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‘Arise & Shine’

Christmas Concert set for December 20

BRIDGEPORT—Performance of an eight-movement cantata called “The Glory of Christmas” will be among the highlights of this year’s “Arise and Shine” Christmas Concert set for Friday December 20, 7:30 pm at Fairfield University Quick Center for the Arts.

The Diocesan Choir for Youth (C4Y) under the direction of Mary Bozzuti-Higgins of Wilton will be celebrating its fifth-anniversary season. A former professional opera soprano, Bozzuti-Higgins is highly regarded for her work in conducting large music ensembles for schools and civic groups, and is the founding director of the diocesan youth choir.

More than 140 singers from grade six through seniors in college will perform traditional carols and contemporary favorites during this year’s concert, which will be attended by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano.

In addition to choir members and college-age alumni who return for the concert each year, children’s choirs from five parishes will be joining the performance. The schools include Our Lady of Fatima in Wilton, St. Matthew in Norwalk, St. Theresa and St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull and the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist in Stamford.

Bozzuti-Higgins said the Christmas Cantata will be presented in the style of “Lessons and Carols,” with three narrators including Deacon John DTaranto, chaplain of Notre Dame High School; Father Bob Kinnally, diocesan chancellor and pastor of St. Aloysius Parish and Ursula Hanavan, a C4Y parent from Our Lady of Fatima Parish.

Bozzuti-Higgins said this year’s concert will introduce a harp to the nine piece instrumental ensemble providing the music.

Those who have attended previous concerts can expect to hear audience favorites including “O Holy Night,” the traditional “Siyahamba” sung in Zulu, and “Believe” from The Polar Express, along with a few surprises.

“We’ll close the concert with our traditional “Dark is the Silent Night,” which calls for audience participation and brings the night to a more quiet and beautiful conclusion with the full company on stage,” said Bozzuti-Higgins.

(General Admission tickets are $22. Tickets can be purchased at the door; online at www.quickcenter.fairfield.edu; by phone: 203.254.4010 or toll-free 1-877-ARTS-396. To learn more about C4Y, please visit the Choir’s webpage at: c4ysings.org.)
Bishop named Chairman of CRS’ Board of Directors

By Nikki Gamer

Catholic Relief Services

BALTIMORE—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, CT, has been named chairman of the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) board of directors by Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, the newly elected president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Bishop Caggiano succeeds Bishop Gregory J. Mansour, bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, who had been CRS’ board chairman since November 2016.

“It’s a great honor to lead an organization that is such a bright light for all of our brothers and sisters overseas who don’t have enough to eat or a place to sleep because of entrenched poverty,” Caggiano said. “All of God’s children have the right to live in just and peaceful societies, and for more than 75 years CRS has worked toward making that a reality. I look forward to joining forces to build on all of the organization’s substantial achievements, and to tackling the challenges that affect so many members of God’s family.”

Bishop Caggiano’s term as chair begins immediately and will run until November 2022.

“Bishop Caggiano will be a hands-on leader who will roll up his sleeves and get to work while inspiring others to do the same,” Mansour said. “He speaks with clarity and is laser focused on renewing the Church and tending to its needs. His love and commitment to our Lord Jesus is truly remarkable.”

Bishop Mansour noted that one of Bishop Caggiano’s strengths is his understanding of the priorities of Catholic youth.

“Young people want to see a Church that is very close to the poor and a Church that is doing works of justice. Bishop Caggiano understands these values and is committed to making sure that youth have a seat at the table in the Church’s outreach to the poor. That’s why he’s a perfect fit for CRS,” Mansour said.

Bishop Caggiano earned a bachelor’s degree in philosophy in 1981 from Cathedral College of the Immaculate Conception, and began his major seminary studies at the Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington, N.Y. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1987, and was consecrated as a bishop in 2006.

In 2013, Bishop Caggiano was installed as fifth bishop of Bridgeport, Conn. A noted catechist, he was invited by Pope Francis to serve as a catechist at World Youth Day in Panama in 2019 and Rio de Janeiro 2013. Pope Benedict XVI asked him to deliver World Youth Day talks in Madrid in 2011 and Sydney in 2008.

Bishop Caggiano currently serves on a number of USCCB committees, including its committee on Evangelization and Catechesis; its subcommittee on the Catechism, which he chairs; and the Orthodox Union Catholic Dialogue. In addition, he was one of five American bishops elected by the USCCB to represent the United States at the Vatican’s XV Ordinary General Assembly: Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment.

“It is a privilege to have Bishop Caggiano serve as our new board chair,” said CRS’ president & CEO Sean Callahan. “He has been actively engaged and supportive of CRS in the Diocese of Bridgeport, and he has sent several of his priests on visits to CRS programs overseas. I am looking forward to traveling with the bishop as he shares his ministry beyond our national shores, and I am confident that, together, we will broaden the reach of the U.S. Catholic community in the years ahead.

Catholic Relief Services is the official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States. The agency alleviates suffering and provides assistance to people in need in more than 100 countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality. CRS’ relief and development work is accomplished through programs of emergency response, HIV, health, agriculture, education, microfinance and peacebuilding. For more information, visit www.crs.org or www.crsespanol.org and follow Catholic Relief Services on social media in English at Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube; and in Spanish at Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Donoghue named Charities Executive

BRIDGEPORT—Mike Donoghue of Darien has been named executive director of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County. The appointment, announced by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, was effective December 2.

Donoghue succeeds Al Barber who has held the post since 2004 and has recently accepted the newly created post as director of Foundations in Charity, one of the foundations created last year through the “We Stand With Christ” capital campaign.

Prior to his move to the non-profit world at Catholic Charities, Mike spent 32 years working in New York City for Wall Street finance and investment firms.

“Mike Donoghue brings the passion, zeal, intellect, experience and love of faith to take Catholic Charities to the next level in its mission of creating a more loving community that serves the most vulnerable and respects the dignity of all people,” said Bishop Caggiano.

“While Mike has had considerable business success, he prepared for this new assignment through years of outstanding volunteer service to the diocese, his parish and the community. He brings great understanding and compassion to those left out of the benefits of our economy and also a commitment to empower them through Catholic Charities programs to move forward in their own lives.”

The bishop said he believes Donoghue will build on the success of Al Barber who left an outstanding business career to take the helm of Catholic Charities for the past 15 years.

“At this time of transition I’m very personally grateful to Al Barber under whose faithful leadership the agency expanded its nutrition, child development and family support services,” the bishop said. “Al rolled up his sleeves to engage with those served by the agency and to build community support, and we are grateful for his service.”

Catholic Charities is one of the largest private social service providers in Fairfield County. Its programs include nutrition, housing, mental health, adoption and pregnancy services, immigration and family support service that help more than 10,000 people of all faiths each year.

Mike Donoghue: After earning a bachelor’s degree in economics from Dartmouth College in 1982 and an MBA from Harvard Business School in 1986, he began his Wall Street career at Morgan Stanley & Co where he worked for 19 years and was named managing director in 1996.

Mike was a founding member of Morgan Stanley’s High Yield Sales and Trading business which he helped grow from inception with eight employees to a $1 billion business with over 200 employees globally.

He joined startup investment management firm Phoenix Investment Adviser in April 2006 as president of the firm. During his tenure, the firm’s assets under management grew from $35 million with four employees to over $1.5 billion with 24 employees.

Among his many Church and volunteer commitments, Mike Donoghue was invested as a Knight of Malta in 2004 and currently leads the Fairfield County chapter as area chair with his wife Cece. He has participated in eight Order of Malta pilgrimages to Lourdes, France where the order brings sick people and their caregivers in search of spiritual, emotional and physical healing. Mike was elected to the Order of Malta board of counselors in 2018 and recently completed a five year strategic plan for the American Association. He was also a founding member and the founding co-president of the recently formed (2017) Legatus chapter in Fairfield County.

He has worked as an active volunteer at New Covenant
Blessed and Thankful:

Bishop forms Youth Advisory Council

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has announced the formation of the Youth Advisory Council to coordinate and enhance parish, school and diocesan ministry on behalf of youth and young adults in the diocese.

The first formal meeting of the full 36-member council will be held on Saturday January 4, 9 am at Saint John Fisher Seminary in Stamford. At that meeting the council will select its chair, vice chair and secretary as well as complete members of the standing committees.

“I am deeply grateful to all who have stepped forward to serve on the Youth Advisory Council,” said Bishop Caggiano. “Through better communication and shared best practices, we can move forward with common goals of coordinating all diocesan youth programs that evangelize and build community for both youth and young adults and creating a network of parishes. The council plans to have their inaugural meeting in early October.

“Our job on the diocesan level is to help you do what you cannot do alone or isolated in a single parish, but is not meant to duplicate what you and your colleagues involved in youth ministry do,” the bishop said. “We have to build relationships because relationships bear fruit.”

The bishop first discussed plans for the Youth Advisory Council at the summer meeting of Directors of Religious Education.

At that time, he spoke of the importance of creating a regional plan for youth ministry, giving examples of current collaborations that are bearing much fruit, such as “United,” which serves youth from St. Mary’s in Bethel, St. Joseph’s in Brookfield and St. Rose of Lima in Newtown. He noted that the parishes have combined their youth ministry efforts to create a thriving group.

The bishop said he will attend all Youth Advisory Council meetings. The group will be coordinated by an executive committee, which will meet monthly.
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By JOE PISANI

MONROE—St. Jude Parish was five years old and celebrating Mass in the school gym when Father John Sabia was named pastor. Several years later, he began what would be one of his greatest undertakings—building a church with his faith community on 17 acres of land in Monroe.

The architectural plans included stone work, so Father invited parishioners to bring stones from their yards and gardens that could be used around the base of the church and in the sanctuary as a sign of their solidarity with Christ and one another.

A lot of those stones are from people’s homes in Monroe,” said Monsignor Sabia, who retired in 2014. “Families would bring stones home from wherever they went on vacation. On Saturdays about 30 of us would have ‘rock parties’ and go to different properties to pick up stones. It was a joy. The Lord gave me the honor and privilege of building that church.”

This year, under the leadership of Father Henry Hoffman, the parish celebrated the 30th anniversary of the dedication of the church. October 28, 1989, the feast of St. Jude. Father Hoffman describes St. Jude’s as “a welcoming community that lives the Good News of the Gospel in its actions and programs—a place to grow spiritually, to put our faith in action, and to use our gifts of time, talent and treasure as disciples of Christ.”

Rich Giannino, longtime parishioner and chairperson of the Development Committee, praised the efforts of Father Hoffman, who was appointed pastor in 2018. “He has worked tirelessly to bring people back to church and offer them opportunities to practice their faith as individuals and as families,” he said. St. Jude’s, which is approaching 50 years as a parish, was established on December 12, 1973 by Bishop Walter W. Curtis to accommodate the growing number of families moving to Monroe, who were originally served by St. Stephen Church in Trumbull. Parishioners were invited to select the name for the new church and chose St. Jude out of 14 possible saints and Father Arthur Norton was appointed the first pastor. For 16 years, Mass was held in the school gym until the church building was completed in 1989.

