it because it spoke to her of everything that is good about the school. “It really stands for what we’re all about: Christ and the children. And everybody’s included in the painting just as the children are all included in Christ’s love. Our school is a big family with children from Columbia, China, Africa and so many places,” she says of the nearly 200 students in Pre-K through grade eight.

Principal Rossi said that the children were so excited about the picture after it was unveiled that she could hear them asking their parents to come into school and look at it with them.

Angela Mantero, enrollment coordinator for St. Joseph School and the mother of two St. Joseph students, said she enjoys seeing the students gathering in front of the mural and socializing before and after school. “It just changes the whole feeling of the school. We had been talking for some time about brightening the lobby, not knowing exactly what we wanted to do, and then Mr. Palumbo came forward. What he did was amazing.”

She says his colorful mural replaced a dusty old trophy case that people stopped noticing long ago. “Now we have a front hallway that is more welcoming and joyful and shows off what the school is all about—family, learning and love for Jesus.”

Palumbo said he offered to paint the mural as a form of thanks for his wife of 50 years, Rose, whom he first met at the parish. Rose is a graduate of St. Joseph School, as are the couple’s two grown sons. Palumbo, who worked professionally as a commercial artist, was born in Troia, Italy, and is the descendant of artists. As young boy, he and his brother would go out into the fields and fashion fresh farm clay into figures for the presepio, the traditional Italian nativity scene.

His grandfather painted a mural of Joseph the Carpenter in the Troia Cathedral, and Palumbo himself has long thought about creating a mural with children for St. Joseph’s, where he has been a long-time parishioner.

The 72-year-old artist is pleased by the reception his mural has received but says his first love is sculpture, preferably working in wrought iron. Visitors to St. Margaret’s Shrine in Bridgeport are familiar with his 20-foot “Gateway to Heaven” cross sculpture, among other works he has completed.

The mural took six months to complete, and in addition to Palumbo’s generosity, other parishioners stepped forward to help with the framing, lighting and installation.

His work has earned much praise, but he says the “thank you” that has meant most to him has come from the children themselves.

“The greatest gift ever has come from the kids. Each one from first to eighth grade sent me a thank you card, which they made with crayons. To me they are little masterpieces. I put them all together and will cherish them the rest of my life.”

Spring 2013

SHARE for the Diocese of Bridgeport courses

Sacraments of Healing: With this course, we will study the theology and history of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick.

• 4-week course: Wednesdays, January 9, 16, 30, February 6 (inclement weather makeup date: February 20)
• Time: 7:30pm to 9:30pm
• Location: Sacred Heart University, 5151 Park Avenue, Fairfield
• Instructor: Msgr. Christopher Walsh, PhD.
• 5140

The Book of Revelation: The Book of Revelation stands at the end of Bible.

It can be a perplexing book, and it is one of the most misinterpreted books of the Bible. Most Catholics are unacquainted with this last book of the Bible. However, this “most neglected book of the Bible” is a magnificent literary creation. At first the book may appear somewhat bewildering and frightening, but it is worthwhile to wrestle with it until it opens its riches to one. The course will help one to understand the baffling but beautiful symbolism in which the book abounds. It will unravel the general messages of the book, e.g., the cosmic battle between good and evil, the final victory of good, how we conquer through suffering, the victims become the victors, self-sacrificing love is the ultimate power in the world, etc.

The Book of Revelation is made up of 22 relatively brief chapters. As one gets into the book, one usually finds it absorbing.

It is a work that demands and repays study. It makes a distinct contribution to one’s understanding of Jesus and the Christian life. Use this course as a Lenten spiritual opportunity.

• 8-week course: Saturdays, February 2, 9, 16, 23, March 2, 9, 16, 23 (inclement weather makeup date: April 6)
• Time: 10am to 12noon
• Location: Sacred Heart University, 5151 Park Avenue, Fairfield
• Instructor: Dr. Thomas Hicks
• $280

To register: www.sacredheart.edu/share. For more information, contact Gina Donnarummo, Director of Adult Formation: 203.416.1440 / SHARE@shuf.org
Trinity Catholic starts anew

By DON HARRISON

It’s all a matter of perspective. A 19-7 won-lost record and a second-place finish in the conference would be reason to rejoice for the majority of the state’s high school basketball teams. Not so for Trinity Catholic and Coach Mike Walsh, who had won the CIAC Class M state title the previous winter. No, they deemed the 2011-12 season a minor disappointment.

