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Welcome back Archbishop Lori

$1.2 million raised at Inner-City dinner

More than 500 guests attended the Twenty-First Annual Benefit Dinner of The Inner-City Foundation for Charity & Education to honor Archbishop William E. Lori, enjoy the music of the Midtown Men, and support a wide range of educational and charitable programs.

Peter Cieszko of New Canaan, who co-chaired the benefit along with his wife Jennifer, announced that the annual black-tie event raised $1.2 million dollars for agencies, institutions and programs throughout Fairfield County.

Five-time Emmy winner and anchor for WNYW “Good Day New York,” Dave Price, was master of ceremonies at the event held on October 25.

Archbishop Lori, former Bishop of Bridgeport and past president of The Inner-City Foundation, was warmly greeted by the gathering and went from table to table to thank those in attendance for their generous support.

The evening featured a concert performance by The Midtown Men—four Stars from the original Broadway cast of “Jersey Boys.” In addition, individuals who participate in programs supported by the Inner-City Foundation expressed their gratitude for the help they have received and for the opportunities that have been made available to them.

Audrey and Daniel Dornier, Helen and Dan FitzPatrick, Leah and Alain Lebec, Vilma and Dick Matteis all from Greenwich and Bill Mitchell of Westport, were co-chairs of the Benefit Committee.

Since 1992, the Foundation has awarded more than $24 million in grants to organizations that provide assistance, including food, clothing, shelter, counseling and education to at-risk and needy children and adults of Fairfield County. In addition to providing scholarship assistance to children attending diocesan schools in Bridgeport, organizations receiving grants include the Cardinal Shehan Center, Caroline House, Community Closet, Domestic Violence Crisis Center, Domus Kids, George Washington Carver Center, Homes for the Brave, Homes with Hope, Kids in Crisis, Liberation Programs, Literacy Volunteers of America, Malta House, McGivney Community House, Mercy Learning Center, Norma F. Pfriem Breast Cancer Center, Regional YMCA of Western CT, and the Thomas Merton Center.
Local News

Diocese reaches out to hurricane victims

BRIDGEPORT—In response to those affected by Hurricane Sandy, Msgr. Jerald Doyle, diocesan administrator, asked pastors to hold a special collection for relief efforts.

Funds collected by each parish are being directed to relief efforts presently underway by local organizations and are also being sent to parishes in New York and New Jersey to reach out to those who lost their homes.

“We know that some parishioners experienced significant damage to their homes, while many more struggled with the loss of power and other difficulties throughout the week,” said Msgr. Doyle. “Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those affected by the storm, and we’re grateful for the parishes and individuals who have reached out to others.”

Fairfield Beach was particularly hard hit, with five houses tossed into Long Island Sound and many more left uninhabitable by the storm. Residents were without power for over a week and faced a massive clean-up.

Fr. Victor Martin, pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish on the Post Road in downtown Fairfield, said his parish took up a second collection and donated it to the “Neighbor to Neighbor” fund of the United Way of Coastal Fairfield County.

“It looks like a bomb hit parts of the beach and the neighborhood behind it,” Fr. Martin said after touring the storm-damaged area.

Fr. Martin, who was nursing a cold after a week without power in the rectory, said that many parishioners have come forward to offer assistance to local families in need.

Some parishes have also sent teams of volunteers to assist the most needy storm victims.

Parishioners of St. Matthew Parish in Norwalk sprang into action when their pastor, Msgr. Walter Orłowski, made a plea at weekend Masses following the storm for donations of blankets, coats, food and supplies. The following Monday, Msgr. Orłowski and a team of seven parishioners filled the parish bus with supplies and drove down to St. Thomas Parish on Staten Island.

Overwhelmed by the scope of damage and the great needs, parishioners then secured a large truck and brought emergency relief to Our Lady of Solace Church and a Gospel Assembly Church on Coney Island. The parish teams also helped out in the Rockaways.

“The response was amazing,” said Sr. Sally Norcross, pastoral minister at St. Matthew, who participated in the response. “Some people are really in desperate need, and a lot of the areas have been devastated.”

Sr. Sally said that blankets and cleaning supplies, including bleach and disinfectants, were in great demand as people struggled to reclaim their homes from the sand and debris. The parish has since sent some work crews down to help homeowners with the clean-up.

While much diocesan relief was sent to help the areas of highest impact in New York and New Jersey, there are also local needs being met by Catholic Charities in Fairfield County.

Msgr. Doyle said people throughout the diocese can make a donation to Catholic Charities directly to support its nutrition, counseling and case management programs which are reaching out to families affected by the storm.

“Our experience join our efforts,” said Msgr. Doyle, “to help save our soup kitchens and food pantries,” said Michael Tintrup, Catholic Charities vice president. “We also expect to see an increase in counseling, mental health and case management services down the line as the long-term effects of the hurricane are felt.”

Robert LeBlanc, director of buildings and grounds for the diocese, said that the initial assessment has turned up minor damage to facilities across the diocese: a tree fell on Queen of Saints Diocesan Retreat Center on the Catholic Center grounds; a stained glass window was blown out of its frame at Merton Center; a portion of the rectory roof at the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Stamford was damaged; and downed trees caused minor damage in schools and parishes.

(Contributions can be sent to Catholic Charities, 238 Jewett Avenue, Bridgeport, CT, 06606, or donate online at www.ccfairfield.org.)

O’Connor named McGivney Center executive

BRIDGEPORT—Terry O’Connor has been named executive director of the McGivney Community Center in East Bridgeport. He will also continue to serve as executive director of the Cardinal Shehan Center, a post that he has held for 20 years.

Both youth centers are sponsored by the Diocese of Bridgeport and serve children of all faiths in the inner city.

O’Connor’s appointment was unanimously approved by the McGivney Center board, and by Msgr. Jerald Doyle, diocesan administrator.

The McGivney Community Center was founded to provide children with an educational “safe haven” from the dangers of the streets. Its after-school programs include computer literacy, learning center, tutoring, arts and crafts, and health and recreation opportunities.

Anne McCrory, chancellor of the Diocese of Bridgeport, said the appointment was made because the McGivney Center is facing financial challenges, and its services are vital to Bridgeport youth.

“At a time when many not-for-profit agencies are challenged to find greater efficiencies and new fund raising sources, we welcome Terry O’Connor’s leadership. His fund-raising experience and overall management abilities will help to secure the future of McGivney Center and bring additional resources to the children it serves,” she said.

Both the McGivney and Shehan boards will remain active, with Attorney Matt Reale serving as president of the McGivney Community Center and Lori Charlton, a partner in Audit Services at Deloitte & Touche L.L. in Stamford, serving as president of the Shehan Center board.

“Having known and worked with Terry O’Connor for over 20 years, we are thrilled to have someone with his experience join our team. He understands our unique spirit and will introduce many new supporters to the McGivney Center as we strengthen our mission in the community,” said Reale.

“We look forward to continuing our work with Terry at the Shehan Center while coordinating efforts with McGivney for the benefit of the children of Bridgeport. We believe that this move allows us to expand the awareness to our surrounding communities of the many challenges facing families all over Bridgeport,” said Charlton.

McCrory said that the two agencies have a history of cooperation, with McGivney Center youth using the Cardinal Shehan Center pool and also participating in the First Tee Golf Program.

“The last few years have been difficult ones for non-profits, and the McGivney Center has struggled, but this is a great organization that is a unique resource for youth and families in the East Side of the city,” said O’Connor. He’ll be working the McGivney board to secure new funding sources, build additional support and make building improvements. He also believes that both agencies can share programs that will enrich the lives of youth.

O’Connor said that Alexis Bevins, a nine-year employee, who has served as the interim director since October 2011, was named site director and will oversee day-to-day operations for McGivney.

(The McGivney Community Center is located at 338 Stillman Street on the grounds of St. Charles Borromeo Parish. For more information, call 203.334.1933.)
Local News

Restoring St. Mary, Norwalk

The beloved Mother Church of Norwalk, St. Mary’s, has begun the final phase of renovation.

St. Mary Parish was founded by Irish immigrants in 1848. The current church, a prominent Gothic structure built in 1871, dominates one of the city’s main thoroughfares and is considered one of Norwalk’s architectural gems.

“Over the past three years, the parishioners of St. Mary Church have been generous in support of the construction,” says St. Mary’s pastor, Fr. Greg Markey. Members of the largely working class parish have already raised $1.2 million dollars for repairs on the roof and the church’s exterior and the renovation of the sanctuary.

Internationally known architect Duncan G. Stroik of the University of Notre Dame was hired to guide the renovation of the church’s interior. The first phase of the renovation focused on renewing the sanctuary of the church with custom Italian marble slabs along with a magnificent marble altar rail, pulpit, and baptismal font. The painting of the interior sanctuary and ceiling with a French blue for Our Lady highlighted by gold stars was done by one of the finest church interior painters in the country, John Canning, Inc. This phase also included lighting throughout the church, and a new state-of-the-art sound system built by Pascomb, Inc.

The final phase will see the finishing of the interior, including the addition of a crucifixion scene on a roof beam at the entrance to the sanctuary.

“The grand centerpiece of the renovation will be an oil painting of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary by artist Leonard Porter in the central reredos,” Fr. Markey says with justifiable pride. Porter, an American artist noted for his vibrant religious art, is based in New York. He is part of the new liturgical movement for sacred liturgy and liturgical arts. Porter will also paint the crucifixion above the sanctuary.

Over 400 families contributed to the first phases of the renovation. Fr. Markey hopes to raise the remaining $300,000 to complete the project by having every family in the parish contribute a donation. He’s asking families to consider a gift of $600 over the coming year. “That comes to $10 a week,” he says, adding “I know that not all the families can pledge that, especially those facing hardship or an economic setback. However, it is important for the vitality of our parish community that we have broad participation in this project and that each family makes a pledge that reflects its means and circumstances.”

He quotes Pope Benedict XVI, who recently gave a talk on the theology of Church architecture: “When faith celebrated in the liturgy encounters art, it creates a profound harmony because each can and wishes to speak of God, making the invisible visible... The via pulchritudinis, the way of beauty, is a privileged and fascinating path on which to approach the Mystery of God.”

“By completing this final phase of the renovation,” Fr. Markey concludes, “we are linking faith and beauty within the liturgy, and taking that fascinating path where heaven’s luminous truth is able to radiate more fully to those who have to come to worship God.

(For more information on St. Mary’s renovation or to make a donation, visit the parish website: www.stmarynorwalk.net or call 203.866.5546.)

PAINTED A FRENCH BLUE in honor of Our Lady, the renovated sanctuary of St. Mary’s will feature a painting of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary by artist Leonard Porter.
Catholics called to witness

STAMFORD—The Apostolic Nuncio and the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations urged Catholics to publicly profess their faith in the face of threats to religious liberty and the sanctity of life.

Speaking at the Annual Red Mass of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Bishop Francis A. Chullikatt, Titular Archbishop of Ostra, said that Christians around the world, particularly in the Middle East are being prosecuted, not for committing crimes, but simply for being Christian.

“They are giving their lives on a daily basis to witness the Gospel,” he said from the pulpit of the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist in downtown Stamford, where he concelebrated Mass with Msgr. Jerald Ostra, said that Christians around the world, particularly in the Middle East are being prosecuted, not for committing crimes, but simply for being Christian.

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“The world has become increasingly complicated. He noted that since becoming president of Catholic University, the university has been sued for the transition back to single-sex residency dorms and for not providing Muslim students a space to worship without crucifixes (though they are very pleased and comfortable at Catholic University). Likewise, the university has been affected by the healthcare mandate that would force it to violate Catholic teaching by providing birth control and sterilization services to students.

President Garvey, an expert in constitutional law and the First Amendment, said that many people today misunderstand the concept of separation of Church and State as formulated to stop the Church from meddling in the State.

“Some might assert that religion is bad for law, like a virus, but they have their principles backward. The reason for the separation is not that religion is bad for government, but government is bad for religions.” Garvey said the Constitution doesn’t require lawyers “to keep their faith to themselves,” nor is it desirable.

He concluded his talk by reminding lawyers that beyond being zealous advocates on behalf of their clients, they should also work toward healing and forgiveness. “We should teach clients that our aim is victory not destruction. The possibility of healing and forgiveness is always there.”

Referring to the last sentence of the Creed, “We confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins,” President Garvey noted that “Baptism is about forgiveness, which unites us with God. Justice is a cardinal virtue, but forgiveness is divine.”

John Garvey was introduced by Attorney Anne McCrory, chancellor of the Diocese of Bridgeport. She thanked all those in attendance for supporting the work of the Church, by defending the poor and vulnerable, fighting for religious liberty and representing Catholic institutions.