At a recent celebration marking the 30th anniversary, Father Hoffman said, “As all of you know better than I, from those of you who worshipped with Father Norton, to those who set up and broke down chairs in the gym and worshipped together, to those who gathered the stones for the church whose anniversary we celebrate, and those who gave of their time, talent and treasure over the past 40-plus years—whether you are here in person or could not be here in person but are here in spirit—this evening is a great big thank you for all who have faithfully served St. Jude Parish, and all who have walked through the very doors of the church whose anniversary we celebrate. You are the priests and deacons and parishioners of St. Jude parish. You are the faithful believers.”

Today, the parish provides many opportunities for participation in the spiritual life of the church, including liturgical ministries, such as choir member, lector, altar server and Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist. There are also social justice ministries that visit the homeless, serve the poor, volunteer at food pantries and the St. Vincent de Paul Society, along with youth ministries, men’s and women’s groups, and the annual parish bazaar.

Giannino, who moved to Monroe in 1978 with his wife Ellen, said, “This is a place where I’ve been able to flourish and grow in my faith, and it allows me to be involved with all kinds of opportunities to help others. There are all kinds of things that go on and activities that incorporate the family.”

In addition to his years on the Parish Council, the Finance Committee and Development Committee, he participates in the music ministry and is a fourth-degree member of the Knights of Columbus. He is also active in the Feed the People program in which parishioners take baked goods from local supermarkets and bakeries to distribute to parish and soup kitchens in Bridgeport for those in need. Giannino’s three children attended St. Jude School, which provided more than 3,200 students with a Catholic education over the years.

In 2017, St. Jude School became part of Holy Trinity Catholic Academy in Shelton, and the building is now used as the Parish Center, where some 450 children receive religious education, church groups meet and parish offices are located.

The 30th anniversary was observed recently with a weekend of events that included Mass and Eucharistic Adoration, a dinner dance at Stone Barn Inn and a celebration of music and reflections about the church. Concert pianist Jacek Zgianiacz and the St. Jude Music Ministries performed. Later, Father Hoffman offered his reflections of the history of the Catholic Church and the parish. Longtime parishioner and photographer Vic Eng said, “Thirty years ago, St. Jude parish worked and prayed together to plan, build and dedicate a new church. It was a great experience to see the entire community united in a common goal...We can’t wait to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the parish in 2023.”

At the celebration, Father Hoffman recognized the efforts of those who contribute to the life of the parish and said, “Thank you to the many parishioners and volunteers who make this parish not only a special place to celebrate fellowship and the sacraments, but also a special environment to worship and praise God. Your spirit, enthusiasm and prayer are the heartbeat of St. Jude parish.”

In addition to Father Hoffman, the parish is served by Father James Bates, parochial vicar, and Deacons Bill Koniers, John Tuccio and David Flynn. Deacon Flynn, who has served at the parish for a decade, said, “I have always known St. Jude as a community where the Holy Spirit has a strong presence. The parishioners’ commitment to service is extraordinary. When Anita and I became parishioners nearly 10 years ago, we found it to be very warm and welcoming. It’s not only a faith-filled community to worship with, but it’s also a great place to build friendships.”

That was a view shared by Patty Eng, who was cochair of the anniversary committee with Giannino. “St. Jude’s parish has been like our second family,” she said. “We have been blessed with a faith-filled community and challenged by our pastor of many years Monsignor John Sabia to live ‘metanoia’—a transformative change of heart. The values of faith and community we taught at home were reinforced for our children as they attended St. Jude School...As a community, with our pastor, Father Henry Hoffman, we look forward to moving ahead as ‘metanoia’ continues to transform us.”

Reflecting on his 36 years as pastor, Monsignor Sabia said, “I loved every minute of it. It was fun building the church because everybody was working together. I had a committee that was wonderful. They did all the work and we raised $1.1 million in ten days.”

Today there is a social hall named in his honor, which is appropriate because he says he is a “people person,” who believes friendship and community are fundamental to St. Jude’s. Looking back on the people he met over the years as pastor, he says, “I pray for them every day. I am going to celebrate Mass right now, and I will pray for them again.”
‘Make All Things New’

BY BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has announced the launch of “To Make All Things New,” the creation of a roadmap to address the challenges faced by Catholic elementary schools across the diocese.

The bishop has asked the diocesan Education Commission in collaboration with the Office of the Superintendent of Schools to begin a comprehensive strategic educational planning process. The goal is to address challenges of changing demographics, declining enrollment, Catholic identity and financial issues that have an impact on Catholic education.

“It is clear that the changing demographic and financial pressures faced by many families in Fairfield County will require us to take bold action now to ensure that a vibrant Catholic school system will be affordable, accessible and excellent well into the future.”

In a letter sent to all parents and educators on November 21, the bishop thanked parents for choosing Catholic education and noted that he asked the commission to submit its preliminary recommendations by February 28, 2020.

Parents will also be invited by their school principal to a meeting at each school to be held during the month of December. A final plan for Catholic education will be released in March 2020.

The agenda for the commission, working in collaboration with local school leaders, will be the review of a variety of school models, governance structures and grade configurations, as well as the current and projected finances and enrollment of each school.

Among the challenges identified by the bishop and the commission which has been studying the issue for six months, are the rising cost of tuition that has made Catholic education financially inaccessible for a growing number of families, the diminishing number of school age children who live in Fairfield County and a growing secularism that does not see Catholic faith as an essential element in the formation of young people.

“These challenges must be addressed in an honest and comprehensive manner to ensure that our schools remain vibrant places of learning in the future.”

The bishop noted that the mission of Catholic education in Fairfield County will require us to take bold action now to ensure that a vibrant Catholic school system will be affordable, accessible and excellent well into the future.

“Make All Things New,” the creation of a roadmap to address the challenges faced by Catholic elementary schools across the diocese.

Fairfield County will require us to take bold action now to ensure that a vibrant Catholic school system will be affordable, accessible and excellent well into the future.

“The vibrant Catholic school system will be affordable, accessible and excellent well into the future.”

By Brian D. Wallace

December 2019

FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

www.ccfairfield.org

Mike Donoghue from page 3

Center, Malta House, Thomas Merton Center, St. Catherine’s Center for Special Needs and the Shepherd’s mentoring program.

Mike and his wife Cece are perhaps best known by Catholics throughout the diocese for their work as the campaign co-chairs for the Annual Catholic Appeal in 2013-2014 during Bishop Caggiano’s first year in the diocese. They are also active supporters and donors to the Ignatian Spirituality Center at Fairfield University, Foundations in Education and the new Veritas Catholic Radio network.

His passion for working with individuals with Special Needs and volunteering led him to serve as head coach and commissioner of the Darien Challenger Baseball League, a position he has held since 2010. He also served as a board member of St. Catherine Academy in Fairfield from 2004-2009 and has been as member of the board of directors of the Ataxia Telangiectasia (A-T) Children’s Project since 1996. A-T is a rare genetic fatal disease that attacks children.

Mike and his wife Cece and have five children ages 19 to 28 and are members of St. Thomas More Parish in Darien.

Catholic Charities sponsors more than 30 programs and services in offices throughout Fairfield County. The main office is located at 238 Jewett, Avenue, Bridgeport 06606 in the Catholic Center.

(For more information call: 203.416.1370 or visit the website at: www.ccfairefield.org.)
Accompanying Youth

“Among the different groups in our Church, it is young adults that in many ways, need our greatest support.” —Bishop Frank J. Caggiano

This issue of Fairfield County Catholic reports on two major initiatives that are crucial in the effort to reach out to the young people of our diocese. The first is the development of the Youth Advisory Council, which will coordinate diocesan efforts to form, teach, engage and empower young people and young adults in the faith.

The second initiative involves our Catholic elementary schools with the launch of “Make All Things New,” a roadmap to the future. “It is clear that the changing demographic and financial pressures faced by many families in Fairfield County will require us to take bold action now to ensure that a vibrant Catholic school system will be affordable, accessible and excellent well into the future,” said the bishop in his recent letter to parents announcing the initiative.

While these initiatives are vital, the bishop stresses that the ultimate success in engaging youth will “not be found in a program, but by building a faith community, one person at a time.” His goal is to create a Church that, in his own words, “listens to the young and accompanies them through the transition to adulthood, and that will help young people use their gift and talents and answer the call to discipleship given to them in their Baptism.”

Christmas Hope

In this brief meditation, originally published on his Facebook page, Bishop Caggiano reflects on a vivid boyhood memory along with the meaning of the Christmas tree and the message of hope in Christ that it brings during the season:

“As I was driving on the Merritt Parkway, I was comforted to see the large number of cars which had Christmas trees tied to their roof. Most of the cars had New York license plates, presumably those who came into Connecticut to buy their tree from one of the many farms that sell them.

It was comforting because it brought back many memories of when I was a boy and the joy I felt when our family Christmas tree went up. Mom did not allow us to decorate for Christmas in any way until after the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. For my mother, Our Lady was due her honor first, since without her fiat Christmas would not have been possible. So that meant that December 9th was decoration day!

While there is a varied history to the Christmas tree, the fact that it is most often an evergreen itself teaches a simple lesson. All evergreens remain “green” even in the midst of the darkness and cold of winter. For this reason, the Christmas tree is a sign of hope that life will conquer every obstacle, even the darkness and cold of life. At Christmas, we celebrate anew our hope who is Jesus, born into the poverty of the manger, in the darkness of night, to free us from all that can harm us, including our own man-made darkness of sin.

So whenever you decide to put up your Christmas tree, remember in whose honor it stands and the message of hope that it brings.”

Love and Healing

While preparation for Christmas is a time of joy and hope for young people and families throughout the diocese, early December will also forever be the somber anniversary of the death of 20 children and six faculty members at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown on December 14, 2012. Eight children from St. Rose of Lima Parish perished in the shooting and were commended to the Lord in burial Masses celebrated by Msgr. Robert Weiss, pastor of St. Rose, during the following week.

As we await the “Light of the World,” it is important to remember that after experiencing unbearable loss, many of the parents went on to commemorate the lives of their children by working against gun violence, advocating for mental health services, and developing programs that protect and cherish all children. In the face of great evil, they chose love and healing. Their courage and faith are a gift to us all—one that will endure and renew itself for many years.
December 2019

Editorial

God wants me to love the ones I don’t understand

A YOUNG WOMAN’S VOICE
BY ELIZABETH CLYONS

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

A round the holidays, my dad used to take us to volunteer at a shelter for those experiencing homelessness. We were young enough that we didn’t really ask questions, it was just something we did…we put on our black dress pants and white tops and off we went. And so volunteering just became something we did as a family, as a school, as a community.

Especially this time of year, I am reminded of the faith that both my parents modeled for us—one of kindness, of giving back, of serving others.

An author I really enjoy, Bob Goff, writes, “God wants me to love the ones I don’t understand, to get to know their names. To invite them to do things with me. To go and find the ones everyone has shunned and turned away. To see them as my neighbors even if we are in totally different places. You’ll be able to spot people who are “becoming love” because they want to build kingdoms, not castles. They fill their lives with people who don’t look or act like them or even believe the same things as them. They treat them with love and respect and are more eager to learn from them than presume they have something to teach.”