“We were very talented, but we didn’t seem to have chemistry,” Walsh says with a chuckle.

For Walsh, whose credentials across 32 seasons encompass 542 victories, six state titles, a multi-year appearance in a final four, the ultimate Class LL state championship in the FCIAC Eastern Division, and the prestigious Gold Key Award from the Connecticut Sports Writers’ Alliance last January, the new season presents challenges as well.

Four important faces from last season have departed—but two were unexpected. Jason Boswell, the 6-foot-3 junior who averaged 17 points per game and was an All-FCIAC selection, moved on to Greensboro, NC. Seven-one Paschal Chuckwu, a sophomore who was beginning to refine his court skills, transferred to Greensboro.

“We lost four of our top seven players,” says Walsh, who also said goodbye to captain Kevin Epp, the 2012 class salutatorian who entered Notre Dame University, and guard Kevin Leumene, now at Eastern Connecticut State.

“We’re hoping their success in football will carry over to basketball,” Walsh says. “They’re good athletes, but they’ll need some time to get into basketball shape.”

Walsh, now 65, considers himself a lucky man. A basketball aficionado for as long as he can remember, he played the game at then-Stamford Catholic and at Iona College, before financial needs forced him to leave the team and take a part-time job. He spent a few seasons at his alma mater as assistant coach to Gary Paschal Chukwu.

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“Frazier is a second-team All-Stater as a sophomore. He’s very quick with the ball and led us in assists; he also shoots the three,” Walsh says. “Frazier is a shooting guard who had a lot of playing time last year and got better as the season progressed.”

The team has been bolstered by the arrival of four members of state championship teams. Senior John Brown and Pat Kineally, all seniors, and junior Neno Merritt. The 6-2, 230-pound Sean Brown rushed for 242 yards and four touchdowns in the 49-28 loss to North Branford in the quarterfinal game at Guilford.

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I absolutely love Christmas!

By ANDRE ESCALEIRA

Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Holiday Doorbuster Deals. This is the “new” Christmas, or so we’re told. But Christmas is so much more than just the time to get a good deal at a department store. Christmas is the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who came into the world to be like us and to save us. It’s the most wonderful time of the year!

Christmas is my absolute favorite season of the year. It’s great! Not only is there no school for a week (which is great in and of itself), but everyone’s so happy, and not with a meaningless, fleeting happiness, but a seemingly inexplicable joy that radiates from within. Plus, there’s time to spend with family that you might not see for the rest of the year, not to mention that Jesus is born!

Honestly, I absolutely love Christmas. Everyone is so joyful, people come together in the “Christmas spirit” to help those in need, kids are excited for Santa, it’s just awesome. During Christmas time, everyone radiates joy, a joy that seems inexplicable, but that actually comes from knowing that your savior is going to come into the world! You get to celebrate this awesome day with your family too!

I know that there are family members that I might not get to see all year, except for Christmas time; my Tia is a perfect example. She’s my great aunt and I very rarely get to see her. She’s a typical, lovable, eighty-seven year old Portuguese avó. When she gets to see all of us, like at Christmas time, she lights up, happy to see all of us. Her joy at seeing us makes us happy, too. Being able to see family, like Tia, makes the day so much better. I love Christmas!

Unfortunately, though, many people don’t seem to understand the true meaning of Christmas; people don’t experience the profound joy of Christmas. Year after year, stores open early on Thanksgiving and stay open later on Black Friday to accommodate Christmas shoppers; companies encourage millions to spend countless hours online shopping; the mall decorates before Halloween and Santa comes soon after; an average person will spend about forty-two hours online shopping. This isn’t even accounting for millions to spend Thanksgiving and stay open later. People don’t experience the profound joy of Christmas because of consumerism. To see people miss the real meaning behind Christmas is sad, especially in my peers.

Combating this consumerized mindset is tough and it’s a definite challenge that we teens have to face. If we don’t stand up for the true meaning of Christmas, it’ll just disappear, because we are the future! This Christmas, let’s place the emphasis on Christ, not on gifts, because Jesus is the reason for the season!

Merry Christmas everyone!

By Andre Escaleira, a member of St. Andrew Parish in Bridgeport, is a senior at Kolbe-Cathedral High School.)
Obituaries

Deacon Barton, 92

STRATFORD—Deacon John Barton, age 92, a former deacon of St. James Parish, died on November 27 at his home.