Love basis for social action

FAIRFIELD—Catholic Social Teaching leads us “to create social conditions where everyone can flourish to his or her full potential,” said Fr. Rick Ryscavage, S.J., at the seventh annual communion breakfast for business leaders, held at Fairfield University.

In his talk before the election, Fr. Ryscavage, director of the Center for Faith and Public Life at Fairfield University, said that Catholics are not in agreement on how to create those conditions nor does the Church have a political platform.

“Catholic Social Teaching is not a recipe book. It provides guiding principles but not the answers,” he told a gathering of over 150 men and women who attended the Mass and brunch sponsored by Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (CAPP), a lay-led group that promotes Catholic thought.

Fr. Ryscavage said that by using individual and communal health indicators such as child mortality, homicide, unemployment and numbers of people who are incarcerated, it is easy to see that there is a failure of human flourishing in our society.

He said that the West has successfully separated Church and State over the past 400 years, but as a result “we’ve lost touch with the theological position in political thought,” which formed the basis for much of our civil society.

Referring to abortion and other life issues, he said the Church’s social teaching is based on natural law and reason and, therefore, can speak to the secular world as well as believers.

He noted that the bishops can be wrong when they advocate specific legislative goals, but they are not wrong in their concerns about religious liberty or the opposition to abortion, “which is the salient social issue in our democracy” and central to our concept of human dignity.

With respect to the political divide in the country, Fr. Ryscavage said that it is not a left/right issue with social justice on one side and respect for life on the other. “That’s a false distinction. Human dignity is integrated with social justice,” he said, noting that Catholics can’t pick or choose from the wholeness of social teaching.

He said that Catholics, who are on both sides of the left/right divide in politics, must work “to restore civility so we can attack our problems, not each other. Catholic Republicans and Catholic Democrats must work toward healing and forgiveness.”

Continued on page 22
Vatican II

Vatican II, an extraordinary moment in the Church

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

“The underlying movement of the Second Vatican Council was a tsunami of the Holy Spirit,” said Fr. Ladislas Orsy at a panel discussion celebrating the 50th anniversary of Vatican II hosted by Sacred Heart University in Fairfield.

Fr. Orsy was joined by theologians Gregory Baum and Nicholas Lash to discuss the meaning of the Council before a gathering of over 200 in the University Commons.

“These are men who were at the Council, were influenced by it, and have spent their lives reflecting on it,” said Dr. Michael Higgins, vice president for Mission and Catholic Identity, in his introduction to the three scholars whose thought helped to reshape Catholicism after the historic enclave.

All three men celebrated the vision of the Council and also discussed missed opportunities to fully implement its spirit in the five decades that have followed.

Eighty-nine-year-old Canadian Gregory Baum, one of the young luminaries and theological advisers at the Council, said Vatican II led to a profound change in the role of the laity and the spirituality of people across the globe.

“Most dramatically, the Church redefined its relationship to the world’s Protestants, Jews and other religions, and found itself in solidarity with all human beings,” Baum said.

Nicholas Lash, the first Catholic to occupy a chair of theology at Cambridge or Oxford since the Reformation, said that Pope John XXIII threw the doors of the Church open to the modern world.

“The Church had pulled up the drawbridge after the Reformation of the 16th century and the Enlightenment of the 18th,” he said. “The Council released that and let the fresh air in.”

Fr. Orsy, a renowned Church lawyer and theologian who was ordained in 1951 in Belgium and attended the Council, said his understanding of the event has grown over the years. “I think back 50 years now and realize how little I understood of the Council while I was there. What happened was extraordinary. The Holy Spirit was hovering over the human family.”

While the theologians agreed that the Council has reshaped the Church, they also expressed disappointment that some changes have not been achieved.

“Much of the Council movement is not visible today,” said Fr. Orsy, who added that the original Council documents were the product of a “synthesis of vision of the theologians and the pastoral experience of the bishops in the field. Now much of that spirit is missing.”

“The Council vision has been laid out in theory but frustrated in fact,” added Nicholas Lash, referring to the Council’s impetus toward decentralization. “The Council did not develop a mechanism to implement its teaching.”

Gregory Baum said that he has written about the “forgotten promises of Vatican II” with respect to decentralization, collegiality and dialogue with the laity.

“Pope Paul VI said that dialogue both within and without would characterize the Church, but no institution is making that possible. Much of the collegiality is gone,” said Baum.

Continued on page 23
Deacons combine faith with family life

By Brian D. Wallace

When Don Ross first entered the Permanent Diaconate Program in the Diocese of Bridgeport at the age of 36, he was surprised by the reaction of some friends and family members.

“The people I thought would encourage me didn’t, while others were very supportive. But you don’t stop there. You learn to walk through the open door,” says 59-year-old Ross, who has been an ordained deacon for 18 years. His oldest child, Mark, is now 29 and the baby, Mary Kate, who was six months old when he started his four-year formation, is 22. He proudly reflects that he has been a deacon for half of his married life.

According to Deacon Anthony Detje, director of the diocesan diaconate program, 96 deacons are now at work throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport. Of that number, 90 are married. Most have children and many have grandchildren.

“The younger men really breathe new life into the diaconate and bring fresh ideas to the parishes,” says Deacon Detje, who joined the first diocesan class of deacons formation in 1975. He said that for most deacons, the support of their wife and encouragement of their pastor is vital to their success.

Deacon Don Ross’s wife, Arlene, was supportive of his vocation from the start. “She’s an extraordinary person and very much a woman of Vatican II,” says Deacon Ross, who adds that both he and his wife saw the Council’s decision to revitalize the role of deacon as a great gift and opportunity in their lives.

Ross, who recently began serving at St. Stephen’s Parish in Trumbull after almost ten years at St. Anthony of Padua in Fairfield, maintains a busy life between his career and ministry.

“Everyone is challenged in some way through formation. Sometimes I wondered if I was putting too much on my wife or taking time from the kids, but it is a life of many graced moments,” he says. “The great strength of the diaconate is that we go through the same things that everyone else does. We have the same problems and challenges and work to find grace in them.”

Deacon Anthony Detje, who was 36 and the father of two when he entered first permanent diaconate formation program of the Diocese of Bridgeport in 1975, tells the new candidates that “they have to set their priorities. It’s not easy, but it’s doable,” he says of the balancing act between family, career and ministry.

Men must be at least 35 years old on the day of their ordination, which means some can start formation as early as 30, because it is now a five-and-a-half-year program. During formation, they give up 11 weekends a year from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. during school and Sunday from 5 p.m. and they also work one night a week in their parish.

“Many people don’t understand that the diaconate is a call from God, not another hobby,” Detje says. “When you hear that call and feel it in your life, you’ve got to respond. You can’t put it off.”

(For more information on the Permanent Diaconate Program of the Diocese of Bridgeport, contact Deacon Anthony Detje: 203.416.1451; email: adejte@diobpt.org)
Cardinal Dolan congratulates President Obama

WASHINGTON—Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, congratulated President Barack Obama, November 7, the day after his re-election as president of the United States. He urged the president to work for the most vulnerable, including unborn, poor, and immigrants:

“In my capacity as president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to express my congratulations on your re-election as president of the United States. The people of our country have again entrusted you with the difficult task of leading our nation. I write to urge the president to work for the common good, especially in care of the most vulnerable among us, including the unborn, the poor, and the immigrants.

We will continue to stand in defense of life, marriage, and our first, most cherished liberty, religious freedom. We pray, too, that you will help restore a sense of civility to the public order, so our public conversations may be imbued with respect and charity toward everyone.

“May God bless you and Vice President Biden as you prepare for your second term in service to our country and its citizens.”

Few new priests for Ireland

DUBLIN, Ireland—Only 12 men began studies for the priesthood this autumn in Ireland’s 26 dioceses—a record low. “On average, just 50% of men who enter Irish seminaries go on to be ordained,” observes Michael Kelly, editor of the Irish Catholic. “Based on this year’s entry of 12 men remaining steady—if not declining further, as certainly seems possible—approximately 180 Irishmen will be ordained diocesan priests in the next 30 years. At the same time, it is estimated that 1,684 priests will have either died or retired from active ministry in that time-frame.”

Kelly also notes that “the Dominican friars are the only part of the Church in Ireland bucking the downward trend in vocations” and that Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin has made controversial remarks on the current seminarians. Proposition 2, Kennedy wrote, is “intended to exclude family members from the actual decision-making process to guard against undue weight on a doctor’s diagnosis that a patient has less than six months to live. Speaking from experience, the Senator’s widow notes that when Ted Kennedy’s terminal cancer was discovered, he was told he had four to five months to live. “Because that first dire prediction of life expectancy was wrong, I have 15 months of cherished memories,” Victoria Kennedy said.

Pope begins catechesis on content of faith

VATICAN CITY—“Christians today often do not even know the central core of their Catholic faith,” Pope Benedict XVI observed at his regular public audience on October 17. The Holy Father announced that he was beginning a new series of catechetical talks, dedicated to the content of the faith, for the Year of Faith. He said that the goal of the Year of Faith—and thus of his weekly talks—is “to renew our enthusiasm at believing in Jesus Christ.”

With his catecheses over coming months, the Holy Father hopes to help people understand that the faith “is not something extraneous and distant from real life, but the very heart thereof. Faith in a God who is love and who came close to mankind by taking human flesh and giving himself on the cross to save us and open the doors of heaven for us, is a luminous sign that only in love does man’s true fullness lie,” he said. “Where there is domination, possession and exploitation … man is impoverished, degraded and disfigured.”

The fundamental content of the Christian faith, the Pope said, can be found in the Creed. Those fundamental beliefs, in turn, form the basis for Christian moral life. “It is the Church’s duty to trans-
Pope canonizes two saints from North America

VATICAN CITY—Pope Benedict XVI presided at the canonization of seven new saints, including two from North America—St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American saint, and St. Marianne Cope, who worked with lepers at Molokai—at a Marian Mass celebrated for a congregation of 80,000 people in St. Peter’s Square on October 21.

The unprecedented canonization of two North American saints in a single day drew thousands of Americans to Rome for the October 21 ceremonies. “This is a great weekend for America in the Vatican,” observed Greg Burke, the Vatican’s communications adviser.

Pioneers in adult stem-cell research win Nobel Prize

STOCKHOLM, Sweden—The Nobel Prize in Medicine has been awarded to John Gurdon and Shinya Yamanaka, two scientists whose work has centered around adult stem-cell research, which does not involve the destruction of human embryos.

“The technique offers hope of progress in stem-cell research without relying on the unethical destruction of human embryos,” said David Jones, director of the Anscombe Center in Oxford. “The past attempts to clone human embryos and the bizarre experiments to create admixed human-nonhuman embryos have delivered nothing.”

“500 nuns belong to Chinese religious community

TONG YUAN, China—The Fides news agency is reporting that 500 women religious, 80% of whom are “very young,” now belong to the Franciscan Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a community devoted to education and the corporal works of mercy.

Headquartered in the central Chinese city of Xi’an, the Franciscan Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are very active in the six dioceses of Shaan Xi province. The community was founded in 1923 and allowed to reopen in 1980, four years after the death of Mao Zedong.

They run 30 clinics, five kindergartens, a publishing house, a religious clothing and sacred objects. They opened a shelter for AIDS patients and for lepers, and are particularly active in emergencies, such as earthquakes, floods. They also organize regular formation courses for lay people.

In his homily the Pope pointed out that “happy coincidence” the canonizations took place on World Mission Sunday, as the Church reflects on “how to be evangelizers, called to bear witness and to proclaim the Christian message.” The seven new saints answered that challenge in their own different ways, the Pontiff observed. “They are sons and daughters of the Church who chose a life of service following the Lord.”

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“In total, these days have resulted in the visitation of about 7,500 homes and conversations with some 3,500 people, with about 370 asking for follow-up, such as requests for visiting the homebound, rides to Mass, information on annulments, or how to have their children baptized,” says William Patenaude, a member of the Diocese of Providence’s Committee for Evangelization.

Visitation teams took notes on the needs of those they met. Special teams—either the original visitors, the pastor, a deacon, or parish staff—can then contact anyone who asked for more information. “We can’t just knock on doors without committing to whatever follow-up is necessary,” said Bishop Tobin, emphasizing the importance of remaining available to those who need additional contact. “That’s like casting seed on dry land: it’s offering the promise but not tending and nurturing the growth.”