Pope Francis gave word to this thought in a recent press conference aboard the papal flight back to Rome after his three-nation visit to Southern Africa, warning of dangerous ideologies. “An ideology, maybe a correct one, infiltrates doctrine…and it becomes ‘doctrine’ in quotation marks, for a period of time,” he said. I am wondering if this issue could simply be solved by getting to know the person of Jesus more—to sit with Him more this Christmas season.

Our very own Bishop Frank Caggiano also spoke word to this idea, at a Divine Mercy Mass a few years ago, saying, “Mercy is not simply teaching and preaching the truth, it is about becoming believable messengers who represent the living presence of God’s love in the world. We must become transparent and hope that others see Jesus face to face in you, in me, in us. That is the great gift of God’s mercy,” he said.

The Church that I knew when I was a child, the one that I am trying to get back to this Christmas, was one filled with people who lived their lives this way. A way that the joy of Christ could be seen through the way that they treated others—with love and with mercy.

I don’t know about you, but my heart is craving peace this Christmas. A peace that can simply be found in seeing the face of Christ in others, and loving them as such.

My Christmas List

A DAD’S VIEW
BY MATTHEW HENNESSEY

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

M y wife helps me write this column. When I get stuck for an idea, which is every time the deadline approaches, she is the one who helps me get unstuck. Works every time. Typically the conversation goes like this:

“I’m out of ideas. What should I do?”

“Write a piece about the kids.”

“Aren’t people tired of reading pieces about the kids?”

“Do it about the kids anyway.”

“But I want to do something different.”

“Don’t.”

She’s always right, as confirmed by the nice notes I get from regular readers. But in true dumb husband fashion this year I’ve decided to ignore my always-right wife and do a Christmas column not about the kids but about me.

Herewith, a list detailing what I want for Christmas, in no particular order.

I want a new baseball mitt because the glove I’ve been toting around since high school finally wore out this summer while I was tossing batting practice to the kids. Any replacement doesn’t have to be fancy. It just has to hang together for the next 30 years.

I want assurances that the newspapers to which I subscribe won’t go all-digital, not because my livelihood depends on it, though it does, but because I love spreading the pages out flat on the breakfast table and saying, “This is so interesting. You should read this.” It’s a lifestyle. Clickey-clickey on the smartphone screen ain’t the same.

I want people to stop acting like whatever news is coming out of Washington, D.C., is either the best they’ve ever heard or the worst they can possibly imagine. Things can always get better and nothing is as bad as it could be.

Relatedly, I want to increase the space in my brain that is not dedicated to thinking about politics and reduce the space that is. The clock is ticking. There are more important things than politics.

I want everyone to quit arguing all the time, especially online, especially with strangers, and especially over stuff they don’t have any control over, like Brexit. If you must squabble, make it about something that matters, like whether the Irishman was too long.

I want my parish to put Mass times on the homepage. I want it to stop getting dark at 4:30 in the afternoon. While I’m told that this is in the works I want it to kick into high gear. My mood depends on it.

I want to see an end to the nonsense term “Xmas.” To me it’s more problematic than “Happy Holidays” and amounts to a negation of the reason for the season. I don’t know who started doing this or why—well, I think I know why, actually—but it’s an atrocity.

I want to stop eating Twizzlers, the good ones I mean, from Australia, that are sold in the little shop in the lobby of the building where I work. I’m just saying.

I want tragedies and disasters to take a break for Christmas.

Every year there’s a mudslide, an earthquake, or a terrible accident somewhere in the world at Christmastime. I want it to not happen this year.

I want to know for sure that justice has found every person who ever hurt a child. This has been such a long season of pain, especially for the victims but also for the good and devoted priests who have carried their crosses in agony during the scandals. I want them to know Christ’s peace.

I want good men and women who are being called by God to priesthood or religious life to hear their calling. I want them to know how grateful we are as Catholics for all that they do.

I want my kids to know how much they mean to me, and not just because they give me something to write about but because they give me something to live for. I also want them to start hanging up their jackets and putting their shoes in the closet.

I want my wife to know how much I love her, and not just because she gives me ideas for the column but for other reasons, too. You’ll understand, I hope, that I want to keep some things private.

Finally, I want to wish you and your family a very blessed and Merry Christmas, not to mention a happy and healthy New Year. Thank you for reading all the way to the end. Next month’s column will be about the kids.
Catholic Charities

‘Making God’s love real’ in Norwalk area

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

NORWALK—“It’s time to dream even bigger about how Catholic Charities can make God’s love real for those who are suffering,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano at the recent Catholic Charities of Norwalk Celebrity Breakfast held at Shorehaven Country Club.

The annual breakfast raised $45,000 to support the Room to Grow Preschool and the counseling and Behavioral Health Services provided in Norwalk. More than 400 packed the Shorehaven banquet room to hear the bishop speak, meet new Catholic Charities executive director Mike Donoghue, and bid farewell to Al Barber, who has led that agency for the past 15 years.

Barber received a standing ovation from the gathering after the bishop thanked him for his leadership. “This was not work for you, it was your heart,” the bishop said, “and I’m personally very grateful for your leadership.”

While the mood was festive, the talks by the bishop and Mike Donoghue pointed out the challenges faced by the poor, vulnerable and struggling served by Catholic Charities in a county of extreme wealth and often invisible poverty and personal anguish.

The bishop said that Catholic Charities has done great work in Norwalk through the generosity of all those who support its work and “believe that faith can make a difference.”

He said that in a divided time, “it is more important than ever to build communities where people can live in peace, children can grow up safely, and people who are hurting can be made whole again.”

Much of his talk focused on the challenges faced by young people who need to be protected from an often predatory social media environment that can lower their self-esteem and make them feel unloved.

“The issue that is burning in my heart is the challenge young people face,” he said, noting that many young people feel bullied, isolated and unable to live up to online images of acceptance.

“In a world governed by ‘likes,’ it is easy for young people to believe they are never good enough. That’s a lie. God loves us all in his image and calls us to a great life,” said the bishop.

Mike Donoghue thanked the board and bishop for the trust they placed in him, and said that after visiting Catholic Charities sites throughout Fairfield County, he was amazed “by the depth and breadth of services.”

He said that for 102 years in Fairfield County, Catholic Charities has been “feeding the hungry, assisting the poor and emotionally challenged, providing help and creating hope by serving all those in need.”

Donoghue said that “far too many people are hungry” in Fairfield County and that income inequality puts stress on housing, food and the cost of basics for many families who turn to Catholic Charities for help.

He said that New Covenant House of Hospitality serves 600,000 meals a year to the poor...
Knights of Columbus Museum: ‘Christmas in Europe’ delights young and old

By EMILY CLARK

The Knights of Columbus Museum in New Haven opened their 15th annual Christmas exhibit on Saturday, November 16 with a stunning display of crèches, icons and religious artwork highlighting the theme of “Christmas in Europe.” Over 80 pieces representing 30 countries across the continent showcase the ethnicities and customs of this most joyous season.

“This exhibit is telling the story of Christmas as it is observed around the world,” said Peter Sonski, Education Manager at the Museum. “It is an opportunity to understand how Christmas has evolved as an understanding of the birth of Christ and cultural traditions.”

As visitors enter the first of several rooms dedicated to the various regions of Europe, they are greeted by a magnificent 120-square foot Neapolitan crèche with 150 figurines depicting a 16th century Italian village with the Holy Family at the heart of this bustling scene. Situated on the highest point of the display, the manger scene is surrounded by townpeople in various activities of daily life. By placing the Christ child in the center, Sonski said, the artist emphasizes that He was born for all people in all times. Though this monumental piece is the largest in the exhibit, dozens of additional smaller pieces tell the story of Christ’s birth through snapshots of the diverse culture of Europe. A minimalist beech wood and polychrome crèche from England, a Nativity scene of Belleek china from Ireland, and a set of Holy Family nesting dolls from Russia are among the scenes in this eclectic display. An elaborate pair of Polish crèches, created from cardboard and wood and covered with metallic foil contrast with the simple Kindertraum or “children’s dream” Nativity scene from Germany, complete with a shooting star above the manger. “There is so much to see here,” said Sonski. “It’s like a fine arts presentation of elegant precision as well as such a learning experience.”

Part of that learning comes from plaques accompanying the displays which detail holiday traditions from that specific country. Stories of the Portuguese Rooster’s Mass, St. Lucia’s Day in Sweden, and the Christmas tradition of pickled cabbage leaves in Bosnia and Herzegovina add to visitors’ understanding of the cultural folklore.

An added attraction is a reproduction of a European Christmas marketplace in which cities host vendors selling items including ornaments, candles, crèches and holiday crafts. At the Museum, similar pieces are exhibited behind glass cases. It was this display that caught the eye of a toddler visiting with his parents. As his mother pointed out the various miniature Nativity scenes, his attention drifted to glittery gold and silver bulbs and those painted to depict decorated trees and snowy scenes. “It’s Christmas!” he exclaimed, clearly filled with excitement. While admiring crèches in the Western Europe room, my teened daughter reflected on the different manners in which artists portrayed their view of the Nativity.

“My 13-year-old, connected to the classic Christmas song. Another family surrounded a tall glass enclosure which held a German crèche dotted with tiny candles. This display, sonski said, reminded him of the one which an elderly relative always sets out at the holidays. “Even if you’ve come before,” he added, “it’s not the same. Each year we showcase an entirely new region of the world, but the theme is always Christmas.”

The exhibit runs through February 2, 2020 at the Knights of Columbus Museum, 1 State Street, New Haven. It is open daily from 10 am-5 pm with free admission and parking.
STAMFORD—Patricia E. “Pat” Brady, head of school and lower school principal at The Catholic Academy of Stamford is proud to announce the winner of the school’s third annual Christmas Card Design project.

“Elise Fernandez, a second grader, submitted an outstanding original design we think is worthy of being named the winner for 2019,” states Brady. “Congratulations as well to everyone of our student artists who submitted their art and shared their inspirational designs with us.”

Elise’s depiction of the Nativity of Jesus will be featured on this year’s Catholic Academy 2019 Christmas card which is being sent to the entire CAS community. “We are proud to showcase our students’ faith and their creative expression,” adds Christine Wagner, principal of the upper school whose students also participated in the project.

Against a backdrop of a colorful, blue, white and pink wintry scene, Elise envisioned a 3D setting of the Nativity within a Christmas tree ornament. The ornament depicts a distant silhouette of the shepherds’ arrival at the manger, with an angel and star announcing His birth.

Their work will be featured in hallway displays at both schools through Christmas.
DANBURY—On Sunday December 8, the students of Immaculate High School performed the “Sounds and Songs of the Season,” their annual Christmas Concert and Tree Lighting Ceremony. The evening featured beautiful holy and seasonal musical performances by the student, concert and mixed choirs, guitar ensemble and bands, refreshments, a visit from Santa and the lighting of the Christmas Tree!
St. Mark School

Students ‘Pay it Forward’

STRATFORD—St. Mark School in Stratford was recently named the 2019 winner of the Macaroni Kid-sponsored Act of Kindness Week Social Media Contest. For recognition of their efforts, the school was awarded $300, which they donated to the charity of their choice—Foundations in Education, Inc.

