



# FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

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## Back to school plans

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*More than 8,000 students in the 26 diocesan schools throughout Fairfield County will return to in-person classes in September.  
Photo by Theresa Sciallo*

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# Commencements

## Celebrated safely amidst pandemic

By **ELIZABETH CLYONS**

FAIRFIELD COUNTY—The coronavirus pandemic has posed unique challenges for all. For the Class of 2020, this meant not getting to enjoy the usual rites of passage as they reached the culmination of their either middle or high school years. Schools throughout the diocese found innovative ways to still celebrate their students—through social distanced graduation ceremonies, giving students the opportunity to take pictures with their family on campus, and more. Here are just a few snapshots of graduation ceremonies in a pandemic.

### St. Rose of Lima

NEWTOWN—St. Rose School's eighth-grade graduation ceremony took place on Friday, June 26 in the school parking lot. Mr. Gjoka, principal, Mrs. Petrillo, eighth-grade homeroom teacher, Mrs. Bokuniewicz, dean of student life and Msgr. Bob, pas-

achieved a 100 percent college acceptance rate, with 99 percent going on to four-year schools, and earned for themselves over 25 million dollars in scholarships and tuition assistance.

The Blessing and Conferral of Diplomas was held at Dalling Field on the school's campus. Parents were confined to their cars, while the graduates were socially distanced in masks on the lower field, in conformance with the CDC and State of Connecticut guidelines. During the ceremony, pre-recorded videos from Ms. Vicki A. Tesoro, first selectman of the Town of Trumbull and Mr. Christopher

graduating eighth grade class. Featured commencement speakers were Clara and Gerry Davis, parents of a graduating student and Stanley Steele, school principal. The event included a Mass celebrated in the church parking lot and homily offered by Our Lady of Fatima Church pastor, Father Reginald Norman.

The graduates will attend the following high schools in the fall (listed alphabetically): Fairfield College Preparatory School, Immaculate High School-Danbury, Lauralton Hall-Milford, New Canaan High School, Norwalk High School, Notre



tor, along with the class parents, worked very hard to make the celebration possible despite these different times.

Chairs were arranged alphabetically for every student and their parents. The ceremony was limited to parents and siblings only to adhere to safety measures. Every student and guest wore a mask.

There are 24 graduates, all going off to a variety of high schools including Newtown High School, Immaculate High School, St. Joseph High School, Canterbury, Fairfield Prep, Hopkins School and The Gunnery. Several of the students received merit scholarships based on their entrance test scores.

### St. Joseph High School

TRUMBULL—St. Joseph High School conferred diplomas upon 213 students on Saturday, July 11, 2020. The Class of 2020

Wilson, chairman of the board of St. Joseph High School, offered their congratulations and best wishes to the Class of 2020.

Your graduation is not like any other. But then the Class of 2020 is unlike any other," remarked recently retired head of school, Dr. William Fitzgerald during his speech. "Ironically, in February, we were talking about how to get the iPhones out of your hands. Today, we are looking to you—the social media generation—to understand what continuous learning is all about. This spring has showed us, that in many ways, this is already your world and we are just catching up."

### Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Academy

WILTON—On Friday evening, June 12, 2020, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Academy held commencement exercises for its

Dame High School-Fairfield, Saint Joseph High School-Trumbull and Wilton High School.

### Sacred Heart, Greenwich

GREENWICH—Sacred Heart, Greenwich graduated 82 young women on June 5, 2020. "Whether in the classroom, on the turf, in the chapel, at the anchor desk, in the lab or behind the podium, the graduating Class of 2020 accomplished so much at Sacred Heart Greenwich," says Pamela Juan Hayes, Sacred Heart Greenwich alum, Class of '64. "We're especially proud to see these talented students matriculate to strong colleges and universities that reflect their individual academic interests and passions so closely. We look forward to seeing how far their academics, faith and commitment to others takes them in the future." ■

# Diocesan Schools

## Diocese releases re-opening plan

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—Students in Catholic schools throughout the diocese will return to the classroom for in-person learning this Fall, according to Dr. Steven Cheeseman, Superintendent of Schools.

Dr. Cheeseman made the announcement in a re-opening plan released to parents, students and faculty on Thursday, July 9.

Dr. Cheeseman said that since announcing the plan diocesan schools have seen an increase in applications with new people moving into the area and concerns about the ability of public schools to re-open in the Fall.

The plan calls for the entire network of schools, Pre-K through grade 12, to resume in-person classes, five days a week based on all the public health and safety guidelines issued by the CDC and the State of Connecticut.

Dr. Cheeseman said that barring a resurgence of the virus or a change in state policy, the schools are preparing to welcome more than 8,000 students in its 25 school buildings throughout Fairfield County.

“As we wait with great anticipation to see how this pandemic will play itself out over the next few months, we are left with many unanswered questions. What is abundantly clear, however, is that our students need to return to the classroom in the Fall.”

The theme of the plan is “We face it together,” and the document focuses on faith, academics, community and empowerment. It covers a wide range of topics related to returning to school including the use of face coverings, physical distancing, sudden closures if necessary, temporary home instruction, and resources for students, parents, faculty and staff.

“As we look toward the 2020–2021 school year, we face obvious challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The re-opening document contains some of the guidelines that we will follow so that, working together, we can meet those challenges,” said Dr. Cheeseman.

In addition to the printed plan, which can be downloaded online, the superintendent also sent a video message to parents and members of the school community.

“We appreciate your patience as



we worked diligently to finalize this document. These guidelines were created with every student, parent, faculty and staff member in mind. It is expected that these guidelines will need to adjust as time goes by and conditions change,” he said, of the 14-page document.

Dr. Cheeseman said the plan recognizes the need for students to attend school in-person to the degree that health conditions allow.

“As such, we have developed plans to increase the safety of everyone in our schools by changing how we use our space and implementing new practices that allow for personalized learning during times of pandemic,” he said.

Distance learning will still be a component at the local Catholic schools, as well as a contingency plan for closing one or more buildings if infection rates rise, but in-person education will be the mainstay in most cases.

Every Catholic school within the diocese has considered the new guidelines and will be expected to implement them based on feasibility, limitations of their setting, and student and teacher needs, he said.

The schools are also fully prepared to resume Distance Learning if necessary and have developed a contingency plan for closing one or more buildings if infection rates rise. However, Dr. Cheeseman believes that in-person education will be the mainstay in most cases.

In May, we created a pre-school and a K-12 task force group of school and diocesan teachers and leaders who, informed by parent and teacher focus groups and interviews, have created a plan to ensure that our schools are prepared to welcome students back in the Fall.

The task force had as its primary focus the safe return of students to a full five-day schedule of in-person instruction, while also planning for the possibility of having to make a fluid transition

to a more robust distance learning plan. Additionally, the groups worked on the creation of a hybrid model for students who either can not immediately return to school in the Fall or who may have to learn at home temporarily at some point in the year.

Dr. Cheeseman said the schools office will modify as necessary and as it is updated, the new version will be posted on the schools’ website.

(To read the schools reopening plan visit [www.dioceseofbridgeportcatholicschools.com/coronavirus-reopening-plan](http://www.dioceseofbridgeportcatholicschools.com/coronavirus-reopening-plan).)

### Elements of the Schools re-opening plan

- Catholic schools will follow the state and CDC guidelines to limit the spread of the coronavirus and keep the school community safe
- In order to accommodate social distancing requirements, most of the furniture and materials have been removed from the classroom
- Students will be guided by signage and markers on the floor
- Freestanding hand sanitizers will be placed throughout the school
- Lunches will be served as desks or students will brown-bag it at their desks
- Grades will be organized into “cohorts” to reduce exposure between different school groups within the buildings
- Classroom windows will be open where possible and fans will be in use
- Classrooms will be sanitized daily
- Through an association with “My Catholic Doctor,” each school will provide a telemedicine service that allows school staff, students and parents to speak with a medical professional during school hours
- Each school will designate a “wellness room,” where a student can be temporarily isolated if he or she displays symptoms, should a student display symptoms of a fever, cold or infection.
- A social worker will be available to meet the social and emotional needs of our students
- Volunteers and visitors will be restricted from entering the building

# Foundations in Education

## COVID-19 tuition assistance

BRIDGEPORT—The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting virtually every area of life for so many. In response, an anonymous donor to Foundations in Education has provided funding for COVID-19 Emergency Tuition Assistance for elementary school families in the Diocese of Bridgeport Catholic Schools who are suffering from the negative economic impact of the pandemic.

This incredibly prescient and generous gift is a welcomed and much needed addition to Foundations in Education, which has already awarded over \$2.3 million from the Bishop's Scholarship Fund in tuition assistance for the coming school year.

Foundations in Education is now accepting applications to the COVID-19 Emergency Tuition Assistance Fund. Families of K-8 students who have experienced loss of job, loss of income, COVID related medical costs, or other unanticipated financial hardship resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic are eligible to apply.



"This gift is truly an answer to our prayers. Many of our families applied for assistance before the pandemic even hit. Imagine the elevated need resulting from the economic consequences facing our families because of business closures and the necessary state shut down. We pray that this assistance is enough to help ease the burden for our families and help keep their children in school," commented Holly Doherty-Lemoine, executive director of Foundations in Education.

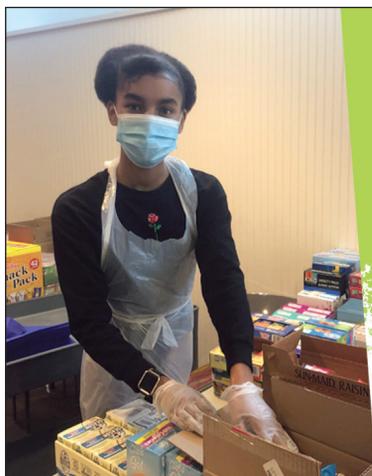
Within the first week of

announcing the fund, Foundations in Education received over 100 applications for tuition relief assistance.

"Things are moving fast, but we want to be able to respond quickly so our families can make their decision to keep their children in our Catholic Schools, which we believe will provide students the stability, support and guidance they need to navigate these unprecedented times," Holly further commented.

Applications to the COVID-19 Emergency Tuition Assistance Fund will be accepted until all funds are awarded. Details about the program and how to apply may be found on the Foundations in Education website: [www.foundationsineducation.org/bishop-scholarship-fund](http://www.foundationsineducation.org/bishop-scholarship-fund).

Individuals or organizations interested in donating to this fund may do so on the Foundations in Education website at [www.foundationsineducation.org/donate](http://www.foundationsineducation.org/donate), or by contacting Megan Quinn, Assistant Director of Development at 203.416.1671. ■



Young adults have answered the call to service by volunteering to help others during this time of crisis.

## ANNUAL CATHOLIC EMERGENCY APPEAL

Now more than ever the Annual Catholic Appeal allows us to continue the mission of the Church and provide for those in need.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began the Annual Catholic Appeal supports:

- Catholic Charities serving twice the amount of nutritious meals each day at our soup kitchens and other non-profit programs and homeless shelters, serving over 1.3 million meals annually
- Meeting the demand for increased counseling services
- Providing tuition assistance through the Bishop's Scholarship Fund to 1,450 students in need
- Celebration of Mass and liturgies online
- Hospital Chaplains and deacons on the frontlines

Please help us meet the need!

MAKE A GIFT TODAY TO THE  
**EMERGENCY APPEAL**  
[www.2020ACAbbridgeport.com](http://www.2020ACAbbridgeport.com)  
or call **203-416-1479**



# Annual Catholic Appeal

## Retired executive reaches out to faithful, one phone call at a time

By **JOE PISANI**

After retiring as director of sales and marketing for Eli Lilly and Company 15 years ago, Ford Lynch walked into the Catholic Center of the Diocese of

from a list he has been given by the Development Office. Since he began, he has made more than 1,000 calls.

“I call up folks on the list and tell them, ‘This is a ‘thank you’ call for your support and to let

schools, and the work the priests do,” he says.

People are encouraged by his phone calls and often write down the information about the services. They are also grateful for the recognition and to know the Church



Bridgeport looking for work...and he got it. Plenty of it.

“I was looking for some way to give back, so I went to see the head of development and asked, ‘Do you need any help? I’ll do whatever you want.’”

Lynch, a parishioner at St. Luke Church in Westport, has generously volunteered his services and done everything from working at the Thomas Merton Center to helping at the Catherine Dennis Keefe Queen of the Clergy Residence for retired priests. He has assisted pastors with the Annual Catholic Appeal and delivered materials throughout Fairfield County to the many charitable organizations the diocese supports.

“I do whatever I can,” says Lynch. “I deliver things to churches, driving around picking stuff up. Nothing is too big; nothing is too small.”

His latest project, which began several weeks ago, is a simple, yet powerful initiative on the part of the diocese to express its gratitude to the many people who have donated to the annual appeal.

Lynch sits at his desk at his home in Westport several days a week and calls parishioners

you know that during the pandemic, the diocese is continuing all its programs,” he said. “I call to thank them and tell them to stay healthy.”

The calls are not only thank you calls, but wellness calls. He asks parishioners how they are doing in the crisis and updates them on how the diocese is continuing its programs, such as online Masses, nutrition services providing increased meals, distance learning and children continuing their schooling, hospital chaplains with patients where families were unable to see their relatives, and faith and sacramental programs.

Many of the people he reaches out to have questions. Some even share the struggles they are facing during the pandemic, so Lynch reminds them of the services the diocese provides and urges them to look on the website and not hesitate to seek help themselves.

“I want to thank them, but also remind them that we are here for them,” Lynch said.

“I can guarantee them their money has been well-spent since I have seen it firsthand, from the soup kitchens to the Blue Ribbon

cares about them during this crisis. Others ask if he has any information about when things will return to normal in their churches. And still others share stories of their personal hardship.

“I hear all kinds of stories. Some say, ‘My business is falling apart. Or I’ve been furloughed. Or I’m going to lose my job. Or I’m afraid what will happen to me in the future,’” Lynch said. “We are facing something that has never been seen in 100 years.”

Lynch, a native of Cambridge, Massachusetts, graduated from the College of Pharmacy at Northeastern University, before starting his career at Eli Lilly, the pharmaceutical company. He has been a committed lifelong Catholic.

“I have always gone to church...always, always, always and still do now,” he said. “I felt this was an opportunity to help the Church and other people. Then, once I got into it and saw how the contributions were spent helping people in Fairfield County, it fortified my belief that it was worth my time to be doing this.”

*(For information about the services the Diocese of Bridgeport offers, visit [www.bridgeportdiocese.org](http://www.bridgeportdiocese.org).)* ■

# Parish News

## Father Edicson named pastor of St. Joseph and St. Ladislaus

By JOE PISANI

NORWALK—When Father Edicson Orozco was named pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bridgeport in 2009, he faced many challenges. The church on the East Side of Bridgeport was confronting the likelihood of closing, there were financial problems, and the buildings needed serious repair. The church, he says, “was in very bad shape.”

But by working with the Brazilian, Haitian, Spanish and English-speaking communities of the parish, things turned around.

instead of working as two separate communities, we will be working as one. The purpose of this merger is to make the church stronger for the future, not just for the present. One of the things I want to let people know is that no changes will be made to damage or destroy what has been done. They will be done to make it better. People have to give me the chance to work with them even though this is something new.”

Both parishes combined will have Spanish and English-speaking communities and Haitians, Father said.

assisting Father Orozco as he prepares to assume his new pastorship on October 1.