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They run 30 clinics, five kindergartens, a publishing house, a religious clothing and sacred objects. They opened a shelter for AIDS patients and for lepers, and are particularly active in emergencies, such as earthquakes, floods. They also organize regular formation courses for lay people.
Dali Lama calls for world of compassion and peace

DANBURY—“We are all the same, human beings on the same planet,” the Dali Lama told a sold-out audience on October 18 at Western Connecticut State University (WestCONN) in Danbury. “Everybody wants a peaceful, happy life.”

The Dali Lama, the spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism, gave two lectures “The Art of Compassion” and “Advice for Daily Life” at WestCONN as part of the university’s Embracing the Challenges of the 21st Century lecture series. One of the world’s most respected religious leaders, the Dali Lama describes himself as a simple Buddhist monk. Committed to the promotion of basic human values, fostering inter-religious harmony, and the welfare of his people in Tibet, the Dali Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

Hundreds of Catholics from the Diocese of Bridgeport were among those attending the Dali Lama’s talks. “I think highly of him as a promoter of peace says Monica Wheeler, a member of the pastoral council of St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Fairfield, who went to the lecture with her husband, Fredric, and daughter, Kristen. “How could you pass up an opportunity to hear a world leader who talks about compassion—instead of economics!”

“The Dali Lama is someone who is in touch with God and wants to proclaim God’s message of goodness and peace and happiness,” says Fr. Bradford Heckathorne, OFM Conv., the chaplain of WestCONN’s Newman Center.

“This is the message of Jesus made concrete. It fits in with our notion of peace, our notion of compassion, our notion of forgiveness,” Fr. Bradford points out that the Second Vatican Council, which celebrated its 50th anniversary this year, encouraged Catholics to connect to other religions, seeking the value they offer.

“Peace does not mean no problems,” the Dali Lama told the assembled crowd, which included not only students but people from as far away as New Jersey and Massachusetts. “It means solving problems without using force. Think more about how to build a peaceful world—that means a more compassionate world.” The solution, he said, lies in individuals, not governments. “Do this by an awareness of the needs of others, their right to happiness as equal to your own.”

Mgr. Robert Weiss, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Newtown, was among the many clergy of several denominations to attend the lecture. “This is a clear, simple message, though it’s difficult to implement,” he says. “It’s about individuals—what can I find within myself to create peace in the world. That’s what Jesus taught. That’s the message of all the great religions.”

He points out that, in a world fractured by division—much of it driven by perceived religious differences—there is an even greater need to respect the gifts of each religion. “This is an age in which we need to be together, not pulling apart. Certainly we can’t have religion pulling us apart.”

Couples celebrate jubilees

TRUMBULL—A total of 5,018 years of marriage were honored when 122 couples from 45 parishes celebrated significant jubilees of 15 years or longer.

The Wedding Jubilee Mass was celebrated on October 14 in St. Theresa Parish. Mgr. Jerald Doyle, diocesan administrator, con-celebrated the Mass with Fr. Brian Gannon, St. Theresa’s pastor, and priests of the diocese.

The honor of being the longest-married couple went to James and Mary Caldorone (center in the photo below), celebrating 70 years of marriage. In a special turn of events, the Calderones were joined at the Jubilee Mass by their daughters and their husbands, Louise and Richard Deenihan (at right), married 45 years, and Barbara and Michael Hamilton, married 47 years.

The Calderones brought up the offertory gifts, along with Dolores and Sabatino Cortello, celebrating their golden anniversary, Dawn and Mark Ringes, married 25 years, and Rose and Steve Ippolito, honoring their 15th anniversary.

This celebration honored couples whose weddings fell in the second half of the year. A spring celebration is planned for couples who were married between January and June.
Local Collaboration

Assumption School begins STEM with SHU

By PAT HENNESSY

"For the mean, we add all these together and divide by the number of quantities," explains Erin Puschak, a junior at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, working at a SMARTboard with sixth-grader Katelyn Pond.

Erin is in the education program at Sacred Heart, specializing in math. She is part of a new collaboration linking Our Lady of the Assumption School in Fairfield and nearby SHU.

"Our advisory board started working with Dr. Seamus Carey, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Sacred Heart, last year," explains Assumption's principal, Gerrie Desio. "We decided to begin with a partnership between their math department and our middle school math program. Once this is in place, we're interested in expanding it to our entire STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) program."

Assumption already has a successful STEM program. Sacred Heart University's participation will focus on strengthening the program, both by assisting students who find the material challenging and by offering enrichment to advanced students.

Principal Desio points out that 99% of Assumption's graduates go on to Catholic high schools. Those in the accelerated math program may bypass a year or even two, of high school math. Those in the general program arrive in high school with a solid groundwork in math. "Over and over I hear from high school principals that our kids come so well prepared," Desio says with pride.

This new program will enhance that spirit of excellence. It has several components. In the first, pairs of sixth-graders from the math department at Sacred Heart come to Assumption and work in the classroom. Their role is to assist younger students who need additional help and to conduct accelerated math work with those who learn at a faster pace.

"The university students won't just help," says Maureen Travers, Assumption's middle school math teacher. "They'll teach a lesson, see what works and what doesn't. Because they're young, they are more high-tech on the SMARTboard. They bring in new techniques to make math more interesting."

The second component of the program, the one Erin and Katelyn are working on this October afternoon, is an after-school tutoring program. Travers pairs Assumption students who need assistance with a tutor from Sacred Heart. The pairing helps both of them.

At the SMARTboard, Katelyn analyzes the mean, median, mode and range of a series of numbers. "I knew it, sort of, but at the same time I kind of was not sure," she says. "I have a test tomorrow. I feel more confident about it now."

Erin, who has already decided to enter the teaching field, finds the experience valuable. "I can figure out what kids have trouble with, and find ways to explain it."

Erin and Katelyn are not the only pair engaged in the tutorial. Eighth-grader Alexander Giainnos is diligently converting percentages into fractions, while Amanda Wilkins, a seventh-grader, is working on the order of operations. (For those who took math many years ago, multiplication is done before addition; in the expression 2+3x4, the answer is 14. Multiply 3x4 first, then add 2.)

Even the most daunting math concepts yield their secrets when Assumption School sixth-grader Katelyn Pond gets assistance from Erin Puschak, a junior at Sacred Heart University. The two are taking part in a STEM collaboration linking Our Lady of the Assumption School and SHU.

"Complicated problems can be extremely daunting," says Amanda's tutor, SHU sophomore Dominique Weigel. "I try to find ways to make it simpler—I wouldn't say easier, because math isn't easy."

Dominique loves math. She isn't sure, though, whether her path will lead to teaching or to another math-related field. The one-on-one tutoring, as well as her time assisting in Assumption's math classes, will help her with that decision.

For Amanda, there's no question. "Now, when Dominique puts a problem on the board—even a big one—I still get it."

The third component of the collaboration will include a Math Club, with math faculty from Sacred Heart conducting presentations to the Assumption students, and a Math Olympics. The club will fit nicely into Assumption's range of extracurricular activities.

The school, which offers pre-K 3 and 4 classes, has a before and after school program. In addition, little ones can enjoy dance classes while older students participate in activities as varied as sports, violin lessons, a Lego program, and band.

"These students may be working on math projects—but at Assumption, they are our projects," says Travers. "We want the best for them. We want to help them succeed."

The collaboration with Sacred Heart University is, for the staff at Assumption, one more way to achieve that goal.
EDITORIAL

Something Different

Thanksgiving. Christmas. New Year’s Eve and Day. So much to do, so much to plan for. Black Friday starts Thanksgiving night, and Christmas lights and the tree go up while you nosh on the turkey leftovers. Then someone throws in Advent—please, stop! Enough!

How about something different? Give yourself a pre-Christmas treat this year; go to Confession for Advent. Yeah, that sure sounds different—different and awfully pious!

But Confession at Christmas is not like Confession at Easter (or at your Confirmation, if that was the last time you received the sacrament). The peace of the quiet church, maybe spiced with the warmth of candle wax and the scent of wreaths on the doors, the chance to do something just for yourself, those set the tone for a different kind of experience. You can drop those burdens of anger, resentment, and self-importance at the feet of the priest. And at absolution they’re gone—less than dust. You’re free.

You can greet your family on Christmas morning with an open heart, as well as open arms (yes, it’s always family that arouses the best and worst in us, isn’t it). At Christmas Mass, you can offer the Sign of Peace and, for once, really feel it. Peace on Earth, and peace in me.

Give it a try.

Much to be thankful for

The St. Augustine Medal of Service recipients highlighted in this issue are the pride and joy of the diocese. The annual prayer service and conferring of medals, held recently at St. Augustine Cathedral in Bridgeport, is a very special moment because it speaks to the best in us and to the blessing of those who lead lives of faith and good works.

This year, Msgr. Jerald A. Doyle, diocesan administrator, presented St. Augustine Medals to 100 men and women, many of them lifetime parishioners, and told them that although they often worked alone, they “did not work in isolation,” because they are “building up the Body of Christ.”

“Though we may not have been aware of it and perhaps even you did not realize it, you have been building us up, making us stronger, making us more Christ-like,” Msgr. Doyle said in praising the medal winners.

It is fitting that the awards are presented before Thanksgiving each year because we owe so much to those who labor in silence and love, who often work alone and unrecognized.

They make our parishes caring, healing and welcoming places. Surely, the depth of their faith, nourished by the gift of the Eucharist, enlarges the meaning of Thanksgiving for the entire human family.

November Storms

How vulnerable we were. The one-two punch of Hurricane Sandy followed by an early season snowstorm sent us reeling. And for a little while, that vulnerability opened us up to each other—neighbors, family members, and strangers. Is it because we realize how helpless we are alone, or how fragile the entire human enterprise is? And that anything short of love and compassion is an impoverished response to the gift or our existence? Many of us lost power, struggled in the dark, slept in the cold, ate poorly and worried. In the blink of an eye, we shuddered through our sudden vulnerability. Those of us who have been through natural and man-made disasters like 9/11 know the feeling; we are initially shocked into openness and generosity, but that spirit fades. Yet, something of the lesson stays with us: no matter how secure our lives may seem, we are always vulnerable in some way, and perhaps that is how it must be before our creator. When the Gospel tells us we must be prepared to lose everything, it speaks to the human condition, but it also offers a fullness that only faith can bring.

Prayer in the Days Before Advent

My brother, Jesus. It happens every year. I think that this will be the year that I have a reflective Advent.

I look forward to Sunday and this new season, Jesus. But all around me are the signs rushing me to Christmas and some kind of celebration that equates spending with love.

I need your help. I want to slow my world down. This year, more than ever, I need Advent, these weeks of reflection and longing for hope in the darkness.

Jesus, this year, help me to have that longing. Help me to feel it in my heart and be aware of the hunger and thirst in my own soul. Deep down, I know there is something missing in my life, but I can’t quite reach for it.

I can’t get what is missing. I know it is about you, Jesus. You are not missing from my life, but I might be missing the awareness of all of the places you are present there.

Be with me, my dear friend. Guide me in these weeks to what you want to show me this Advent. Help me to be vulnerable enough to ask you to lead me to the place of my own weakness, the very place where I will find you most deeply embedded in my heart, loving me without limits.

Submitted from Creighton University Online Ministries

GOOD SHEPHERDS—Congratulations to Brendan Fisk and Barnet Phillips, IV, co-founders of Shepherds, Inc., the youth mentoring program that has helped scores of young people across the diocese succeed in high school and go on to college. The dynamic duo received the Business Leadership Award at the recent CAPP breakfast held at Fairfield University.

Clergy APPOINTMENTS

Msgr. Jerald A. Doyle, JCD, Diocesan Administrator, has made the following clergy appointments in the Diocese of Bridgeport:

ADMINISTRATOR

REV. EDWARD MCAULEY, Parochial Vicar, Saint Mary Parish, Bethel, to Administrator, Saint Bridget of Ireland Parish, Stamford. Effective date was November 5.

PAROCHIAL VICAR

REV. PAUL D’OLIZA, Diocese of Varamasi, India, to Parochial Vicar, Our Lady of Grace Parish, Stratford. Effective date was October 13.

REV. CHRISTOPHER SAMELE, Parochial Vicar, Saint Catherine of Siena Parish, Trumbull, to Parochial Vicar, Saint Stephen Parish, Trumbull. Effective date was September 18.

CHAPEL

REV. WILLIAM PLATT, Chaplain, Saint Mary Hospital, Waterbury, to Chaplain, Saint Vincent’s Medical Center, Bridgeport. Effective date was November 12.

RETIREMENT

REV. GILL BABBUE, Pastor, Saint Bridget of Ireland Parish, Stamford, to retirement. Effective date was November 5.