He graduated from Central High School and was a World War II U.S. Army veteran, serving as a medic in the European Theater. Injuries sustained during his military service led to three years of hospitalization at the Newington Veteran’s Hospital.

Deacon Barton was a member of the Raymond Goldbach VFW Disabled American Veterans and served as a member of Hospice bereavement program. He also established their “Coping” bereavement program. He also served as a member of Hospice through the VNA of Stratford.

Deacon Barton was received into St. James Church at 4 pm on November 30 for a parish wake. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated for him the following morning, December 1. Msgr. Jerald Doyle, diocesan administrator, was the principal celebrant. Fr. Thomas Lynch, pastor of St. James. “This became his ministry and his passion in life.”

Deacon Barton is survived by his wife, Dorothy Snurkowski Barton and daughter Deborah Ann Barton. He was predeceased by his son, John.

Deacon Barton took his experience in life—being sick for years as a young adult and losing his son at a young age and, with God’s power, transformed these wounds into a gift of healing for the sick and those who have lost a loved one,” says Fr. Thomas Lynch, pastor of St. James.

Sr. Sara Mooney, OSU, 91

East Patchogue, NY—Sr. Sara Mooney died October 12 at Brookhaven Hospital, NY. Born in 1921 in County Monaghan, Ireland, she entered the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk in Blue Point on Long Island in 1940 and professed her final vows five years later. She received a bachelor of arts degree in education from Manhattan College and her master’s from St. Rose College in Albany, NY.

Sr. Sara ministered for many years as a teacher in New York, principally in Queens and Long Island and in Connecticut. She taught at the former St. Maurice School in Stamford from 1959-62. Following her years of teaching, she ministered for several years from 1977-89 as a home healthcare aide.

In 1998, after many years of active service, Sr. Sara retired to the St. Ursula Center in Blue Point, where she continued in a ministry of prayer.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated for Sr. Sara on October 15 at the St. Ursula Center Chapel in Blue Point, followed by internment at the cemetery of the Ursuline Sisters there.

Sr. Marie Julie Condon, 83

WILTON—Sr. Marie Julie Condon died of cardiac arrest on November 3 at Lourdes Health Care Center in Wilton. She was 83 years old.

Gerardine Marie Condon was born in 1929, in Boston, MA. Upon graduation from high school in 1946, she entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was given the religious name Marie Julie. She professed her final vows in 1955.

She earned her bachelor’s degree in education from Villanova University in 1957. Sr. Marie Julie taught in Philadelphia and New York before coming to the former St. John School in Darien where she taught from 1964-68.

When her years of teaching concluded in 1976, Sr. Marie moved to Wilton to serve the Sisters living at Lourdes Health Care Center and the Motherhouse.

In 1982, after earning a master’s degree in counseling from the University of Bridgeport with a focus on geriatrics and gerontology, Sr. Marie Julie focused her ministry on pastoral counseling. In 1986, she returned to the Wilton motherhouse to assist the elderly sisters. She served there before retiring in 2001.

A Mass of Christian burial was celebrated for Sr. Marie Julie on November 6 in the Chapel at Villa Notre Dame. Burial followed at St. Mary Cemetery in Bethel.

**FUNERAL GUIDE**

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Funeral Director

267 Greenwich Avenue
Greenwich, CT 06830
203-869-0315

**Sr. Sara Mooney, OSU, 91**

East Patchogue, NY—Sr. Sara Mooney died October 12 at Brookhaven Hospital, NY. Born in 1921 in County Monaghan, Ireland, she entered the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk in Blue Point on Long Island in 1940 and professed her final vows five years later. She received a bachelor of arts degree in education from Manhattan College and her master’s from St. Rose College in Albany, NY.

Sr. Sara ministered for many years as a teacher in New York, principally in Queens and Long Island and in Connecticut. She taught at the former St. Maurice School in Stamford from 1959-62. Following her years of teaching, she ministered for several years from 1977-89 as a home healthcare aide.

In 1998, after many years of active service, Sr. Sara retired to the St. Ursula Center in Blue Point, where she continued in a ministry of prayer.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated for Sr. Sara on October 15 at the St. Ursula Center Chapel in Blue Point, followed by internment at the cemetery of the Ursuline Sisters there.

**Sr. Marie Julie Condon, 83**

WILTON—Sr. Marie Julie Condon died of cardiac arrest on November 3 at Lourdes Health Care Center in Wilton. She was 83 years old.