Father Orozco is from Colombia, where he began his seminary formation before coming to the Diocese of Bridgeport in 1996. He spent a year at St. John Fisher Seminary and was ordained in 1999 by then-Bishop Edward Egan. Before becoming pastor of St. Charles Borromeo, he served as parochial vicar at St. Mary Parish in Stamford and St. Peter Parish in Bridgeport. He received his master’s degree in mental health and counseling from the University of Bridgeport in 2014 and worked as a counselor at LifeBridge Community Services in Bridgeport. Since 2017, he has been parochial vicar at Our Lady of Gaudalupe Parish in Danbury.

St. Ladislaus was founded to serve the Hungarian community that came to America and settled in South Norwalk around 1900. The cornerstone of the church was laid on Nov. 25, 1909 and Masses were celebrated in the church basement a year later. The church, built in the Romanesque Revival style by Hungarian architect Odon Lechner, was dedicated on June 30, 1912.

In 1895, St. Joseph was founded to serve the southern portion of Saint Mary Parish. Masses were initially celebrated at the Music Hall on South Main Street. On April 4, 1897, the cornerstone was laid for the church, built in the Gothic revival style and designed by architect Joseph A. Jackson.

Father Orozco expressed his gratitude to Bishop Caggiano and the Council of Deans for his appointment, along with his hope that the churches will serve the growing community of South Norwalk.

“All the pastoral services that we offer will bring us closer to God and be a beacon of light in the South Norwalk area,” he said. “A lot of people are moving into the area, and we can show them that following Jesus is to be one, just as he asked the Father to make us one in John’s Gospel. We will see how things go with the help of God, the protection of Our Lady, St. Joseph and St. Ladislaus because we have them working for us.”



With parishioners working together, the church survived and started to revive. During his six years as pastor of one of the most historic churches in the Diocese of Bridgeport, he enlarged the parking lot, repaired the roof and bell tower, installed chimes and returned the tabernacle to the center of the sanctuary. He also united the different communities of the parish in a common cause. Today, St. Charles is one of the most vibrant, culturally diverse parishes in the diocese.

“We did an excellent job, and all of us worked hard,” he recalls. “Even though we had a big debt, we brought it down and were able to do many things.”

As the recently appointed pastor of St. Joseph and St. Ladislaus parishes in Norwalk, which are soon to be merged, his new job will have challenges along with opportunities.

“We are not just talking about merging, we are talking about bringing together two beautiful communities that have been under the direction of two beautiful priests who have done a great job,” Father Orozco said. “But

“It is a blessing to have two churches; their buildings will be used to provide pastoral services and education,” he said. “It is going to be one community using two churches because in no respect will it be one taking over the other. We are bringing them together. I know that some people are afraid to face changes, but eventually those changes will be beneficial for everyone.”

In his letter to parishioners, announcing Father Orozco’s appointment, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano said, “I am confident that Father Orozco, with your collaboration and support, will carry the new parish forward with his calm leadership, his dedication and his holy example. You will find him to be a true spiritual father, who seeks only to serve and to bring others closer to Christ. Although he will be greatly missed at Our Lady of Guadalupe, I know he will find a warm welcome at St. Joseph and St. Ladislaus and be loved there as he has been in his other assignments.”

Bishop Caggiano also expressed his gratitude to Father Peter Lenox and Father Juan Gabriel Acosta for

# Catholic Charities

## Partnering to feed the hungry

By KATHY ANN GOBIN

DANBURY—Dozens of hot meals were distributed to families in Danbury through a collaborative effort by Catholic Charities and two local business owners.

“These meals are a lifeline for a lot of families,” said St. Peter Pastor Father Gregg Mecca. “It stretches a family’s budget a little farther and they get a substantial meal.” About 100 families were contacted by the parish and individual meals were prepared by the Amber Room Colonnade, a catering venue on Stacey Road.

“We are thankful to be a part of this and grateful to be able to do it,” said Douglas Polistena, who worked at the Amber Room for 12 years before becoming an owner in 2018. “It’s so important to give back.”

The meals were made possible by the private donation of a local business owner who read that the Amber Room Colonnade is keeping some employees working by accepting donations from businesses and non-profit organizations to prepare individual meals for distribution to people who are struggling due to the pandemic.

Catholic Charities is an important organization to the donor, so Polistena reached out to the organization and Catholic Charities reached out to Father Mecca to identify families that would benefit from having a free hot meal.

“It’s only one day but it is a good way to provide a hot meal to a number of families in need,” said Mike Donoghue, executive director, Catholic Charities of Fairfield County.

Polistena not only works with his staff to prepare the meals, which on this day, included chicken francese with rice, a vegetable and a side salad, but he also takes the time to personally deliver them to those in need. Earlier in the day he delivered meals to homeless members of the community who are temporarily staying at a local motel.

Despite thunder, lightning and a downpour of rain, volunteers from Catholic Charities, the Catholic Charities Morning Glory program and Polistena, happily distributed meals on Wednesday (July 22) from the Morning Glory van parked in the St. Peter church parking lot.

“For me this has an extra spe-



cial meaning because St. Peter’s was such a great part of my life,” said Polistena, a graduate from St. Peter School.

Families in cars stopped by, others walked, and parish volunteers picked up meals to deliver them to members of the community who are homebound.

Catholic Charities also dropped off meals at the Brazilian Community Center on Liberty Street to help serve members of Our Lady of Aparecida the Quasi-Parish officially recognized by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, earlier this year.

“This was a collaboration from a lot of parties coming together,” said Polistena, who, like many others, has had to reinvent his business model to survive during the pandemic. He says he expects his business to continue with this added function even when the coronavirus crisis is but a distant memory.

“It’s a win-win all around,” Donoghue said. “People in the community who are struggling at this time can have a hot meal and it keeps the Amber Room employees working during this difficult time.”

### *Dorothy Day House*

## Donation drive helps

RIDGEFIELD—Recently, Lukas Dapkus, a young adult parishioner of St. Mary’s in Ridgefield was inspired to collect much-needed items for those who depend on the Dorothy Day Hospitality House in Danbury.

In addition to feeding the hungry, hospitality shelters such as Dorothy Day House provide personal hygiene supplies to those in need. Following the coronavirus outbreak, the Dorothy Day House was forced to close and the nearly 100 people per day that depend on the Dorothy Day House experienced shortages of hygiene supplies.

On Saturday, June 27, Lukas and St. Mary’s in Ridgefield held a donation drop-off to collect much needed items to benefit the Dorothy Day Hospitality House.

From 10 am to noon, cars came through the St. Mary School parking lot with donations such as travel size shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste and soap, disposable toothbrushes and razors.

The donation drive was a great success!

The Dorothy Day Hospitality House has been feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless in the Danbury CT area since 1982 and is based on the Houses of Hospitality founded by Dorothy Day during the Great Depression. Dorothy Day Hospitality House serves 60-80 hot meals each afternoon and provides shelter to 16 people each night. The house is located on 11 Spring Street in Danbury.

(For more information visit: [dorothydaydanbury.org](http://dorothydaydanbury.org).)

# Parish News

## St. Catherine/St. Agnes holds Neighbor-to-Neighbor food drive

RIVERSIDE—Due to the huge and growing need, the Social Justice Committee of the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena and St. Agnes is continuing to help Neighbor-to-Neighbor by collecting food and other living essentials in a no contact format.

Until further notice, there will be a car or SUV with an open trunk in the parking lot across from St. Catherine's church on Tuesdays from 9-11 am. Please drop your bagged grocery donations in the trunk, and we will take them to Neighbor-to-Neighbor.

The committee delivered five trunks and back seats full of much-needed items.

Neighbor-to-Neighbor delivers to 700 households each week.

**Food items needed:** peanut butter and jelly, oatmeal, canned meats (chicken, chili, Vienna sausages, Chef Boyardi ravioli) tuna, canned fruit, black or red kidney beans (dried or canned), cereal, rice, soup



**Non-food items needed:** (which cannot be purchased with food stamps): brown paper grocery bags, toiletries, toilet paper, paper

towels, sanitary products, cleaning products, etc.

(For more information visit [www.stc-sta.org](http://www.stc-sta.org).)

## St. Peter's youth come together to worship and give back

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

DANBURY—Even during this difficult time, teens at St. Peter Church in Danbury have found ways to safely come together for worship and to give back to their

wiches for Dorothy Day House, and on Sundays to help with registration for next year's classes.

"Even in a pandemic, we can all still lend a helping hand!" says Mike Falbo, director of youth

be present, and some are involved in the liturgy as lectors and ushers.

"A special thank you to the parents for putting their trust in the Lord and bringing their children back to the church, allowing



community.

Teens who are a part of St. Peter's school leadership program (CREW) have been volunteering on Thursdays to help make sand-

ministry at St. Peter Church.

Every other week, some of St. Peter's high school and middle school teens participate in a private Mass just for them. Twenty teens are allowed to

the teens to receive Christ present in the Eucharist. As well as a special thank you to Father Mecca for taking time out of his Sunday to be with us!" Falbo says.

# Faithful mourn

## Recent passing of five priests

By **JOE PISANI**

In less than a week, two beloved priests who served at St. Peter Church in Danbury died, leaving a faith community in shock and mourning. The loss of Father Bernardo Rodriguez and Father Paul Merry, who were known for their compassion and love of Christ, created a void in the church that will be difficult to fill.

"We were devastated by the news," Father Gregg Mecca, pastor, said. "It was really a one-two punch for us. Everybody loved Father Merry, who was such a gentle, sweet guy, and no matter what he was going through, no matter how much pain he had, he was always smiling. And the death of Father Bernardo was a total shock to everybody. He embraced our Hispanic community, who loved him and had a close friendship with him."

Father Merry, 73, was a priest in residence at St. Peter and chaplain at Saint John Paul II Center for Health Care in Danbury, and Father Rodriguez, 66, was parochial vicar.

"Father Bernardo helped knit the Hispanic community together," Father Mecca said. "Before him, we didn't have someone here full-time. He was a true shepherd with them every week, and they came to him for confession and counseling. For the first time, they had a real shepherd and they loved him and embraced him. We lost him all too soon."

"Everybody loved Father Merry," Father Mecca said. "People knew he was sick and that he was fighting cancer, but his death still came as a big shock."

As the pandemic first took hold in Fairfield County, the diocese lost its beloved "priest brothers," Msgr. Roger J. Watts and Canon Albert W. Watts who died within two weeks of each other at the end of April and beginning of May. (The full obituary for the brothers, who were ordained together on June 5, 1959, was published in the May issue of *Fairfield County Catholic*.)

In recent months, the Diocese of Bridgeport also lost Father Stephen J. Balint, 81, Father William Verrilli, 68, and Father Jose A. Fernandez, founder and first pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Danbury,

who died on March 13 in Spain.

Vickey Hickey, administrator of the Catherine Dennis Keefe Queen of Clergy Residence in Stamford, who has known many retired priests in her 20 years at the facility said, "You never know half the things they accomplished in their mission until you read their obituary and say to yourself, 'Oh my goodness, I had no idea he did all that.'"

She recalled Father Balint as a "silent do-gooder" who had many friends at St. Ladislaus Church in Norwalk, where he was resident priest for almost 40 years. He coordinated the Hungarian Ministry and celebrated Mass in Hungarian there and at St. Emery Church in Fairfield.

"He was very special because he was very humble and loved being a priest," she recalled.

"Every time he went into the hospital, his friend Bob would call and the priests here would pray for him. I would send him cards signed, 'Your Brothers at Queen of Clergy' so he would know that people were thinking about him. Sometimes I sent him a Valentine's card just so he felt he was not forgotten."

She recalled his work as the coordinator of Catholic Boy Scouts in the Norwalk-Ridgefield area. A former Eagle Scout, he was council chaplain for the Pomperaug Council of the Scouts and received many honors and awards for his service to the Connecticut Yankee Council.

Hickey also knew Father Merry well and says, "His last name described him perfectly, and when he talked to you, he would look you right in the eye, and you were the most important person in his life. He didn't look behind you, he didn't look over you, he gave you all the time you needed."

Hickey's aunt was a resident at Saint John Paul II Health Center, where Father Merry was chaplain.

"The residents called him 'The Mayor' of the center," she said. "He was just so wonderful. He would say Mass and walk around talking to people. On the days I couldn't go to see my aunt, I would call him and ask if he could visit her and cheer her up and he would."

She said, "He was a very humble man who touched so many people. You didn't even have to talk to him. Just his presence showed you his love."

She stood at the back of the

church during his funeral at St. Peter's and said he was buried in a simple Trappist casket, a plain box with no lining and a cross on top of it. She she cried when she read the online guest book from Jowdy Kane Funeral Home, where people recalled the lifelong impact he had on them.

One friend wrote, "I could go on and on with stories of his acts of kindness toward others as my parishioners could do as well. Though he was a man of small stature, he was a 'giant' with a big heart with those who came in contact with him. It never ceases to amaze me how one life can have such a positive effect on so many other lives."

Father Rodriguez, who was born in Catalonia, Spain, studied for the priesthood in Barcelona and was ordained in 1980. He worked in prison ministry in Spain, Panama City and Connecticut.

"Father Bernardo's ministry was varied and demonstrated his care for the least of our sisters and brothers," Father Mecca said. "He left parish ministry to minister for a while to migrant workers, hospital patients and once again, inmates for many years at Bridgeport Correctional Facility and Garner Prison. He was quickly embraced by our Hispanic parishioners. He elevated the celebration of the liturgy and brought to it excellent preaching...Father Bernardo went where there was human need and brought God's love and living-giving Word."

In recent years, he suffered from poor health and in April contracted COVID-19 and was hospitalized.

Father Mecca said that after Father Rodriguez' passing, his sister requested that his remains be returned to Spain, but she changed her mind and wrote through her son that Father chose the United States as his country and "Let him be buried there."

"He will be buried at the Priest's Circle at St. Peter's Cemetery in Danbury, where he would want to be," Father Mecca said.

Father Verrilli was remembered by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano for "his commitment to lifetime learning and faithful service as an educator and a judge in the diocesan Tribunal. A Bridgeport native, he attended Blessed Sacrament School and Madison School and graduated from Fairfield College

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

# Sr. Melinda Pellerin

## ‘We are at a crossroads’

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—The first of several webinars being hosted by The Leadership Institute, the diocesan Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism and the Apostolate for Black Catholics, titled “Conversations About Race” kicked-off Thursday featuring Sr. Melinda Pellerin.

“We are at a crossroads in this nation,” said Sr. Pellerin, “the choice of which path we take is ours. Where are we to go? As people of faith we need to rely on the Word of God.”

Sister explained that, as Catholics, the foundation of everything we do is Scripture. Much of Sister’s webinar was centered around the story of the Samaritan Woman at the Well in the Gospel of John. She explained how at the time of Jesus many racial groups held preconceived notions about each other—therefore, Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman shows just how much Jesus was willing to go to the peripheries. “John’s theme in the gospel is the foreigner, the outcast, the poor,”

Sister said. “Jesus enters into relationship with an outsider, a woman, a member of a minority group. This is our teachable moment. He sees this woman’s worth, there is no hesitation in his love for her humanity.”

Sister Pellerin did not hesitate to call out injustice. “Our black brothers and sisters have been persecuted in this country for over 400 years,” she said. “This is the African American legacy in the United States. We need to enter into the conversation honestly and speak out about race. We must be willing to engage. To meet one another where we are, to create our ‘Well’ experience.”

Sister stressed the importance of learning to see our neighbor as ourselves. “Engaging in dialogue is never easy,” she acknowledged.