DEACON

DEACON DAVID SOCHACKI, Deacon, Saint Matthew Parish, Norwalk, to Deacon, Saint Margaret Mary Parish, Shelton. Effective date was October 15.

Editorial

Vatican recognizes “Venerable” Fulton J. Sheen

A Woman’s View

By Antoinette Bosco

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

This summer a news story from the Vatican reported that Pope Benedict XVI had officially approved the “heroic virtues” of the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. This was reported as a major step towards one day declaring him a saint of the Catholic Church. Anyone who watched television back in the 1950’s would remember that attractive, very human priest who drew us to watch his program that he called “Life is Worth Living.” He would stand there before the cameras, dressed in impressive priestly robes, and preach, always showing a tremendous sense of humor.

I never missed his show because I could brag about how I once got to meet him. That was back in 1945, and I had just started my studies at the College of St. Rose in Albany, NY. One day, a few of us girls had walked along a downtown hallway looking for (I don’t remember what) and there in an empty room was sitting this young and gorgeous priest. Of course, we were too shy to start a conversation, but he wasn’t. He smiled and welcomed us.

I don’t remember why he was in Albany, and later I heard he was from Illinois, so I—being a smart college girl—assumed he was on a crucial assignment. A decade and a half later, seeing him on television, I felt very important as I could tell people I had met this television star!

Of course, when I was still in college, I had no way of knowing that one day I was going to be a writer for the Catholic press. I was a pre-med student, hoping to serve the sick as a doctor, until I had to face the reality, namely that back then, in the late forties, medical schools never accepted women with no financial resources. So I did what I had been doing since I was eight years old: I wrote—specifically choosing to work for the Catholic Press—which brings me back to Archbishop Sheen.

I learned that this television star was very involved in supporting Catholic missions, heading the American branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. What mostly impressed me was learning that he frequently visited prisoners, even those on death row. Now the Vatican has officially recognized Archbishop Sheen for having (their words) “heroic virtues.” His cause for sainthood was opened ten years ago. What is needed for his beatification is an authenticated miracle. A recent story in the New York Times tells of a reported “miracle” being reviewed by the Vatican, where, after giving birth to a stillborn baby, the mother “prayed repeatedly to Fulton Sheen,” and after 61 minutes, the baby’s heart started beating. Today, the child is a “healthy toddler.”

The cause for Archbishop Sheen’s sainthood is gaining momentum, and as a media person, I am overjoyed and agree with Father Robert Barron—who spreads the Gospel through television—that Archbishop Sheen “is the patron saint of media evangelization.”

I would like to share with you some words given to us by Father Robert Barron, Fulton J. Sheen, that I have kept in my Bible for many years—“If you live for Christ, not the slightest moment of your life goes to waste.” Amen!

There is darkness before the dawn

A Dad’s View

By Matthew Hennessey

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

We have certainly had a rough ride. Some have had a tougher time than others, but no one in Fairfield County or the Diocese of Bridgeport can claim to have been unaffected by Hurricane Sandy. It has been a true test. Keeping body, mind, and soul together has not been easy. I truly hope that you and your family remained healthy and safe during the brutal storm and its painful aftermath. For me and my family, the blackout brought the worst. For me and my family, it brought only their faith. For others—for the struggles and sacrifices, for the heartaches and property, but they left me something of greater value. They left me the tenets of a faith that has for two millennia provided shelter from the storm.

Take away my iPod and my cordless phone. Take away my hot shower and the microwave that warms my coffee. What am I left with? Take away my daily concerns about my appearance. Strip away my fear of failure, my privacy, my sense of humor, and my occasional good cheer. Take all of this stuff and what have I got? What have any of us got?

Faith. That’s it. Faith that we are loved. Faith that we are protected. Faith that we are saved, ultimately, from our earthly failures and our sins. Faith that when we have lost everything, we still have Him. Think of how we come into this world—confused and in darkness. Often that’s how we leave it, too. In between, we spend far too much of our brief time here worrying about trifles. Like the way I nearly spent my week, stewing over such counterproductive questions as: Why is it taking so long for them to get to my street? Who do I have to call to get some answers? How come that neighborhood got power and ours didn’t?

I won’t be glad to go through this again. I doubt anyone around here would be. We must always remember that our true fate is not in the hands of Connecticut Light & Power. Our souls are in the hands of a merciful and loving protector. Even if the lights go out, we have to remember to keep the faith.

For Jesus said, “I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)
2012 Saint Augustine Medal of Service

CONGRATULATIONS

2012 SAINT AUGUSTINE MEDAL OF SERVICE RECIPIENTS

“Service is the hallmark of a Christian, the true sign of a believer,” Msgr. Jerald A. Doyle, diocesan administrator for the Diocese of Bridgeport, said in his homily before presenting St. Augustine Medals of Service to 100 men and women across the diocese.

More than 700 faithful turned out for the annual prayer service and award ceremony, held at St. Augustine Cathedral in downtown Bridgeport.

“Year in and year out you have given generous and constant service to the diocese,” Msgr. Doyle said of the recipients, who were recognized for giving of their time and talents in parishes, schools and charitable works.

Msgr. Doyle thanked the medal winners for the dedication to Christ and the Church. Referring to the day’s reading from Romans 12: 3-8, he told them, “St. Paul tells us we must take what gifts we have and use them to the best of our abilities. Don’t let them be hidden or diminished.”

Many of the medal winners served on parish councils, volunteered to lead youth groups, visited hospitals, worked in soup kitchens, and performed a wide variety of acts including helping with maintenance, cleaning altar linens, leading parish fairs and serving as Eucharistic ministers. (Photos by Michelle Babyak)
2012 Saint Augustine Medal of Service

Saint Michael the Archangel Parish, Bridgeport: Mrs. Tadeusz Gnidula – “In addition to his many ways of faithful witness, Tadeusz has served on the Parish Council and presently assists at Mass and is a Eucharistic Minister.”

Saint Peter Parish, Bridgeport: Mrs. Luz Perez – “Luz, a lifetime parishioner, is always there to serve the parish in every capacity when she is needed and she does it with great generosity and commitment. She helps in a great deal in festivals and celebrations.”

The Cathedral Parish – Saint Augustine Cathedral, Bridgeport: Mrs. Irene Sceurman – “For her life-long service to our community as a receptionist, and for her excellent example of Catholic life, Irene deserves this honor.”

The Cathedral Parish – Saint Patrick, Bridgeport: Mrs. Louelle Piccirillo – “Whether organizing the decoration of the church, fundraising, or being active in our Ladies’ Guild, Lucille is well-known for her generosity, patience and faith.”

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Danbury: Mrs. Maria Pereira – “Maria Pereira is one of the Founders of this parish. She helps to organize some of our parish celebrations, and, every year, she is in charge of our Christmas Bazaar.”

Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, Danbury: Mrs. Gerald Daly – “Mr. Daly is a lifelong member of Sacred Heart Parish. He is a generous and wise counselor in legal matters. Mr. Daly’s service is an example to all of us and our parish.”

Saint Gregory the Great Parish, Danbury: Mr. Gregory Wencek – “Gregory has been very instrumental in helping to bring Saint Gregory’s into the 21st century age of media. Weekly parish homilies are now available on the internet and iPhones for our homebound.”

Saint Joseph Parish, Danbury: Mr. and Mrs. Marc Grenier – “Marc and Jeanine Grenier and their extended family have been actively engaged in making Saint Joseph Parish a vibrant community of faith. Both are exemplary in their dedication to the mission of the Parish.”

Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Danbury: Mr. Osvaldo Conv. – “As a musician, Osvaldo brings expertise and authority to encourage liturgy while linking others to the action of sacred music. He truly takes care of all of us and our parish.”

Saint Peter Parish, Danbury: Mr. John Edmond – “John has been a dedicated sacristan for many years. Active in both the Men’s Society and Community Concerns Committee, John serves both the needs of the parish and the wider community.”

Saint John Parish, Danbury: Mr. and Mrs. Peter Way – “Peter and Kris are outstanding in their charity and pastoral zeal. Both have worked with great joy and a most cooperative spirit in the work of evangelization. They live the ideal of Christ’s call to serve.”

Father Reggie Norman, Pastor

Father George O’Neill, Pastor

Father Aniceto Villamide, Pastor

Father Gregg Mecca, Pastor

Monsignor Frank McGrath, Pastor

Monsignor Frank McGrath, Pastor

Father Peter Lennon, Administrator

Father Peter Lennon, Administrator
2012 Saint Augustine Medal of Service

SAINT THOMAS MORE PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. JAMES SEWLAN – “Jim has been a member of the parish since 1992, serving as an Usher, an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, Youth Minister, and Member of the Finance Committee. Well done, Jim.” – Father Paul Murphy, Pastor

NOTRE DAME PARISH, EASTON: MRS. SEANON STMMLER – “Sharon Stemme is a Religious Education teacher, a Lector and Eucharistic Minister. She is very involved in our parish Ladies Council. We are pleased to honor her.” – Monsignor Thomas Driscoll, P.A., Pastor

HOLY CROSS PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. AND MRS. PATRICE WALTER – “Both Patrick and Mary have been extremely active in volunteering their time, talent, and energy in many activities. We thank them for their selflessness in giving devotion to God, country, and parish.” – Father Alfred Pecovic, Pastor

HOLY FAMILY PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. ANNE CHAMBLIN – “Anne has been a trustee, coordinator of RCIA, and prayer group leader as well as home-bound visitor and Eucharistic Minister. We pray the good Lord will continue to guide her in all her endeavours.” – Father Guido Montanaro, Pastor

SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. THOMAS MEYERS – “Tom personifies the faithful disciple of Christ. He is ever present at morning Mass, usually opening the church and serving as the adult server. Tom is a welcoming face of the parish.” – Father John Baran, Pastor

SAINT EMORY PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. AND MRS. ANDREW RENAS – “Taking part in many parish activities, Andrew and Elizabeth have been most supportive of their Hungarian culture and their Catholic faith. They are people one can call upon whenever there is a need.” – Father Alfred Pecovic, Pastor

SAINT Pius X PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. OWEN DOWD – “Owen Dowd has generously served the parish as a volunteer overseeing the repairs and maintenance of the buildings and grounds.” – Monsignor J. Peter Cullen, P.A., Pastor

OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. ALFRED KAPITONI – “Al is a faithful and committed Catholic who witnesses to Christ in so many ways by serving as an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist and visiting the sick at St. Vincent’s.” – Father William Quinlan, Administrator

SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. CATHERINE ROBBINS – “Jim and Gen are Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. Their cheerful spirits and depth of faith are great examples to all of us here at Sacred Heart.” – Father David Leopold, Pastor

SAINT AGNES PARISH, GREENWICH: MRS. CARLOLE WINTER – “A teacher and Prayer Group leader, Carole graciously accepts life’s challenges and continues on her journey because of her deep faith, love and trust in the Lord and she shares them with all.” – Father Bose Raja Selvaraj, Pastor

SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL PARISH AND SAINT TIMOTHY CHAPEL, GREENWICH: MRS. OWEN DOWD – “Owen Dowd has generously served the parish as a volunteer overseeing the repairs and maintenance of the buildings and grounds.” – Monsignor J. Peter Cullen, P.A., Pastor

SAINT MARY PARISH, GREENWICH: MRS. MICHAEL RIPOLI – “Michael and Frances have been very community minded and have helped many individuals in the parish over the years. They are an example of service to everyone.” – Monsignor Francis Wisel, Pastor

SAINT Aloysius PARISH, GREENWICH: MRS. TRECIE FENNEWALL – “Trecie is a long time devoted member of the parish. She served on the Parish Council, and is a Eucharistic Minister. She devotes many hours weekly to the patients of Nathaniel Witherell Nursing Home.” – Father James McDermott, Pastor

SAINT MARY PARISH, GREENWICH: MRS. AND MRS. JAMES FAGAN – “Jim and Gen are Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist and skilled volunteers. Their cheerful spirits and depth of faith are great examples to all of us here at Sacred Heart.” – Father David Leopold, Pastor

SAINT THOMAS MORE PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. SANDY ZERA – “This Christian woman reaches to all people in their various needs. From her support of our music program to taking care of the altar during the week, Sandy has been a tremendous asset to the parish.” – Father Victor Martin, Pastor

SAINT MICHAEL PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. SHARON STEMMEN – “Sharon Stemme is a Religious Education teacher, a Lector and Eucharistic Minister. She is very involved in our parish Ladies Council. We are pleased to honor her.” – Monsignor Thomas Driscoll, P.A., Pastor

SAINT MICHAEL PARISH, EASTON: MRS. MICHAEL RONSOLI – “Michael and Frances have been very community minded and have helped many individuals in the parish over the years. They are an example of service to everyone.” – Monsignor Francis Wisel, Pastor

