



FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

digital edition

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Around the Diocese

Signs of hope in the pandemic

Where there's a need, there's a Knight

BETHEL—David Mallonee, current chancellor of the Knights of Columbus Pavia Council 48 in Bethel, recently discussed some of the finer operating points of the newly-arrived COVID-19 vaccine with Laura Vasile, director of health services and Shani Burkespecht, EMS services. He and his wife Susan joined brother knights and members of the Bethel community in participating in a weekly town-wide clinic to assist medical professionals in providing COVID-19 vaccinations to those priority groups most in need.



Long-time development associate bids the diocese farewell

BRIDGEPORT—Joan Trombetta, a member of the development fundraising team is retiring after 16 years of excellent service processing and coordinating Annual Catholic Appeal gifts and other fundraising initiatives. “She became a friend to many, speaking daily to parishioners and donors, parish staff and pastors,” said Pam Rittman, director of the ACA. “Her accuracy and attention to detail, handling a volume of requests and record keeping, in addition to training new staff, will be missed but we wish her the best as she focuses her time on family and welcoming a new grandson in March.”



St. Joseph's host an NCAA signing/commitment day

TRUMBULL—St. Joseph High School recently announced the names of thirteen senior student-athletes who will sign National Letters of Intent (NLI)

or Celebratory Letters in four different sports.

Student-athletes, alongside their parents, celebrated their achievements at a signing/commitment

event in St. Joseph High School's newly renovated gymnasium on Thursday, January 21 at 9 am. Social distancing and wearing masks were required at the event.



Around the Diocese



St. Mark School increases focus on student well-being amid COVID-19

STRATFORD—St. Mark School in Stratford is pleased to announce that amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it has increased its emphasis on student well-being. This year, the school initiated a

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Program into the preschool–grade 8 curriculum and hired a part-time School Counselor.

This year St. Mark School implemented Second Step, an evidence-based, interactive SEL curriculum, supported by Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning

(CASEL), through which students learn and practice vital social skills, such as cooperation, problem-solving, empathy, emotion management and impulse control.

(For more information, call 203.375.4291, email contactus@stmarkschool.org or visit www.stmarkschool.org.)



Immaculate High School welcomes prospective students

DANBURY—Immaculate High School invited 115 students from the early decision applicant pool to join the Class of 2025 and hosted virtual accepted student and parent sessions this past month. Additional sessions were offered in the following weeks for incoming families to explore the many opportunities students will have to excel in academics, athletics and the arts.

The annual Accepted Student Day pivoted to a virtual event which included fun games and giveaways, polling to learn more about the Class of 2025, a panel of student ambassadors to answer questions and share their experiences, smaller breakout rooms with fun games led by current students and a special appearance by alumna Megan Mitchell '10, news anchor and reporter for WLTV in Cincinnati who emceed a fun virtual scavenger hunt.

The school offers rolling admissions for families, as well as in-person tours. Contact Denise Suarez, director of admissions at 203.744.1510 x148 to schedule a tour or for questions about the admissions process.

Diocesan News

Bishop will consecrate diocese to St. Joseph

By JOE PISANI

BRIDGEPORT—In observance of the Year of St. Joseph, proclaimed by Pope Francis, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has announced a spiritual program that will include a year of events centered on different themes each month to honor the foster father of Jesus and the husband of the Blessed Mother.

The pope proclaimed the special year in observance of the 150th anniversary of St. Joseph being named Patron of the Universal Church by Blessed Pius IX. The pontiff also issued an Apostolic Letter titled *Patris corde*, (With a Father's Heart) in order "to increase our love for this great saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtues and his zeal."

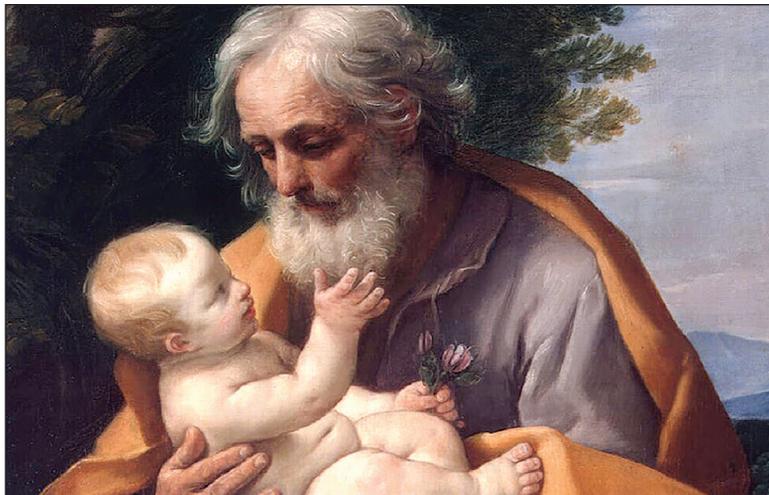
The foster father of the Son of God, Pope Francis says, was "a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a father who is creatively courageous, a working father...a father in the shadows."

The diocesan consecration to St. Joseph will begin with a special live-streamed Mass on the Feast of St. Joseph celebrated by Bishop Caggiano on March 19, 7 pm, from St. Augustine Cathedral. The bishop has also invited pastors throughout the diocese to celebrate Mass at that time in their parishes as a symbol of unity.