As a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Pellerin has a focus on right relationship with others. “We need to see the life in another person and realize that their life matters just as much as our life matters.”

“How do we move towards love of our neighbor?” Sister asked. “We must engage.” She explained that without proper

knowledge, effective communication is not possible. “That is why I encourage you to all engage in these webinars. That is why we are all here today.”

Sister said that meeting our neighbor at the Well requires calling out racism for what it is—a sin. “Like the Samaritan woman, we unburden ourselves enough to begin to understand each other. We need to understand how deeply seeded systemic and structural



racism is. The Church must ask how does racism play a part in the great divide, in the median income in two communities.”

During the Q&A session following the webinar, a listener asked what to say when an individual gives the response “All Lives Matter” to the statement “Black Lives Matter.” Sister responded, “If we really practiced ‘All Lives’ we wouldn’t be in the state we are today.” She followed up her statement saying, “we must all be willing to confront the hatred. The Church must speak out. Our Pope calls the struggle to end racism a pro-life issue, and that’s indeed what it is.”

When asked what one’s next steps should be, Sister said, “You must act for social justice. Transformation is a powerful thing. The Samaritan woman got up, went into town, and she preached.”

Sister implored listeners to read and learn from the perspective of people of color. “Your courage may cause you pain,” she said. “You may lose friends. Pray for those who may try to use your commitment to racial justice as a weapon against you. We must unconditionally stand for our brothers and sisters.”

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano posed the question, “where is the face of racism in our own Church?”

Sister Pellerin stressed the importance of our Church leaders calling out racism from the pulpit.

At the closing of the webinar, Dr. Patrick Donovan, director of The Leadership Institute encouraged listeners to visit the Institute website for resources and recordings of each webinar.

The webinar series, produced by the diocesan Leadership Institute, features talks by teachers and pastoral ministers and will run through September 3. The talks will be live-streamed at 1 pm each Thursday and then rebroadcast at 7 pm each evening, with a question and answer sessions moderated by a member of the diocesan ad hoc committee against racism.

**About Sister Melinda:** Sister Melinda Adrienne Pellerin took her final vows of chastity, poverty and obedience Oct. 13 as a Sister of St. Joseph of Springfield after 10 years of discernment and formation during which her varied ministries included working with children in a day care in Kansas, starting a sewing program at a sober living house in Chicago and directing the SSJ’s Homework House in Holyoke.

She was baptized at St. Michael’s Cathedral in Springfield and attended the former Holy Family Parish and School and the former Notre Dame High School. She earned a degree in history and secondary education at Annapolis College in Woodstock, Conn., and a master’s degree in educational technology from Lesley College.

A retired public school teacher, Sr. Melinda taught in Massachusetts at the middle and high school levels. She taught the International Baccalaureate Program at Springfield’s High School of Commerce and criminal justice at the Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy. She also coached a mock trial team that was the first inner city team to go all the way to finals in Boston, and in 2004 she was the Massachusetts Teacher of the Year.

(To register to join the “Conversation About Race,” visit the Leadership Institute: [www.formationreimagined.org](http://www.formationreimagined.org). To view all of the resources and information about joining the conversation: [www.formationreimagined.org/conversations-about-race-main](http://www.formationreimagined.org/conversations-about-race-main).)

# We Stand With Christ

## Parishioner makes music of 'We Stand With Christ'

By **JOE PISANI**

TRUMBULL—When Anna Bendiksen was a teenager growing up in Rochester, her dream was to be an opera singer, so she began formal voice training, along with her studies in Russian. As she tells the story, her voice instructor discreetly suggested she

Stand With Christ campaign of the diocese.

"We are incredibly grateful to Anna for offering her hymn and reflection about our campaign. It highlights our central theme of standing with our neighbors," Robert O'Brien, capital campaign director said. "We Stand With Christ is more than just a capital

order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ, the Church needs art. Art must make perceptible, and as far as possible attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God. It must therefore translate into meaningful terms that which is in itself ineffable."

Nestled among her creations,



stick with Russian.

She did and eventually earned degrees from Bryn Mawr College and Yale University in Slavic languages and literature.

Anna, who grew up singing and playing the piano, is a writer, poet, and author of hymn texts. A convert to Catholicism from Anglicanism, she is a member of the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull. Since she was received into full communion with the Catholic Church at the 2019 Easter Vigil, she has written several dozen hymns set to traditional melodies. One of her most recent is titled "We Stand With Christ," in recognition of the Diocese of Bridgeport's capital campaign.

"I was just taken with the phrase, 'We stand with Christ,' and it sounded to me like the title of a song," she said. "Then, it occurred to me that it would fit a tune in the public domain, the old Welsh tune 'Ar Hyd y Nos,' or 'All Through the Night.' So I sat down and wrote it. Thank goodness for music writing software." She later gave the hymn to We

campaign. It's been an opportunity to personally reflect on our roles as the hands and feet of Christ in our communities."

Patricia Hansen, director of development operations, said, "We are encouraging parishes still running the campaign to play Anna's hymn at Mass or at any future campaign receptions."

"To me, it is all about joy," she said. "We are an Easter people and our song is 'Alleluia.' But we are also a Christmas people and our song is 'Peace on Earth, good will to all.' I want to bring Christmas to the lives of other people, and peace is not really peace if it is not combined with God's justice."

She doesn't write the music to her compositions because by her own admission, "I am a horrible composer." Instead, she borrows music from traditional sources, which she finds in her collection of hymnals.

In the folder that contains her hymns, Anna keeps a copy of a 1999 "Letter to Artists" by St. John Paul II, which has inspired her writing. It says in part: "In

she also keeps "The Prayer of a Christian Writer," which she wrote, and before starting a new project, she always remembers to pray it:

"Lord Jesus Christ, Incarnate Word,  
I do not ask for influence, riches or fame.  
I ask to be a vessel of Your grace, to love as Your Sacred Heart loves,  
and to be known by You, my truest friend.  
Help me to proclaim Your truth courageously,  
Your goodness kindly,  
and Your beauty selflessly,  
that bearing with cheer the taunts of the world,  
I might serve as witness to Your life, death and resurrection.  
Amen"

And what about Anna's first love of opera? Even though she may not be singing in the Metropolitan Opera production of "Don Giovanni," she is diligently at work on a Christmas libretto for the holiday season. ■

## Local News

## EDITORIAL

Pandemic has shaken  
parish life

According to a survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University and reported by Catholic News Service, nearly every U.S. Bishop said that the coronavirus pandemic has seriously affected the celebration of the sacraments and disrupted parish life.

Confirmations, First Communion, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and other sacramental preparation were the ministries most often cited by the bishops as being affected.

In addition, the morale of priests, lay ecclesial ministers, deacons and chancery staff has been affected as parishes remain a long way from a return to normal in terms of Mass attendance, ongoing formation and social and educational activities that make up parish life.

Regarding finances, the bishops said they were concerned that the loss of income from Sunday collections would have a devastating impact on parishes. Likewise, they worried about the effect of increased unemployment on family life and the viability of Catholic schools as parents struggle to pay tuition.

While the Diocese of Bridgeport has experienced many of the challenges outlined in it has been blessed by the leadership of Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, the sacrificial witness of priests, religious and lay ministers, and the generosity of donors whose contributions have enabled diocesan ministries to feed the poor, provide scholarships for school children and respond to needs within parishes during this time of crisis.

To be certain, we have many challenges ahead in the safe re-opening of schools, the gradual return to full activity in parishes and the successful completion of the Annual Catholic Appeal. Yet there is much to be hopeful about as we move forward together in faith and service.

Summer Decisions,  
Winter Consequences

*The following reflection originally appeared on Bishop Frank Caggiano's Facebook page. Follow the bishop for daily reflections and weekly videos.*

"There is an old saying in my parents' Italian dialect that referred to August as the "head of winter." For a rural, agrarian society, the meaning was clear. August was the time when preparations began for the coming winter months, to ensure that everything was ready. The first chore was to accumulate firewood that was needed to keep the kitchen fire burning all winter long. Many other preparations followed.

In our modern, urban world, we consider August the apex of the "lazy days of summer." Ordinarily, these weeks saw many of us take our summer vacations, do some work around the house or simply relax from the frantic pace of life before the start of a new school year. I think it is fair to say that the winter would ordinarily be far from all of our minds.

This year, however, things may be different. In fact, the decisions that you and I now make regarding how to respond to the pandemic will have a profound impact on the shape of the upcoming fall and winter months. The lazy days of summer should not be an excuse for anyone to drop their guard or relax their vigilance against the many ways in which the virus can be transmitted. We must always keep in mind the grave consequences that will result if we disregard the future effects of the actions we take right now.

The safety measures we have been asked to observe are not designed solely to keep us safe. They are also primarily focused on keeping our neighbor safe, especially the vulnerable in our midst, which is a mandate that flows from our Christian belief in the sanctity of all human life.

So it seems to me that past generations have an important lesson to teach us this summer. August is clearly at the "head of winter," setting the stage for the autumn and winter months ahead. Let us do what is required of us with cheerful hearts. For to do otherwise will guarantee for all of us a long, cold, and bitter winter." ■



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

## RETIREMENT

DEACON RAYMOND J. CHERVENAK, from Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, Fairfield, to retirement. Effective date was July 23, 2020.

DEACON JOHN DEROIN, from Saint Mary Parish, Bethel, to retirement. Effective date was June 18, 2020.

DEACON DONALD NAIMAN, from Saint Joseph Parish, Danbury, to retirement. Effective date was July 7, 2020.

DEACON ROBERT E. MORRIS, from Diocese of Charlotte, NC, to retirement. Effective date is August 18, 2020.

*Reverend Francis T. Hoffmann  
Vicar for Clergy, August, 2020*

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# Editorial



## Come to the water

### 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](mailto:elizabeth.clyons@diobpt.org).*

I couldn't believe the news. As soon as I hung up the phone I stared out the window for a good ten minutes, letting it all sink in.

A single pipe burst ruined my beach vacation. A little background...my family and I take one week a year to go to our beach house in the summer—and that time is sacred to us, the closest we ever get to true peace.

With the coronavirus pandemic surrounding our every thought, tough decisions to be made and hard conversations to be had at home, I had been looking forward to this vacation since March, even just longing for a change of pace.

But when my family called to let me know of the flooded lower level and the 6-8 week renovation to follow, I couldn't help but feel devastated, like this lifeline that we looked forward to was being taken away from us.

My mom came up with a plan—we would stay a few days at a house down the road from ours that a family friend rented and spend one night at a hotel. This seemed like a good consolation, and at least we would still get to

go to the beach.

Let's just say, the rental wasn't what we expected, but we made the best of it for a few nights! Despite the fact that this was my vacation, I found it extremely difficult to relax. Moving from house to house to hotel, dragging everything back and forth, left my brain little time to fully tune-in to vacation mode. My mind kept returning to all the problems I had to deal with back home. No matter where we go, we take our problems with us, despite our intentions to leave them at the shore.

My brother and dad headed home after the first few days, but my mom and I couldn't tear ourselves away. With a bathroom hooked up in our newly de-floored beach house, we decided to stay—call it “an adventure.” I was determined to relax, even if I had to force myself.

It turns out it wasn't all that difficult once I really let myself settle in. We kept saying we'd “play it by ear” ...but we ended up staying most of the week.

There is something truly magical about getting to swim in the ocean every day. Salt water has

such amazing health benefits and my whole body could feel it. Maybe it was the sun, maybe it was the fact that it was just my mom and I, or maybe it was my conscious decision to leave my problems at the shore.

The Sunday following my vacation was the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. The first reading from Isaiah read:

Thus says the LORD:

All you who are thirsty,  
come to the water!

You who have no money,  
come, receive grain and eat;

Come, without paying and  
without cost,  
drink wine and milk!

Why spend your money  
for what is not bread;  
your wages for what fails  
to satisfy?

Heed me, and you shall eat well,  
you shall delight in rich fare.

Come to me heedfully,  
listen, that you may have life.  
I will renew with you

the everlasting covenant,  
the benefits assured to David  
(Isaiah 55:1-3).

Come to the water. Water is healing. Throughout Scripture, water is used as a symbol for healing, for being made new. When was the last time you let that healing water wash over you? Whether it be immersing yourself in the ocean, taking a long hike, reading a great book or cooking a nutritious meal? What can we do for ourselves during this time to ensure that we leave our problems at the shore?

Thus says the LORD:

All you who are thirsty,  
come to the water! ■

*Are you one of the over 14,800 donors to the We Stand With Christ Campaign?*

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

- **WHERE ARE WE NOW?** 70 parishes have completed their We Stand With Christ capital campaigns. Nine additional parishes are completing their campaigns in 2020-2021.
- **DISTRIBUTIONS?** \$26.0 million of capital campaign contributions have been distributed to parishes and the three foundations as of 6-30-2020 as approved by the We Stand With Christ Board of Directors.
- **HOW CAN YOU HELP?** Choose to fulfill your pledge online to save the costs of mailed remittances. Payments via credit card and direct debit can be made by visiting [www.GiveCentral.org/WSWC](http://www.GiveCentral.org/WSWC).
- **WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON?** The Annual Catholic Appeal, which was included in the first year of each parish's capital campaign, is currently underway for 2020. The Annual Catholic Appeal goals for the parishes were lowered this year based on the success of We Stand With Christ. Thank you for your continued support!
- **QUESTIONS?** We want to hear from you with any concerns or issues you are experiencing. Contact the campaign at 203.648.9050 or at [Campaign@WeStandWithChrist.org](mailto:Campaign@WeStandWithChrist.org).

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

# Leadership Institute

## Stuck inside with memories

By DR. PATRICK DONOVAN

I have an app that sends me “this day in pictures” reminders. Most days, I look at the photos and wonder where my youth or good looks went or I comment to my wife how fast the children are growing. Oftentimes, I send a few photos to the children to let them join in the reminiscing.

In the last several days, how-



ever, my inbox has been flooded with photos from Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Capernaum – all places I visited in 2019 with a group of young adults from the Diocese of Bridgeport. It was the second time The Leadership Institute sponsored such a pilgrimage and 2020 started off with the promise of a similar pilgrimage, this time to Greece and Turkey to walk in the footsteps of St. Paul. Next year, our pilgrimage would have headed to Rome to study early Christianity.

Then came the pandemic.

Our plan is still in place—a three year cycle – The Holy Land, Footsteps of St. Paul, Early Christianity—but now we will delay a year and pick it up again in 2021. If you are a young adult, keep an eye out next spring for registration information.

Now back to the photographs. There is one of the group huddled into the very small chapel where the Christ child was laid in the manger. It is the only site in the Church of the Nativity where a Catholic Mass can be held and the group of pilgrims cannot exceed 15. We just fit. Celebrating Mass together did not keep other tourists from trying to shove their way into the chapel or from taking pictures above our heads, but it was still a solemn moment for all of us as we sang O Come All Ye Faithful at the very spot where Our Savior lay helpless in the feeding trough.

Another pictures pops up and this time the group is at the Mount of Beatitudes, trying very hard to recite all the Beatitudes out loud. I remember the first year I took a group and the tour guide gave us the same challenge. He began: “How many of you can recite the first lines of the Constitution of the United States?” He asked.

The group responded in delight: “We the People of the

United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, ensure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare....”

Then he asked for the Ten Commandments. No problem.

Quite pleased with ourselves, we were silenced with the task: “So how many of you can recite the Beatitudes?” he asked. “After all, aren’t they the constitution of the Church?”