SAINT AUGUSTINE PARISH, FAIRFIELD: MRS. AND MRS. PATRICE WALTER – “Both Patrick and Mary have been extremely active in volunteering their time, talent, and energy in many activities. We thank them for their selflessness in giving devotion to God, country, and parish.” – Father Alfred Pecovic, Pastor
2012 Saint Augustine Medal of Service

Saint Rose of Lima Parish, Newtown: Ms. and Mrs. James Healey

– "Lynda and Jim spend every Sunday at our local nursing home, the day on which many residents are alone. They are a true blessing, especially to those who have no family or friends in the area." — Monsignor Robert Weis, Pastor

Saint Jude Parish, Monroe: Mr. and Mrs. Doug Stevens

– "Doug and Ellen Stevens chair the ministry for Eucharistic Ministers, maintaining the roster and scheduling the ministers for the Masses. They are always ready to share their time and talent with Saint Jude Parish." — Monsignor John Sahia, Pastor

Saint Matthew Parish, Norwalk: Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Romano

– "Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you." These words of Saint Augustine truly reflect the lives of Joseph and Florence Romano.” — Monsignor Walter Orlowski, Pastor

Saint John the Evangelist Parish, Ridgefield: Mr. and Mrs. Don Parks

– "Don Parks is one of the quiet heroes at the parish. He has worked behind the scenes for decades as a Eucharistic Minister and sound system volunteer. He is always just a phone call away." — Father David Blanchfield, Pastor

Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish, Norwalk: Mr. and Mrs. Michael Amato

– "Michael faithfully serves every day in our St. Vincent de Paul Pantry and makes frequent runs to the food bank to extend Christian hospitality to the needy." — Father Robert Croftic, Pastor

Saint Joseph Parish, Shelton: Mrs. Josephine Romance

– "Paul and Rosana have served the parish in ministries like the Parish Council, Building Committee and Dorothy Day House. They are generous beyond measure in giving of their time and talent." — Father Joseph Prince, Pastor

Saint Lawrence Parish, Shelton: Mrs. Carol Calandra

– "For her selfless service, generosity and expertise, Carol is a quiet and steady paradigm of Christian witness." — Father Michael Jones, Pastor

Saint Mary Parish, Ridgefield: Mr. and Mrs. Robert Slosne

– "Robert Slosne assists people in obtaining employment and evaluating their skills through our “Support Circle.” He has been very generous with his time in support of parish activities." — Monsignor Alan Deutsch, Pastor

Saint Catherine of Siena Parish, Ridgefield: Mr. and Mrs. Robert Slosne

– "Robert Slosne assists people in obtaining employment and evaluating their skills through our “Support Circle.” He has been very generous with his time in support of parish activities." — Monsignor Alan Deutsch, Pastor

Saint Mary Parish, Shelton: Mrs. Mary Orazietti

– "Mary can be found each Tuesday and Thursday at the parish Adoration Chapel, where she prays for the needs of the parish and anyone who asks for prayers. Mary is a loyal parishioner who lives her faith." — Monsignor Christopher Walsh, Pastor

Saint Jude Parish, Monroe: Ms. and Mrs. Doug Stevens

– "Doug and Ellen Stevens chair the ministry for Eucharistic Ministers, maintaining the roster and scheduling the ministers for the Masses. They are always ready to share their time and talent with Saint Jude Parish." — Monsignor John Sahia, Pastor

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– "Mary can be found each Tuesday and Thursday at the parish Adoration Chapel, where she prays for the needs of the parish and anyone who asks for prayers. Mary is a loyal parishioner who lives her faith." — Monsignor Christopher Walsh, Pastor

Saint Philip Parish, Norwalk: Mr. Paul Sullivan

– “Paul is a ‘life-time’ member of our choir and a Cantor. He is also very active in the Men’s and Youth Ministries. His happiness is contagious. He inspires through wit and faith.” — Father Michael Boccaccio, Pastor

Saint Joseph Parish, Norwalk: Ms. Patricia Licari

– “Pat keeps the daily fonts, changing the votive candles, and much more through her prayerful example. We thank God for her presence.” — Father Greg Markay, Pastor

Saint Mary Parish, Norwalk: Ms. Patricia Licari

– “Pat keeps the daily fonts, changing the votive candles, and much more through her prayerful example. We thank God for her presence.” — Father Greg Markay, Pastor

Saint Jerome Parish, Norwalk: Mr. Donald Parks

– "Don Parks is one of the quiet heroes at the parish. He has worked behind the scenes for decades as a Eucharistic Minister and sound system volunteer. He is always just a phone call away." — Father David Blanchfield, Pastor

Saint Patrick Parish, Redding Ridge: Mr. Betty Lecar

– "Betty has been a member of the parish for 37 years, involved in many aspects of parish life as a Eucharistic Minister and Parish Council member. It is with great joy that we honor such a vital part of our parish family.” — Father Joseph Cervin, Pastor

Saint Joseph Parish, Monroe: Ms. and Mrs. Paul Agostini

– “Paul and Rosana have served the parish in ministries like the Parish Council, Building Committee and Dorothy Day House. They are generous beyond measure in giving of their time and talent.” — Father Joseph Prince, Pastor

Saint Philip Parish, Norwalk: Mr. Paul Sullivan

– “Paul is a ‘life-time’ member of our choir and a Cantor. He is also very active in the Men’s and Youth Ministries. His happiness is contagious. He inspires through wit and faith.” — Father Michael Boccaccio, Pastor

Saint Mary Parish, Ridgefield: Mr. and Mrs. Robert Slosne

– "Robert Slosne assists people in obtaining employment and evaluating their skills through our “Support Circle.” He has been very generous with his time in support of parish activities." — Monsignor Alan Deutsch, Pastor

Saint Catherine of Siena Parish, Ridgefield: Mr. and Mrs. Robert Slosne

– "Robert Slosne assists people in obtaining employment and evaluating their skills through our “Support Circle.” He has been very generous with his time in support of parish activities." — Monsignor Alan Deutsch, Pastor

Saint Mary Parish, Shelton: Mrs. Mary Orazietti

– "Mary can be found each Tuesday and Thursday at the parish Adoration Chapel, where she prays for the needs of the parish and anyone who asks for prayers. Mary is a loyal parishioner who lives her faith.” — Monsignor Christopher Walsh, Pastor

Saint Lawrence Parish, Shelton: Mrs. Carol Calandra

– "For her selfless service, generosity and expertise, Carol is a quiet and steady paradigm of Christian witness.” — Father Michael Jones, Pastor
**2012 Saint Augustine Medal of Service**

**Saint Augustine Medal of Service**

**Holy Spirit Parish, Stamford: Mrs. LyndaNaNen** – “Lynda is a Eucharistic Minister who brings communion to the residents of Scofield Manor and volunteers at Greenwich Hospital. She is a gift to Holy Spirit parish.”

– Father Robert Hyl, Pastor

**Saint Leo Parish, Stamford: Mrs. Ann Hogan** – “Ann serves as a Lector, Eucharistic Minister, Parish Fair volunteer and Social Concerns Committee member. Ann is a part of all of the spiritual, social, and educational ministries of our parish.”

– Father James Grossi, Pastor

**Saint Cecilia Parish, Stamford: Mrs. Theresa Signore** – “A loyal parishioner for years, Theresa has been a Eucharistic Minister and a member of our Resurrection Guild, serving funerals for many years and helps set up for Mass almost every morning.”

– Father David Riley, Pastor

**Saint Benedict-Our Lady of Montserrat Parish, Stamford: Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Pagano (Posthumously) and Mrs. Ann Pagano** – “Ann Pagano and her late husband Tony have been truly humble servants of our parish and worthy of praise. Even during his illness, Tony served the parish.”

– Father Joseph Malley, Pastor

**Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish, Shelton: Ms. and Mrs. Ronald Osseo** – “Stacey and Ron have been active parishioners for many years, serving as leaders in the ‘The Walk’ youth group. They are wonderful people and a great gift to the parish family.”

– Father John Strohowski, Administrator

**Sacred Heart Parish, Stamford: Mr. Louis Sileo** – “Louis Sileo has been a vigilant steward of the parish resources. Committed to living his Catholic Faith, he generously has dedicated hours as Chairman of the Parish Finance Council.”

– Father Richard Panic, Pastor

**Holy Trinity Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Palma Colarossi** – “Palma is our Volunteer Director of Religious Education, St. Ann Society Fund Raising Committees’ Annual Tag Sale organizer, Church Decorations and our ‘Coffee And’ coordinator.”

– Monsignor Edward Surwilo, Pastor

**Saint Clare of Assisi Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Madeleine Calvano** – “Madeleine is active in many areas of parish life including St. Gabriel Women’s Group, Youth Group, and Hospitality. She also devotes time by preparing sandwiches for the New Covenant Soup Kitchen. His kindness and exuberance in all that he does is a genuine model of selfless giving.”

– Father Alfred Pietropaio, Jr., Pastor

**Saint Lawrence Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Nadin Ishish**

**Saint Catherine of Siena Parish, Stamford: Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Muzzio**

**Saint Name of Jesus Parish, Stamford: Ms. Theresa Augustine** – “Teresa is an exemplar of a dedicated volunteer. She takes great care of the beauty of our church and helps in many initiatives around the parish.”

– Father Pasqual Herbenek, Administrator

**Saint Benedict-Our Lady of Montserrat Parish, Stamford: Mr. and Mrs. Madeline Trenza** – “Madeline is active in many areas of parish life including St. Gabriel Women’s Group, Youth Group, and Hospitality. She also devotes time preparing sandwiches for the New Covenant Soup Kitchen.”

– Father Cyriac LalPattina, Pastor

**Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish, Shelton: Mr. and Mrs. James Kibler** – “James and Joan have been active parishioners for many years, and have contributed much to the Parish. They are wonderful people and a great gift to the parish family.”

– Father John Strohowski, Administrator

**Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Stamford: Mrs. Rita McCormick** – “Rita has been a parishioner at Holy Name for most of her life. As a member of the Parish Council, tag sale volunteer and faithful member of the Ladies Guild, she is most worthy of honor.”

– Father Andrew Marx, Pastor

**Saint Mary Parish, Stamford: Ms. George Connolly** – “George grew up in Stamford and attended St. Mary Parochial School. He is a volunteer for all parish activities including the annual parish fair. He is one of our longest attending members.”

– Father Arthur Mollenhauer, Pastor

**Saint Mary Parish, Stamford: Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Pia** – “Janet and Tom have been involved in almost every aspect of parish life for 75+ years. As stewards they have both given their time and talents in many ways including service in faith formation and liturgy.”

– Father Albert Piscinato III, Pastor

**Saint Mary Parish, Stamford: Ms. Ann Pagano** and her late husband Tony have been truly humble servants of our parish and worthy of praise. Even during his illness, Tony served the parish.”

– Father Joseph Malley, Pastor

**Saint Benedict-Our Lady of Montserrat Parish, Stamford: Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Pagano (Posthumously) and Mrs. Ann Pagano**

**Saint Martha Parish, South Norwalk: Mr. and Mrs. Edward Postlewaite**

**Saint Mary Parish, Stamford: Ms. Mary Roseummings** – “Mary has been active in almost every aspect of parish life for 55 years. She is a lifelong parishioner who is always ready to help with any and all activities. She has a good heart and is a devout soul. She served as Lector as well as Eucharistic Minister.”