Plans also call for an annual Mass at St. Joseph High School in Trumbull that will be concelebrated by the alumni priests from the school.

Bishop Caggiano said "The Holy Father has asked us to honor St. Joseph this year, and I can think of no better saint to honor as we begin this unique preparation for renewal of our diocese. In the scripture he doesn't speak a word, yet he was given the mandate to protect Our Lady and Our Lord. It is good that we consecrate everything we do in the diocese to St. Joseph, our protector."

The year dedicated to St. Joseph, which runs until March 2022, will have a calendar of events centered on the different titles by which the saint is known, such as Hope of the Sick, Patron



A LIVESTREAMED Mass from St. Augustine Cathedral is set for March 19, 7 pm

of Workers, Comforter of the Afflicted, Protector of the Church, Patron of the Dying, Head of the Holy Family and Protector of Families. The full schedule with details of the events will be available at the diocesan website, www.bridgeportdiocese.org, and announcements will be made throughout the year.

In his apostolic letter, Pope Francis describes St. Joseph as "a hidden presence" and "a man in the shadows" and offers his "personal reflections on this extraordinary figure," who is only mentioned several times in the Gospels. He is a "hidden presence," whose defining characteristic was that he was "a righteous man" who loved Jesus with "a father's heart."

Two thousand years after the birth of Christ, St. Joseph is much-needed power of example for the modern world in which the role of fathers has been diminished and society is suffering from a spiritual pandemic of broken families.

The head of the Holy Family, the husband of the Mother of God, and the foster-father of the Son of God is a model for every father and every Catholic.

As Pope Francis says, "Each of us can discover in Joseph—the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence—an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble. St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation."

During the Year of St. Joseph, which began December 8 on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Catholics may receive

a special plenary indulgence, which remits all temporal punishment due to sin.

There are 15 ways to receive the indulgence, including to pray for St. Joseph's intercession for the unemployed, recite the Litany of St. Joseph for persecuted Christians, perform a corporal work of mercy or spiritual work of mercy, celebrate the feast of St. Joseph on March 19 with an act of piety, and pray the rosary with your family so that "all Christian families may be stimulated to recreate the same atmosphere of intimate communion, love and prayer that was in the Holy Family."

The indulgence requires sacramental confession, receiving Holy Communion and a prayer for the pope's intentions.

Pope Francis said he was inspired to share his personal reflections on St. Joseph because of the global coronavirus pandemic and his belief that countless people, hidden in the shadows like St. Joseph, had done so much for others:

"We experienced, amid the crisis, how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked. At the conclusion of his Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis offers a prayer to St. Joseph, which he encourages Catholics to pray together:

Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To you God entrusted his only Son; in you Mary placed her trust; with you Christ became man.

Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen. ■

Diocesan News

Diocese welcomes expanded capacity order

By **BRIAN D. WALLACE**

BRIDGEPORT—The State of Connecticut has removed the cap of 100 people for indoor religious gatherings, making it possible for larger churches in the diocese to expand their capacity at each celebration of the Mass.

The Catholic Conference statement pointed out that infections and related problems in Catholic parishes have been minimal “due to the commitment to safety and the hard work of all concerned.”

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano welcomed the modifications

As a result of new regulations and the diocesan success in preventing communal spread at Mass, the bishop said pastors can continue to use diocesan Mass reservation system or choose another, more flexible method to manage capacity limitations as long as parishioners are given



Governor Ned Lamont issued Executive Order No. 10 on Thursday, February 4, removing the previous cap of 100 people for indoor religious gatherings. Under the modification of the state mandate, restrictions on religious gatherings have been eased to permit indoor capacity of up to—but not to exceed—50 percent.

The Connecticut Catholic Conference, representing the Catholic dioceses of the state, issued a statement welcoming the expanded capacity policy.

“We view this new lifting of the cap on attendance at worship as an important step forward welcoming back more of our faithful to Mass and the sacraments. Freedom of religion is the most sacred of our God-given and constitutional rights.... At the same time, we remain firmly committed to ensuring that all steps are taken to promote public health and safety.”

as “a significant development that must now factor into our reasoning regarding how best to regulate seating capacity moving forward.”

While larger churches in the diocese will be able to include more people at Mass, smaller church structures will likely not necessarily benefit from the expanded capacity change because they lack the space for adequate social distancing between pews.

The bishop said that in effect, the modifications mean that every church building will have its own, specific maximum capacity number dependent upon the actual seating capacity of the building. For most parishes that can seat people in every other pew, maximum capacity will likely range between twenty and twenty-five percent because of the social distancing restrictions that remain in place.

advance notice of the changes

Likewise, because diocesan policies have demonstrated success in avoiding transmission of the virus at Mass, parishes will no longer be required to notify parishioners if someone who attended Mass later tests positive for COVID-19. However, if a member of the clergy or an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion tests positive, the pastor will notify the parish through normal parish communication channels including website, emails, robocalls, etc..