“There’s ‘Blessed are the merciful...’,” one person responded.

“And the one about the meek,” said another.

Ouch.

To be fair, I think we ended up getting about five of the eight. Try it sometime. It’s not an easy assignment and yet our guide was correct: the Beatitudes lay the foundation of our call to discipleship. How can we expect to live them if we cannot even remember them?

There is another photo of the group at Mass and this time, it brings tears to my eyes. It was on the feast of St. James, July 25th and we were crowded into the Holy Sepulcher, the tomb of Jesus, the place where John’s Gospel tell us: “At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” (John 19:41-42).

That day has been special to me for some time. In 1997, it was the day my father and I met St. John Paul II. I remember the bishop that was with us at the time asked my dad if an afternoon trip to the catacombs would be anticlimactic following the morning’s audience with the Holy Father. My father, always quick with his wit, smiled and said, “Bishop, I think after this morning the rest of my life will be anticlimactic.”

Dad died on the feast of St. James in 2011. His middle name was James. So, yeah, reading at Mass that morning in the Holy Sepulcher was a little overwhelming. I remember my good friend, Father Joe, who accompanied our group, commenting that saying the words of consecration at Mass and remembering the sacrifice of Jesus will never quite be the same after that morning.

The last photo to come up on my phone recalls the serenity of the Sea of Galilee, incredibly blue and appearing though a storm had just passed and the waters had only recently been calmed. The group took a boat ride across the sea, spending time in prayer and contemplating the significance of the Sea of Galilee in Sacred Scripture.

We discussed Jesus walking on water (Mark 6:45–53; John 6:16–21) and how, in Matthew’s version of the story (Matthew 14:22–33), Jesus invites Peter to leave the boat and come toward Him. When Peter steps out of the boat and heads towards Jesus, he is failed only by his lack of faith. We could relate to that. We talked about the feeding of the four thousand (Matthew 15:29–39) and the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10–17). Finally, we contemplated Jesus teaching the crowds gathered on the shore (Mark 4:1–34) and how he preached while standing in a boat on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 13:2).

Then, we danced. I have videos to prove that some young adults in our diocese are quite good at the Jewish dance, Havah Nagilah (“Let us rejoice”).

Even though the family is still somewhat stuck inside, I was glad to be reminded of this special time in my ministry and I look forward to the day when a group can return to distant shores to study our faith, journey like St. Paul, and return renewed in mind and spirit. ■

# Foundations in Faith

## COVID-19 grants announced

BRIDGEPORT—Foundations in Faith has announced that it will distribute funds for diocesan initiatives to combat racism and support faith formation programs, along with providing emergency funding to parishes suffering financial shortfalls as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Andy Aoyama, newly named chairman of the foundation's board of trustees, said it was necessary to be proactive and offer support to the parishes. The board approved \$200,000 to be disbursed to the parishes as part of the COVID-19 Emergency Fund from the St. Francis Xavier Mission Church Fund, supported by We Stand With Christ capital campaign.

Kelly Weldon, director of Foundations in Faith, said, "I'm very proud of Foundations in Faith and how the board responded to the crisis. We have now distributed \$210,000 to parishes that have been unable to collect monies the way they have for years and years."

The board also approved funding for anti-racism training in diocesan programs, following Bishop Frank J. Caggiano's call for the Church to work for justice and combat racism. Bishop Caggiano has been appointed to the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and created a similar diocesan committee, which recently held its first meeting.

The committee, which includes clergy and laity, will develop a strategy to respond to racism.

"It is my hope that the diocese will be a more just place—a place that welcomes everyone and allows opportunity to everyone, especially to come and know the Lord," he said.

At the initial meeting, Bishop Caggiano said Foundations in Faith has earmarked up to \$40,000 for initiatives, and the Committee Against Racism will draft a proposal for the board's consideration.

Among the programs being adopted are several webinars to advance the discussion about racism and cultural diversity. They will feature talks by experts from academia and ministry and run from July 30 every Thursday at 1 pm until September 3.

### Topics include:

- Race and the Catholic Church
- Race and Catholic Social Teaching



- How to have a conversation about race
- Beyond Black: Race and Multiculturalism
- Growing in Awareness and Knowledge
- Teaching Peace

A preliminary video will feature Father Reggie Norman, pastor of Our Lady of Fatima in Wilton and episcopal vicar for the Apostolate of African American Catholics. For complete details on the webinars and to register, visit The Leadership Institute's website at [www.formationreimagined.org](http://www.formationreimagined.org).

Weldon, who is a member of the committee against racism, said there is a direct connection between anti-racism training and faith formation.

"I'm passionate and committed to anything we can do to confront racism," she said. "COVID slowed us all down and made us watch that horrible video and listen to the stories that came out in response to George Floyd's death. We couldn't use day to day life to distract us from the harsh reality that racism is real, and it is killing people of color. We all must accept a level of responsibility."

Because of the coronavirus pandemic a number of St. John Paul II grant requests were withdrawn, and the board decided to earmark the unspent funds toward anti-racism education. The St. John Paul II Fund was established to support religious education, youth ministry and faith formation.

More recently, 17 parishes received \$66,800 in St. John Paul II grants for religious education programs, youth ministry and

other formation efforts. In addition, three grants totaling \$18,000 were awarded to the Leadership Institute, which offers opportunities for ministry personnel to learn the Catholic faith and discover new ways to shape the next generation of disciples in Fairfield County.

All the funded projects can be implemented online and are in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They will fund parishioners' access to Catholic Brain.com, a digital faith formation platform allowing families to access resources via videos, handouts, and worksheets; bulk Zoom subscriptions to help alleviate costs of the video conferencing tool to parishes, which have been encouraged to continue to connect virtually with young people and families; and the funding of book purchases for faith formation leaders in the diocese, complete with group online conversations with the authors.

Aoyama has asked board members to be advocates for each of the nine pastoral ministries that Foundations in Faith supports. This will allow board members to serve as contacts for the respective ministries and help shepherd them through the grant process.

"This is an important part of my mission as chair," Aoyama said. "It is exciting to be a part of Foundations in Faith because I think we can effect some real change at a critical moment in time where change is essential. I find the bishop's leadership so inspiring, especially the recent call to action and I'm so impressed with the staff of the diocese and the efforts they put into everything." ■

# St. Matthew Parish Center

## ‘A place to pray, work and play’

By JOE PISANI

NORWALK—St. Matthew Parish had a vision of creating a welcoming recreation center that would keep people of all ages connected to parish life the way past generations were. That vision is on the way to being fulfilled with a \$2.9 million facility expected to be

of people’s lives. It’s all for the good, all for God’s people.”

The project, which was designed by the architectural firm Doyle Coffin, is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Carl Lecher, the owner’s representative of Lecher Development, said, “The project is moving along in spite of the pandemic. There has been some

a community of faith, Monsignor said, is “to maintain the Church as the heartbeat of our longing for spiritual growth, service to others and social and family life.”

The recreation center will be the focus of athletic programs, team and league sporting events, exercise programs, movie nights, employer fairs, health fairs, bloodmobiles, yoga and



completed by the end of the year.

The Parish Life, Activity, Community and Recreational Center, which is a two-story, 18,000-square-foot facility, made possible by the We Stand With Christ capital campaign, will “provide the opportunity for more space to pray, to work and to play together. It will be a place for people to find a safe home to get to know one another and to grow together,” said Msgr. Walter C. Orłowski, VF, KCHS, dean and pastor.

The goal of the center is to invite parishioners and the community to make the Church the center of their lives by offering a multipurpose gymnasium with a full basketball court, an elevated walking track, a teen study center and a Newman Center for Catholic young people in college.

At the groundbreaking last June, Monsignor said, “As a pastor who comes from the old CYO leagues, I’m delighted to create a place for busy families to come together, to have fun, to offer basketball tournaments, soccer, volleyball, martial arts and boot camps.... We’re building on what we already have to give people the training space and programs they need to encourage health in body, mind and spirit. It’s all about creating a parish even more welcoming, even more alive and vibrant in faith than ever before—one that can be the center

difficulty communicating but it is moving along as well as we could expect.”

Lecher, whose son Steve owns the company, said, “We have a roof on and we are in the midst of having some additional engineering work done and looking at everything on the job to see if we can reduce the cost.”

Lecher, who with his wife Christine belongs to the parish, had been the contractor of construction and renovation done on the church some 15 years ago.

“This will be a beautiful facility and there will be a lot of activity in the gym. Monsignor had a great vision about how to get young people and other people into church, and this will serve that purpose,” he said.

The vision, which is articulated in materials explaining the project, is “to create a safe, welcoming and practical recreation space that will offer people of all ages the opportunity to engage in a variety of social, physical, intellectual and catechetical activities while remaining connected to our parish family.”

At a time when the Church is constantly competing with secular interests and pursuits, research shows there are 365,000 non-practicing Catholics and 140,000 students who don’t attend religious education programs in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

One of the greatest challenges as

spinning classes, and catechism and faith formation classes.

The parish, which began in 1957, currently has 8,000 registered parishioners.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, who attended the groundbreaking ceremony, said, “Many people will find their way to St. Matthew through the recreation center before they find their way to the church door.... This is really an historical moment in the life of a remarkable parish.”

In an effort to ensure St. Matthew is inviting to all those who enter, there is also a program underway to repair and renovate existing facilities to create a more welcoming parish than before. This includes replacing carpeting in the church along with upholstery and cushions on the pews and kneelers. The flat roofs will be repaired, and a new furnace and ventilation system will be installed in the chapel. In the Parish Center, renovations include replacing the existing air conditioning and updating the Welcome Center to create a more comfortable environment.

At the kickoff of the campaign, Msgr. Orłowski said, “This campaign is an opportunity to create a bridge to the future of what St. Matthew Parish can become. Our challenge is to make St. Matthew even more alive and vibrant in faith and the center of our lives.” ■

# Bishop's Online Mass

## Putting music to the Mass

By KATHY ANN GOBIN

BRIDGEPORT—Online Masses have given thousands of people the opportunity to not only worship together but also the ability to experience a variety of liturgical music to hear the word of God.

Lyndy Toole is one of many musicians who have accompanied Bishop Frank J. Caggiano during his Sunday online masses from

and I think it becomes a richer experience for them," said Dr. Patrick Donovan, director of the Diocesan Leadership Institute.

Lyndy says she selects songs that help make the liturgical passages memorable. "I want people to walk away thinking, 'I like that song and words out of the second reading or the homily. There's always a connection from the songs to the liturgy. I feel it and I want other people to

Beatles and U2, also listened to Irish and classical music and studied piano.

A self-taught guitarist, her skills flourished during her college years at the University of Notre Dame where all students were encouraged to not only listen to but participate in liturgical music. There was even a waiting list to participate in the dormitory folk choir.

The demand was so great she



the chapel at the Catholic Center in Bridgeport.

"It is a wonderful gift to me to be able to do this," Lyndy said. "I get so much out of it," she said adding that selecting the music for the masses is an honor.

"Each song is important to me," she said. "Sometimes I'll mull it over for a long period of time and sometimes it's a spur of the moment selection but always with the intention to be connected to the liturgy, easy on the ear and easy to sing for the congregation. I'm hoping people are singing at home along with me."

The diocese has made it easier for people to do just that by scrolling the words of the songs on the screen during Mass.

"By putting the words on the screen, we give the folks at home the chance to participate more fully in the liturgical experience

feel it too."

She said she specifically tries to choose songs for communion that are not overpowering and that have a recognizable melody.

"Music should connect to the liturgy and enhance, not detract from it," she said. "I am there to encourage others to participate in the mass through the music."

Collecting liturgical music, referencing annual liturgical planning magazines and attending liturgical conferences, including a virtual conference earlier this month, helps Lyndy to keep abreast of what composers are working on and any new music books that are coming out.

"I like to incorporate all different styles, from traditional to more contemporary because we are all different," she said.

Lyndy, who grew up listening to rock and roll music, the

didn't get to actively participate in her own dorm choir until her senior year. Undeterred, her passion for music led her to play guitar in other dorms and as fate would have it, she met her husband Deacon Patrick Toole, episcopal delegate for administration of the Diocese of Bridgeport. The retired IBM executive also shares her love of music and enjoys the cello, organ and clarinet.

Married two and a half years after meeting, they lived in North Carolina before moving to Connecticut and raising five children. Their children attended St. Thomas Aquinas in Fairfield where Lyndy spent five years as a volunteer developing and teaching music programs before being hired by the school where she continued to guide her musical charges for the next five years.

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

# Bishop's Online Mass

PUTTING MUSIC TO THE MASS FROM PAGE 17

The musical legacy continues in some of the couple's children and respective families (they now have two grandchildren) but mostly through her teaching at schools and summer camps which unfortunately have been suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic.

A music minister at St. Luke Parish in Westport, she welcomed the extraordinary opportunity to play during some of the bishop's online Masses on Sunday.

"It gives me so much joy when the bishop sings with me. People need to see that he is singing along as well. What it has made me do is connect more to the actual music the musicality of the piece and the words."

"I love that the bishop is trying to bring as much diverse forms of Catholic liturgical music to the general public," she said. Music from other artists including Dr. Bill Atwood, David Harris and Jane Lambert, reflects the many musical styles of the congregations in the diocese.

"All of the musicians bring such great passion to the small chapel where we gather," Donovan said. "As Bishop Caggiano often says, the music they provide offers, 'a bridge to the Beautiful One.'"

Reaching the entire congregation through music is important and it is especially important to get teens involved to encourage

the next generation to actively participate in Mass, Lyndy said.

Her own journey with music started at a young age. Although trained classically to sing and play the piano, when she was 10, she tried her hand at the flute before choosing to focus on the guitar which her father brought home after playing the instrument while serving in Vietnam.

When the family moved to Hawaii, her beloved piano and coach stayed behind and she picked up the guitar in earnest. This time, the lesson books were her coach and the nuns at St. Francis in Honolulu became her ardent supporters.

"The nuns were trying to get girls who were proficient, to play at mass. I said, 'I'll try,' and I just loved it."

Traditional music is important but Lyndy tends to favor the more upbeat contemporary music selections.

"Traditional melodies have been handed down through the years but by taking traditional hymns and playing them with different instruments you can breathe a more contemporary life into them," she said.

She enjoys the musical treasure hunt.

"I try to find songs that I'm not familiar with and listen to them," Lyndy said. "I also want to present music in such a way people want to listen to it and

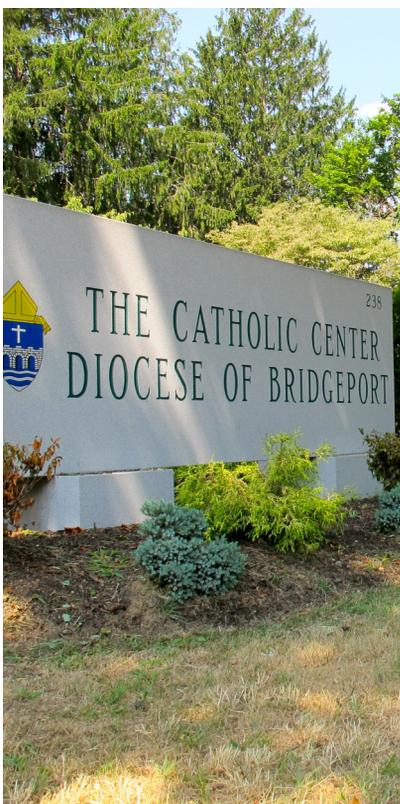
seek it out."