– Father Gill Baken, Pastor

**Saint Clare of Assisi Parish, South Norwalk: Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Muzzio**

**Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Marlene Girard**

**Saint Mary Parish, Stamford: Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Osseo**

**Saint Luke Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Madeleine Calvano**

**Saint Charles Borromeo Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Rita McCormick**

**Saint Lawrence Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Nadin Ishish**

**Saint Mary Parish, Stamford: Ms. Mary Roseummings**

**Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish, Shelton: Ms. and Mrs. Ronald Osseo**

**St. Benedict-Our Lady of Montserrat Parish, Stamford: Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Pagano (Posthumously) and Mrs. Ann Pagano**

**Saint Mary Parish, Stamford: Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Pia**

**Saint Martha Parish, South Norwalk: Mr. and Mrs. Edward Postlewaite**

**Saint Martha Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Marlene Girard**

**Saint Luke Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Madeleine Calvano**

**Saint Charles Borromeo Parish, South Norwalk: Ms. Rita McCormick**
2012 Saint Augustine Medal of Service

Our Lady of Grace Parish, Stratford: Mrs. Linda Superowski – “Linda attends daily Mass, and is a Eucharistic Minister. She leads the parish Bible Study and has assisted in our parish Religious Education Program. She shares her faith and love with enthusiasm.” – Monsignor Martin P. Ryan, Administrator

Christ the King Parish, Trumbull: Mr. James McNamara – “Jim is the current Finance Chair, a Eucharistic Minister and Lector, and a choir member. He is a thoroughly generous, devoted and committed to his parish.” – Father Lawrence Carver, Pastor

Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, Westport: Mrs. Eileen Major – “As Parish Council Chair, Elise Major is an extremely dedicated and very generous leader who has gone above and beyond the call in giving of her time, talents and efforts in service to our parish family.” – Father Michael Dawson, Pastor

Saint Catherine of Sienna Parish, Trumbull: Mr. Stephen Sando – “Steve directed the choir for 23 years and has been Saint Catherine’s representative to the Trumbull Interfaith Committee for 25 years.” – Monsignor Richard Shea, Pastor

Saint Luke Parish, Westport: Mrs. William Valeant – “Bill is the good and faithful servant, quietly and prayerfully in the background, no matter the event, making sure that the details of hospitality and good order are always in place.” – Monsignor Andrew Varga, Pastor

Diocese of Bridgeport: Mr. Benedict Danieleczuk – “Ben has been a volunteer, helping to wheel residents to Mass in the Health Care Center since 1975, and a Lector at Mass for years.” – Reverend George Mader, OFM Conv., Chaplain of Bridgeport Health Care

Diocese of Bridgeport: Mr. George Danieleczuk – “George has been active at the Health Center for more than 30 years. He has dedicated himself to helping wheel the residents for Mass on Sundays and whenever he can.” – Reverend George Mader, OFM Conv., Chaplain of Bridgeport Health Care

Catholic Charities: Sister Eileen Boyfa – “Sister Eileen is a Sister of Mercy who ministers to the poor and all those who need comfort and support through The Thomas Merton Center. Having Sister Eileen around is a blessing to guests and staff.” – Al Barber, President

Catholic Charities: Dr. Roger Lagatta – “Dr. Lagatta, a retired surgeon, has served the Danbury community and Catholic Charities for more than 25 years. He also reflects the qualities of the medal in his faith and family life.” – Al Barber, President

Catholic Education: Mr. R. Bradford Evans – “The students at Saint Raphael School are delighted with the science lab that Mr. Evans’s kindness has made possible. Brad has exceeded all expectations as a member of the School Advisory Board.” – Dr. Margaret Dames, Superintendent

Catholic Education: Mr. Wally Hurd – “Wally Hurd has been the president of the All Saints Catholic School Home School Association since 2009. He lives the Gospel values and is always there to do whatever needs to be done.” – Dr. Margaret Dames, Superintendent

Development Office: Mr. and Mrs. Leo Van Munching – “We are grateful to Peggy and Leo Van Munching for their longstanding generosity and service to the Diocese of Bridgeport and Kolbe-Cathedral High School.” – Jeff Machi, Director of Development
Advent

RCIA Congress helps Catholics share their faith

By PAT HENNESSY

“Two words sum up the Catholic faith: love, and forgive,” said Susan Filan. “Love one another as I have loved you, and forgive others and forgive yourself.”

Filan’s witness to her path from her Jewish roots to baptism in the Catholic faith at St. Rose of Lima Parish in Newtown was one of the highlights of the RCIA Congress held November 10 at St. Luke Parish in Westport. Over 100 directors of faith formation and religious education teachers attended the congress, the first held in this diocese.

“The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, RCIA, is a great gift to the Church,” says Gina Donnarummo, director of adult formation for the diocesan Office for Pastoral Services. Every year, she says, over 250 people come to the diocesan-wide Rite of Election, the last step before receiving the sacraments of initiation during the Easter Vigil. “That’s a big number for this small diocese.”

Pastoral Services held the Congress as part of the observance of the Year of Faith called by Pope Benedict XVI. “The Year of Faith is about evangelization, sharing our faith and our love of Jesus,” says Donnarummo. “We hope to get people inspired, and give parishes the tools they need to do this.”

Along with the witness talk by Filan, participants heard a keynote address, “Beyond What Jesus Would Do,” by Fr. Ian Jordan, parochial vicar at St. Aloysius Parish in New Canaan.

Our lives are all about coming to know our need for Jesus Christ,” Fr. Jeremiah said. “We can give of ourselves because of who we are—a child of God.”

Through personal examples, Fr. Jeremiah encouraged participants to understand what it means to be a Christian. “It’s not by the effort of trying to work out what Jesus would do, he said, but something deeper and more intuitive.

“It means to allow Christ to draw out of us the beautiful music we are all capable of producing,” he said. “We are born to new life, baptized into love. We are called to spread the fragrance of Christ in the world.”

“This is such a warmedhearted ministry,” said Janice Jordan, echoing Fr. Jeremiah’s thoughts. Jordan is in charge of the RCIA process at Holy Trinity Parish in Sherman, a cozy parish of 250 families tucked into the northern corner of Fairfield County.

“Adults really want to know their faith. Sometimes they’ll come to me because their baby is being baptized, and they really want to be part of the faith of their child. They’ll say, ‘I’m Catholic, but I don’t really understand the Mass.’ In many ways, I’m the one who grows in faith because of their search.”

To help RCIA coordinators and presenters, workshops followed the opening address and witness talk. The workshops covered ways to handle the needs of children and teens coming into the Church; welcoming people in their first, tentative, contact with RCIA presenters and parish ministers; and best practices and available assistance.

Two priests, Fr. Gustavo Falla, director of the ministry to Spanish-speaking Catholics, and Fr. Bernardo Rodriguez, a former pastor of Nuestra Señora de Montserrat Parish in Stamford who now works in prison ministry, held workshops in Spanish. Hispanics are now the largest single ethnic group among Catholics in Fairfield County.

The tradition of receiving the sacraments, especially Baptism and First Holy Communion, is strong in the Hispanic heritage, explained Miryam Calle, who heads the RCIA process at St. Mary Parish in Stamford and at nearby St. Benedict-Nuestra Señora de Montserrat Parish. Many adult Catholics are drawn into the RCIA process through their children. “They’re enthusiastic about being catechized, learning their faith at the same time as their children.”

In any language or tradition, the purpose of the RCIA process is the same. “We’re giving Jesus Christ to people, sharing what our faith means to us,” said Pam Franco, who is in charge of the RICA process at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Weston.

“The RCIA process in a parish is a personal invitation. It shows that people care. It can be hard for Catholics to share our faith. Through RCIA, we can say ‘join our relationship with our Church and with Jesus Christ.’”

Sr. Eileen offers ministry of friendship

By PAT HENNESSY

“My purpose was simply to say a kind word, give a gentle look, compassionately hear a person’s sorrows,” says Sr. Eileen Boffa, RSM.

Following the charism of her order, the Sisters of Mercy, she wanted to work directly with the poor. “I prayed, ‘God teach me what to do,’” says Sr. Eileen, who had recently retired from teaching at St. Catherine Academy for special needs children in Fairfield.

God took Sr. Eileen to a street corner in downtown Bridgeport where people tended to hang out. They might be homeless or hungry or merely lonely, looking for a way to exchange a smile with another person.

“It was easy,” says Sr. Eileen of her street ministry. “If someone looks alone or lonely, I’ll say ‘hi’ and tell them my name.” Sometimes that exchange is the end of the contact. Other times it may lead to a shared cup of coffee or hot chocolate in a nearby Dunkin Donuts. “We’ll talk a little, and I’ll ask, ‘Have you had breakfast?’” Sr. Eileen’s concern for their situation may mean as much to a struggling young mother or a man between jobs as the offer of a hot meal on a cold day.

Following God’s prompting, Sr. Eileen began dropping in at centers that care for the hungry or homeless, including the Thomas Merton Center for Hospitality, CCAR (the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery), and the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), a program of the Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System. Sometimes she joins the HOT night team, who cruise the lonely streets looking for people who are sleeping outdoors. The team may offer them blankets or—a heartbreaking thought—give them some cardboard as a buffer from the hard cement of the sidewalk.

“There are so many gaps, so many tremendous gaps in the way we can reach people,” Sr. Eileen says. While meeting people on the street remains an important aspect of her ministry, she says that being a regular visitor in the drop-in centers leads to a higher level of trust. “There’s a tremendous need to simply spend time with people,” she says. “I’m not looking to get someone housing or solve their problems. I do a lot of listening.”

In some cases, her knowledge of resources can help make a person’s life easier. “I met an elderly woman who carried the only utensil she had left—a plastic fork—around with her everywhere. She had no pots or pans in her apartment.” A simple phone call connected the woman with help. The father of five children who had been laid off from his job needed a bike so he could go look for jobs. A young mother needed a ride to St. Vincent’s Medical Center; a copy of her baby’s birth certificate would ensure her a room in a shelter. 

“I really feel the presence of God in these folks,” says Sr. Eileen. “There’s such a simplicity and openness about them. Jesus, more than any other person, understood that we find God in other people—not on Cloud Nine. God is always present among the poor, the downtrodden, the suffering.”

The compassion of Jesus finds full expression at the Thomas Merton Center. The Merton Center draws from the love of the poor embodied in the lives of Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day. “Most people call this a soup kitchen, but it is a House of Hospitality,” says Merton’s director Mark Grasso.

“We spend more time talking about how to treat people than on what to feed them. A lot of our people are not used to being treated with respect.”

At places of refuge like the Merton Center, Sr. Eileen looks for those who are lonely, who need someone to talk to or a little extra encouragement to make it through the day.

“The more than sits and talks—she’s active,” says Rose DeVellis, a Merton Center guest. “She helps a lot of people.”

DeVellis, a member of St. Patrick Parish in Bridgeport who started coming to the Merton Center after a hospitalization derailed her life, is a member of its Spiritualty Group with Sr. Eileen. “It’s been a new beginning, a growth for me,” she says. With the encouragement of Sr. Eileen and the Merton staff, she has begun running an art class at the center. “It’s helped me be myself.”

“Companionship means a lot,” adds her friend Pat, another Merton Center guest. “Having someone to socialize with is as important as having a meal.”

Given friendship and encouragement Pat, too, contributes back, working in the kitchen one day each week. “Sr. Eileen is doing is what Jesus would do.”

Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, Danbury wishes to thank Carol Bates and all our Catechists for echoing the faith to the generations.

With Thanks & Blessings To Our Entire Religious Education Team

Our Lady of Fatima, Wilton
Democrats can create a bridge the country needs to move forward.”

Fr. Ryscavage, who formerly ran the Migration and Refugee Services Office of the United States Catholic Bishops Conference (USCCB), said that all social action must first be motivated by love. “We must love first before we do social justice. It can’t be achieved by haters, by those who polarize and those who don’t love.”

Before the talk by Fr. Ryscavage, CAPP President Bill Fox of Stamford presented the CAPP Business Leadership Award to Brendan Fisk of Fairfield and Barnet Phillips, IV, of Greenwich for their work in co-founding Shepherds, a mentoring program that has helped inner city youth complete high school and go on to college.

Fox said the program created by Fisk and Phillips reflects “the dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity at the core of Catholic Social Teaching. Since it was founded in 1997, it has helped over 240 students to complete high school and go on to college.”

In accepting the award, Barnet Phillips said that then-Bishop Edward Egan (now Cardinal Egan) encouraged him to start the mentoring program, which has helped students at Kolbe-Cathedral High School in Bridgeport and other Catholic high schools.

“These are kids who come from neighborhoods with 55% graduation rate and are at risk of falling through the cracks. In the last six years, we’ve had 100% of our students go on to high education. Public schools can’t say that,” said Phillips.

Fisk introduced some former students who are now serving as mentors in the Shepherds program. “I challenge you to reach out to the youth, he said. “You’ll find they are going to hold on tight and it’s going to make a difference in their lives.”
Advent

“Think about Jesus first”

By PAT HENNESSY

“The middle school kids are the hardest ones to buy presents for. They’re too old for toys,” says Liz Harakal, the director of religious education (DRE) at St. Stephen Parish in Trumbull. “I tell my middle school students, ‘Go out and buy something you would want for yourself—something you would wear, something you would like to read. But don’t let Mom and Dan shell out the money for it. Pay for it out of your own money.’

Every Advent season, the religious education students at St. Stephen’s collect new toys for the Daughters of Charity Rescue Mission in Bridgeport, run by Sr. Theresa Tremblay. “Our goal is not just to give kids information about their faith, important as that is,” says Harakal. “Our goal is to mirror the life of Jesus Christ. We have to learn that our first thought is for others, then ourselves.”