The bishop emphasized that the easing of restrictions must be accompanied by maintaining existing safety protocols including wearing masks and providing seating that observes recommended social distancing—six feet of space in all directions between individuals or groups not from the same household during a liturgical celebration. ■

2021 ACA

ACA looks to year
of recovery & renewal

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—“Arise” is the theme for the 2021 Annual Catholic Appeal (ACA), which launches in all parishes on February 27-28, as the diocese looks toward renewal in the coming year.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano said he chose the “Arise” theme in gratitude for the many faithful who have truly risen to meet the challenge of caring for others during the pandemic and because he’s hopeful about the new year.

“As I’ve prayed and continue to pray for you and for your loved ones and for the mission of our Church, there is a single word that the Lord has put on my heart, and that word is, ‘Arise,’” he said.

In the new “Arise” ACA video, the bishop said that during the past year “our hearts were troubled, or our families threatened, and our neighbors and friends have suffered at the hands of this invisible menace in our midst.”

“Yet we have come together in hope and encouragement for one another and for our sisters and brothers in need and we have made the Lord’s presence real to them and to one another,” he said.

Bishop Caggiano said with vaccine distribution and the state’s recent easing of restrictions on church capacity and other activities, “We’ve come to a moment when we can dare to hope that we begin to see the first lights of a new dawn.”

The bishop said he is particularly concerned for “those in our midst whom this pandemic has ravaged so deeply.” And he urged the faithful, “to not leave anyone behind, most especially those who are suffering, have lost homes, have lost jobs and even have lost hope.”

Joe Gallagher, Chief Development Office of the diocese, said this year’s goal is \$8.1 million, 10 percent less than last year due to the success of the We Stand With Christ Capital Campaign and will allow the diocese to maintain works of charity, pastoral ministry, education and catechesis.

“Last year in the midst of a historic health crisis, we were blessed by the extraordinary generosity of the faithful throughout the diocese,

the sacrificial work of our campaign co-chairs and the leadership of Bishop Caggiano, who has been tireless in his advocacy for serving the most vulnerable among us while celebrating our faith in a time of great hardship and anxiety,” said Gallagher.

Gallagher said that those who gave to the Annual Appeal last year helped to bring the mercy of Christ to people who suffered immediately from job loss, hunger and psychological stress as a result of the pandemic, and who needed

of the past year. “The vaccine is here and we are inaugurating much needed and innovative initiatives in our diocese, which are giving people hope and inviting them back to church,” she said.

ACA funds will support the bishop’s plan for a Year of Eucharistic Celebration and Renewal through the dedication of Centers of Mercy and Centers of Eucharist in various parishes throughout the diocese.

Rittman said that additionally, a new partnership has been established

between the diocese and parishes to share resources generated from the ACA. The new sharing formula makes it possible for over-goal funds to be used to address critical needs within a parish, or to be allocated to a neighboring parish or specific diocesan mission.

(Please participate in this year’s, Arise, Annual Catholic Appeal by giving

as generously as your means allow. You may mail your gift in the enclosed envelope in this issue, make a donation online at www.2021ACA-Bridgeport.com or text the word APPEAL to 475.241.7849. Donations of whatever amount will help us to help those in need. Thank you for your support.)

(chart on page 7) The 2020 Annual Catholic Appeal, While the historic health crisis of 2020 impacted everyone, the generosity of the donors to the 2020 Annual Catholic Appeal enabled the Diocese of Bridgeport to expand services to meet the spiritual and daily needs of individuals and families, many of whom lost their jobs. We are grateful for the support of all those who participated. The 2020 “Renew” Annual Catholic Appeal raised \$8,047,988 on a goal of \$9 million dollars. The Appeal makes it possible for works of charity and pastoral services, faith and ministry and education and catechesis to continue each and every day. Thank you to our donors, pastors and priests, staff and volunteers who work tirelessly during the Appeal. Likewise, we extend our gratitude to the pastors and parishioners of the “We Stand With Christ” Capital Campaign for meeting and exceeding their capital campaign goal and meeting 100 percent of their Annual Catholic Appeal goal.

2021 DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
ANNUAL CATHOLIC APPEAL

immediate help through Catholic Charities and other ministries.

The Emergency ACA also helped churches and schools to safely remain open while also supporting online Masses, remote learning when necessary and other emergency measures.

Many also stepped up through the worst months of the pandemic and supported their parishes and the diocese in unprecedented ways in addition to making their gift to the Annual Catholic Appeal.