Music and music selection permeate all aspects of her life. As a kickboxing instructor at a local gym, she knows her music choices can help inspire and focus her class or distract from the task at hand. Understanding not everyone is going to appreciate all music styles, she is pleased to be a part of the bishop's mission to showcase a variety of musicians and liturgical music during the online Masses.

"I have been so grateful for the way the musicians plan and hours they put into this small celebration," Donovan said. "They know that for many, this is the only opportunity to celebrate Mass with their bishop and so great care is taken to include music that both adds to the beauty of the Eucharistic celebrations and engages those at home who miss going to Mass in their parishes."

Lyndy said she's adjusted to not playing in the company of a large congregation. The most challenging aspect of that she said was not audibly participating in the congregational responses during the Mass.

"Music is an expression of how you are feeling," she said. "The joy you get from participating is wonderful. It's isolating for everyone right now. You have to find joy somewhere else. This gives me a purpose and joy. This is fun." ■



## Catholic Center re-opens

Consistent with the general Business Guidelines issued by the State of Connecticut, The Catholic Center building re-opened for visitors on July 27.

In accordance with CDC recommendations, the diocese will continue to primarily operate with employees working from home.

However, detailed office protocols have been issued for those in the building including daily health checks, taking temperatures, and requirement for facemasks and social distancing. Daily cleaning and disinfecting protocols are also in place with continued enhancements to protect staff and visitors.

### Visitors Protocol:

- Visitors are welcome on Tuesdays and Wednesdays
- Visitors must be pre-registered using the Catholic Center Visitor Registration site
- The employee hosting the visitor must ask pre-screening questions about their health and travel
- All visitors will have their temperatures taken and will have the health and travel questions confirmed again before being permitted to enter
- Visitors must wear a face mask while in the building
- Meetings will be held in conference rooms to allow for social distancing

# Immaculate High School

## Appoints two to leadership positions

DANBURY—Immaculate High School announced that Denise Suarez of Bethel and Jeannie Demko of Danbury will assume new leadership roles at the Catholic college-preparatory school beginning July 1, 2020.

Denise Suarez has been appointed to be the director of admissions. Suarez is a 1987 graduate of Immaculate, and has served as the director of alumni relations since 2013. In that position she developed and continuously expanded Immaculate’s alumni program to reach and engage its ever growing base of over 7,000 alumni, including members of her own family.

“After thoroughly enjoying my work with our incredible alumni community over the last seven years, I look forward to serving my alma mater in this new role. I am excited to build upon the great work of our admissions department as I look to welcome the next generation of Immaculate students as director of admissions,” she said. “I can say without hesitation that the academic continuity, development of compassionate leaders and vibrancy of the Immaculate community have remained steadfast during these challenging times. There has never been a bet-



**Denise Suarez**  
Director of Admissions



**Jeannie Demko**  
Director of Alumni Relations

ter time to consider Immaculate and I look forward to sharing the mission, values and outcomes of an Immaculate education with prospective families,” Suarez added.

Jeannie Demko will serve as the school’s director of alumni relations. A 1988 graduate of Immaculate High School, Demko returned to Immaculate as event coordinator in 2018. In that role she

helped plan, organize and run special events including the annual Golf Outing, Spring Gala and Scholarship Breakfast.

“Working at Immaculate for the past two years has been an absolute joy. In my new role as director of alumni relations, I will have the privilege and honor to

work directly with our amazing network of alumni. Thanks to the leadership of Denise Suarez, our efforts in this area have never been stronger,” Demko said. “I am inspired and energized to continue creating pathways for alumni participation that advance the goals of IHS. As an alumna, parent of an alumnus and current parent I am passionate about the mission of Immaculate and have seen firsthand how alumni relations help benefit our students and contribute to their growth,” she noted.

Immaculate High School is a private, non-profit Catholic college-preparatory institution serving students from 28 communities in Connecticut and New York. Founded in 1962, Immaculate High School also allows students to focus on academic excellence, spiritual development, service to others and personal goals. Located in Danbury, Conn., Immaculate High School is part of the Diocese of Bridgeport’s school system. ■

**“Immaculate serves students from 28 communities in Connecticut and New York.”**

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- ✓ safe and nurturing environments
- ✓ COVID-19 emergency tuition assistance funds available
- ✓ Rigorous academic program
- ✓ Temporary at-home instruction option available

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- ✓ **Safe and nurturing environments**
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- ✓ **Returning full-time, 5 days a week**
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# Sacred Heart, Greenwich

## 82 young women graduate

GREENWICH— Sacred Heart, Greenwich graduated 82 young women on June 5, 2020.

Sacred Heart Greenwich is proud to recognize Valentina Grether as valedictorian and Caroline Badagliacca and Elisa

Salem N.Y. has spent ten years as a student at Sacred Heart. During her time at Sacred Heart, she was the co-editor of *Voices* publication, served as a music therapy volunteer with Alzheimer's patients, was a participant in

a Kairos retreat leader, Kumon Math and Reading instructor, George Washington Carver Community Center volunteer, White Plains Hospital step-down unit volunteer, CT Special Olympics volunteer, an altar server



VALENTINA GREETHER



CAROLINE BADAGLIACCA



ELISA HOWARD

Howard as co-salutatorians for the Class of 2020.

Valentina Grether of Riverside has spent eight years as a student at Sacred Heart. She played tennis and squash, was a freshman peer leader and served as a Eucharistic Minister. She will attend Brown University in the Fall.

"I chose Brown firstly because of the open curriculum," says Grether. "Since I plan on majoring in engineering, which has stricter requirements than other majors, it was really important to me that I still had as much flexibility as possible to pursue courses in all my other interests. Ultimately, Brown's open curriculum seemed ideal to extend my college experience to encompass not only my intellectual development, but also my growth as an individual. Another important factor was the collaborative culture at Brown, and the amazing opportunities that the university offers. Many of the current students I talked with highlighted the Brown UTRAs, which are undergraduate teaching and research awards for Brown students. Brown fascinated me because the students and faculty are always challenging each other to grow together in learning. Last but certainly not least, Providence is a great town for college students. Students always praise the art exhibits and other events available outside of Brown, not to mention a seemingly endless list of amazing Providence restaurants."

Caroline Badagliacca of North

Sacred Heart's science research program, a Regeneron Scholar for studying music and cognition, and the Girl Scout Gold Award recipient. She will attend Vanderbilt in the Fall.

"Upon first visiting Vanderbilt's campus, what stood out to me the most is the incredible balance the school possesses," says Badagliacca. "I knew when looking for a school I wanted a place that was academically rigorous, but still left room for other enrichment and Vanderbilt's programs, research possibilities, SEC sports, and boundless opportunities to be involved on campus were perfect for me. Additionally, one of my main focuses during my time at Sacred Heart has been working with those suffering from dementia and trying to use music to improve their quality of life. Not only does Vanderbilt have a music cognition laboratory, but the interdisciplinary nature of their academic programs, as well as my acceptance into the Curb Scholars Program, provided me with a unique chance to combine my interests in music, cognition, and business both in and out of the classroom."

Elisa Howard of Norwalk has spent two years at Sacred Heart. She was co-captain of Sacred Heart Robotics, Perspectives art editor, NY Medical College Summer Prostate Cancer research assistant, saxophonist in Sacred Heart Jazz Band, a participant in varsity track and field, varsity cross country, and varsity fencing,

and Eucharist Minister. She will attend Yale University in the Fall.

"I have always been fascinated by the innate intricacies of the human brain and nervous system," says Howard, "and Yale University's renowned research opportunities, including the First-Year Summer Research Fellowship, will enable me to explore unanswered questions of neuroscience. When applying to Yale, I was particularly inspired by the research of Professor Nenad Sestan, who revived cellular functionality in a pig brain four hours after its death. Through research in one of Yale's over 1,200 laboratories, I can investigate my own rather unconventional questions of the brain. At the same time, I am an aspiring neurosurgeon, and, through Yale's affiliations with the medical school and hospital, I may explore my surgical interests as an undergraduate student."

"Whether in the classroom, on the turf, in the chapel, at the anchor desk, in the lab or behind the podium, the graduating Class of 2020 accomplished so much at Sacred Heart Greenwich," says Pamela Juan Hayes, Sacred Heart Greenwich alum, Class of '64.

"We're especially proud to see these talented students matriculate to strong colleges and universities that reflect their individual academic interests and passions so closely. We look forward to seeing how far their academics, faith and commitment to others takes them in the future." ■

# Desert Fathers

## Priest explores ancient message

By **JOE PISANI**

TRUMBULL—During the third and fourth century, Christian men and women began leaving a corrupt society and going to the deserts of Egypt and Palestine in pursuit of holiness.

They became hermits, monks and ascetics who laid the foundation of modern monasticism. Their ranks included legendary figures who had legendary conversions like St. Mary of Egypt, who left behind a promiscuous life to follow Christ, and St. Moses the Ethiopian, a bandit who escaped to the desert fleeing the authorities...and finding Christ. And St. Anthony the Great, who gave away his family inheritance and went into the wilderness to live an ascetic life and became recognized as a founder of monasticism.

Centuries later, the stories and wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers are an enduring example for the modern era of what it means to follow Christ, says Father Philip G. Bochanski, author of "Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers: Ancient Advice for the Modern World." (The book, recently published by Tan, is available on Amazon.)

"The monks of the desert went out to the wilderness to be reshaped according to the image and likeness of God in which they had been created, and which had been distorted or blurred by sin and selfishness," Father Bochanski said.

A priest in residence at the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena, Father Bochanski is the executive director of Courage International, an apostolate of the Catholic Church that ministers to people with same sex attraction who want to live chastely in accord with the Church's teaching.

A native of suburban Philadelphia, he was ordained in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 1999 and served in several parish assignments and as a high school theology teacher, chaplain for the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters, spiritual director for seminarians and chaplain for the Courage Apostolate there. Last year, Pope Francis awarded him the Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice in recognition of "sustained and exceptional service" to the Church.

Father Bochanski says the lives of the desert men and women offer valuable lessons for contem-

porary society.

"The question of how much I should detach from the world to keep my faith intact is a perennial challenge for all of us," he says. "The Desert Fathers and Mothers are really the ancestors of religious sisters and brothers that we are familiar with today. Like contemporary monks and nuns, they took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and lived in a radical way."

The Desert Fathers can be a genuine inspiration for modern Christians, he says. "We are supposed to be detached from material possessions and be attentive to God's plan for our relationships and more focused on God's will," he said. "But we all sometimes chafe at minor inconveniences in regard to detachment and following God rather than the prevailing mood."

Another parallel has been the lives of isolation, which people have been forced to live since the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted familiar patterns of social interaction and forced us to live in confinement with others.

"We are all living more isolated lives than we might have otherwise chosen, and that brings its own set of challenges, both in the idea that we're isolated and that we are with people—especially our families—more than before," Father said. "In terms of isolation and in terms of strict confinement with a small group of people who know how to push our buttons, we can sympathize with how the Desert Fathers were living but also how they were growing in their humility and charity."

Recalling the words of his first pastor, he said, "Your family can push your buttons because they installed them and know where they are."

We often endure trials in the very areas where we need conversion, he said, adding that the devil knows what those places are, and he is going to use them to trip us up.

Men and women did not go into the desert to escape society but to find themselves, he said. During the fourth century, the persecution of Christians had stopped, and they wanted to emulate the spirituality of the previous generation of martyrs, who gave witness to Christ.

"Their question was 'What is going to be our way of giving witness, our way of overcoming the world and the traps the world sets for people of faith? If they are not

coming after us and making us martyrs, then we are going to go and be intentional about taking on this penance and

this struggle voluntarily," he said.

"The modern world is very escapist," Father said. "Everybody constantly has their phones in their hand because if they're not surfing the Internet or checking social media, they have to come face-to-face with their own inner thoughts, desires and battles. The intention of the Desert Fathers was to step away from the distractions and come face-to-face with the self and fight that spiritual battle and end up in a deeper relationship with God and a deeper generosity, humility and ability to pray and intercede for the whole world."

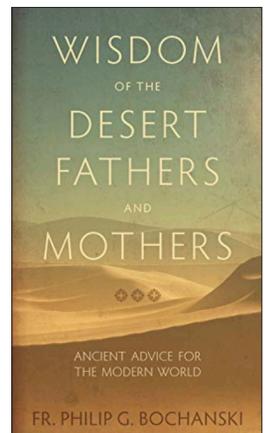
Modern monastic communities are founded on the tradition of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Even today, there are religious orders that bring the desert to the city, such as the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters, known as the Pink Sisters, who have a community in downtown Philadelphia.

For a decade, Father Bochanski belonged to a small community of diocesan priests called the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, a 16th century priest inspired by the example of the desert monks and St. John Cassian, who wrote extensively about the Fathers and their spirituality.

"I am not at the Oratory anymore, but I think there is still part of me that values time set apart from action and having a prayer place—even an area of my room for that purpose," he said. "And that part of me is shaped by the Desert Fathers and Mothers."

The teachings of the Fathers and Mothers are compiled in the "Sayings of the Desert Fathers," or *Apophthegmata Patrum*, which is a collection of short sayings and stories used for study, meditation and prayer.

"Their message is always that only God will satisfy the deepest



# Obituaries

## Father Paul F. Merry, 73

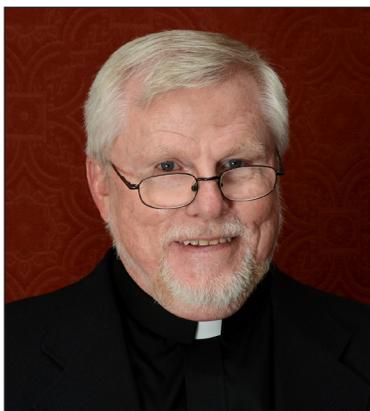
DANBURY—Reverend Paul F. Merry passed away on the morning of July 15, 2020. He was 73 years of age.

“Father Merry is fondly remembered by many across the diocese as a kind and humble man and a true servant priest who worked tirelessly and gave of himself sacrificially in his ministry to others. Please pray for the repose of the soul of Father Merry and for the consolation of his family,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano.

Most recently Father Merry had served as chaplain of Saint John Paul II Center for Health Care, Danbury and in-residence priest at St. Peter Church in Danbury.

Paul Francis Merry was born in Stamford, Connecticut, on December 20, 1946, son of Francis and Mary (Tierney) Merry. He was baptized January 12, 1947, at St. Cecilia Church in Stamford, Conn.

He attended St. Mary Grammar School, Stamford and



REVEREND PAUL F. MERRY

St. Basil Preparatory School, also in Stamford.

Father Merry began his priestly formation at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield Conn., continued at St. John Seminary and completed his theological studies at the North American College in Rome. He was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Bridgeport by the Most Reverend James A. Hickey at St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City on December 17, 1971.

He first served as parochial vicar of St. James Church in Stratford (1972-1976). In June 1976, he was appointed as the priest chaplain to Sacred Heart University. During this time, he resided at St. Andrew Church in Bridgeport and St. Stephen Church in Trumbull. From 1982 to 1985, he served as pastor of St. John Vianney Parish in Chiclayo, Peru.

Returning to the diocese in 1985, Father Merry was assigned as parochial vicar at St. Mary Church in Bridgeport. He was named pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church in Bridgeport in 1989. Since 2007, Father Merry has served as the chaplain at Pope John Paul II Care and Rehab Center, residing at St. Peter in Danbury.