That goal is evident throughout the year, not just at Advent and Christmas. “We have a fantastic program, we really do,” says Fr. Stephen Gleeson, St. Stephen’s pastor. “Liz gets the parents involved, too. They learn things about their faith they hadn’t known before.”

Harakal, in return, appreciates the support and love of St. Stephen’s families. “It’s wonderful to see the young families all together at the Family Mass. My faith has multiplied ten times over because of the people in this parish.”

The Family Mass, held at 9:30 am the first Sunday of every month, is followed by a community breakfast that lets parents get to know each other. Held from October through April, it sets the welcoming tone of St. Stephen’s religious education program.

“At the breakfast, you’re able to chat with families and meet other people,” says Lisa Hughes. She and her husband, Chris, are the parents of four children, two boys and two girls. “That makes you feel good about where you’re sending your children. Our kids feel like they’re part of a community.”

The entire parish catches the spirit of living out the Gospel message. During November, the Family Mass saw the kickoff for the Thanksgiving food collection. “It makes your heart want to burst to see the littlest ones,” says Harakal. “They’re hardly big enough to walk, but they’re bringing up a can of soup.”

The food will fill the food pantry of Blessed Sacrament Parish, the center for aid in one of Bridgeport’s poorest sections. This year, in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, the donations are needed more intensely than ever. On November 19, Blessed Sacrament’s Gospel Choir will sing at the 7:30 pm Mass, surrounded by an altar heaped with food.

Another Family Mass marks the first Sunday in Advent. While children in the religious education program bring in toys, St. Stephen’s altar will also be home to a Giving Tree. Over the weeks of Advent, parishioners will surround the tree with practical necessities: pajamas, clothing, hats, sweaters, gloves. “We can get caught up in so many things as Christmas approaches,” says Harakal. “The toy collection and the Giving Tree are a nice way to sum it up, to remind ourselves that Christmas is truly the birth of Our Lord.”

The highlight of Advent comes during the second week in December, when all the religious education classes will have the chance to take part in a Candlelight Advent Service, with young voices singing the traditional Christmas carols. It’s a beautiful way to sum up the spirit of the season.

“It gives you the atmosphere that this is a special time of year,” says Hughes. “It’s not just reading out of a book. The children learn about how Jesus was born, and the love he brings to us. You give that love to others; that’s one of the biggest things they’ve learned.”

Hughes recounts with pride an anecdote certain to warm the hearts of Harakal, the priests at St. Stephen’s, and every catechist. Her youngest daughter, Jane, was watching an older brother make his Christmas list. “Christmas is about baby Jesus,” Jane, who is eight, scolded her brother.

“There’s nothing wrong with thinking about presents, but you have to think about Jesus first!”

Fall 2012 SHARE for the Diocese of Bridgeport courses

All the classes will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings 7pm to 9pm at: Sacred Heart University
12 Omega Drive
Stamford, Connecticut

Sacred Heart University

SHARE (Sacred Heart Adult Religious Education) for the Diocese of Bridgeport is a four-year certificate program created through a partnership between Sacred Heart University and the Diocese of Bridgeport. This theology program for adults will help Catholics understand their faith and empower them to put it into action. SHARE has a no-test format. Students can take one or more classes, or complete the entire four-year certificate program from SHU and the Diocese.

Catholic Social Teaching: A study of Catholic Teaching grounded in Scripture, the social encyclicals, with special emphasis on Gaudium et Spes: Special emphasis should be given to the pastoral letters and other authoritative statements by the U.S. bishops on the economy, war and peace, capital punishment, immigration, and poverty.

• 6-week course: Tuesdays, November 20, 27, December 4, 11, 18
• Instructor: Dr. June-Ann Greeley
• $210

Blessed Trinity: Beliefs are not inconsequential things—Our belief in a God who is Father, Son, and Spirit lead of all! In this course, we will examine the controversies and teachings of the Church surrounding the Trinity and the Trinitarian experience of God and the Church. Special attention will be paid to the revelation of the Trinity within the Scriptures, the clarification of the Trinity as discovered by the Early Church, and our continuing experience of the Trinitarian God in Creation, Liturgy, and the life of prayer.

• 4-week course: Wednesdays, November 28, December 5, 12, 19
• Instructor: Fr. Donald Guglielmi
• $140

To register: www.sacredheart.edu/share. For more information, contact Gina Donnarummo, Director of Adult Formation: (203) 416-1446 / SHARE@diobpt.org.

Visit us on the web for more information: www.sacredheart.edu/share.cfm
**Sports**

**At Kolbe-Cathedral, Hodges wins quietly and often**

By DON HARRISON

To the basketball cognoscenti, Lisa Hodges’ coaching accomplishments at Kolbe-Cathedral, the small Catholic high school overlooking downtown Bridgeport, have flown under the radar.

Yes, her teams have won no fewer than five state championships—in three different classifications—across the past nine seasons. Yes, her career won-lost record of 190-38 computes to a winning percentage of .833.

And yet when one thinks of Kolbe basketball, two names come immediately to mind: Chris Smith and Walter Luckett.

Smith returned to his alma mater as the boys’ coach after three NBA seasons with the Minnesota Timberwolves, four superb seasons at UConn, where he remains the all-time career scorer; and a Kolbe playing career that encompassed multiple honors and championships. The gifted Luckett accumulated points at a sublime 31.2 rate in his four seasons at Kolbe (prior to the merger with the Cathedral girls) and appeared on the cover of “Sports Illustrated” as a college freshman in 1972.

Hodges concedes the point. “It is what it is,” she says of her lack of recognition on the local scene.

Hodges is also the business manager at Kolbe, and her office is adjacent to that of the principal, Jo-Anne Jakab. They share a long-time bond, points out Hodges, a 1981 Kolbe graduate.

“She was my first gym teacher at Kolbe. She is a great advocate for sports,” she says.

Hodges attributes some of her coaching success to what she gleaned from Jakab and two other predecessors: Henry Rondon, now the school’s director of athletics, who coached the Cougars to their second state title in 1999-2000, and Dave Hennessy, who both preceded and followed Rondon as head coach. In the late 1980s, three of Hennessy’s teams reached the Class S championship game.

“Henry taught me how to visualize on a higher plane than just see the details,” Hodges says. “Sometimes you have to let the team go; the players have to have ownership as well. Dave Hennessy is the detail organizer, bent on drills and fundamentals. He also taught me time management.”

A 5-foot-8 forward, Lisa Hill Hodges played four seasons at Kolbe and then put basketball aside to earn an accounting degree at Rhode Island College.

She and her husband, Doug, have two daughters. The younger one, Leah, 15, is a sophomore member of Kolbe’s 2012-13 team. Lindsay, 17, is a senior and a cheerleader at the school.

Hodges is hoping that Leah—“who is intuitive; she just needs to learn the pace of the game”—will provide some help this winter. The Cougars slipped to a comparatively mediocre 12-10 record last season, in part because of the team’s youth.

The current squad will be led by a senior, Jasmine Fogle, a 5-8 forward who averaged a team-high 15 points per game a year ago. “She is being recruited by Iona and Franklin Pierce,” the coach says. Fogle’s mother, Yolanda Macklin Fogle, is a Kolbe alumna and a former basketball player of note.

Three other seniors, Caroline Cerrone, Kaitlyn Vanatta, Naijeha Green, and a junior point guard, Nakayla Nelson, are viewed as other important ingredients this season. “All of the girls played over the summer on various AAU teams,” Hodges says.

Hodges is reluctant to name the greatest player she has coached, or has seen, at Kolbe. But the best? Easy answer. That was the undefeated 2004-05 squad that capped a perfect 26-0 season by defeating Sacred Heart of Waterbury, 63-49, in the Class S championship game.

“We had five players on that team who were six foot or above, including Erica Beverly, who went on to play for Jen Rizzotti at the University of Hartford and then overseas in Australia and Switzerland,” the coach says.

Hodges’ teams also captured Class S titles in 2003-04 and 2006-07. When the CIAC used a complicated point system to elevate Kolbe to a higher classification, the Cougars barely blinked and proceeded to win Class L (2007-08) and Class M (2009-10) championships before being returned to Class S for small schools.

Basketball success is just one part of the equation, the coach says. “You’ve got to use basketball as a stepping stone to get something higher. If you do have the athletic ability to go further, your grades will stop you if you don’t study,” she explains.

Two of our All-State players, Antoinette Robinson and Ashley Prim, were salutatorians. Beverly was in the top ten of her class. They epitomize the student-athlete piece.”

(Don Harrison is the author of *Hoops in Connecticut: The Nutmeg State’s Passion for Basketball,* published by The History Press.)
Youth

An Indian girl looks inside a Catholic world

By ANJALI VASAVADA

Going into my freshman year at Sacred Heart Academy (SHA) in Hamden, there was one question I heard constantly: “If you are Hindu, why are you going to a Catholic school?” It almost became a routine for me to laugh airily and quickly say, “Oh, their science program is magnificent!” Even though SHA’s main attractions, in my opinion, were its strong science program and warm environment, the question I was so often asked did end up altering my outlook on the typical “SHA girl life.”

I remember the day of the first First Friday Mass. I was petrified, to say the least. I had so many questions: “Why am I here?” “Who is that guy with the robe on?” “What do I do when they hand out communion?”

After all that stress, I was pleasantly surprised when the hour-long event consisted mostly of singing the catchiest songs, such as “You Are Holy,” and reflecting silently in prayer. Now, First Friday Mass is probably one of my favorite things about SHA, after Shirley’s cookies, of course.

I often thought that being of a different faith in a Catholic school made me some sort of outcast. I realize religious intolerance is a thing of the past, but I was terrified of being judged by others due to my faith. One day in Freshman Theology, it somehow came that I was Hindu. I expected people to mock me and say something along the lines of me being a crazy cow worshipper, but instead, I was greeted with honesty and insightful questions about both my faith and my culture. Some of these questions challenged my knowledge on my own faith, and that excited me.

Although I have grown up in a Hindu household, I was never able to receive a religious education. Because of this, I took it upon myself to become knowledgeable about Hinduism as I passed through Freshmen Theology. I thought that if I were capable of knowing so much about a religion that was not my own, I should have the same capacity of knowledge for my own religion. I distinctly remember reading pages upon pages of Hinduism for Dummies and being so mesmerized at the beauty of my religion and its similarities to many other religions in the world.

I credit my increased spirituality and knowledge of Hinduism to SHA. If I had never seen girls at our school who are so deeply connected with Christ, I would not have had the impetus to form a strong bond with Brahma, the supreme Lord in Hinduism.

Religion and spirituality are important in the growth of individuals, but often, people do not use these concepts as bases when evaluating a person. Rather, we are evaluated on the basis of our actions. We are called to mirror God and act as though the divine light passes through us. What is truly important is having faith and trust in God and to mirror the holy ways that are put forth. This philosophy compels us to be the best people we can possibly be.

(Anjali Vasavada is a junior at Sacred Heart Academy in Hamden. This article, first published in their school newspaper, Alethea, was featured in the national edition of My High School Journalism.)
Msgr. Whalen dies at 72

SHELTON—Msgr. Thomas J. Whalen died on October 27 in Bridgeport Hospital after a long battle with cancer. The pastor of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish in Shelton, Msgr. Whalen was 72 years old.

Thomas Whalen was born in Hartford on October 28, 1941. He attended Catholic elementary and high school, and graduated from St. Mary College in St. Mary, Kentucky. He completed his theological studies at Mount St. Mary Seminary in Emmitsburg, MD, and was ordained by Bishop Walter W. Curtis in St. Augustine Cathedral on May 20, 1967.

His first assignment was as parochial vicar of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Fairfield. He then became the chaplain at Bridgeport Hospital, with residence at St. Ambrose Parish in Bridgeport, a position he held for 10 years. During that time he was diocesan director of the Apostolate of the Sick, and spiritual moderator of the Bridgeport Area Chapter of the Catholic Physicians’ Guild.

“Tom Whalen was like Frank Sinatra—he did it his way,” says his good friend, Fr. Robert Crofut, pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Norwalk. “His ministry was all about his people, nothing else mattered.”

Msgr. Whalen had his light side, though. Fr. Crofut describes him as an avid golfer who enjoyed going to the beach, a good steak and lobster.

Msgr. Whalen became pastor of St. Ambrose in 1980. He was named Prelate of Honor, with the title of Monsignor, by Pope John Paul II in 1991.

His final appointment, in November of 1993, was to St. Margaret Mary. He would serve as pastor there for almost 20 years. “He touched so many lives,” said Fr. Crofut, who celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial for Msgr. Whalen and delivered the homily. It was a tribute to Msgr. Whalen’s devotion to his people, Fr. Crofut noted, that so many former parishioners travelled long distances to come to his funeral.