Macaroni Kid, a national online publication dedicated to helping parents find local family fun, teamed up with the Diocese of Bridgeport Catholic Schools to spread compassion through the distribution of 20,000 Random Act of Kindness cards across the 26 Catholic schools. Students were awarded Act of Kindness cards when they were witnessed being kind.

St. Mark School Principal, Melissa Warner, saw Kindness Cards as an opportunity to place attention on positive deeds and Catholic values. “This program highlighted the importance that thoughtful, caring acts play in creating a loving and supportive school community—the type of family atmosphere we are proud to have at St. Mark School.”

The elementary school, serving students in Pre-K to 8th grade, chose to donate the contest earnings to Foundations in Education, a non-profit organization created to assist the Diocese of Bridgeport’s ongoing mission to support Catholic education.

Foundations in Education supports innovation in academic and extra-curricular programs, fosters opportunities for the professional development of school leaders and provides tuition assistance to families in need. This year alone, they awarded 1,456 Catholic elementary school students nearly $2.8 million in Bishop’s Scholarship Fund tuition assistance and will be funding grants to educators in the amount of $150,000 across all Diocesan Catholic schools.

“At St. Mark School, our students and faculty have been directly impacted by the kindness and support of Foundations in Education. It is our honor to be able to pay that kindness forward with a charitable donation to an organization that provides tuition assistance to families in need and grant opportunities to school educators.”

Foundations in Education Executive Director Holly Doherty-Lemoine commented, “We are so grateful for the generosity and partnership of both St. Mark School and Macaroni Kids. Just as one act of kindness leads to another, the donation will continue to touch the lives of students who value Catholic education.”

St. Mark School instills in students and faculty the value of service, which is at the core of their teaching. Students learn the value of looking outside of themselves and giving to others, whether in small random acts of kindness or school-wide service projects.

(To find out more about St. Mark School, visit www.stmarkschool.org.)
Diocesan Youth Choir

Youth choir is ‘music’ and ministry

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—“I think it’s actually one of the coolest things I’ve ever done,” says 17-year old Sarah Almeida, a senior at Immaculate High School, of her participation in the Diocesan Choir for Youth (C4Y). Seventeen-year old Drew Mitchell of Brookfield, also an Immaculate senior, says that singing in the choir has been a great opportunity for him. “When I heard about the choir, I knew I wanted to join.”

Sarah, a soprano, and Drew, a tenor, will be among the 120 choir members to perform at the “Arise and Shine” Christmas Concert set for Friday December 20, 7:30 pm at the Fairfield University Quick Center for the Arts.

Sarah and Drew and other young people throughout the diocese have been rehearsing with choir director Mary Bozzuti-Higgins for months in preparation for the Christmas concert, which is one of the highlights of the year in the diocese.

December will be the third Christmas concert for both students who look forward to it and enjoy performing for their parents and the community.

Sarah, a Brookfield resident, says that performing in the choir has been a gift to her because she has made many new friends.

“It kind of in a way makes me feel like I’m not alone. I have a bunch of people singing the same thing as me, and everyone’s on the same page. For me this choir is somewhat of an escape from problems in real life, the schoolwork and stress. For the one and a half hours that we rehearse, I’m with people I love and have been with for a long time. The singing is something you’re doing for other people and it feels good.”

Working with Bozzuti-Higgins, a former opera singer and noted teacher coach and mentor, has helped her to improve her singing voice.

“Mary has helped me to strengthen my voice and to build confidence. She taught me a lot about breathing control—I’ve learned so much from her,” says Sarah.

At this year’s Christmas concert she will be singing the solo of Mary exclaiming the Magnificat. It’s a very tender movement in the Cantata and the entire choir joins with her.

Drew, who runs cross country and track for Immaculate High School, began performing in grammar school and loves singing with a large chorus.

“We get a lot of alumni back from college each year to sing with us, and quite a few guys have joined the choir,” he says. “You don’t think of it when you’re up there—there are so many strong voices behind you. You find your voice in the choir.”

Sarah agrees. Although she admits to a little nervousness before each performance, she takes strength from the choir.

“I always love when I’m performing in a group for people who really want to be there. You feel less nervous, more inclined to go all out with the performance.”

Drew said his favorite song from “Arise and Shine” is “Believe” from The Polar Express. He says the lyrics and music reach out and touch the entire audience.

Both credit choir director Mary Bozzuti-Higgins with being a great teacher coach and mentor. She’s the best—so kind and welcoming to others. She really wants to help everyone out,” says Sarah.

“I love that interaction. She makes you feel wanted and appreciated—it’s awesome,” says Drew.

Sarah plans to attend Western Connecticut State College and pursue a minor in music. She would love to follow in Bozzuti-Higgins’ footsteps and be a high school choral director. Drew loves performing but is headed for Fordham University, where he plans to major in Communications.

What about young people who are interested in joining the choir, but are shy or don’t think their voice is good enough?

“I believe that anyone can sing. I think everyone has the power to have a voice. Maybe some people are born farther into it, but with the right techniques you become better,” says Sarah who encourages young people to join the choir.

“You don’t have to learn on your own. Mary will stay after rehearsal to help you,” says Drew.

Bozzuti-Higgins is encouraging parents to bring young people and their friends to the concert. She believes the excitement and beauty of the Christmas concert will encourage young people to join the choir.

“It’s not about being a perfect voice or musician. The choir is a youth group with music,” Higgins says, noting that new members can join in January before the next semester begins. Rehearsals are held weekly in Bridgeport, Stamford, Wilton and Danbury.

“Also, the time spent in rehearsal and performance count as service hours,” says Bozzuti-Higgins. “This is truly a ministry.” Both Drew and Sarah agree. They say that it makes them feel good knowing that they are bringing happiness and joy to the audience at Christmas and others at different performances during the year.

Bozzuti-Higgins said auditions for the second semester are open to all interested singers in January. Young people interested in joining the choir can go to C4YSings.com to register and see some additional videos and testimonials.

(General Admission tickets for the Arise and Shine Christmas Concert are $22. Tickets can be purchased at the door; online at www.quickcenter.fairfield.edu; 203.254.4010 or toll-free 1.877.ARTS.396. To learn more about C4Y, please visit the Choir’s webpage: c4ysings.org.)
Coat Drive

St. Matthew Knights give thanks by serving others

NORWALK—Assisting children and veterans is one of the many goals of the Knights of Columbus St. Matthew Council 14360. Recently, the council joined forces with six local councils from Norwalk, Darien, New Canaan, Westport, Wilton and Weston at the Family & Children’s Agency Ben Franklin Center in South Norwalk.

More than 220 brand new and 75 gently used winter coats were distributed during the Knights of Columbus Coats for Kids event. This event helps keep kids warm over the winter months by providing this necessity, and this year’s event had a record response with all coats claimed in just 45 minutes. In addition, handmade scarves and hats donated by St. Matthew parishioners Terri Sargent and Karen DelVecchio were distributed along with toiletry items such as toothpaste and shampoo to those in need. The local event is part of the Knights of Columbus national Neighbors Helping Neighbors initiative and, since the program launched in 2009, more than 500,000 coats have been distributed in 49 states and all 10 Canadian provinces.

“While our society is pushing us to purchase items for the Christmas season, we don’t want to forget those that need basic necessities for the upcoming cold winter season,” said project chairman and district deputy George Ribellino, Jr. “It’s great to see brother Knights come together from different councils to combine resources to help more people in need.”

The Coats for Kids distribution took place at the same time as the Connecticut Food Bank’s mobile food pantry distributed fresh groceries outside, in partnership with Filling in the Blanks and Family & Children’s Agency.

“By bringing the incredible generosity of the Knights of Columbus and the vital resource of the Connecticut food bank into our community, we make it easier for our neighbors in need to access the services they need,” said Robert F. Cashel, president & CEO of Family & Children’s Agency. “The incredible response to the coat drive demonstrates how great the need in our community is.”

On Thanksgiving Day, the council and the Catholic Daughters of the America’s St. Matthew Court 2640 provided and delivered a full Thanksgiving meal for the residents of Homes for the Brave for the 7th consecutive year. In addition, Grand Knight Anthony Armentano, Past Grand Knight’s George Ribellino and Scott Criscuolo helped serve the meal along with George’s daughter Mia.

“Our men and women both loved the food and we could not be more appreciative. What a blessing St. Matthew Council #14360 and Catholic Daughters Court 2640 have been to us. All

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20
SHELTON—More than 45 years ago, when America was facing a financial crisis, the young parish of St. Margaret Mary was confronting harsh economic realities of its own. The church had closed the school that summer and was struggling to pay off a staggering mortgage.

That winter, a group of women conceived of a Christmas celebration to help the parish. They called it the “Holly Fair,” and from that first year, it was an enormous success, offering homemade food, arts and crafts, a raffle, baked goods, music, activities for children and, of course, a visit from Santa.

The Women’s Group of St. Margaret Mary has continued the tradition, and hundreds of people showed up December 7. Under the leadership of President LeAnne Sheldon, the fair showcased several dozen crafts vendors, a “cookie walk,” a basket raffle, a bake sale and for the first time, a children’s holiday boutique, which offered inexpensive gifts for kids to buy for their family and friends.

“It has always been a really good fundraiser and community event,” said Sheldon, who chaired the committee for the fourth year. “The women love getting together to work on it and we look forward to it every year.”

Money raised from the Holly Fair assists ministries of the parish, including the youth group, Sheldon said.

The Women’s Group has a history of helping the parish and the larger community, said former pastor Father Philip Brady, who at 101 still celebrates Mass several times a week at his senior residence in Orchard Park, N.Y., outside of Buffalo.

“The fair began in 1973, after I had been pastor for five years,” he recalled in a phone interview. “The ladies did all the work. It was a big event and went over well. The women are a great group and hard workers, who put on a number of events during the year to raise money for the parish.”

One of the popular activities this year was the “Cookie Walk,” which was held in the new Sacred Heart Parish Center, completed under the leadership of Father Ciprian Bejan, who recently celebrated his fifth year as pastor.

Parishioners each donated five dozen of their favorite homemade cookies, from Italian anginettes to short bread, butter balls and fudge, and people walked past the tables, selecting their favorite assortment.

Barbara Nordin and her husband Dave, who have been parishioners since 1966, work at the fair every year. “Everyone is always eager to help,” she said.

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 20
Morning Glory, Danbury

Tamara’s Handbag Mission

DANBURY—“When you are a homeless individual it’s very difficult to establish yourself and anticipate your daily needs during this life-changing event you are facing,” says Tamara Espinal, program coordinator of Morning Glory Breakfast Program in Danbury.

That’s why she came up with the idea to try and make the daily lives of women easier by providing them with the simple necessities for self-care that most women take for granted.

Through Tamara’s Handbag Mission, Catholic Charities hopes to make homeless women’s lives a bit smoother when they are moving between temporary shelters by providing them with all the essentials (i.e. hair brush, toothpaste and toothbrush, deodorant, hand and body lotion, under garments) in a handbag that can easily be carried with them. This can make their day less stressful and build self-esteem to create a positive outcome for the future.