Throughout his years of priestly ministry in the diocese, Father Merry also served on the Presbyteral Council, as auditor notary for the Marriage Tribunal, the diocesan advisor to the English Language Cursillos. ■

## Father Bernardo Rodriguez, 66

DANBURY—Reverend Bernardo Rodriguez passed away on July 16, 2020. He was 66 years of age.

“Through his work as a hospital chaplain, his service in prison ministry, and his ministry to migrant workers, Father Bernardo reached out in a special way to those who were suffering, and he brought the healing of Christ to all he served. Please pray for the repose of his soul and for the consolation of his family,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano.

Father Bernardo Rodriguez was born in Lleida, Catalonia, Spain, on April 28, 1954. His parents were Eulogio Rodriguez and Patrocinio Chicano. He is survived by a sister, Manoli Rodriguez and a nephew, Josue Martinez Rodriguez.

Father Rodriguez studied for the priesthood at the Pontifical University of Saint Pacian, Barcelona where he received the degree of Master in Pastoral Ministry. He was ordained to the priesthood by the Most Reverend

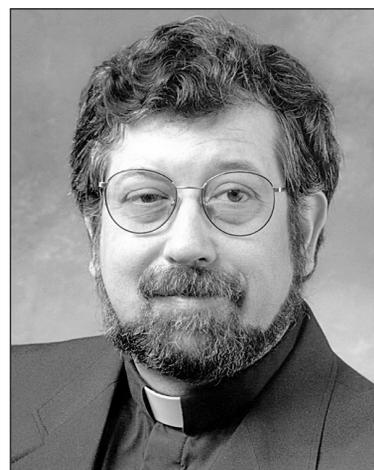
Ramon Malla Call in Lleida, Spain on October 11, 1980.

After his ordination, he first served as Parochial Vicar of Nuestra Senora de! Puig. In 1981, he began work in prison ministry for the first time, serving as the chaplain at the federal jail in Lleida, Spain. In 1986, he continued that work at the National Jail in Panama City, Panama.

Father Rodriguez came to the United States in 1987 where he began work as parochial vicar at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bridgeport. He was incardinated into the Diocese of Bridgeport in 1989. In 1991, he was transferred to Our Lady of Montserrat in Stamford, serving first as parochial vicar, then as parochial administrator, and lastly as pastor beginning in 1993. He served in that position until 1997. Father Rodriguez then spent a year in ministry to migrant workers in Orange County N.Y.

He returned to the diocese in 1999 to begin work as Catholic chaplain to Bridgeport Hospital,

residing at St. Patrick Church in Bridgeport. Returning to



REVEREND BERNARDO RODRIGUEZ

prison ministry in 2001, Father Rodriguez worked in Prison Chaplaincy and Seaport Ministry at Bridgeport Correctional Facility and Garner Prison. His most recent assignment was as assistant chaplain at Danbury Hospital and part-time parochial vicar of St. Peter Parish in Danbury. ■

# Obituary

## Reverend F. William Verrilli, 68

BRIDGEPORT—Reverend F. William Verrilli passed away on Saturday, July 25, 2020. He was 68 years of age.

“Please pray for the repose of the soul of Father Verrilli and for the consolation of his family,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, who praised Father Verrilli for his commitment to lifetime learning and faithful service as an educator and a judge in the Diocesan Tribunal.

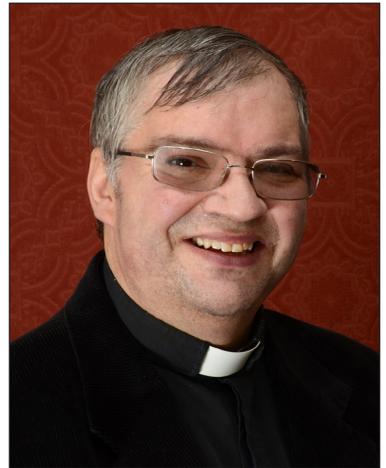
Father William Verrilli was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut on August 4, 1951. His parents were William R. Verrilli and Florence Caseria Verrilli. He is survived by a sister, Sister Marie Verrilli, SND.

Father Verrilli was educated at Blessed Sacrament School and Madison School in Bridgeport and graduated from Fairfield College Preparatory School in 1969. He continued his education

at Fairfield University earning his degree in 1973. Fr. Verrilli studied for the priesthood at Theological College, Catholic University in Washington DC. He was ordained to the priesthood by the Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis at St. Augustine Cathedral, Bridgeport on May 5, 1979.

After his ordination, Father Verrilli first served as parochial vicar of St. Andrew Parish in Bridgeport. In 1980, he began his career in our diocesan high schools, teaching at St. Joseph High School in Trumbull for many years, later as spiritual director at Trinity Catholic School in Stamford and faculty member of Notre Dame High School in Fairfield.

Father Verrilli was given leave to pursue a licentiate degree in Canon Law at Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. in 1999. Upon the completion of this



REVEREND F. WILLIAM VERRILLI

degree in 2001, he spent many years as a judge in the Tribunal of the Diocese of Bridgeport.

Condolences can be sent to Father Verrilli’s sister, Sr. Marie Verrilli SND, in care of The Catholic Center, 238 Jewett Avenue, Bridgeport CT 06606. ■

# CATHOLIC CEMETERIES

DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

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# Obituary

## Father Fernandez, founder of Our Lady of Guadalupe, dies at 85

By **JOE PISANI**

Reverend Jose A. Fernandez, one of the early leaders of the Spanish-speaking community in the Diocese of Bridgeport whose vision and faith led to the construction of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Danbury, died on March 13 in Spain. He was 85.

“Father Fernandez was a man of great devotion to Our Lady and is recognized as the founder and first pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano. “He was much loved and respected by all whom he served.”

Father Fernandez is recognized by a plaque that hangs at the entrance to the church, which says, “With honor and gratitude to Rev. Jose A. Fernandez, founder of the first Spanish church built in the Diocese of Bridgeport, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Danbury, Connecticut, 1976-1995.

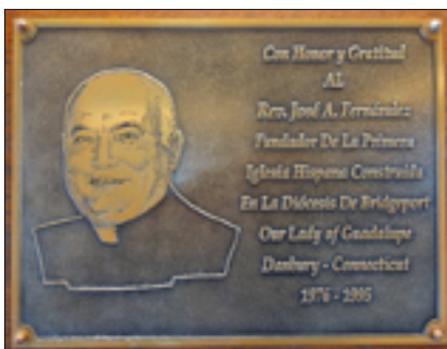
Father Fernandez was appointed parochial vicar at St. Catherine of Siena in Riverside in 1969. In 1970, he was named chaplain of Abbet Manor and Hillside Home in Bridgeport and served as resident priest at St. Ambrose Church in Bridgeport and later St. Joseph Church in Shelton and St. Joseph Church in South Norwalk.

In 1975, he was appointed co-pastor and later pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish in Bridgeport. A year later, he was named Associate Director of the Apostolate for Spanish-speaking People for the greater Danbury area and became the first administrator of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission at St. Joseph Church in Danbury.

At first, the Spanish-speaking community celebrated Mass in the lower-level chapel of St. Joseph's. The mission was named after Our Lady of Guadalupe because, as Father Fernandez wrote in his history of the parish: “The Virgin of Guadalupe was our guide and patron, the Mother of the Americas, who appeared in 1531 to Juan Diego and said, ‘Go to the bishop and ask him to build a chapel on this very spot from which I can demonstrate

my maternal vigilance and give compassionate assistance to those who ask for it.’ Maybe the echo of Mary’s petition was heard here after 450 years. Perhaps Mary wanted to have a sanctuary in this town.”

Father Fernandez, who later retired to New Jersey, wrote, “In



the beginning, most of the men worked 70 to 80 hours a week in diners and restaurants without health insurance, paid vacations or other benefits. Life was a bit hard. The mission fostered finding better jobs, fomenting small businesses and especially urged them to purchase their own homes. By 1989, there were about 50 families who lived in their own homes. In 1990, there were 21 businesses run by Spanish-speaking residents. The parish also promoted scholastic and occupational learning.”

The faithful began a campaign to build their own church with the slogan, “WITH GOD WE CAN.” Several women approached Father Fernandez and said, “Father, if we all put a dollar in each time we enter the church, something can be done.” Each month, people donated an additional \$5, \$10 and \$15 and held other fund-raising activities. “Even with all this, faith and God had to complement our human limitations,” Father wrote.

In 1983, they found a 5-acre parcel of land, which they purchased for \$70,000, and on June 3, 1985, Bishop Walter W. Curtis blessed the cornerstone. A year-and-a-half later, the church was completed. Some companies worked for reduced fees, many parishioners donated their time and talents, and one contractor let them use excavators free of charge.

The church was finished on December 12, 1986, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and on Sunday December 14, the

first Mass was celebrated. Father Fernandez was named the first pastor, on June 3, 1985 and he served until 1995.

Jose Antonio Fernandez was born July 27, 1934 at San Ramon de Bembibre, Spain. The youngest of four children, he was the son of Jose Fernandez and Isabel Enriquez. He received his preparatory education in Leon at Valencia de Don Juan. He attended college at Valladolid, Spain and minor seminary at Becerril de Campos in Palencia. He later studied at Saint Augustine College in Valladolid and Salamanca University.

He was ordained on July 17, 1960 in Valladolid by Archbishop Jose Goldaraz. A year later he came to the United States and served as parochial vicar at several parishes in Staten Island and the Bronx. He was incardinated into the Diocese of Bridgeport in 1974.

According to longtime parishioner Carmen Madrid Kinsler, he was “a great man” who was very personable. After his retirement he lived in Bethel while assisting at the Portuguese church, Immaculate Heart of Mary in Danbury.

“He was loved by the Portuguese community,” she said. “He also enjoyed a small farm in upstate New York and visited many parishioners at home and held monthly brunches with some of his former congregation.”

In 2017, Father Fernandez returned to Leon, Spain, where he grew up in Leon and lived with his sister Isabel and his seven nephews, she said.

Today, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Danbury, which he founded, is a thriving parish with families from Puerto Rico, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Peru, El Salvador and Ecuador. Six weekend masses draw worshippers from towns in Fairfield County and Westchester and as far away as the Bronx.

Father John Perez, the fourth pastor, says there are 1,500 families in the parish community and 600 children are enrolled in the catechism program. The parish has groups devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and Our Lady of the Clouds from Ecuador, along with parishioners who are charismatics and Cursillistas. ■

# Catholic Cemeteries

## Providing a Catholic Burial

By **BRIAN WALLACE**

BRIDGEPORT—With an increasing number of Catholics choosing cremation, diocesan cemeteries have worked to create burial options that accommodate the wishes of families consistent with Church teaching and funeral practices.

Dean Gestal, director of Catholic Cemeteries in Diocese of Bridgeport, says that over the last few months as many as half of the recent burials in the diocese have been cremations.

The diocese has responded by offering both inground interment as well as columbarium niches and mausoleums for cremated remains. It is also working to make Catholics more aware that if they choose cremation, they can have a Catholic Mass and funeral.

Dr. Patrick Donovan, director of the Leadership Institute of the diocese, says the institute has issued detailed funeral norms on its website [www.formationre-imagined.org/funeral-norms](http://www.formationre-imagined.org/funeral-norms). The norms include frequently asked questions and address misconceptions concerning cremation.

According to Dr. Donovan, in 2017, the Vatican re-affirmed its 1963 decision that there are valid sanitary, economic and social reasons for cremation. The document from the doctrinal office teaches that cremation is allowed, so long as it isn't chosen to deny hope in the resurrection of the body.

However, it cautions that families should not have the ashes of their loved ones scattered at sea or kept in urns at home, but properly buried with a Catholic funeral.

Ashes should not be divided up between family members, "nor may they be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry or other objects."

Guidelines instruct that cremated remains should be kept in a "sacred place" such as a church cemetery, and that "By burying the bodies of the faithful, the Church confirms her faith in the resurrection of the body, and intends to show the great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity."

Gestal says that in line with Church teachings, diocesan cemeteries offer opportunities to family members for the respectful burial of their loved ones.

"This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the care and attention in which they are transported and displayed and the final disposition. Ultimately, the cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium," he says.

Gestal says that what many families don't realize is that if they have an existing plot in a cemetery, even if all of the spaces are filled, two cremated remains can be placed above an existing inground burial, thereby making it possible to united generations of the same family in one cemetery.

He said Catholic cemeteries are also working with those who have a loved one cremated as well as those who may have brought the ashes home after a funeral service but have not yet interred them: single grave holding one

full casket may accommodate the interment of two additional cremated remains.

A single grave without any casket can accommodate the interment of three cremated remains.

Those who prefer above-ground interment now also have the option of illuminated glass-front niches available in columbarium.

"Diocesan cemeteries wish to offer these opportunities to family members for the respectful burial of their loved ones in order to give effective witness to the importance of Christian burial and belief in the resurrection of the body," Gestal says.

There are 14 Catholic cemeteries established throughout the diocese (Fairfield County) to serve the Catholic faithful and their families, providing beautiful places of prayer and reflection.

Catholic cemeteries offer many options and services including estate lots to accommodate current and future generations of the same family, special areas on which to construct family mausoleums, entombment in community mausoleums and memorial design services.

Gestal encourages people to consider "pre-need" planning for themselves and their loved ones, so that decisions do not have to be made when they are dealing with loss and emotional stress. Pre-planning also gives families more time to visit and select a cemetery and meet with cemetery representatives.

*(For more on how to get this important information, call 203.416.1491. Visit the website, [www.bridgeportdiocese.org/cemeteries](http://www.bridgeportdiocese.org/cemeteries), refer to FFC and its website or tune in to Veritas Catholic Radio.)* ■



### Catholic Cemeteries | Diocese of Bridgeport

St. Michael Cemetery | Bridgeport/Stratford | 203.378.0404

St. Peter Cemetery | Danbury | 203.743.9626

St. John Cemetery | Darien | 203.322.0455

St. Mary–Putnam Cemetery | Greenwich | 203.869.4828

Resurrection Cemetery | Newtown | 203.268.5574

St. John–St. Mary Cemetery | Norwalk | 203.838.4271

Queen of Peace Cemetery | Stamford | 203.322.0455

Gate of Heaven Cemetery | Trumbull | 203.268.5574

Assumption Cemetery | Westport | 203.838.4271

# Inspirational Speaker

## Jeff Cavins, speaking online from St. Francis of Assisi

WESTON—On September 11 and 12, Jeff Cavins will be speaking at St. Francis of Assisi in Weston, and his talks will be live streamed.

Jeff Cavins is a much sought after Catholic inspirational speaker, author and biblical scholar. He is the creator of the popular Great Adventure Bible Study program where he unlocks how to read the Bible in a way that is understandable and relevant in today's world. It helps readers discover the story of salvation history and how we fit into God's plan. Cavins was also the founding host of the television show "Life on the Rock" on EWTN and the Morning Air radio program on Relevant Radio.

On Friday, September 11, from 7-8 pm, Cavins will give an engaging talk on his conversion story, 'A rebel returns to his faith.'

On Saturday September 12, from 9:45 am to 2:15 pm, Cavins will conduct a seminar entitled 'The Activated Disciple: Taking your faith to the next level.' As he says in his book, "Practice Is Over. It's Game Time." Cavins will talk about moving beyond believing and practicing to becoming an activated disciple. His real-

world message inspires people on how to imitate God in order to become an instrument for him to transform the world.