While a gift to this year’s ACA will continue to support Catholic education, Faith formation, vocations, retired priests, Catholic Charities and other ongoing ministries, this year’s campaign will fund programs that have grown out of the needs that emerged during the pandemic

Pamela S. Rittman, director of Development, said that the 2021 ACA will help the diocese move forward after the difficult months

Individual Parish Results

		Pledged	Goal	%
DEANERY A	Blessed Sacrament, Bridgeport	\$9,256	\$13,500	68.56%
	Our Lady of Fatima, Bridgeport	22,390	27,000	82.93%
	Saint Andrew, Bridgeport	42,772	67,500	63.37%
	Saint Ann, Bridgeport	18,365	32,750	56.08%
	Saint Charles Borromeo, Bridgeport	12,666	27,000	46.91%
	Saint George, Bridgeport	4,220	15,300	27.58%
	Saint Mary, Bridgeport	10,628	25,200	42.17%
	Saint Michael the Archangel, Bridgeport	33,095	40,500	81.72%
	Saint Peter, Bridgeport	18,499	40,500	45.68%
	Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish, Bridgeport	5,435	16,200	33.55%
	Shrine of Saint Margaret, Bridgeport	29,960	29,700	100.88%
	The Cathedral Parish, Bridgeport	36,926	62,750	58.85%
	DEANERY B	Holy Name of Jesus, Stratford	22,311	49,500
Our Lady of Peace, Stratford		26,095	58,500	44.61%
Saint James, Stratford		49,096	117,000	41.96%
Saint Joseph, Shelton		35,882	81,000	44.30%
Saint Lawrence, Shelton		126,661	175,500	72.17%
Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, Shelton		49,135	43,350	113.34%
Saint Mark, Stratford		101,290	123,300	82.15%
DEANERY C	Christ the King, Trumbull	37,795	72,000	52.49%
	Saint Catherine of Siena, Trumbull	96,979	171,000	56.71%
	Saint Rose of Lima, Newtown	200,780	199,750	100.52%
	Saint Stephen, Trumbull	61,132	93,750	65.21%
	Saint Theresa, Trumbull	110,010	163,800	67.16%
DEANERY D	Holy Trinity Parish, Sherman	34,845	58,500	59.56%
	Immaculate Heart of Mary, Danbury	11,245	18,900	59.50%
	Our Lady of Guadalupe, Danbury	10,303	22,100	46.62%
	Sacred Heart, Danbury	26,895	35,700	75.34%
	Saint Edward, New Fairfield	120,095	180,000	66.72%
	Saint Gregory the Great, Danbury	60,159	90,000	66.84%
	Saint Joseph, Brookfield	126,610	117,000	108.21%
	Saint Joseph, Danbury	101,283	117,000	86.57%
	Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys, Brookfield	28,552	65,700	43.46%
	Saint Mary Parish, Bethel	135,859	136,000	99.90%
DEANERY E	Our Lady of Fatima, Wilton	130,391	202,500	64.39%
	Sacred Heart, Georgetown	25,155	63,000	39.93%
	Saint Aloysius, New Canaan	972,747	600,000	162.12%
	Saint Elizabeth Seton, Ridgefield	94,517	94,500	100.02%
	Saint Francis of Assisi, Weston	85,499	94,500	90.48%
	Saint Mary, Ridgefield	236,397	259,250	91.18%
	Saint Patrick, Redding Ridge	34,655	51,000	67.95%
	DEANERY F	Assumption, Westport	118,969	165,750
Holy Cross, Fairfield		11,105	16,200	68.55%
Notre Dame, Easton		32,325	103,500	31.23%
Our Lady of Assumption, Fairfield		119,708	135,000	88.67%
Saint Anthony of Padua, Fairfield		77,223	126,000	61.29%
Saint Luke, Westport		155,125	202,500	76.60%
Saint Pius X, Fairfield		284,827	213,750	133.25%
DEANERY G	Saint Thomas Aquinas, Fairfield	139,215	175,500	79.32%
	Saint Jerome, Norwalk	51,235	76,500	66.97%
	Saint John, Darien	163,008	225,000	72.45%
	Saint Joseph, South Norwalk	21,135	55,000	38.43%
	Saint Ladislaus, South Norwalk	7,000	16,000	43.75%
	Saint Mary, Norwalk	56,842	96,750	58.75%
	Saint Matthew, Norwalk	114,930	170,000	67.61%
	Saint Philip, Norwalk	40,370	70,200	57.51%
	Saint Thomas More, Darien	478,158	450,000	106.30%
	Saint Thomas the Apostle, East Norwalk	38,093	103,500	36.81%
DEANERY H	Basilica of Saint John the Evangelist, Stamford	103,470	93,500	110.66%
	Holy Name of Jesus, Stamford	17,390	37,800	46.01%
	Holy Spirit, Stamford	80,060	90,100	88.86%
	Our Lady Star of the Sea, Stamford	69,177	94,500	73.20%
	Sacred Heart, Stamford	23,780	40,500	58.72%
	Saint Bridget, Stamford	36,425	52,200	69.78%
	Saint Clement, Stamford	28,947	47,700	60.69%
	Saint Leo, Stamford	90,169	292,500	30.83%
	Saint Mary, Stamford	37,370	76,500	48.85%
	Saint Maurice, Stamford	35,145	54,000	65.08%
DEANERY I	Sacred Heart, Greenwich	21,250	45,000	47.22%
	Saint Mary, Greenwich	261,539	360,000	72.65%
	Saint Michael, Greenwich	261,400	297,500	87.87%
	Saint Paul, Greenwich	77,658	104,400	74.39%
	Saint Roch, Greenwich	38,825	49,500	78.43%
	St. Catherine of Siena and St. Agnes Parish, Greenwich	292,550	255,000	114.73%

**2020
WE STAND
WITH CHRIST
PARISHES &
QUASI PARISH**

The 2020 We Stand With Christ capital campaign parishes of St. Cecilia-St. Gabriel, Stamford; St. Peter, Danbury; Holy Family and St. Emery, Fairfield; Our Lady of Grace, Stratford; St. Jude, Monroe; and the Quasi Parish—Our Lady of Aparecida all met their 2020 Annual Catholic Appeal raising \$690,200.