The agency is looking to the community and volunteers for help with this project. “Many women have old handbags in their closets that are not being used and are simply collecting dust. Any handbag or any shape or size will do,” states Espinal. “These can simply be filled with items on our wish list that will benefit someone in need and donated.”

On Spring Street at the Dorothy Day Hospitality House, Catholic Charities operates its Morning Glory Breakfast Program which serves hot and healthy meals to the hungry and homeless of the Danbury area. The agency made sure that the program is conveniently located to the homeless shelters so that the neediest in the area would be served a hot breakfast and provided with a safe and warm environment daily.

Morning Glory works in collaboration with other Danbury area agencies to provide education and referrals that assist with ending homelessness. Currently a multitude of agencies and programs use Morning Glory as a location to outreach to the hardest to access populations and to provide services with the hope of ending their homelessness. Morning Glory has served over 100,000 meals since opening in October of 2007. There is no cost associated with meals or engagement with agencies; guests are only asked to sign in when they arrive. All participation in services with visiting agencies and programs is voluntary.

“As I’m in the kitchen serving clients on a daily basis, I see new people each day who are in need of attention as they are facing increasing challenges,” states Espinal.

Morning Glory also offers a mobile non-food pantry that provides items such as cleaning products, paper goods and hygiene products. The service is provided to participants of Catholic Charities’ other programs in Danbury as well.

(For more information on the Morning Glory Breakfast Program visit the website at www.ccfairfield.org/programs/morning-glory-breakfast-program.)
FAIRFIELD—More than 150 family and friends gathered on Sunday, November 17, at Holy Cross Church in Fairfield for the annual Mass Celebrating People with Special Needs, hosted by Saint Catherine Center.

In his homily, Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano spoke of the “unique witness” given by the 12 young people who were receiving the Sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. “God has chosen these young people in baptism and reaffirms their baptism [in Confirmation] because they are worth everything to him before they do a single thing,” the bishop said. “It’s with their joy, their enthusiasm, their innocence, their purity, their faithfulness that they respond....

My friends, in a world where we are judged solely by what we can offer, today as we celebrate these sacraments let us remember the great gift of just being a son or daughter of God. Everything else takes a second place.”

Participants came from St. Mary’s Church (Norwalk), St. Thomas Aquinas Church (Fairfield), St. Rose of Lima (Newtown), The Cathedral Parish (Bridgeport), and six students from Saint Catherine Academy.

Each year, Saint Catherine Center offers the opportunity for individuals with special needs to receive the Sacraments of Initiation outside the typical faith formation program. Center staff worked with parents and Directors of Religious Education throughout the diocese to coordinate preparation and participation.

Msgr. William Scheyd and Rev. Charles Allen, SJ, con-celebrated the Mass with the bishop. Members of the Knights of Columbus Honor Guard, Saint Catherine Center board members and staff joined the celebration. Family members gave the readings and two students from Saint Catherine Academy presented the gifts. The bishop acknowledged Saint Catherine Center staff, the Center’s Board of Directors, and Executive Director Helen Burland for their work with young people with special needs. “The Center is not a ‘Center,’” he said. “It’s a home.”

At the conclusion of the Mass, Bishop Caggiano presented Joe and Carrie Sindelar of New Canaan with the St. Augustine Medal of Service for outstanding volunteerism.
"And Father Ciprian is doing a great job. He is a blessing to our parish. Everyone loves him and wants to help him."

Barbara Mariano, treasurer of the Women’s Group, said, “This is a popular tradition for the parish that attracts a lot of people. As Father Bejan made his way through the tables of gifts and crafts, he said, “Every year it improves. The women organize the fair and what they raise helps other groups and charitable organizations. People come and go, and priests come and go... but this fair shows continuity for future generations.”

of us at Homes for the Brave are extremely grateful as you made the day very special for our residents” said Homes for the Brave CEO/executive director Vince Santilli.

The council wrapped up the long weekend by delivering three loads of non-perishable food to Blessed Sacrament in Bridgeport. The food was collected at the St. Matthew Annual Thanksgiving Mass. “Giving back to those in need during the Thanksgiving season is a blessing for our council. One of the most profound ways we can truly give thanksgiving to God is through serving others,” said Grand Knight Anthony Arementano.

We wish you a Merry Christmas

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

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By EMILY CLARK

At this time of joy and gratitude, one local family is giving thanks for gifts many take for granted: a supportive community, the generosity of strangers, and most importantly, the health of their child after coming close to losing her to a rare and complicated disorder.

When 16-year-old Sarah Martinez started feeling ill last May, her doctor prescribed antibiotics to relieve her sinus pressure. But the pain continued—and panic attacks, vertigo, and focal seizures ensued. Sarah’s parents knew this was more than just a routine infection, but medical tests revealed nothing, leading one doctor to even ask the otherwise healthy teenager, “Why are you pretending?” She wasn’t. Once she was confirmed a very real condition, Sarah had developed Opsoclonus-Myoclonus Syndrome with Benign Ovarian Teratoma, an illness known to afflict only 22 other people worldwide.

Despite the removal of a fist-sized tumor and her entire right ovary, Sarah’s ordeal continued though she doesn’t remember much of it. “It was like a dream,” she said, having endured rounds of chemotherapy and other treatments. “When I woke up though, I realized so much had happened.” Anxiety, tremors, and the inability to walk or even swallow kept her hospitalized at Yale and later at Blythedale Children’s Hospital in New York. Through it all, however, Sarah was never alone, as her large family worked out scheduled visitations, especially from her father Gonzalo who never left her side. Along with the inspiration they drew from each other and their community, it was their unwavering faith that sustained them.

“There was a time when we seriously feared her death,” said Sarah’s mother Karla, “but I had already talked to God, and I accepted what he had given to me. We were blessed with His graces, and it brought our family closer.” That family, including Sarah’s 10 siblings, leaned on their strong religious upbringing and the support of Catholic Charities and the Room to Grow (RTG) preschool in Norwalk during the months of Sarah’s hospitalization and referred to Yale New Haven Hospital and underwent additional exams, a diagnosis finally confirmed a very real condition. Sarah had developed Opsoclonus-Myoclonus Syndrome with Benign Ovarian Teratoma, an illness known to afflict only 22 other people worldwide.

BLESSED AND THANKFUL—16-year-old Sarah Martinez of Norwalk (standing center) is surrounded by her parents and siblings for this family portrait taken at Room to Grow preschool in Norwalk. The family of 11 relied on their strong faith and Catholic Charities as Sarah battled a rare and serious illness.

We wish you a Merry Christmas

Proud Printers of Fairfield County Catholic for more than 20 years!
ongoing recovery. A proud and humble couple, the Martinezes said they never “stressed over material things,” but with Gonzalo on leave from his job and Karla juggling the needs of her younger children, the family relied on the generosity and prayers of others, especially those connected with RTG.

“We are so blessed. Room to Grow takes care of everybody,” said Gonzalo, with his family surrounding him in a large room at the preschool where eight of his 11 children have attended over the years.

As Sarah, now in remission after being discharged in August, recounted her story of struggle and rehabilitation, her younger siblings played cards, constructed Lego towers, munched on Goldfish crackers, and rested in the arms of their teacher, showing the loving atmosphere of RTG which has become a second home to this family.

According to Sarah’s mother, program director Nancy Owens and program coordinator Regina Terenzio are “special sisters and therapists” to the family, collecting meals, diapers and toys for them while Sarah was in the hospital, though Karla is grateful for so much more.

“With Room to Grow, it’s not just the material goods but the friendship,” she recalled. “They always have time to listen. I don’t know how we would have gotten through this without them.”

Owens, who has known the Martinezes for over 20 years, remembers Sarah as a typical teen prior to her illness: funny and enthusiastic with a good sense of humor. “And a fighter!” Owens emphasized. “Her faith in God has guided her through this challenging journey and continues to give her strength.”

While RTG and Catholic Charities supported the Martinezes with food, clothing and tuition assistance, Owens added, they also helped make connections within the Norwalk community to assist the family during Sarah’s hospital stay. And at home, Sarah’s sisters and brothers took over. Twenty-two year old Angelica left college in Arizona to become a second mom to the little ones as Karla cared for Sarah. Despite their own illnesses and injuries, Bella, 15, and Miguel, 11, have assumed some of the responsibilities that Sarah previously handled, along with Alex, 13, who commented on the difficulties they have all faced.

“It was hard to keep it together sometimes,” said Alex, pausing from the game of Uno he was playing with Miguel, “but I knew I had to set an example. I want to show a good pathway for my siblings.”

It is another pathway, paved with the generosity and compassion of so many, that has helped Sarah and the entire Martinez family over the last six months, but their needs are still so great. Amy Zajac of Catholic Charities said this is a family of remarkable faith but limited means. “They are in dire straits but continue to be so optimistic,” she added.

A GoFundMe page was established with Karla posting frequent updates on Sarah’s condition. Progress is being made toward their goal of $25,000, though the Martinezes are still not financially stable, needing a car and continued assistance with medical bills.

“Every donation, every meal, every gift we are grateful for. Thank you for showering us with a boundless amount of love. We ask for your continued help,” Karla wrote, referencing a “wish list” of necessities such as gift cards and car seats, along with Christmas ideas for the children.

In recognition of all the Martinez family has received, Sarah, now back to school part-time at Catholic Charities at Cardinal Kung Academy in Stamford, has established a group devoted to corporal works of mercy. “I was always praying and trusting in God,” said Sarah. “So many people gave to my family. Now I want to give back.”

(Anyone wishing to assist the Martinez family is asked to contact Nancy Owens, program director for Room to Grow, at nowens@ccfc-ct.org.)
By ELIZABETH CLYONS

INDIANAPOLIS—Youth from around our diocese recently made the trip to Indianapolis, Ind., for National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC). Youth from St. Philip’s in Norwalk, St. Andrew’s in Bridgeport and St. Peter’s in Danbury enjoyed getting closer to Christ with more than 20,000 other young people.

“The energy surrounding NCYC is almost palpable,” commented Alyson Musco, who serves as Confirmation program coordinator and youth minister at St. Philip Church in Norwalk. “It’s an honor to be able to participate in the advancement and development of the young church.”

Musco explains that St. Philip’s has been sending a group to NCYC for many years and that it has become an experience teens look forward to as soon as they enter high school, as the conference welcomes youth grades 9-12.

And the group does not waste any time preparing, as they begin fundraising a full year in advance of the conference. “We held car washes, plant and bake sales, sold reusable shopping bags and handmade tie-dyed t-shirts,” says Musco.

“We dedicated a lot of time and effort to raise funds for our trip but it was worth it in the end,” she says. “We are so grateful to our teens’ parents who also gave of their time and energy to help out at our fundraisers and supported us as we prepared for this trip.”

Musco also noted the generosity of the parishioners, who she says were so generous in helping the group reach their goal.

Youth at the conference enjoyed breakout sessions on a variety of topics including how to courageously defend the life of witnessing to Jesus, how to live as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ; when the gifts, struggles and diverse realities of young people are welcomed in Catholic faith communities; when ministry leaders have embraced the joy of the Gospel, and when families are living as the domestic Church.