"We are excited to be hosting Jeff Cavins", said Father Jeffrey Couture, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi, "We are especially pleased to open this to all faith communities in Fairfield County. We hear from many people that they are hungry to renew and reactivate their faith. This is a unique opportunity for all of us to do that."

The cost for both events is \$75 and includes the cost of his

book, *The Activated Disciple*. Registration is required by August 28. Proceeds go towards the St. Francis of Assisi Women's Guild

Scholarship Fund.

Online registration is at [www.stfrancisweston.org](http://www.stfrancisweston.org). Once registered, a password-protected link and information on how to pick-up the book will be emailed seven days in advance. If you have any questions, please contact [WomensGuildSFA@gmail.com](mailto:WomensGuildSFA@gmail.com). This event is sponsored by the St. Francis of Assisi Women's Guild. ■

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### RECENT PASSING FROM PAGE 9

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Preparatory School in 1969. He earned a degree from Fairfield University and then began his studies for the priesthood at Theological College, Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

After his ordination on May 5, 1970, Father Verrilli served as parochial vicar at St. Andrew Parish in Bridgeport and then began teaching in diocesan schools. He was at St. Joseph High School many years and later spiritual director at Trinity Catholic School in Stamford and on the faculty of Notre Dame High School in Fairfield.

He received a licentiate degree in Canon Law at Catholic University in 2001 and for many years served as a judge in the diocesan Tribunal. He is survived by his sister, Sr. Marie Verrilli SND.

Father Fernandez was one of the early leaders of the Spanish-speaking community in the Diocese of Bridgeport, whose vision and faith led to the construction of Our Lady of

Guadalupe Church.

A man known for his great devotion to Our Lady, he is remembered by a plaque that hangs at the entrance to the church, which says, "With honor and gratitude to Rev. Jose A. Fernandez, founder of the first Spanish church built in the Diocese of Bridgeport, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Danbury, Connecticut, 1976-1995."

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Today, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish has its own church and rectory. Worshippers come from towns in Fairfield County and Westchester and as far away as the Bronx. ■

# Sports

## St. Joe's beloved hockey coach's death saddens many

By DON HARRISON

A life devoted to playing and coaching the sport he embraced seemingly from infancy—hockey—ended much too soon for Edward “Eddy” LeMaire. The head coach of St. Joseph High’s boys hockey team succumbed to a heart attack on July 11. He was just 53 years old.

“Eddy was incredible with the kids, a wonderful teacher of the game,” said an aggrieved Kevin Butler, St. Joe’s assistant principal for athletics. “Many of the juniors and seniors on our team had played for him since they were five years old. He was truly a player’s coach.”

LeMaire had been the Cadets’ head coach the past four seasons, a period that encompassed just 18 wins and 1 tie against 60 defeats. Earlier, he had served as an assistant to the program’s founding coach, Marty Crouse, from 2010 to 2013, when St. Joe’s followed up on its 2009 CIAC Division III state title with successive appearances in state championship games in 2010 (Division II) and 2011 (Division I).

“He was not only one of the best hockey coaches and players I saw, he was a good all-around guy,” Crouse noted.

Defenseman Liam Gelston, who was just four years old when he met LeMaire for the first time at The Rinks at Shelton Hockey 101—and served as St. Joe’s assistant captain as a junior last winter – underscored Crouse’s summation of Eddy’s coaching expertise.

“As a team, we recognized that remaining in Division I and working hard to support the coaches as they looked to retool the team was important,” Gelston said. “This created a few challenging years record-wise, for sure, but the system Coach Eddy was employing really showed



EDWARD “EDDY” LEMAIRE

promise last year, and we were looking forward to a strong season this year.

“Coach was able to connect with everybody. Everyone knew that he demanded 110 percent because that’s how you get better as individuals and especially as a team. Coach Eddy was in the game his entire life... he had so much knowledge of the game and always knew what had to be done. Everyone on the team knew he was an incredible hockey mind and player; he was poetry on ice.”

Eddy LeMaire was just five years old when his father, Louis, began teaching him the game’s basics. The senior LeMaire, also a lifelong player-turned-coach, helped to hone his son’s natural gifts into the outstanding player he became.

At East Haven High School, Eddy starred for the Yellowjackets as a junior and senior, earning All-Housatonic League hockey honors at center. He established a school record with 182 points and, in 2007, was inducted into the high school’s Alumni Hall of Fame.

LeMaire’s ardor for the game led to him to Canada for three years, where he played for the Chatham Maroons Western Junior B team during the 1984-

85 and 1986-87 seasons, and the Sudbury Wolves Junior A team in 1985-86.

Professional hockey beckoned, and so he brought his skills to Le Vesinet, France, an affluent suburb of Paris, where he played from 1987-89 and once led France’s B Division in scoring.

Coaching became his passion thereafter, and he shared his hockey expertise at various levels, with private lessons, at multiple age levels and several hockey schools, as coach of the Yale Junior Hockey Bulldogs and the Wonderland Wizards of Bridgeport. It was said he touched the lives of thousands of students...boys, girls, men, women...and in the words of his sister, Janet Lockwood, “treated every student as if he were a champion.”

One of the state’s most respected collegiate coaches, C.J. Marattolo of Sacred Heart University, expressed his sorrow when he learned of LeMaire’s passing. “He was one of the best players in Connecticut in his era, great hands and hockey IQ. He was a kind soul. RIP my friend!” he tweeted.

“He was more than just a coach, he was a legend,” Gelston said. “I loved him, the team loved him, and he loved us.” ■

# Column: Thomas Hicks



## We are the sum of our relationships

### POTPOURRI

BY THOMAS H. HICKS

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

If we examine our personal histories, we will find a story of relationships. In a real sense, we are the sum of our relationships. The human person was created, designed, to be in relationship with others. We cannot be truly ourselves by ourselves. I read somewhere that a thing that does not exist in relation to anything else cannot itself be said to exist. To really grow as a human being, we need other people. We only become who we are through the relationships that shape our lives. There is Martin Buber's famous conclusion that "all real living is meeting."

Lately I've been trying to think of all those whom I've met in my life in one way or another; those who went with me along the path of life. Not too many came in a way that I planned or contrived. Most relationships sort of found me. There's a mystery to it. People come into our lives and go out of our lives, sometimes only for a few minutes. For example, I remember, from many years ago, an early Saturday morning on the DeKalb Avenue subway station. I was standing on the platform. She was wearing a black coat. She had jeans on and was drinking coffee. One strand of her hair blew across her cheek, touching the corners of her mouth. There was some eye contact, glances. We got on the same car. We both got off at Grand Central, and then I lost her. In retrospect I wish I had approached her.

There are all the people to whom I must by now be the merest memory.

When I think back over my own life, I recall the relationships that were formal and distant. My main emotion with some people was unease. There

were relationships in which we took an immediate dislike to each other. Saint Seraphim of Sarov addressed each person who came to him as "my joy." My response to too many people was, "You again?" There were the relationships that did not stand the test of time.

Writers and philosophers of our time speak of existential isolation. They take the view that no relationship can surmount loneliness; no one has access to the real depths of another.

Albert Schweitzer said we are each a secret to the other. Freud stated that every encounter, beautiful as it may seem, only dulls the incurable wound of loneliness. Flannery O'Connor wrote "I love a lot of people, understand none of them." (Spiritual Writings, p.161). And W.H. Auden wrote:

"I'm beginning to lose patience

With my personal relations:

They are not deep,

And they are not cheap."

(Shorts)

I don't think life is exclusively like this. A number of people became very dear to me. As Carson McCullers stated, they became "the we of me" (The Member of the Wedding, p. 137). I can't imagine the world without them. They've got to be there just as naturally as trees or birds or clouds. Without them I would be incomplete; I would no longer be me. A dear friend like this moving out of your life is almost as much of a loss as a death.

I think all people's lives involve such we-relationships. They are among the best things God handed us.

I can't help thinking that I didn't have a real biography until

my wife entered my life. After a while, I often tire of being with other people. I could be with her for hours and hours and not be tired for an instant of her.

I die as often from thee I go,  
Though it be but an hour ago.  
(John Donne, The Legacy)

Many happily married people feel this way.

The elderly often develop relationships in which the two of them complement each other wonderfully. There are the long years of affectionate understanding between them. Hurts and annoyances that might otherwise end a relationship no longer have the last word. They've grown very close, close to death and close to each other. They sort of fuse together in these last years.

All of us, as we age, tend to be able to discern more and more when to act, how to act, what to say, and often more importantly, what not to say. We learn not to strike the wrong note.

John of the Cross tells us we are like a stone that must be chiseled and fashioned before being set in the building. Our relationships are instruments which God uses to chisel us. They are part of God's plan. By means of these chiseling interactions we become more the self God wants us to be. We should think of some of our relationships as artisans, present there in order to improve us.

Overall, I believe there are people God has given us. I wonder if there are any accidental meetings, or is grace and providence at work in all of them? Some people do come to us at crucial times. There are certain people who come to us like a gift from heaven. Most of our hurts come through relationships, so does our healing.

We develop an ever-deepening gratitude and wonder for all those who have loved us

I have two particularly poignant memories. One is how I felt my throat tighten when I watched an elderly woman reach for her husband's hand as they strolled down the sidewalk. The other is a memory of how my wife would make room for me beside her on a couch and spread a quilt across our laps and rest her head on my shoulder. ■

# Column: Joe Pisani



## “Lord, help me!”

### SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

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

For most of my life, when I knelt in front of the crucifix to pray, my prayer went something like this: “Lord, help me.” Actually, it went something like this: “LORD, HELP ME!!! PLEASE!!!”

I always remember to say “please,” which seems only appropriate when you’re begging the Lord of the Universe for emergency assistance. And like most people, I’ve needed all kinds of emergency assistance for a variety of personal crises: children straying from the faith, family members suffering the ravages of cancer, friends afflicted with addiction, relationships torn apart, and worst of all, people despairing because their lives were in shambles, and they couldn’t see that the only possible solution was the only one they weren’t considering—Jesus.

Others were dealing with the death of a spouse, or tragically, the death of a child, the loss of a job, emotional abuse—a seemingly infinite number of reasons to look at Jesus on the cross and plead, “Lord, help us!”

Then, something happened. It’s not that the list of reasons to petition Jesus had gotten shorter. In fact, it had gotten longer. Look at the world, and you’ll recognize immediately there are countless reasons to

pray harder than ever before.

However, the day came when I knelt before the Eucharist with my laundry list of petitions, and for a moment it seemed that Jesus was saying, “Help me.” What could the Son of God need from me?

My prayer eventually became “Lord, how may I help?” What a curious concept that the God who made Heaven and Earth should need the help of fallen, imperfect creatures. And yet if you look around you, you’ll realize the harvest is great and the laborers are few.

Be assured that Jesus needs our help, and it doesn’t require a PhD or special training or a flashy title, only a commitment to do his will in every moment and to turn your life over to him every morning.

The game plan is pretty simple. If you give him your day, he’ll do great things. He’ll also tell you moment by moment how you can help even if you don’t think you have the ability.

Your deficiencies won’t matter because his grace is all you’ll need. It will strengthen you when you’re afraid, and it will supplement your meager abilities. What he told St. Paul applies to all of us: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

When a friend comes to you because her husband died or her

child has been diagnosed with cancer or she’s depressed about her family situation, ask Jesus what you should say before you open your mouth, and the Holy Spirit will guide you. Ask Jesus what to do in every situation, and he’ll lead you.

Sometimes, silent compassion is the answer. Less preaching and more listening is always a good rule to follow. Wonderful things occur when we offer to help Jesus. He can work miracles through us without our even knowing.

We live at a critical time when countless souls are being lost—souls that Jesus wants saved. We live at a time when there’s a lot of talk about justice and love but much more anger and hatred. It’s one thing to talk the talk, and another to walk the walk.

Never doubt that you can make a difference. It doesn’t have to be a new program, a major speech or a political rally. When small imperceptible acts are spiritually charged by Jesus, they have a vastly greater effect than highly publicized initiatives with a cast of thousands. Sometimes all we’re called to do is plant the seed and Jesus does the rest. We may never see the results of our actions until the next life.

A smile, a display of compassion, silent listening, laughter, prayer. These seem to be the smallest gestures but they’re the greatest gestures to Christ, who deserves all the glory.

Never underestimate what you can do with Jesus beside you. And never doubt for a moment that he is calling you to serve day to day and moment to moment in situations that may seem commonplace and ordinary. Heed the call.

“Lord, how may I help you?” Say it every morning, and he will answer you. ■

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#### PRIEST EXPLORES ANCIENT MESSAGE FROM PAGE 22

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longings of our hearts,” Father Bochanski says. “Whatever it is that we are going through, whatever sacrifices we are called to make, whatever conversion needs to take place, whatever detachment, whatever penance—the goal is always purity of the heart. We suffer in many ways and struggle with many things, and there is a constant battle against self, but none of it is in vain if it is leading us to a deeper relationship with God—the God who created us. And this always means a fuller, freer, more fulfilling living of the

lives of our true selves.”

In our age, we tend to think of holiness as “getting rid of all our fun, getting rid of our personalities, getting rid of anything that makes us unique,” he said. “We think of holiness as something oppressive when in reality, holiness is living fully the life that God has given us. Then, we understand more clearly what his plans are for us and for our lives.”

Even though we may not go into the desert, Father says we need to embrace some of their practices and spirituality in our lives.

“Just by having a place in the house or apartment set aside for prayer, where you can go and shut the door, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, we can also bring a little of the desert into our homes and neighborhoods and really find God in a more intense way,” he said. “It can purify our hearts and give us the strength and grace that we need. Then, we can go back to the rest of our family, go back to our workplace, go back to our regular life and bring with us what we received from the Lord in those little desert moments.” ■

# ¡Celebremos nuestra fe!

## Un programa online en español hecho por milenios

POR MARICARMEN GODOY

BRIDGEPORT—El programa virtual de la Diócesis de Bridgeport conocido como “Faith Friday”, se trasladó al español bajo el nombre de “¡Celebremos nuestra fe!”, donde su presentador el P. Abelardo Vásquez, toma textos bíblicos, la cultura latina y hace un acompañamiento espiritual a los fieles católicos a través de las redes sociales.

El programa, que semana a semana es conducido por el P. Abelardo Vásquez, sacerdote colombiano de la Diócesis de Bridgeport, actual párroco de la iglesia de Saint Charles de Borromeo en Bridgeport, se maneja tal cual se operan las presentaciones pautadas en los medios de comunicación.

Es supervisado y producido por John Grosso, Director de Comunicaciones de la Diócesis; pero en vez de un equipo de técnicos salidos de las escuelas de comunicación, tiene un séquito de milenios voluntarios que se encargan de monitorear la tecnología y como si fuera una producción de Hollywood hasta cuentan: “¡Tres, dos, uno: grabando!”.

El primer programa que nació antes de Navidad fue a consecuencia de asistir a un desayuno con Grosso, quien le dijo al P. Abelardo: “creo que como tú eres joven te quedaría perfecto presentar el programa ‘F Friday’ que se realiza con mucho éxito en la Diócesis de Bridgeport”, contó como anécdota el P. Abelardo.

La idea era reproducir en español el “F Friday”, que es un programa de evangelización en inglés, pero el P. Abelardo tenía en mente, en cambio, un programa similar pero en audio tal como si fuera un “Audio Book” para ser enviados por la aplicación de WhatsApp a sus fieles.