Gerardine Marie Condon was born in 1929, in Boston, MA. Upon graduation from high school in 1946, she entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was given the religious name Marie Julie. She professed her final vows in 1955.

She earned her bachelor’s degree in education from Villanova University in 1957. Sr. Marie Julie taught in Philadelphia and New York before coming to the former St. John School in Darien where she taught from 1964-68.

When her years of teaching concluded in 1976, Sr. Marie moved to Wilton to serve the Sisters living at Lourdes Health Care Center and the Motherhouse.

In 1982, after earning a master’s degree in counseling from the University of Bridgeport with a focus on geriatrics and gerontology, Sr. Marie Julie focused her ministry on pastoral counseling. In 1986, she returned to the Wilton motherhouse to assist the elderly sisters. She served there before retiring in 2001.

A Mass of Christian burial was celebrated for Sr. Marie Julie on November 6 in the Chapel at Villa Notre Dame. Burial followed at St. Mary Cemetery in Bethel.
Nuestra Voz

La Verdadera Navidad

COLUMNISTA INVITADO

POR EL DIACONO JUAN ACOSTA QUEVEDO

El Diácono Acosta, colombiano, un diácono transitorio de la Diócesis de Bridgeport, está acabando sus estudios teológicos en Mount St. Mary Seminary, Emmitsburg, MD, en preparación para su ordenación al sacerdocio el año que viene.

¿Por qué la navidad no tiene ese impacto espiritual que debiera tener?

Sin duda alguna la navidad se ha convertido en una de las épocas más esperadas y especiales para la mayoría de nosotros, especialmente porque es una época animada por festividades, alegrías, regalos, vacaciones y buenos recuerdos tal y como lo fue desde sus orígenes en contextos paganos. Para nosotros los cristianos, la navidad tiene un sentido cristiano de la navidad se ha ido deteriorando para muchos hombres y mujeres quienes experimentan en su diario vivir las secuelas de una sociedad cada vez más secularizada y alejada de los planes de Dios.

Si preguntáramos cuál es la primera imagen o significado que viene a la mente cuando escuchamos la palabra “navidad,” de seguro habría variedad de respuestas de fe y devoción tales como el rezo de la “novena de aguiluchos”, “las posadas”, villancicos y peregrinaciones, y con esto, celebramos que Cristo se hizo hombre para salvarnos; Él es el precio de nuestra alegría y libertad. Sin embargo, con el paso de los días, el verdadero sentido cristiano de la navidad se ha ido deteriorando para muchos hombres y mujeres quienes preguntarnos a nosotros mismos por qué la navidad no tiene ese impacto espiritual que debiera tener en nuestros tiempos actuales. El propósito es rescatar las enseñanzas de nuestras abuelas y abuelos y no dejar en el olvido lo que ellos mismos nos transmitieron con tanta devoción y dedicación, porque en su sencillez y “simplicidad” nos dieron ejemplo de una fe fundada en los principios morales y cristianos; en su sencillez nos enseñaron que la única verdadera navidad es la que recuerda y celebra el nacimiento de Jesús entre los hombres.

Durante estos días de Adviento, tiempo de preparación para la navidad, la Palabra de Dios nos ha propuesto una serie de reflexiones en torno al mensaje profético sobre la esperada venida del Mesías; a través de signos sobre la proximidad de los últimos tiempos, de la llamada a la conversión y de la figura del mensajero, somos invitados a prepararnos para recibir a Cristo, quién está a la puerta esperando una respuesta por parte del hombre.

Dios no nos pide que abandonemos nuestra vida ordinaria, pero si nos pide un cambio radical en nuestro interior, un cambio que exige en si mismo apertura a su palabra y a su mensaje. Por eso, en medio de nuestras fragilidades y de una fe quizás inmadura es lógico pensar que aún podemos reunirnos en familia en torno a la mesa, al árbol, al pesbre y a los regalos para celebrar la navidad con gozo y alegría reconociendo que en nuestro interior Dios mismo es quien nace para hacernos libres.

Desde el punto de vista etiológico, la palabra navidad significa “nacimiento” y para nadie es un secreto que nacimiento es sinónimo de nuevos tiempos, de la llamada a la conversión, de la “apertura a su palabra y a su mensaje…” (Lc 21,28b). Con estas palabras el evangélista Lucas pone en boca de Jesús el llamado a la esperanza, el cual es posible si interpretamos los signos de los tiempos que vivimos reconociendo en ellos la presencia y el paso de Dios porque esto es navidad, la única y verdadera “fiesta” que recuerda la presencia de Dios hecho hombre entre los hombres.