(For more information visit: nfcym.org)

Young woman attends Leadership Forum

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The GIVEN Institute hosted the annual Catholic Young Women’s Leadership Forum providing leadership training, faith formation and dedicated mentoring for 120 rising women leaders ages 21-30 at the Catholic University of America this past June 12-16.

Two women from the Diocese of Bridgeport attended the GIVEN conference this year: Erin McAtee and Siobhan Heekin-Caney.

Siobhan, 28, whose home parish is Our Lady Star of the Sea in Stamford is currently a graduate student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

Siobhan found out about the forum back in 2016, when it took place for the first time. “At the time, I was running the Endow study groups on my undergrad campus—and was eager to develop my ‘feminine genius’ through mentoring and leadership training,” she says. But she was studying abroad at the time and couldn’t attend.

So when the dates for the 2019 GIVEN conference were announced on social media, she couldn’t pass on the opportunity to sign up. “I was so excited to learn from the experiences of Catholic women who have made outstanding contributions to the Church and to society as a whole,” shares Siobhan.

“We came in expecting a leadership conference with a Catholic touch, but left profoundly transformed by the encounter with each other and with the Lord,” Siobhan says of her experience. As part of the conference, the attendees each submitted a proposed Action Plan towards the New Evangelization which they intend to implement within, and in collaboration with, their local Church communities in the months following the GIVEN forum.

“My Action Plan was to launch a blog that would be a comprehensive resource for Catholic perspectives on international affairs,” explains Siobhan. “As a student of international affairs, I had become convinced that the field desperately needed the insights of the Church.”

Siobhan felt that there needed to be a way for Catholic voices to be heard when it came to international affairs, especially because, she explains, “St. Augustine is considered one of the earliest international relations theorists and international law has incorporated many of St. Thomas Aquinas’ teachings on just war.”

“It seemed like this was God’s way of telling me to take that leap,” said Siobhan on the topic of her action plan, “I hope that the blog will someday grow into a valuable tool for Catholics in the Diocese of Bridgeport, throughout the United States, and even internationally.”

The GIVEN Institute is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to activating the gifts of young adult women for the Catholic Church and the world. It inspires and equips the next generation of female leaders to receive the gifts that they are; realize the gifts they’ve been given; and respond with the gift that only they can give.” Through leadership training, faith formation, and dedicated mentoring, GIVEN forms women for mission and for life. The flagship event of the GIVEN Institute is the Catholic Young Women’s Leadership Forum. This event brings together young adult women from across the country for a five-day forum.

(For more information visit: giveninstitute.com)
Acknowledging regrets and focusing on faith to create a fulfilling life was the message shared with more than one hundred women at a prayer breakfast gathering sponsored by Magnificat.

The Triumphant Heart of Mary Immaculate chapter of the ministry to Catholic women hosted the event at the Ethan Allen Inn in Danbury earlier this month. The invited guest speaker and author of “Retreat from the World,” Kathleen Keefe, shared her personal faith-filled journey and advice on dealing with inevitable regrets along life’s path.

“Even the smallest regrets find a nesting place in our hearts and if we don’t look at them, it becomes debris of the heart if left unattended,” Keefe said. “God can’t use us if our hearts are filled with debris.”

Keefe, who was a teacher for 23 years in the South Bronx, has been involved in the teaching and healing ministry since 1987.

Keefe held up a small jewelry-sized bag labeled regrets and explained how she has it hanging on a statue of Our Lady of Fatima in her home. She said she writes down her regrets, places them in the bag and prays.

“If we are not humble, if we do not pray for Divine Mercy every day, that’s where contamination will seep in,” Keefe said.

Everyone has regrets—from sins in our lives, to choices we make and the impact of other people’s choices on us, she said—adding, regrets are often dismissed, repressed or denied.

Keefe said she was inspired to share a story of regret from her childhood that she only recently came to peace with.

She explained that her brother, who suffered a brain injury at birth, had chosen Saint Aloysius for his confirmation name. With her 13-year-old wisdom at the time and two weeks of relentlessly trying to get him to change his mind as only a persistent sibling could, she succeeded, and he took the name Brian—a name she thought was better for him.

He went to be with the Lord almost two years ago and she realized she regretted ever changing his mind about his preferred confirmation name. After praying on it, she was assured that although the earthly name chosen was Brian, the heavenly name he received was Aloysius.

“Special children, God puts in our lives. There are 180 chapters around the world. There are 180 chapters around the world.”

Keefe met with women after the breakfast exchanging additional stories, words of support and advice on how to deal with regrets along the path at the recent Magnificat breakfast for women, held in Danbury.

“Everyone has a different journey in life. Their experiences may help you in your life,” said Monica Segura of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Danbury. Segura, who has been coming to the Magnificat breakfasts for the past four years, brought her friend Ana Guevera to introduce her to Magnificat and all that is has to offer.

“The speaker was very inspiring. I think I will take some of the advice she shared and apply it to my own life,” Guevera said. “If I could do what she said, I could improve my own life.”

At the conclusion of the breakfast, Hood and Keefe were presented with hand-made prayer shawls and women in attendance were given the opportunity to pray with prayer partners.

Hood and Keefe were taken by a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Danbury. Segura, who has been coming to the Magnificat breakfasts for the past four years, brought her friend Ana Guevera to introduce her to Magnificat and all that is has to offer.

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La Fiesta Guadalupana

Devotos se consagraron a la Inmaculada

By MARICARMEN GODOY

NORWALK—El domingo 8 de diciembre, día consagrado a la Inmaculada Concepción, un grupo de estudiantes del curso de “Mariología” de la parroquia de Saint Ladislaus, se consagraron a la Virgen en forma perpetua, luego de festejar al son del mariachi a la Emperatriz de América, la Virgen de Guadalupe.

La misa dominical del mediodía, con asistencia de los alumnos del padre Juan Gabriel Acosta, el párroco general, que por 33 días consecutivos acudieron al curso bíblico para aprender más sobre la virgen María y el rol que tuvo desde el día en que el Ángel Gabriel le anunció que sería la madre de Jesús, el salvador de la humanidad.

Mientras en la misa dominical las flores, los mariachis, los niños disfrazados del santo Juan Diego, peregrinaban de un lado a otro; los devotos marianos, niños disfrazados del santo Juan, llenaban de flores, luces y escultura, la Virgen de Guadalupe, que en forma perpetua, se pone a disposición de Cristo hacia la humanidad.

El curso, acorde con el sacerdote nativo de Colombia, pretendió afirmar no solo los misterios de fe, sino entender cómo la Virgen se pone a disposición de Jesús y recorre con él el camino de su vida hasta llegar a la crucifixión.

“María nos ayuda a conocer el corazón de Jesús y nos permite llegar a él a través de su intersección”, dijo el sacerdote. Recordando a sus fieles que el rol de María es de ser abogada ante Jesús.

Como parte de las 33 clases dadas en Saint Ladislaus, se profundizaron temas basados en el Evangelio de San Mateo, empezando por la Anunciación y se discutió la Asunción de la Virgen hacia el cielo.

Otro de los temas abordados está la forma cómo María obedeció y siguió en forma prudente a Jesús. Obediencia que es exaltada en la oración del Magnificat. Pero también Acosta apuntó que el liderazgo de la Virgen siempre estuvo presente, por ejemplo, cuando ella –por su propia iniciativa- le pidió a su hijo que convirtiera el agua en vino en las Bodas de Caná.

También, cómo en forma prudente la Virgen estuvo durante el recorrido al calvario y cómo después de la muerte de Jesús, María, junto a los discípulos estuvo en la primera aparición que se conoce como la fiesta de Pentecostés, donde les entregó los dones para enfrentarse al mundo. En estos tiempos modernos, sostuvo el sacerdote, es necesario que la iglesia reafirme la presencia de la virgen María como una mujer que supo escuchar, discernir, responder y respetar. “Los valores de la tolerancia, el amor a las diferencias, a amar a los demás en María es innegable”, sostuvo.

Lo que dio paso a preguntarle sobre cómo lidió la iglesia ante un mundo feminista donde la femenidad ha sido mal interpretada. A esto, el sacerdote respondió: “Ahí está: María fue una mujer llena de valor, llena de fe, llena de liderazgo pero supo cómo actuar. Era prudente, era silenciosa cuando debía, pero era líder cuando era necesario también”.

La Virgen de Guadalupe: Identidad Mexicana

En Saint Ladislaus, sin duda alguna, es el lugar en donde se vienen realizando las fiestas más devotas y alegres del área. El Grupo Guadalupano de Norwalk, que cumplió 20 años de realizar la celebración, no escatima esfuerzos ni tiempo y con meses de anticipación se preparan para agasajar a la Emperatriz de América.

Mariachis, flores, velas, disfrazados, cientos de fieles, comida típica y la virgen vestida primorosamente; marca el interés por entender por qué tanta devoción y tanto amor a la Virgen de los mexicanos.

El sacerdote Acosta tiene como respuesta una sencilla palabra: “identidad”. Y con este vocablo desarrolla un concepto que implica nacionalismo, sentido de pertenencia, conexión con las raíces y por ende una profunda fe, devoción y amor a la virgen de Guadalupe.

Año a la entrevista dada por el sacerdote a La Voz Hispánica, estas mismas palabras se pronunciaron en su discurso del día, Don Alberto de la Rosa, un mexicano co-fundador del Grupo Guadalupano, que año tras año, junto con una docena de sus paisanos ponen en los fieles una fiesta que demanda semanas de trabajo, no solo por los detalles sino por la forma tan sincronizada con la que la realizan.

Mientras un grupo está en la iglesia dando la bienvenida a los fieles, otro grupo está acarreando comida y utensilios de cocina; otro grupo está cerca de la imagen de la virgen colocando correctamente las flores, otros están ayudando al sacerdote en la homilía y otros están en el coro atendiendo a los mariachis.
Reverend Mark Connolly, 91

BOSTON—The Reverend Mark Connolly, age 91, passed away into Eternal Life on December 3, 2019. Father Connolly was born on March 24, 1928 in Boston, Ma. to the late Mark Connolly, Sr. and Kathleen Holland. He was the third of five children.

Father Connolly was ordained in 1957 in Union City, New Jersey to the Order of St. Paul of the Cross (the Passionist Order). In 1970 Father Connolly produced the first television Mass in the New York area. He also wrote the TV prayer guide for the Mass that is still in existence. In September 1981 he produced a second program called That’s the Spirit. The program won 13 awards including 3 Emmy nominations. He retired from the television Mass in 1990.

In 1991, he became incardinated into the Diocese of Bridgeport and was assigned as Parish Vicar to St. Michael the Archangel Church in Greenwich, Conn. until his retirement in May 2008.

In 1993 he took over the radio program Thoughts for the Week for the Diocese of Bridgeport. The program was aired through many stations throughout the country and ran for 26 years. In 1995 he launched the first Internet magazine called Spirituality for Today. The magazine received numerous awards for its excellence in Catholic content and journalism. It is still in production today.