Unspecified \$576,781

Total \$8,047,988

2021 ACA

Annual Catholic Appeal
co-chairs 'Arise' to the challenge

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—For both the Melaragnos and the Murphys, leadership of the 2021 Annual Catholic Appeal, the pandemic has been a time for noticing and stepping up to address the great need in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

"Many people are asking for help at a time when help isn't as readily available," explained Roxanne Melaragno.

The 2021 ACA theme is "Arise" and people around the diocese have truly "arisen" to the challenge during this difficult time, although the need is still great.

Roxanne and Jason Melaragno, parishioners of Holy Family/St. Emery Parish in Fairfield continue as chair couple for this year's appeal and have been serving in leadership roles within their parish and at the diocese. Kelly Anne and Dan Murphy, parishioners for St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull, continue a second year as vice chair couple.

Kelly Anne and Dan Murphy shared their experiences of volunteering at multiple food drives this summer. The couple volunteered at St. Catherine of Siena, St. Lawrence, the Thomas Merton Center and New Covenant Center, just to name a few.

"We learned that we need to direct generosity properly so that it reaches those in need," shared Kelly Anne, referring to an experience at Blessed Sacrament Food Pantry in Bridgeport. "Many people that benefit from the food pantry come by on foot, so bulk items are often too heavy for them to carry." Kelly Anne explained that with each food drive, the volunteers learned more and more about how to be intentional when it comes to donations.

"The manner in which we do outreach is different," she said. "We have to be cognizant of what people's needs are."

"My experience volunteering during the pandemic has opened my eyes to what others really need and how we can meet those needs in new ways."

The Melaragnos noticed how enthusiastic people were about being able to return to Mass. From early-March to mid-May, public Mass was not celebrated in



ROXANNE AND JASON MELARAGNO

the diocese due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While it was a great sacrifice for many, especially those who watched a relative or friend fall ill, buried a loved one, or remained in isolation, the effort was in order to observe the state's shelter at home order and save many lives.

On May 11, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano announced a gradual return to public Mass to begin later that month. The Melaragnos explained that although virtual Masses were a wonderful addition and a way to keep people connected during the height of COVID-19, the return to public Mass was indeed an occasion for much joy.

"People realized how much they missed Mass," shared Jason Melaragno.

At their home parish of Holy Family/St. Emery, they noticed that the goal was to take precautions to help people feel as comfortable as possible returning to Mass—that even included the addition of a Holy Water dispenser.

The Murphys also remarked that it was comforting to see people gradually returning to public Mass, and at their home parish of St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull, all available seating has been filled since the middle of the summer.

That being said, the Murphys are very grateful for the ability to livestream and attend virtually, especially for the elderly or those at high-risk. Their hope is that parishes can continue to reach out to their parishioners via livestream.

The Murphys also praised the many opportunities that have



KELLY ANNE AND DAN MURPHY

become available for virtual group prayer and reflection. "More people are praying the Rosary virtually than ever before," remarked Kelly Anne.

The Melaragnos praised the efforts of the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Bridgeport to make sure staff and students were safe while still delivering instruction, and dispelling fear through transparent and hopeful messaging. The Bishop's Scholarship Fund, funded through the ACA, is there for students who may not have the ability to receive Catholic education otherwise, a cause that is of great importance to the chair couple.

"As we look towards 2021, the need will continue, but we are both eager to see how the ACA will be able to help people," said Jason.

He explained that he and his wife's focus for this year's appeal is participation. He hopes that participation can be at 100%, even without a specific dollar amount, in order to more readily help those in need. "We see that as an opportunity to both display their Catholic faith and enhance their faith."

"We can call on donors to act heroically," said the Murphys. "With the help of the ACA, we hopefully will get back to something vaguely better than normal by continuing to learn and through people engaging with their faith in different ways."

(To learn more about the 2021, Arise, Annual Catholic Appeal or to make a gift, please visit 2021ACABridgeport.com or call 203.416.1470. Thank you for your support.)

Lenten Fasting & Almsgiving

Two ways to give this Lent: Loaves & Fishes & CRS Rice Bowl

BY ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—This year, Catholic Charities of Fairfield County will be running two faith in action campaigns concurrently during Lent—Catholic Charities annual Loaves and Fishes Campaign together with Catholic Relief Services’ Rice Bowl program.

The Catholic Charities feeding programs provide food for the needy and most vulnerable members of the local community while the CRS Rice Bowl program supports members of the global family who are impoverished and endangered in the developing world.

“Due to COVID-19 we are doing things a bit differently this year,” said Mike Donoghue, director of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County.

“Since the pandemic began, food insecurity is the biggest need amongst some of our most vulnerable families,” Donoghue said, explaining that their main programs, pre-pandemic were doing 4-500 meals a day; now they do 1,000-1,200 meals a day. “Demand has definitely increased,” said Donoghue.