Porque Cristo al hacerse hombre rescató nuestra dignidad humana. Dios siendo Dios aceptó hacerse hombre para compartir nuestros sufrimientos y enseñarnos que para Dios todos somos iguales, para liberarnos de nuestras esclavitudes y heredarnos el Reino que se nos fue prometido desde antiguo. Este es el misterio más grande que celebramos en la navidad y por el cual cada gesto, signo o palabra debiera rescatar el centro de nuestra fe y esperanza, Jesucristo.

Quizás esta no sea la invitación que nos hacen las propagandas de televisión durante la navidad ni la motivación que nos lleve a celebrar esta época de gran valor para los cristianos, pero si el lenguaje por el cual compartimos la angustia que nos toca vivir, plagadas de sufrimientos, gemidos, dolores y desesperanzas, especialmente para aquellos quienes su fe es mucho más frágil y por los cuales muchas veces nos alejan de Dios y de la verdadera razón de ser de la navidad. Pero en medio de esta realidad de nuestra propia humanidad somos invitados a meditar sobre la libertad prometida: “levanten la cabeza porque está cerca su liberación…” (Lc 21,28b). Con estas columnas el evangélista Lucas pone en boca de Jesús el llamado a la esperanza, el cual es posible si interpretamos los signos de los tiempos que vivimos reconociendo en ellos la presencia y el paso de Dios porque esto es navidad, la única y verdadera “fiesta” que recuerda la presencia de Dios hecho hombre entre los hombres.

Feliz Navidad

In the nativity scene on display at St. Mary Parish in Bridgeport, Mary and Joseph adore their newborn baby while the village life of Bethlehem swirls in animation around them. Visitors see a steam rising gently from the pot on the fire, while a man noisily chops more wood and others go about their daily tasks. The display draws crowds of admirers every year.

DECEASED CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

DECEMBER 16–JANUARY 12

NOVEMBER 2011
28 Deacon Wayne E. Malloy

DECEMBER 2011
3 Msgr. John E. Gilmartin
17 Rev. Kieran T. Ahearn
19 Rev. Philip Morrissey
26 Rev. Vincent P. Cleary
27 Rev. Ignatius Baraniak, O.F.M. Conv.
29 Msgr. James H. Grady
30 Rev. M. Joseph McCarthy

JANUARY 2012
2 Rev. Robert J. McDermott
3 Msgr. Pierre A. Botton
6 Msgr. William J. Fox
7 Rev. Walter E. Bozek
8 Rev. Mr. Edward R. Kovacs
9 Rev. Joseph P. Biondino
9 Rev. Gerald T. Devore
10 Rev. Mr. Hugh Sweeney
13 Rev. Daniel J. Deehan
14 Msgr. Joseph A. Sullivan

Fairfield County Catholic
The Power of Prayer

**Guest Columnist**

**By Martin Tristine**

Martin Tristine is assistant to the superintendent of diocesan Catholic schools.

If you were like me, you learned your prayers at an early age. We learned by memorizing the words. We didn’t necessarily understand the meaning behind the words and quickly fell into the habit of saying the words—not praying the words.

Recently, I had an experience that demonstrated to me how powerful prayers are and how responsive Jesus and Our Blessed Lady can be.

I am a 67-year-old man, assistant to the superintendent of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Bridgeport. I am married to an extraordinary woman and together we have four married children, whose spouses have fit perfectly into our family and have given us 11 grandchildren.

I was reasonably healthy, took pretty good care of myself, although I could have exercised more. I never had a heart problem.

On April 23, Holy Saturday that year, I was shedding some old documents. I was at it for two hours, when I began to experience heaviness in my chest and dizziness. I stopped the shedding and rested for the afternoon. The symptoms went away and stayed away Easter Sunday and Monday. On Tuesday I went to work and again experienced heaviness and dizziness, but in typical male fashion I ignored the symptoms and went about my business through the whole day. That night the heaviness became more severe as did the dizziness. It got to the point where I became a little fearful, but of course I didn’t call 911, convincing myself that this would pass. Even so, it became somewhat concerning, so I prayed to Jesus and Our Lady and immediately felt totally at peace even though the symptoms continued.