El formato debió ser cambiado porque el Director de Comunicaciones de la Diócesis le apostaba al Face Book Live y al Youtube con el fin de que se extienda el concepto. “¡Y dio resultado!, evoca el P. Abelardo; porque, ahora, sus seguidores no son solamente los parroquianos de la Diócesis ni de la iglesia de Saint Charles donde él es su

párroco, sino de miles de fieles de toda América Latina, incluyendo: New Jersey, New York, España y Connecticut.

Celebremos la Fe, entonces, pasó a ser un programa netamente inter-activo de reflexiones y eso le ha dado un nivel de confianza en sus seguidores que esperan con ansias que sean las 9 de la noche hora de la costa este de Estados

Radio María o tener sus propias transmisiones En Vivo vía Face Book Live o Youtube Live con invitados dentro de una tarima y hasta con público para que ellos tengan la opción de hacer preguntas, el sacerdote respondió “que no es de su afán planificar algo parecido, pero que si en el camino la vida le lleva por ese rumbo así lo hará”.



Unidos para conectarse.

Por lo que ha motivado al P. Abelardo a seguir experimentando nuevos segmentos y nuevas escenografías que van desde las locaciones de un templo con el fondo del altar mayor o el jardín primoroso de algún convento o a los pies de alguna imagen religiosa.

“Me emociona que nos escuchen y vean en España u otros países porque para ellos es de madrugada o bien llegada la noche y eso habla de que el contenido está realmente construyendo la evangelización y motivando la fe”, repuso el sacerdote.

Para las grabaciones de su programa, al que no quiere que le llamen “show” porque considera que aunque usa locaciones, tecnología y herramientas propias de los medios de comunicación y hasta ya se acostumbró a utilizar términos propios del argot de los medios como: locaciones, iluminación, escenografía, audio, online y streaming (en vivo por pantalla); es un espacio de reflexiones tal como él lo hace en el púlpito o en una reunión de catequesis.

Y al preguntarle si es que estaría dispuesto a pedir a la Diócesis un espacio de comunicación dentro de la barra de la

Por ahora, el P. Abelardo quiere seguir usando la forma tradicional de comunicarse con sus fieles a través de la Palabra de Jesús, pero bajo la guía del Espíritu Santo con el fin no solo de hacer reflexiones sino de orar juntos y vivir la fe en forma viva y real.

Entonces, recordó que en mayo para celebrar la consagración a la virgen María ofreció un taller de “Mariología” por 31 días consecutivos y debido a la pandemia del COVID 19 debió hacerlo en tiempo real a través del Face Book Live y actualmente las misas dominicales de la iglesia de Saint Charles de Borromeo se realizan de la misma manera.

“Tenemos como protocolo de sanidad recibir en cada misa dominical a cien feligreses a quienes antes de la misa les tomamos la temperatura, les ubicamos en sus puestos guardando la sana distancia y desinfectamos sus manos; entonces, quienes NO pueden estar en forma presencial, pues, siguen la eucaristía por Face Book Live”, repuso y recordó que las misas son en inglés, español, portugués (brasileños) y criollo-francés (haitianos) porque aunque es una sola parroquia sirven a cuatro comunidades étnicas. ■

# 'Conversation on Race'

## Webinar series launched

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—The diocese has launched a new webinar series, "Conversation on Race," to explore the issue of race and the Catholic Church.

The webinar series, produced by the diocesan Leadership Institute and featuring talks by teachers and pastoral ministers, began on July 30 will run through September 3. The talks will be live-streamed at 1 pm each Thursday and then rebroadcast at 7 pm each evening, with a question and answer sessions moderated by a member of the diocesan ad hoc committee against racism.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano called for the "Conversation on Race," to explore the issue of race within the diocese and its institutions, to support diversity and multi-culturalism within the Church and the community, and to discuss racism within the context of Catholic Social Teaching.

"Without proper knowledge, effective and thoughtful action is not possible. For this reason, I invite all to join in these 'Conversations on Race' as we begin to respond in faith to this most important issue," said Bishop Caggiano.

According to Dr. Patrick Donovan, director of the Leadership Institute, the webinar

series is designed to inform those who attend about the sin of racism and the Church's teaching regarding it, the many forms that racism and bigotry can take, its history in our society and the personal, economic and social consequences

invite all people of faith to conversion. We are called to open our minds and hearts to Christ's love for all people and to the experiences of those who have been harmed by the evil of racism.

"We cannot tolerate or turn a



that racism has had on the lives of generations of people.

### Scheduled talks include:

**August 13**—Gloria

Purvis: Topic TBD

**August 20**—Armando Cervantes  
Beyond Black: Multicultural Voices

**August 27**—Pamela Harris:  
Race and Catholic Social Teaching

**September 3**—Dr. Marcia  
Chatelain Living the Faith, Living  
Antiracism

Talks are Thursdays at 1 pm.

In November 2018, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a new pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*. In the letter, the bishops

blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life," said Pope Francis, June 3, 2020.

In June of this year Bishop Caggiano formed an ad hoc committee against racism to respond to the call for change in the Church and the larger community. The committee includes clergy and religious, as well as lay men and women who will develop a strategic vision and practical steps to foster diversity and work for equality.

The webinar series is sponsored by the Leadership Institute, the diocesan ad-hoc committee against racism and the Apostolate of African American Catholics. ■

## Ad hoc committee virtual meeting

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—On a late June afternoon, Bishop Frank J.



Caggiano gathered virtually with the diocesan appointed ad hoc committee against racism for their first meeting.

This committee was established as a response to the call for change in our communities. The committee includes clergy and

religious, as well as lay men and women who will develop a strategic vision and practical steps for the diocesan response to the sin

of racism.

"I am very grateful for your willingness to come together to address this particular moment of opportunity and grace in our midst," said the bishop. "It is an opportunity to take a tragedy and make it a real opportunity for

long-term change."

The bishop began by updating the group that Foundations in Faith has secured upwards of \$40,000 for any initiatives that may come out of the committee. Bishop Caggiano also announced that he has been appointed to the USCCB's ad hoc committee against racism, which would make for a good opportunity to share resources and ideas amongst the groups.

It was discussed that The Leadership Institute will host several webinars this summer to advance the conversation about racism, cultural diversity and how simply by listening to one another, we can begin to affect change.

(For complete details on the webinars and to register, please visit [The Leadership Institute's website at www.formationreimagined.org](http://www.formationreimagined.org).) ■

# Sacred Heart U

## Program helps students in recovery

By JOE PISANI

FAIRFIELD—James was just another young person thinking about his future. At 21, he had his entire life ahead of him, and he was considering the possibilities, while lying on the sofa in his parents' Westchester home.

As he saw it, there were three options: suicide, dying from drugs and alcohol...or sobriety. He chose sobriety.

That was four years ago. Today, James Cafran is the coordinator of the Sacred Heart University Collegiate Recovery Program, which began operations last fall and is among a growing number of college programs in the country.

A lounge in the Main Academic Building provides a place for 12-Step meetings along with yoga and meditation classes. The area is available to any students struggling with addiction or related issues so they can gather and talk.

"This lounge makes people know they are not alone," Cafran said. "It's where students can meet other students in similar situations. They can just hang out and talk. It's all about knowing someone who has been through, or who is going through, what you are. Whether they're talking about being sober or whatever, it's about having that bond and feeling comfortable."

Cafran, who has been in recovery since 2016, is available to talk with students facing similar challenges. "Everything is confidential. They can contact me to inquire about the program, and I will maintain their anonymity," he said.

"We have people who have problems with drugs, alcohol and life and are discontent with themselves—and that is all really the same thing," he said. "These students are helping me with my own sobriety, whether they know it or not. I'm grateful for the people who come here and let me tell my story, and if they get something out of it, it's a better high than anything."

In addition to 12-Step meetings, there are all-inclusive recovery sessions for young people who may not be in a program but are seeking some type of recovery in their lifestyle or who are dealing with friends or family members struggling with substance abuse.

"We have every possible resource that anyone would need," he said. In order to be part of the program, students must have a desire to stop using drugs or alcohol through an abstinence-based lifestyle.

The mission of the program, Cafran said, is "to create a safe and supportive educational environment where students in recovery from substance use disorders can be the best version of themselves and live to their best academic potential, and to give every student the best possible chance at achieving success through physical, mental and spiritual growth."

Sacred Heart also has a partnership with Progressive Institute, a counseling organization in Shelton that treats people with mental health and substance abuse issues and provides clinical services for students who suffer from addiction.

Liz Modugno, the clinical director at Progressive Institute, said, "We'll be able to assess each student to see what their needs are...and work with Sacred Heart to offer individual therapy, group therapy and other services that promote wellness and recovery."

By next September, the university plans to create a sober living space at the Scholars Common for four students in recovery, Cafran said. A graduate assistant will share their living arrangements in the apartment. To be eligible, students will be required to have some type of grounding, whether a 12-Step sponsor, a recovery coach or participation in a program.

Larry Wielk, dean of students, said the program has been extremely well received by the Sacred Heart community. "When we send a global out to the community, promoting an activity sponsored by the Collegiate Recovery Program, we always get a response with someone telling us their personal story or the story of a friend or loved one. This program seems to touch a lot of folks on campus," he said.

"It's all about second, and third and maybe even fourth chances," Wielk said. "These are strong students who suffer from a disease that they are fighting back against. And for us, it is a chance to partner with them to successfully complete this part of their journey and give them the tools and structure they need, as well as to make sure they

are an integral part of the campus community."

Bill Mitchell, a trustee of Sacred Heart since 2002 and Vice Chairman of Mitchell Family Stores, was the driving force behind the program.

Mitchell, who has been in recovery 29 years, approached the school's president, Dr. John J. Petillo with the idea and received an overwhelming positive response.

"Recovery saved my life, and it gave me a life," said Mitchell, who provided a significant gift to the university to start the program.

He also traveled around the country to see what other colleges were doing and visited the University of Alabama, which has one of the leading programs in the nation. When Sacred Heart began developing the program, it turned to Caron Treatment Centers, an internationally recognized not-for-profit organization that specializes in addiction and behavioral health-care treatment.

"What family do you know that doesn't have someone suffering addiction?" Mitchell said. "We stepped up to the plate and did what we did as a Catholic school. People want their kids to come to Sacred Heart because of the character of the school. We are a school that believes in Catholic education, and we support a culture of hard work, faith, honesty, niceness, kindness ... and now we have recovery."

Over the years, Mitchell has helped many individuals in recovery and has been a friend and mentor to several Sacred Heart students striving to live clean and sober. James Cafran was one of them. "I could not have gotten this done without James," Mitchell said. "I took him before the board of trustees, and James told his story. You could hear a pin drop. Then, the board voted approval."

Cafran's message to students is one of hope and encouragement. It's also a simple message: "If you get sober now, at such a young age, you will have your whole life ahead of you. I'm super grateful I got sober at a young age," he said. "But it is just for today."

*(For more information about the recovery program, contact James Cafran, Recovery Coordinator, at 914.849.8590 or cafran@sacredheart.edu.)*

# St. Vincent's

## Helping patients find God in crisis

By JOE PISANI

BRIDGEPORT—The seed of Tim Bolton's vocation was planted shortly after his daughter Kaitlin was born with a chromosomal abnormality in 1993. "My youngest daughter taught me," he says.

At the time, he and his wife Mary Ellen were members of St. James Church in Stratford, where they were embraced by the faith community, who brought them meals, prayed rosaries and held a benefit for them when the insurance company refused to pay for Kaitlin's final surgery.

"It was an unbelievable gathering of people, prayer, love and faith," he recalls. "I really saw what a Christian community is like. My vocation to the permanent diaconate was born that day and evolved over the next ten years. And Fr. Tom Lynch cultivated that call."

Today, Deacon Tim Bolton, who left his family business after the Recession, extends that same compassion, care, prayer and presence to others in his assignment at Hartford HealthCare, St. Vincent's Medical Center, where he is Manager of the Pastoral Care Department.

"A hospital is a container for everything from the beginning of life to the end of life and everything in between that is imaginable or unimaginable," he says. "It is an amazing environment to be part of and see people offering themselves in the service of others. As a chaplain, you get to observe everything through the lens of faith. We see more than other clinical disciplines do because we participate across the spectrum. We see patients receiving a diagnosis, going through treatments, at the start of life and at the end of life with prayers of commendation at their bedside."

Very often, he says, family members see themselves at the foot of the cross, like the Blessed Mother and St. John, with no power to influence the outcome. They are present to their loved one and recognize, some for the first time, the possibility of the Resurrection.

"We have this opportunity to be with families and frame for them through the lens of faith their part in the Passion and see their loved one as a unique reflection of the image of Christ, a reflection of the image the world has never seen before," he said.

When Deacon Bolton was ordained in 2006, he was originally assigned to St. James Church but was later given permission to do his ministry full-time at St. Vincent's, where he began working in 2011.

The challenges his family has confronted helped him understand God's plan and recognize the needs

of others facing a medical crisis. In those encounters, you can let them know they are not alone."

Deacon Bolton manages the Pastoral Care Department at St. Vincent's under the direction of Bill Hoey, Vice President of Mission.

"Pastoral care has been an integral part of how we provide care at



of others facing a medical crisis.

"It is really the grace of God," he said. "We have lived through a lot and also experienced great love, unlike any family has ever experienced from the community."

Mary Ellen, who is principal at Jane Ryan School in Trumbull, has gone through three bouts of cancer over the past 20 years.

"I saw the need for people to have someone to talk to while she was in the hospital," he recalled. "And I learned about the clinical surrounding when Kaitlin went for treatment....I know what it is like in the newborn intensive care when a doctor says to a family, 'We need to do an MRI on the baby's brain lesions.' I know what it is like, and I can be in that place with them."

Deacon Bolton calls himself "a trench guy" and says a fundamental part of his ministry is to accompany people. "I identify with the mystery of accompaniment and presence to help people feel comfortable and meet them where they are, while trying to have a healthy humility," he said.

He tells the story of a woman dying of cancer, who asked if she and her husband could renew their wedding vows. Several months before she passed away, they were joined by their family members and friends at the vineyard where she worked. In the barn, with her gown on, she and husband renewed their vows. Deacon Bolton later went to her home, where she was receiving Hospice care, and did the prayers of commendation while her family and friends were present.

"I really feel privileged to do the work I do," he said, "It is a privilege to accompany people at moments in

St. Vincent's since we were founded by the Daughters of Charity, and we have been blessed with some of the most gifted chaplains imaginable," Hoey said.

There are lay and priest chaplains. The priests celebrate Mass, administer the Sacrament of the Sick, hear confessions and sometimes do a crisis baptism. They provide spiritual support to all patients, even those who are not Catholic, Hoey said.

"They are not just here to bring the Eucharist to a Catholic patient," he said. "They provide a full array of chaplain services and will offer support to a Jehovah Witness or a Muslim or a member of the Jewish faith, or even a person of no faith."

Very often when a patient receives a life-altering diagnosis, it raises the question of "Where is God in all this?" A medical crisis, he says, provides an opportunity for people to re-examine their lives and their relationship with God.

"We all get so busy in our day-to-day lives that those may not be questions we ask," Hoey said. "But if you get a blocked artery or renal disease, it can provoke a crisis as well as the receptivity to take a look at spiritual issues—and what better person to help you than a well-trained chaplain?"

"Many patients are very receptive to them because it is a different component of care," Hoey said. "Just as important as medical treatment is the question of 'Am I right with God?' Having a trained, empathetic, compassionate chaplain fulfills the goal of reverent holistic care. They are right there near your hospital bed. It brings the Church to the people." ■