Father Connolly was preceded in death by his sisters, Patricia of Dunedin, Fla.; Rosemary Mason of Portland, Maine; and Katharine Micena of The Villages, Fla.; and nieces and nephews. He is also survived by the members of the IHM Obits and his brothers, Francis and Michael James and by a niece, Patricia Scoville.

Father Connolly is survived by his nieces Eileen Connolly and Claire Martin and nephews Mark Connolly, John William McLaughlin (Sharon), James McLaughlin (Diane) and John Martin, all residing in Massachusetts.

Father Connolly was grateful for all his brother priests and many friends that enriched his life through the years. Special thanks to Dr. Radhika Jasthi who took such good care of him through the years. Her dedication and kindness will not be forgotten. In addition, many thanks to his nurse aids, Angella Thomas and Shelly Gibbs for their unending assistance, care, and professionalism during his illness; and to his housekeeper, Patricia Hurtado, for her invaluable help.

To leave an online condolence, please visit www.leopgalaghergreenwich.com In lieu of flowers please make a donation in memory of Father Mark to St. Jude’s Children Hospital 501 St. Jude Place, Memphis, Tenn 38106 or the Queen of the Clergy Retirement Home, 274 Strawberry Hill Ave., Stamford, Conn 06902.

Obits

December 2019

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19 Rev. Philip Morrisey ...................... 2008
20 Rev. Msgr. Thomas J. Driscoll, P.A. .......... 2018
21 Msgr. Constantine R. Caldas .............. 2015
26 Rev. Vincent P. Cleary ................. 1965
27 Rev. Ignatius Baraniak, OFM Conv. ...... 1980
29 Msgr. James H. Grady ..................... 1967
30 Rev. M. Joseph McCarthy ................. 2006

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15 Rev. M. Joseph Joaquín ...................... 2013
17 Rev. Msgr. Ernest T. Esposito ............. 2019
18 Msgr. Harry L. Hale ....................... 2003
19 Msgr. G. Robert Hanover .................. 1992

December 2019

Sister Margaret Burke, IHM

Sister Margaret Burke, IHM, (formerly known as Sister M. Malachy) of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary died on Sunday, November 17, 2019 at Geisinger Community Medical Center in Scranton.

She was born on July 13, 1941, in New York, N.Y. She was the daughter of the late John Andrew and Mary Grossman Burke.

She entered the IHM Congregation on September 8, 1958 and made her temporary profession of vows on March 11, 1961 and her final profession of vows on March 11, 1966.

Sister Margaret served as a teacher in the following schools: St. Patrick Elementary School in Spangler, Pa., in 1961; Immaculate Conception Chapel School in Scranton, Pa., from 1961 to 1964; St. Rosalia Elementary School in Pittsburgh, Pa., from 1964 to 1971; St. Matthew Elementary School in East Stroudsburg, Pa., from 1971 to 1975; St. Paul Elementary School in New Bern, N.C., from 1975 to 1978; St. Mary School in Manhasset, N.Y., from 1978 to 1979; Our Lady of Perpetual Help Elementary School in Rocky Mount, N.C., from 1979 to 1984; St. Francis de Sales School in Lumberton, N.C., from 1984 to 1986; St. Ann Elementary School in Nyack, N.Y., from 1986 to 1988; St. Ambrose Elementary School in Bridgeport, Conn., from 1988 to 1994; and Holy Rosary Elementary School in Scranton, Pa., from 1994 to 2007. She was on the library support staff at All Saints Academy in Scranton, Pa., from 2007 to 2008. She also served as an instructor at the IHM Educational Enrichment Institute in Scranton, Pa., from 2010 to 2019; and as receptionist at The Catherine McAuley Center in Scranton, Pa., from 2008 until the time of her death.

She is preceded in death by a brother, John Andrew. She is survived by a brother, Thomas of Oyster Bay, N.Y.; and three sisters, Patricia of Dunedin, Fla.; Rosemary Mason of Portland, Maine; and Katharine Micena of The Villages, Fla.; and nieces and nephews. She is also survived by the members of the IHM Congregation.

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New Notre Dame boys and girls hoop coaches

By DON HARRISON

Many people will recognize her name. Maria Conlon. She was a hometown star—Derby, Seymour High—who, as a point guard and three-point marksman, helped lead the University of Connecticut women to three successive (2002-03-04) NCAA basketball championships.

Shawn Stanco is a more recent UConn graduate (2009), but his athletic endeavors were limited to Watertown High, where he played football, basketball and baseball with considerable skill. Indeed, he recently was inducted into the Watertown Gridiron Hall of Fame. Now, they have something else in common beyond their alma maters. Conlon and Stanco have been named head basketball coaches—girls and boys, respectively—at Notre Dame High of Fairfield for the 2019-20 season. Stanco, who has been appointed on an interim basis, was a homegrown star—Derby, Connecticut won 139 games and lost just eight times, reached the Final Four when they were freshmen and then won three straight NCAA titles.

Conlon’s personal high point at UConn? “I was the starting point guard for both Final Fours in my junior and senior year, and (as a senior) I had something like three turnovers in three minutes,” she says.

And her take on coach Geno Auriemma: “He’s exactly the way you see him on TV. He demands a lot from you, but he’s also a father figure. He’s great to be around.”

She came oh-so-close to joining Taurasi in the WNBA, with the Los Angeles Sparks, but played professionally overseas in Germany and Iceland.

Stanco, 32, has the unenviable undertaking of replacing Chris Watts, who in three years as coach, directed Notre Dame to its first-ever undefeated season (27-0) and state basketball championship, in 2017-18, and compiled a 65-13 record over-all. Watts, who retired in June from his full-time job as a state parole officer, accepted an assistant coaching position at Division-II Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, New York.

“I watched some (Notre Dame) games last season, and I know Max Mitchell (6-5 senior) and Blake Macklin (5-10 junior) are among the returning players of note,” Stanco says. Although he had been “looking for a head coaching position for some time,” Stanco remained in athletics as an assistant coach, most recently as the offensive coordinator for the Watertown High football team, which won seven of 10 games this fall. He also was an assistant basketball coach at Watertown, Brookfield, New Milford and Bunnell.

His recipe for success? “Control the pace of the game and you control the game.”

Madeline Fried of St. Joseph named High School Soccer All-American

TRUMBULL—St. Joseph High School, southern Connecticut’s premier college preparatory school, is proud to share that junior student, Madeline Fried, has been chosen to play on the 2019 High School Girls All-America Team by the United Soccer Coaches.

“Maddie is one of the best players I’ve ever coached here at St. Joes,” remarked Jack Nogueira, SJ Soccer Coach. “She’s had a fantastic three years, winning a State Championship and an FCIAC Championship. Maddie will be a tremendous asset to Villanova University.”

While at St. Joes, Madeline has had a career 64 goals and 43 assists. She has been a part of the All-FCIAC 1st Team (‘17, ’18, ’19), All-State 1st Team (’17, ’18, ’19), All-New England (’18, ’19), and All-America (2019).

Madeline also has been named one of CT Post’s Top 15 Players in 2019 and GarnetTime CT’s Top 25 players in the State of Connecticut. She is also affiliated with the Yankee United FC.

Madeline Fried has committed to play soccer at Villanova University.

About St. Joseph High School

St. Joseph High School is the premier college preparatory school in Southern Connecticut. The school provides a learning environment that embraces the Gospel values of the Roman Catholic faith and promotes a commitment to family and community. SJHS prepares young women and men to realize their potential, helps them to excel in higher education, and provides a foundation to guide them throughout their lives.

St. Joseph High School is a member of NCEA, NAIS, NEAS&EC.

About United Soccer Coaches

Founded in 1941 and headquartered in Kansas City, Mo., United Soccer Coaches is the trusted and unifying voice, advocate and partner for coaches at all levels of the game. The largest community for soccer coaches in the world, we unite coaches of all levels around the love of the game and we elevate the game through advocacy, education and service.

(For more information visit www.jsadores.org, or UnitedSoccerCoaches.org.)
Column: Thomas Hicks

The Mysticism of Everyday Life

There are certain experiences about which I wonder whether many, even most, people have them. I think most people have them, but, as T.S. Eliot said, “We have the experience, but miss the meaning.” The experience may happen when one is alone on a starlit night; when one sees the migration of birds in autumn. It may take place on a mountain top or on the prow of a ship at night. It may happen when we see children in a moment when they are really children. Etc.

There is a flash of heightened awareness of something qualitatively different and deeper than the realities that are received through external consciousness.

The experience seems to provide a fleeting glimpse into some kind of transcendence, a touch of being accessed by something Infinite.

There is a sense of a kind of boundary crossing; something crossed over and then crossed back again. The experience lasts barely longer than a glimpse. One glimpses something one cannot really explain; one glimpses an infinite moment. Having tasted it, one longs for more awareness of what has been fleetingly glimpsed. It’s like a few bars from a song once heard that begins to haunt a person. Then every once in a while, a child laughs, or it starts to rain, and there are reverberations of the experience.

Karl Rahner, the preeminent theologian of the twentieth century, wrote of “The Mysticism of Everyday Life.” He was convinced that out of our ordinary, humdrum daily lives, with its routines and banalities, there is the reality of an experience of God. This experience of God can be overlooked, repressed, or even denied, but an experience of God is offered to everyone. Rahner claims that even atheists have an experience of God in everyday life. Once, in an interview Rahner stated this idea. The interviewer responded “I never had an experience of God,” to which Rahner replied, “I don’t believe you.” Rahner is convinced that everyone has a “God-experience” in which they experience God’s small whisper. These experiences of God can be repressed, but not destroyed, they are found in everyone. God is constantly communicating.

As Rahner understands it, the experience of God gives witness to an unsatisfied longing, some kind of longing for the All. The experience calls us to listen more carefully to our depths. The infinite God crossing a border and accosts our heart, urging it to seek Him.

Grace is at the heart of human existence. It is always experienced. It is not rare, but always experienced. I think that is part of what Rahner talks about. There are times when we sense a touch, a flash, of some kind of awareness. It is an awareness of somehow having some kind of communion with the Ultimate, a sweet invasion, as someone called it. These expansive states of consciousness are more common than we realize.

These states involve a sense of being grasped by a deeper dimension of reality than ordinary experience. For a unique moment something divine makes itself palpable. For some it is something never forgotten.

St. Aloysius teens bring the joy of Christmas

EARLIER THIS MONTH, 30 young people from St. Aloysius Parish and their chaperones traveled to Corbin, Kentucky to bring Christmas stockings and cheer to children in need. Guided by local hosts, teams of young people went house to house to deliver stockings and visit with families. Afterward, the teens visited a local nursing home to sing Christmas Carols and spend time with some of our elderly brothers and sisters.
Under our Christmas tree is a shoe box filled with cards, actually a few hundred Christmas cards, from the sacred to the profane, from classic Renaissance paintings to Norman Rockwell illustrations, along with cats and dogs dressed in their holiday outfits and, of course, Santa with his entourage of elves.

The box is pretty large, and at one time it must have accommodated snow boots, size 11 or 12. The cards inside have been collected over the years. Many of them are those personally designed photo cards that families send nowadays from services like Shutterfly, which let you create your own montage of snapshots of the kids with Mom and Dad, or your own montage of snapshots of the kids with Mom and Dad, or your own montage of snapshots of the kids with Mom and Dad.