The next day I went to my son, a physician, who examined me and immediately sent me to a cardiologist. A heart biopsy confirmed sarcodosis of the heart. Sarcodosis of the heart is an extremely rare disease that has affected very few men. It is so rare that the treatment protocol is still trial and error. In my case it didn’t work.

A week later I was taken to St. Vincent Medical emergency room, barely able to breathe or walk. Tests determined that my heart was barely functioning. I was put into ICU and arrangements were made to transport me to Westchester Medical Center the next day. I overheard a nurse discussing my condition and stating I could die that night. When I asked the staff doctor to confirm that, he did. Again, I started to pray and, again, I felt complete and total peace, no fear, almost joy.

The next morning I was taken by ambulance to Westchester Medical Center where I met Dr. Alan Gass, head of the transplant unit. He explained the transplant process to me, including the need to be approved by the transplant committee to be put on the transplant list. I was told that because of my blood type, I might have to wait as long as two months.

The next day, my youngest son’s wife brought with her pictures of my family and a beautiful poster of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Our family has had a special devotion to Our Lady since my oldest grandson was diagnosed with leukemia at the age of two and a half. My wife had acquired a beautiful framed poster of Our Lady which we hung in my grandson’s room.

Over several years he was cured. So Our Lady secured a special place in our hearts.

Dr. Gass came in that day and asked who the poster represented. I explained the story of Our Lady. As many of the floor nurses came into my room to ask about the poster, I explained the story many more times. Dr. Gass asked me to pray for a 17-year-old transplant patient who was not doing well and asked me to put him on the prayer lines I was on.

One of my sons, an attorney, had a contact in Mexico City and he emailed him and asked him to arrange for a Mass to be said for me and Dr. Gass’s patient at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Mass was said on a Monday, and when I asked Dr. Gass how his patient was doing, he told me he started to improve that same day.

After I arrived at Westchester, I had to remain flat on my back and could not move my right leg. Because the poster of Our Lady was always in my vision, I was peaceful and even joyful. I felt the lack of mobility was a privilege and the time passed quickly.

A few weeks later, on June 8, Dr. Gass was in my room next to my bed watching the monitors as we talked. Suddenly, I nearly passed out and received a powerful blow in the back. I had just suffered a ventricular fibrillation and Dr. Gass told me the blow was from the defibrillator, which started my heart again. Dr. Gass had still been a little uncertain about giving me a transplant up until then, but the episode convinced him I needed a heart.

The next day, the transplant coordinator called to tell me they...
Alive to happiness

**Potpourri**

*By Thomas H. Hicks*

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

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“Hope’s it be, life is good.”

(Boethe)

An uncle once told me that "we are boats in a storm. You just ride it out and hope that the boat holds together." Shakespeare put it his way when, in King Lear, he wrote of how we "hide the pelting of the pitiless storm."

Surely, there is too much pain and weariness in life, too much loss, too much fear. We all meet our difficulties, disappointments, tragedies—all the ills that flesh is heir to. I see the Cross everywhere. However, despite everything, there is the delight in being a human being. What life gives us is often beautiful. There is the ordinary human happiness we find, e.g., in times of completion, the last stroke as you complete painting a room or a fence, the final sentence on a term paper, attaching the last shelf of a bookcase you have built. There is the joyful moment that accompanies the conquest of a skill: mastering riding a bicycle, being able to completely play a piece of music, etc. Exercising a skill easily and well is one of the great joys in life. There is the sensation of happiness that accompanies some earned success.

The lives of all of us contain these types of moments of exhalation, instants of the joy of life. There are some moments in my life that I would have frozen if I could. They encapsulate being "alive to happiness."

There was a certain sunrise, an experience of the magical first light of day. One spring morning I was up before sunrise and stepped out onto my deck. The stars were just beginning to dim as first streaks of light were in the sky. The world seemed hushed and waiting. Then a robin called, a tentative call as though asking who else was awake. How fresh it all was, how pure. Then came the roseate hues of dawn. The clouds were edged with crimson just before the sun rose. I sensed the sheer wonder of creation, felt thanksgiving for existence. The world appeared like a precious gift. I felt so glad for life.