Donoghue explained that this year’s Loaves and Fishes Campaign will be foregoing the use of envelopes, to cut down on paper waste and make giving more stream-lined.

Instead, flyers will be available



in parishes with information on how to give including online and a mailing address.

Catholic Charities Feeding Programs supported by Loaves and Fishes

New Covenant Center, Stamford

- Open 365 days per year serving 3 meals each day
- Soup Kitchen serves 600,000 meals per year to 3600+ men, women, and children
- Food pantry serves 1000 families per month
- 800+ volunteers help cook, stock shelves and serve clients
- Also provides clients with Day Shelter, Job Skills and Life Coaching, Immigration Counseling, Showers, Barber Services, and a Computer Lab

Thomas Merton Center, Bridgeport

- Provides breakfast, lunch, and day shelter 6 days per week
- Soup Kitchen serves 100,000+ meals a year to 4000 individuals

- Eat Smart Food Pantry provides 600 families with 10 days of groceries per month
- 600+ volunteers help cook, stock shelves and serve clients
- Other Services provided - Thrift store, Shower program, Cosmetic day, Computer resources, medical services and referrals, homeless outreach team, life skills

Morning Glory Breakfast Program, Bridgeport

- Serves hot breakfast 365 days per year to 100+ individuals daily
- Served 45,000 hot and nutritious meals in 2019
- 400+ volunteers help cook and serve clients
- Non-food pantry provides household staples to over 1000 families

Parish Leaders may order CRS Rice Bowl materials free of charge at www.crsricebowl.org. Please contact Father Michael Boccaccio at: frboccaccio@diobpt.org for further information or questions on the Rice Bowl program. ■

ARISE
2021 ANNUAL CATHOLIC APPEAL
DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

“Arise” is the theme of the 2021 Annual Catholic Appeal and is a statement of hope for renewal and recovery this year. The Lord invites us to arise from the darkness of this pandemic and to seek new life in Him.

The 2021 Annual Catholic Appeal provides for ministries and programs in the Diocese of Bridgeport



Charity and Pastoral Services

Serving with dignity and love those who have nowhere else to turn.

Serving those in need who are physically, emotionally and spiritually challenged.



Education and Catechesis

Faith-based learning communities of academic excellence.

The Diocese of Bridgeport educates students who will steward their God-given gifts to understand, express, create and ultimately serve as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

Faith and Ministry

Celebrating the gift of the Eucharist in our lives and parishes.

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Lenten Fasting & Almsgiving

Rice Bowl: putting something aside for the poor

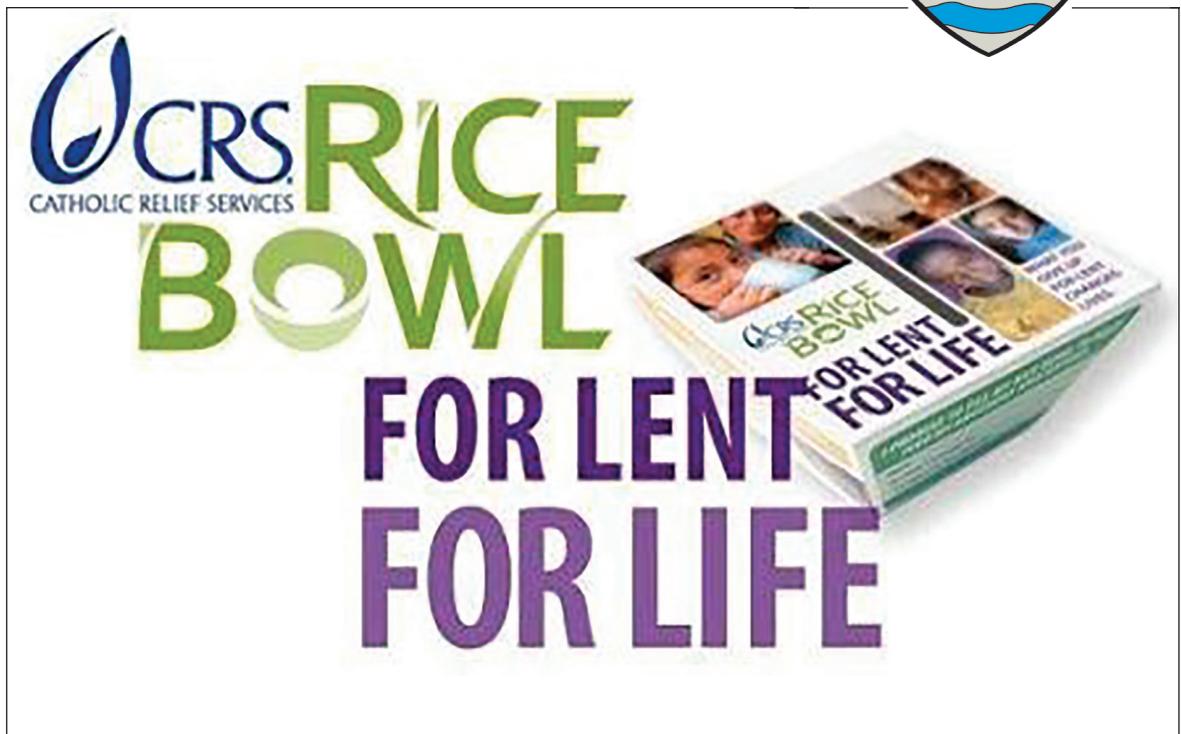
BRIDGEPORT—The Lenten Rice Bowl program with its familiar Rice Bowl donation boxes began on Ash Wednesday, February 17, in all parishes throughout the diocese.