A parish Vigil Mass was celebrated for Msgr. Whalen on November 4. The following morning Fr. Crofut celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial. Internment followed at Mount St. Benedict Cemetery in Bloomfield.

Sr. M. McCormack, SSND, dies at 92

WILTON—Sr. Mary McCormack, who taught school for 34 years and spent three decades in administrative ministries, died on October 14 at Lourdes Health Care Center in Wilton. She was 92 years old and had been a professed member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for 72 years.

Mary Theresa McCormack was born in 1919 in Lynn, MA, to Irish immigrant parents. In 1937, she entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame congregation in Baltimore, MD, and was given the religious name Sr. Mary Lambertine. She professed her final vows in 1946. Sr. Mary earned a bachelor’s degree in education from Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore.

Sr. Mary’s years of teaching carried her to New York State, Maryland, and Massachusetts. In 1974, she left teaching to begin ministering to the elderly sisters at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton. In 1984, she became a financial secretary at St. Joseph of Yorkville in New York City before returning to Wilton to work in the medical records office of Lourdes Health Care Center. In 1998, she joined the finance office of Notre Dame Child Development Center, then on the grounds of Villa Notre Dame. In 2002, Sr. Mary retired to prayer and presence at Villa Notre Dame.

A Mass of Christian burial was held on October 17 in the chapel at Villa Notre Dame. Burial followed at St. Mary Cemetery in Bethel. Sr. Mary is survived by her sister, Sr. Marie Elena, SSND, who also lives at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton.

Sr. Eva Marie

SCRANTON, PA—Sr. Eva Marie Zlotucha, IHM, died on October 15 at Our Lady of Peace Residence in Scranton, PA.

Mary Ann Zlotucha was born in 1937, in Montrose, PA. She entered the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1954, and made her final profession of vows in 1960. She earned a bachelor’s degree in education from Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore.

Sr. Mary entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame congregation in 1943. She was given the religious name Sr. Mary Theresa McCormack.

In 1961, Sr. Mary entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame Development Center, then on the grounds of Villa Notre Dame. In 1998, she joined the finance office of Notre Dame Child Development Center, then on the grounds of Villa Notre Dame.

Sr. Mary spent 51 years in ministry with the elderly sisters at Villa Notre Dame. She is survived by her sister, Sr. Marie Elena, SSND, who also lives at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton.

Obituary notices are being published by local advertisers. For information, contact 203-255-0461 or 203-869-0315.
Nuestra Voz

No más un soñador

Por ALEX ARÉVA LO

El 21 de Diciembre del 2000, el entonces presidente de Estados Unidos, Bill Clinton, firmó en acto una ley llamada “LIFE Act,” o Ley de Equidad para las Familias de Inmigrantes Legales (LIFE por sus siglas en inglés). Esa nueva ley me permitió cumplir el sueño de comenzar una nueva vida. Esta ley se firmó más de diez años de yo haber llegado a Connecticut. Yo llegué en noviembre de 1990 para reunificarne con mis hermanos mayores, que habían huido de la guerra civil de El Salvador. Ellos, como yo, salieron de El Salvador porque estaban de edad para entrar a un reclutamiento forzoso de cualquier bando del conflicto armado. Al cual peor si fui forzado a cometer un pecado que me iba llegar al Norte con un baúl con mi padre. La última vez que lo vi fue el 19 de diciembre de 1990. No más un soñador.

Antes del LIFE Act, en abril del 1997 se hizo efectiva la Ley de Castigo que te castiga no dejándote regresar por 10 años al momento que sales de estados unidos, aun así hayas salido a colectar una visa ya aprobada. En mi caso, significaba regresar a un país que deje debido a la guerra. Mi último recuerdo de El Salvador fue la voz de mi padre que me decía que empecara a caminar hacia donde el Padre y siguiera a un hombre desconocido que me iba por territorio de mis hermanos. Sin cuestionarle, fui forzado a cometer un pecado mortal de cruzar fronteras. Sufri y sobrevivi por más de 11 años como otro más de los mil millones de documentos. Con mucho trabajo y sacrificio me gradué de secundaria (high school) y también con licenciatura de la universidad. Aun así graduado de la universidad no había podido arreglar mi situación legal en los Estados Unidos.

El LIFE Act me dio una vida nueva. Al caminar hacia el edificio de la Corte Federal de Bridgeport este 24 de octubre del 2012, medité en cómo mi camino se trazó hace 22 años. Paso a paso camine a tomar mi juramentación de alianza con mi país de nacimiento. Fue el momento que me recibieron sin prejuicio dió a un país que deje debido a la guerra. No fue una amnistía, pero si me dio un beneficio que el LIFE Act me dio no fue una amnistía, pero si me dio la oportunidad de de evitar el pe en el que dió a un país de nacimiento a miles de migrantes que inmigraron a un país que deje debido a la guerra. No fue una amnistía, pero si me dio el servicio a ser arreglar mi situación legal en los Estados Unidos.

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No longer a DREAMer*

GUEST COLUMNIST
By Alex Arevalo

Alex Arevalo is the immigration counselor at Catholic Charities.

On December 21, 2000, President Clinton signed into law the Legal Immigration Family Equity Act (LIFE Act). It gave me a chance to dream of a new life. By that time, it was more than 10 years since my arrival in Connecticut. I entered the United States in 1990 to reunite with three of my older brothers, who had fled the civil war of El Salvador before me. They fled because they had, like me, become of age for being drafted by either side fighting in that armed conflict.

I was barely 16, and new life in the U.S. required me to work and pay the expenses for a trip that had almost cost my life. I had been robbed at gunpoint twice by so-called law enforcement in Mexico, forced to spend a night in a pig’s corral, hitched a ride on the infamous cargo train now known as “the Beast,” and spent days without food and water. Like many who were fleeing civil unrest in Central America at the time, I traveled alone and undocumented. It was only divine intervention that allowed me to reach San Diego, CA, on a Thanksgiving night.

The LIFE Act contained a series of immigration benefits destined to alleviate the backlog of family and work visas. It provided additional possibilities for a small number of immigrants who had been unable to regularize their situations. The main benefit that LIFE act provided me was not amnesty, but the chance to avoid the penalty that required a mandatory return to the country of origin to collect an “already approved immigrant visa or green card.”

Before the LIFE Act, politicians used to say that this “touch back” policy was a fair way of treating those who entered without inspection. But going back does not actually give anyone access to a green card. It simply activates a three to ten year penalty that prevents a prompt return. In my case, it would have meant a return to a country I left due to war.

My last memory of El Salvador was my father’s command to pack up and follow some man who would bring me north to find my brothers. Young though I was, either side in that war might have conscripted me. To escape that fate, I was forced to commit the mortal sin of crossing Mexico and the U.S. borders. I suffered over the 10 years I had to survive undocumented. I worked, and while working I achieved high school and college graduation. Yet, even as a college graduate, I had no way to regularize my situation here in the United States.

The LIFE Act gave me new life. As I walked to the Brien McMahon Federal Building in Bridgeport at 10:30 am on October 24 to pledge my oath of citizenship to the United States, I reflected on how “manifest destiny” guided me over the years.

Since that time I have dedicated my life to providing the counsel I did not have when I first arrived and have helped hundreds obtain legal status. As the immigration counselor for Catholic Charities I have helped over 100 immigrants file for naturalization and we have joyfully celebrated their achievement. I continue my commitment to “welcome the stranger in our midst” for Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

Over the years, I have walked my own path to earn my U.S. citizenship. I’ve waited for over five years for my green card and waited as a green card holder (an alien legally admitted to reside in the United States) for the five years needed to file my application for U.S. citizenship. Almost 22 years since my arrival, and after passing my background check, English and civics requirements and an interview with a citizenship and immigration officer, I was approved to become what I had always dreamed of.

Today I walk with head up high, next my wife who naturalized with me, I am most proud to shout: I’m no longer merely a DREAMer*; I am an AMERICAN CITIZEN.

**“DREAMers” refers to DREAM Act legislation that would allow many young people who arrived before age 16 to earn citizenship and someday, like me, stand tall as American citizens.

To apply for U.S. citizenship, contact Arévalo at Catholic Charities Immigration Services: 203.416.1306 or 203.416.1311.)
We die before we die

POTPOURRI
BY THOMAS H. HICKS

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

Recently, a 92-year-old Australian priest stated that his journey as a priest has been away from the formalities of titles and trappings in search of the deeper meaning of the Gospels, particularly the paradoxes which run through the Gospels. I relate to what this elderly priest said. There are so many mysterious sayings of Jesus. There are many Christian paradoxes: e.g., poverty is richness, weakness is strength, emptiness is fullness, if anyone wishes to be first, he must become the last and servant of all, Jesus came not to bring peace but the sword, etc. Like that priest, I think a lot about these mysterious statements and about how imperfectly I understand them. However, the hardest of the many hard sayings of Jesus I feel I am beginning to understand. That is the saying about how the grain of wheat must die before it can bring forth a rich harvest.

Jn.12:24-25: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” I consider this Christianity’s profoundest and most difficult paradox. It frightens me. The fundamental law of our Christian faith is that we must die if we are to live; we can only gain our life by losing it. And clearly the life that springs from death refers not only to the end of our lives, but also to the many deaths along the way.

I think that Jesus’ central wisdom, that losing one’s life is the path to finding it, plays out in all our lives over and over again. Our lives are naturally filled with loss and “dying.” We don’t have to seek them out. Humans are hunted. The Lord’s hounds are everywhere. We keep on running, but as Psalm 116:4 states, “they caught me, sorrow and distress.” According to Teilhard de Chardin, roughly half the things in life are things we undergo, or which overtake us without warning.

But perhaps we do become really ourselves only by getting away from ourselves. Perhaps we do find ourselves by losing ourselves. We must die before we die. I’m beginning to understand what that means. We die by instalments, as life asks us to let go of many things. Eventually, God takes back all He has given.

We become wise through suffering. Indeed, Hebrews 2:10 states that we are “made perfect through suffering.” St. Augustine in his Confessions spoke of “the sweet fruit gathered from the bitterness of life.” It has been said that personal suffering is the crown of life. Perhaps Jesus implied all this is his paradox about the seed that has to die. I like a book by Willa Cather titled My Antonia with its images of darkness containing light, as if loss were always at the heart of gain, and gain implied in any loss. Many moments of transcendence or revelation in My Antonia occur at sunset.

A story is told about a nobleman named Ammonas and sighing “when I think of everything I still have to acquire.” Ammonas replied, “You mean to lose.” A good proportion of the Gospel sayings of Jesus have a stark, demanding tone. There are his words about leaving father and mother, wife and home, to follow him, about letting the dead bury their own dead, about not looking back after one has put one’s hand to the plow, about the rich and the camel trying to pass through the needle’s eye, about plucking out one’s eye, etc. Recurring efforts are made to rationalize the unyielding firmness of these statements. We read the Scriptures and have some favorite passages and usually a blind spot for others which are hard to digest. We develop selective listening. We are conveniently deaf to Christ’s radical requirements.

How demanding Jesus’ teachings can be, and possibly the most demanding is the great paradox that when we lose life, we find it. How this happens in each individual life is impossible to say, this dying before we die. But it is only by self-emptying that we become truly ourselves. Now and then, I have some sense of that.

The Lord seems to make the same point when he teaches that “every branch that bears fruit, the Father purges, that it may bear more fruit” (Jn.15:2). But, O God, tenderly, tenderly.
MISSION BOUTIQUE will be held at St. Mary Parish, Ridgefield, Sat-Sun., Nov. 17-18, from 10 am-2 pm in the Barn, adjacent to the church. Creches, advent wreaths, icons, books, original Dalí etching, jewelry, gifts for the whole family. For more information, call 203.438.6538.

HOLIDAY BOUTIQUE to celebrate the Feast of Christ the King will be held at St. James Parish, Stratford, Nov. 25, from 2:30-5:30 pm. A social hour will follow. For more information, call Debbie Camp: 203.224.0190.

LADIES NIGHT OUT – WHITE CHRISTMAS, with a cast of students from Sacred Heart Academy in Hamden, when a group from the Barnum School in Trumbull, with Fr. Larry Carew. For more information, call 203.268.8253.

CURSILLO ULTREYA meets the second Sat. of the month (Dec. 8) at St. Mary Parish, Norwalk, at 10 a.m. after the 9 am. Pro-Life Mass. For more information, contact Eileen Bianchini: 203.847.5727 or stmarygols@aol.com.
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