I had an exquisite moment at a family Thanksgiving gathering. After the meal, the family had gathered in a circle, and such a sweet sociability prevailed. There was such a depth of harmony. Conversation was easy and natural, making a kind of music out of the different voices. A fire was crackling in the background. There was such a sense of belonging and peace, a feeling of calm and safety; a strong sense of belonging with my own people, in my own space. I had such a simple sense of happiness, indeed, a sense of being at home in the world.

Another moment was the twilight of a lovely mid-summer day. The sun was setting, tranquil and light of a lovely mid-summer day. The world seemed hushed, as first streaks of light were in the sky. The world was all quiet. To stop and ponder its mystery. Then there was such a depth of harmony. Conversation was easy and natural, making a kind of music out of the different voices. A fire was crackling in the background. There was such a sense of belonging and peace, a feeling of calm and safety; a strong sense of belonging with my own people, in my own space. I had such a simple sense of happiness, indeed, a sense of being at home in the world.

But on a tender July afternoon, in the lovely blue twilight, the world appeared like a precious gift. I felt so glad for life. The sun was setting, tranquil and light of a lovely mid-summer day. The world seemed hushed. To stop and ponder its mystery. Then there was such a depth of harmony. Conversation was easy and natural, making a kind of music out of the different voices. A fire was crackling in the background. There was such a sense of belonging and peace, a feeling of calm and safety; a strong sense of belonging with my own people, in my own space. I had such a simple sense of happiness, indeed, a sense of being at home in the world.

I had such a simple sense of happiness, indeed, a sense of being at home in the world.

Psalm 90 says: "Give us joy to balance our affliction." And possibly God does. There is an ebb and flow. I like something St. Gregory the Great wrote: "The present life is but a road by which we advance to our homeland. We are subject to frequent disturbances so that we do not have more love for the journey than for the destination."

We can be so charmed by the beauty of the journey that our steps are slowed. It is for this reason that the Lord makes the path through the world difficult. Otherwise, we might want to stop by the roadside for a picnic and a sleep in the sun.
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HURRICANE SANDY TOY DRIVE sponsored by Al’s Angels is taking place now through Thurs., Dec. 20. Drop off new, unwrapped toys at 1175 Post Rd., Westport, 2nd floor, rear entrance parking. Toys go to NY tri-state areas hit hardest by the hurricane. To make a financial donation, go to www.alsangels.org. For more information contact Al DiGuido: 203.254.1759.

TONY MENELENDEZ CONCERT to benefit St. Benedict/Our Lady of Montserrat parishes in Stamford will be held at West High School, Stamford, on Sat., Dec. 15, at 7 pm. Tickets: $20. For more information, call the parish: 203.323.7379 or email pobando@optimum.net or sharonmarcia@optimum.net.

“We CARE” PERINATAL GRIEF support group meets the third Wed. of each month (Dec. 19; Jan. 16) from 7-8:15 pm. The group is for those grieving the loss of a baby through miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillborn, or newborn death. No charge; no registration required. For more information, call Sr. Arthur Marie: 203.576.5110, or Marilyn Faber: 203.576.5716.

YEAR OF FAITH: St. Philip Parish, Norwalk, is hosting a Vatican II discussion group the third Thurs. of each month (Dec. 20; Jan. 17) from now through June, from 7-8 pm. For more information, contact Eileen Bianchini: 203.847.5727 or stmarygols@stvincent.org.

 CONNECTIONS, a new spiritual and social opportunity for singles 35 and over, will launch on Sat., Jan. 5, at Holy Family Parish, Fairfield, following the 4:30 pm Mass. Its mission is to bring together singles 35 and older for friendship, social get-togethers, spiritual talks, and community outreach. Connections will offer a variety of events throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport. For more information, contact Fr. Norm Guilbert at Holy Family: 203.336.1835 or fnorm@gmail.com. (Facebook page coming soon.)

 CURSILLO ULRTEYAS are held at locations around the diocese: Mon., Jan. 7, at St. James Parish, Stratford at 7 pm; and Thurs., Jan. 17, at St. Mary Parish, Bethel, at 7:30 pm. For more information, contact Jeanette: jkovacs@snet.net.

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP is offered at St. Vincent’s Medical Center, Bridgeport, first Tues. of each month (Tues., Jan. 8) from 4-5:30 pm for adult patients, family members and friends who are coping with a diagnose of: leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma, and Hodgkin’s disease. No reservation required. For more information, call 203.576.6158 or email tmclaugh@tvsmv.org.