Some of the Christmas photos we’ve collected were taken overlooking the Grand Canyon or the Manhattan skyline, during trips to national parks or on European vacations, or at family picnics and special occasions like weddings and christenings.

One of my favorites is always the DeTullio family’s, which has several dozen sons, daughters and grandchildren (I’ve lost count) gathered together on the beach, smiling and boisterous, all wearing the same outfit, surrounding the patriarch Norman and the matriarch Barbara.

And I can’t forget the Matthews’ clan—three boys and two girls—who are no longer little kids but off to school and college. That’s a card we look forward to so we can see the changes a year brings, not to mention the youngest daughter, who has an endearing mischievous grin.

For as long as I can remember, we’ve saved Christmas cards. It lets us see how much the children have grown in a year—some you wouldn’t recognize any longer—and helps preserve fond memories of Christmases past.

A few families stop sending cards when the kids get older, while others turn their attention to their pets or their grandchildren, beginning a whole new generation of holiday greetings.

I confess that I have a personal fondness for the pet photos because animals played such an important supporting role in the Nativity...so why not now? To my thinking, animals also have an advantage over us. You see, they recognize their Creator and give him homage, which is something that the species known as Homo sapiens finds hard to do.

Even after the tree comes down, we keep the box of Christmas cards near our statues of Our Lady of Fatima, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and St. Joseph to remind us to pray for all these families and ask for their constant protection in a harsh world.

Sometimes, we open the box and take the cards out one by one, reminisce and say a prayer for them. All families need prayer, even those we mistakenly assume are perfect. To tell the truth, I’ve never met a perfect family, and I certainly know mine isn’t. Family life can be hard, but with prayer, families endure. As they say, the family that prays together stays together. But the problem is that most families don’t pray together, so anything we can do for them would surely be beneficial.

Take some time to pray for your friends and relations over Christmas and throughout the year. You won’t regret it, and someday when we’re all together in heaven, you’ll realize the power that your prayers had, even the seemingly insignificant prayers like “Blessed Mother please help her.” or “Jesus, he seems so lonely, please make this a special Christmas for him” or “Lord, always watch over these children.”

Pray for a son who has a substance abuse problem, pray for a husband who lost his job, pray for a wife in a troubled marriage, pray for anyone afflicted with a physical or spiritual sickness.

This is my hope for the holiday season. When you open your Christmas cards this year, take some time to pray for the people who sent them...even the ones you can’t get along with.

It’s certainly nice to receive gift cards to Starbucks and Amazon, but I have a better idea. Give grace at Christmas.

It’s the best gift possible, a gift of inestimable value, a gift that doesn’t cost anything—a few moments of your time, a rosary, a novena, a prayerful request—and in the end, it will be the best gift imaginable.

PLANNING TO BE IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA THIS WINTER?

You are invited to join Bishop Caggiano for a Mass and Reception in Naples.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2020

See you in the Sunshine State!

Please contact Connie Von Zwehl for further details and your personal invitation by email at ccvzvz@att.net or call 203-216-1608.

Column: Joe Pisani

Give grace for Christmas

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

By Joe Pisani

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

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Youth group makes and donates blankets for victims of trauma

To celebrate the season of giving, the youth group of St. Theresa Church in Trumbull sponsored a pasta dinner and blanket service project to benefit the Center for Family Justice. Over 100 members of the parish joined in fellowship to support the Binky Patrol, an organization that provides blankets to ill and traumatized children in the greater Bridgeport area.

St. Theresa Apostolic Youth (STAY), a recipient of a grant through the Re-Imagining Faith Formation Initiative, sold tickets to the event, served dinner, led parishioners in a round of Christmas carols, and joined with them to make 50 fleece blankets to distribute before the holidays.

“It’s wonderful to see all these young people working together,” said Fr. Flavian Bejan, associate pastor at St. Theresa and the coordinator for STAY. “What they are doing shows this really is the season of giving. They are here to serve.”

SEASON OF GIVING—More than 100 parishioners of St. Theresa Church in Trumbull joined St. Theresa Apostolic Youth (STAY) for an evening pasta dinner and blanket-making service project. The blankets made during the event will benefit Binky Patrol, an organization that provides blankets to ill and traumatized children in the greater Bridgeport area.

As parishioners young and old bonded through this work of mercy, the sense of community and service was not lost on the teens who orchestrated the efforts, including STAY member Isabella Pucci. “This is so good for the community. It’s always a good thing to get together and help people,” she said, tying knots at the edge of a blanket patterned with footballs.

Samuel Miller, another STAY teen who worked alongside his friends and Fr. Flavian, added, “This is so cool. It’s nice to know that we are making these and that they’re going to children who really need them.”

Those children and their families, survivors of domestic violence and abuse, will receive the blankets in time for Christmas.
CREDO YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY IN SOUTH NORWALK meets twice a month on Wed. evenings from 7-9 pm at St. Joseph in South Norwalk. Young adults ages 21-31 are welcome! For more info visit stjoepasadena.org/credo.

SACRED HEART OF JESUS PARISH IN DABURY is hosting a day-long workshop: Unbound, Open Wide the Door to Christ on Sat., Dec. 14 from 10 am-5 pm. Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, Fr. Giuseppe, will present the Unbound model of prayer. Bring a bag lunch. There is no cost for the day, but there will be free-will offerings collected for the Friars. Register online at: www.sacredheartdabury.org or call the parish office at: 203.748.9029.

EAT, DRINK AND SHOP MERRY—St. Francis of Assisi in Weston will host an Eat, Drink and Shop Merry vendor fair on Sat., Dec. 14 from noon-7 pm and Sun., Dec., 15 from 10 am-4 pm. Enjoy a festive environment within which to holiday shop, enjoy a cold or hot beverage as well as to support local businesses. For more info visit the event page at: www.stfrancisweston.org/events/eat-drink-and-shop-merry.

THE ST. THERESA CHRISTMAS CONCERT will be held on Sun., Dec. 15 at 4 pm. The choirs and soloists of St. Theresa Church, accompanied by Dr. Aymeric Dupre la Tour and directed by Dr. Carolina Flores. Admission: free will offering. For more info please call the parish office at 203.261.3676.

ST. ANN’S YOUTH GROUP is having their Christmas Party on Sun., Dec. 15 at 5:30 pm. Students from grades 6-12 are invited to join and bring a dessert to share. For questions email Mr. Tomasko at: salt@stanmomblackrock.com.

REDEMPTORIS MATER SEMINARY is having their second annual Christmas Concert on Sun., Dec. 15 at St. Anne Church in Bridgeport. Dinner will be served at 6 pm and the concert will begin at 7 pm. For more information email: events@rmbridgeport.org.

WOMEN, WINE AND THE DIVINE—A new women’s group is starting in Stamford for all women (over 21)! The nights will be from 7-30 pm (Mon., Dec., 16) at the house of the Marchettis (29 Carriage Drive South, Stamford). This event is sponsored by St. John’s Basilica. All are invited!

CATHOLIC YOUNG ADULTS OF GREATER DANBURY will gather for their Christmas Party on Thurs. Dec. 19. Bring some food to share and a gift for the white elephant gift exchange. The group will gather Tues., Jan. 7 at 6:45 pm for a Praise and Worship Holy Hour at Sacred Heart Parish in Danbury, followed by a social at a local eatery. On Wed., Jan. 15 at 7 pm the group will gather for Faith Formation and Discussion at Sacred Heart Parish Center in Danbury. The group will also gather on Fri., Jan. 24, at 6:30 pm for dinner at Two Steps in Danbury, followed by DJ ice skating at Danbury Ice Arena.

VATICAN II: THE POWER AND PROMISE discussions led by Deacon Brian Kelly will take place on the third Thurs. of every month through April 2020, St. Luke’s in Westport at 7:30 pm. Dates are as follows: Dec. 19, Jan. 16, Feb. 20, March 19, April 16.

EVENING OF LESSONS AND CAROLS—A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION a service of scripture, music and caroling will take place on Sun., Dec. 22, 7 pm at St. Philip Church in Norwalk. The combined choirs and instrumentalists of St. Philip and Assumption Church of Westport will be featured. A reception will follow at our Sacred Heart Parish. Admission is free; a good will offering will be taken up to support the work of the St. Philip Music Ministry. For more info, call the music director, Maria O’Kelly, at 203.847.4549.

DIACONATE DISCOVERY EVENINGS will be a consistent space to wonder, explore, pray and share with other men of faith regarding serving the Church as a Permanent Deacon. St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, Brookfield: Jan. 9.

SAINT JUDE PARISH in Monroe will be hosting a “Day With Mary” retreat on Jan. 18 from 8:45 am to 3 pm. It will be held by the Franciscan Friars to inspire love of our Lord through the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The retreat is free; bring a lunch bag and a friend. All are welcome! (In the event of inclement weather, check status at www.daywithmarywest.org; Snow Date is Jan. 25) For more info, visit stjuderc.org or email communications.stjuderc@gmail.com.

COME AND SEE if you are being called to a vocation in the Secular Franciscan Order. The Secular Franciscan Holy Spirit Fraternity invites everyone to St. Anthony of Padua Church in Fairfield at 9:30 am on Sat., Jan. 18 with Fr. Michael Boccaccio. After Mass, there will be a social and meeting held in the Parish Hall. All are welcome! For further information, call Fran Karpie, OFS, at 203.452.7040 or paxjc@aol.com.

JOIN FATHER BRIAN GANNON for an amazing pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Trip is from Feb. 3-12, 2020 for only $3698 per person. Price includes round trip economy air, all meals, sightseeing, transfers and most meals. Call Virginia at 203.402.0632 or email vdeda@cruseplanners.com for more information or to book.

SAVE THE DATE International Speaker Jeff Cavnis will be speaking at St. Francis of Assisi in Weston on his conversion story on Fri., March 20 from 7-8 pm and on taking your faith to the next level on Sat., March 21 from 9-2 pm. This event is sponsored by the St. Francis Women’s Guild. For more info email: womensguildafa@gmail.com.

ON APRIL 1, 2020 CENSUS DAY will be observed nationwide. By this date, every home will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Government Census. Once the invitation arrives, each household should respond by phone, mail, or online. More information about the upcoming census may be found at 2020census.gov/en.html.

SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE TO HOLY LAND, ITALY AND MEDITERRANE—Sept. 14-28, 2020 NY/ NY PRICE: $4,399.00. (Including: airline tickets, taxes, first class hotels, breakfast and dinner daily, sightseeing, transportation to JFK, tips. For reservation please contact Fr. Marcel St. Jean, Christ the King Tribunal, 203.434.7208 or email: marcellaintjean@gmail.com.

84TH ANNA FUSCO PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY SHRINES OF CANADA—Join Fr. Michael Novajovsky to visit the Holy Shrines of Canada from Mon., July 13th—Thu., July 17 $650 per person, double occupancy. Passports required. For more information call Michelle Rowe at: 203.218.6882 or email: orapro-nobi20@gmail.com.

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LAP

St. Jude’s Novena

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

Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us.

St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us.

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

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

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