The CRS Rice Bowl has become a staple on the table of Catholic families across the country during Lent. The colorful cardboard box is a tool for col-

lecting Lenten alms—and comes with a Lenten calendar that guides families through the 40 days of Lent with activities, reflections and stories.

will bring hope and sustenance to many of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters,” Bishop Caggiano said.

Once again this year, Bishop Caggiano has asked Father Michael Boccaccio, director of Pontifical Mission Societies Office of the diocese, to coordinate this year’s Lenten Rice Bowl effort.



lecting Lenten alms—and comes with a Lenten calendar that guides families through the 40 days of Lent with activities, reflections and stories.

The Rice Bowl campaign is sponsored by Catholic Relief Services, the Church’s official relief and development agency of the United States Catholic Bishops. It provides emergency assistance and global humanitarian aid to those in need.

“The number of those who face food insecurity, a lack of clean drinking water or adequate housing has dramatically increased because of the disruptions caused by the pandemic,” said Bishop Caggiano, who serves as chairman of the board of CRS.

“During the most difficult and trying time in the lives of people around the globe, I urge people to put something aside for the poorest and most vulnerable in the world. It is a Lenten sacrifice that

Father Boccaccio said Catholics in the United States have the ability to turn Lenten sacrifice into a gift. By giving something up, like that daily cup of coffee and putting the money into the Rice Bowl donation box, they can feed the hungry across the world.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has affected our entire world. Even in the US, we have seen food lines expanding and food pantries emptying. Joblessness is historic and many families have lived with suffering and death.”

“This is an opportunity to walk in the sandals of our faith family in the developing world. Hunger, thirst, illness, homelessness, etc. are everyday realities under ‘normal’ conditions—let alone the constant threat of being imprisoned, persecuted and killed,” he said.

Father Boccaccio said donations make a difference overseas and here in the United States,

with 75 percent going to CRS programming in targeted countries and the remaining 25 percent staying in the diocese to feed the hungry.

“I encourage you to participate in this most important program and invite your parishioners to do the same,” said Father Michael Boccaccio in a recent letter.

Father Boccaccio has asked people across the diocese to invite co-workers, family, friends and neighbors to check with your parish or school to find out when CRS Rice Bowls will be distributed.

Lenten Rice Bowl materials are also available and free in English and Spanish at: crsricebowl.org or crsplatodearroz.org. People can also send donations directly to the Pontifical Mission Office of the Diocese of Bridgeport, 238 Jewett Avenue in Bridgeport, 06606.

(For more information, please contact Father Boccaccio at: frboccaccio@diobpt.org or: 203.416.1447.) ■

Diocesan News

Bishop forms Vicars Council

By **BRIAN D. WALLACE**

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has announced the creation of a Council of Vicars in order to ensure that the needs, concerns and voices of the many diverse racial, cultural and ethnic communities of our diocese are included in every aspect of diocesan life.

The new council, effective February 1, 2021, is made up of seven priests who minister to and serve the Black, Brazilian, Filipino, Haitian, Hispanic, Polish and Vietnamese communities within the diocese.

“Please join me in prayer that the work of this newly created council will serve our diverse communities and strengthen the overall unity and mission that we all share as disciples of the Lord Jesus,” said Bishop Caggiano in making the announcement.

They will meet with the bishop on a quarterly basis to discuss diocesan pastoral priorities, the pastoral concerns and challenges that are faced by their respective communities.

“We are blessed to have seven episcopal vicars who have given of their time generously to be engaged in this important work of collaboration, which will ensure that the voices of these important communities are effectively heard on every level of diocesan life,” said the bishop.



The newly named episcopal vicars include:

Episcopal Vicar for Black Catholics: Father Reginald Norman

Episcopal Vicar for Brazilian Catholics: Father Leonel Medeiros

Episcopal Vicar for Filipino Catholics: Father Cyrus Bartolome

Episcopal Vicar for Haitian Catholics: Father G. Frantz Desruisseaux

Episcopal Vicar for Hispanic Catholics: Father Gustavo Falla

Episcopal Vicar for Polish Catholics: Father Pawel Hrebenko

Episcopal Vicar for Vietnamese Catholics: Father Augustine Nguyen

“The council has a unique opportunity to bring many cultural pearls to the whole diocesan community and to educate people of the value of our diversity and traditions,” said Father Reginald Norman, pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Wilton and episcopal vicar for Black Catholics.

“We have been led to believe that America is a great melting pot,” said Father Reggie. “But when you melt something it loses its original value and becomes something new. We should instead consider ourselves a pot of gumbo, many ingredients that stand on their own but together make a great meal.”