THE JOURNEY FOR CONTROL, an interactive monthly diabetes education workshop will be held at St. Vincent’s Medical Center, Bridgeport, the second Thurs. of the month (Jan. 10) from 6-7:30 pm. Space is limited. To register, call Diane Sheehan, APRN: 203.576.6168.

GOSPEL OF LIFE SOCIETY meets the second Sat. of the month (Jan. 12) at St. Mary Parish, Norwalk, at 10 am after the 9 am Pro-Life Mass. Maureen Cardiello, director of the diocesan Respect Life Ministry, will be the guest speaker. For more information, contact Eileen Bianchini: 203.847.5727 or stmarygols@aol.com.

OPLATEK (CHRISTMAS WAFER) DINNER will be held at Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Stamford on Sun., Jan. 20, at 1 pm. Cost $25/person. A traditional Polish meal, together with entertainment. For more information and for reservations, call the parish: 203.323.4967.

CHRISTMAS MASS will be televised on WWOR, channel 9, at 8 am on Christmas morning. The Mass will also air on WBNY, channel 10/55, at 9 am. Throughout the year, Sunday Mass is televised on the following stations: WNYW, Channel 5, at 5:30 am; ABC Family, 6 am; and WBNY, Channel 10/55, 9 am. In addition, THE NET Vigil Mass (formerly The Prayer Channel) Time Warner, Channel 97; Cablevision, Channel 30, has a televised Mass at 6 pm on Saturdays.

MASSES OF HEALING AND HOPE sponsored by the Charismatic Renewal Office will be offered Mon., Jan. 21, at St. Lawrence Parish, Shelton, with Fr. Ed Nadolny; and Mon., Jan. 28, at 7-30 pm at Christ the King Parish, Trumbull, with Fr. Larry Carew. For more information, call 203.268.8253.

JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME a 15-day pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Cairo and Rome will be hosted by St. Mary and St. Benedict-Our Lady of Montserrat parishes in Stamford with Fr. Rolando Torres starting Sat., Feb. 11, 2013. Cost: $4,023 includes transportation and hotels, guides, a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee, breakfast and dinner, and tips. For more information, contact Fr. Torres: 203.324.7321 or rolandoma-lak@gmail.com.

SPRING VACATION CRUISE to benefit the Playground Improvement Fund at St. Lawrence School, Shelton, will take place on Apr. 13-20, on the RCLL Oasis of the Seas. For more information, call 203.402.0632.

ITALY AND MEDITUGORJE, a pilgrimage tour with Fr. Marcel St. Jean, will take place June 23-July 5, 2013. Visit the historic cities of Venice, Padua, Siena and Assisi before traveling to Medjugorje. Return to Rome in time to attend the Wednesday Audience with the Holy Father. Price: $3,899 includes airfare, hotels, sightseeing, breakfast and dinner. For more information, or to make reservations, call Fr. Marcel Saint-Jean: 203.434.7208.
Merry Christmas

Cathedral Parish lights the Remembrance Tree

There was much to remember and be thankful for as nearly 200 parishioners of The Cathedral Parish braved the chill and persistent rain for a prayerful and joyous Remembrance Tree lighting on December 7 at St. Patrick’s Church in Bridgeport.

For the first time, the annual tree lighting ceremony included members of the combined parish that brought together parishioners from St. Augustine and St. Patrick parishes.

The grounds of St. Patrick’s Church on North Ave. were graced with a beautiful nativity, angels, and a Remembrance Tree to celebrate the birth of Christ. The large, living spruce tree on the front lawn was surrounded by four decorated dogwood trees and angels. A beautiful nativity, which was built by the parishioners, was proudly displayed.

The lights on the tree represent parishioners and friends of the parish, both living and deceased. Individual and family names are displayed on a banner in the church printed in a Remembrance Book and commemorated in a bright light on the tree.

The Christmas Tree lighting was held after the 5:30 pm Mass celebrated by Fr. Peter Lenox, administrator of The Cathedral Parish. The Knights of Columbus served as honor guards for the ceremony, held on the anniversary of the attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
The entire St. Vincent’s Health Services family wishes you and your family a happy and holy Christmas and a life renewed by all the blessings and gifts of the holiday.

CHRISTMAS TRADITION AT ST. VINCENT’S — Lindsey Flavell, 11, of Trumbull adds figures to the lobby creche that greets visitors to St. Vincent’s Medical Center. She is the daughter of St. Vincent’s Physician Services Director Laura Flavell.