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Year of St. Joseph

Pastors reflect on St. Joseph's message during jubilee year

By **JOE PISANI**

(Editor's note: In this Year of St. Joseph proclaimed by Pope Francis, pastors of parishes named after St. Joseph offer their thoughts on the saint's importance to the Church. What follows is a by pastors of the four St. Joseph churches in the diocese on the head of the Holy Family, the husband of the Mother of God, and the foster father of the Son of God, who is a model for every father and every Catholic.)

When Father Michael F. Dogali reflects on St. Joseph, the patron of his parish in Shelton, he recounts a story about Pope Francis that he read in the Jesuit theological journal "La Civiltà Cattolica."

"One day, Father Antonio Spadaro had a meeting with Francis in his private apartment, and in this very sparse apartment on top of the bureau was a small, four-inch statue of St. Joseph," Father Dogali recalled. "The statue was lopsided, and under St. Joseph were pieces of folded paper."

Father Spadaro, the Jesuit editor-in-chief of "La Civiltà Cattolica," asked the pope what it was about and Francis responded, "That's my St. Joseph statue, and under it are all my toughest problems and the things I am praying for and working on. I put them there so Joseph will take care of them."

It should be no wonder that Pope Francis declared a Year of St. Joseph in observance of the 150th anniversary of his being named Patron of the Universal Church by Blessed Pius IX. The pontiff also issued an Apostolic Letter titled *Patris corde*, ("With a Father's Heart") in order "to increase our love for this great saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtues and his zeal."

Father Dogali said, "I am telling this story because there are more than 10,000 proclaimed saints in the Church...and who does the pope have in his apartment—not St. Ignatius Loyola or St. Aloysius Gonzaga or any of the Jesuit saints—but rather St. Joseph, and he places his biggest problems at St. Joseph's feet."

Father Dogali, a graduate of Fairfield University, also studied under the Jesuits at The Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, which was originally part of the Roman College that St. Ignatius

Loyola founded in 1551.

Father Dogali, who was also pastor of St. Joseph Church in Danbury, says the Year of St. Joseph offers Catholics a great opportunity not



FATHER MICHAEL F. DOGALI

only for a plenary indulgence, but for special veneration of the saint who was head of the Holy Family, the foster father of Jesus and husband of the Mother of God.

"He is a big part of my life and my confirmation name is Joseph, after my uncle," Father says.

At the Shelton church above the altar of St. Joseph, there is a painting titled, "The Death of St. Joseph" on the ceiling.

"I have never seen anything like it," Father says. "The saint is in bed and he is dying and with him are Jesus and Mary. So many of us have been with our parents when they died and this shows us that Jesus cared for his foster father just as St. Joseph cared for Jesus."

Among the special liturgical observances that Father will have during the year will be penance services in Advent, Lent and for First Communion and Confirmation students that will offer reflections on St. Joseph and his importance in our lives.

"A man in the shadows." That is how Pope Francis describes St. Joseph in his apostolic letter, in which he offers his "personal reflections on this extraordinary figure," an extraordinary figure who is only mentioned several times in the Gospels. He is a "hidden presence," whose defining characteristic was that he was "a righteous man" who loved Jesus with "a father's heart."

The foster father of the Son of God, Pope Francis says, was "a beloved father, a tender and loving

father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a father who is creatively courageous, a working father...a father in the shadows."

Father Edicson Orozco, pastor



FATHER EDICSON OROZCO

of the Church of St. Joseph and St. Ladislaus in Norwalk, emphasizes the importance of Joseph as the head of the Holy Family.

"In Nazareth of Galilee, there was a happy family which confronted a lot of difficulties," he said. "In the middle of so many struggles, they kept their faith, love and respect for each other as fundamental principles of strength, unity and spiritual growth. St. Joseph was not just the adoptive father of Jesus and the chaste spouse of Mary—the Mother of God—he was in fact the guide, the example, the true presence of a man who gives up everything for his family."

In St. Joseph's house, Father said, "lived a poor divine family defined by a profound relationship." St. Joseph is the silent man who trusts God and sees in the silence of his heart the answer to any single obstacle or incomprehensible situation. Even though St. Joseph was "tormented by life thorns," Father Orozco said he was "the vivid example of what a selfless love is."

Father Orozco said that he has a personal devotion to St. Joseph and regularly prays to him for his intercession, and that he should be an example to all Catholic fathers and husbands.

"This unique family had the best husband, father, friend, laborer and protector," Father Orozco said. "Joseph entrusts fathers and families with the secret to renewing ours: meditative silence, love, respect, sincerity, work, honesty, under-

➤ **CONTINUED ON PAGE 13**

Pastors Reflect on St. Joseph

PASTORS REFLECT FROM PAGE 12

standing, dialogue and trust in God. He is not just an intercessor; he is the true example for living a sincere Christian life. So the best way to honor him is by imitating his life.”

The Church of St. Joseph and St. Ladislaus is going to prepare for the Solemnity of St. Joseph, which is celebrated on March 19, by praying a novena to him and live-streaming conferences about his life and message.

Saint Joseph's power of example

Two millennia after the birth of Christ, St. Joseph is more than ever a power of example for the modern world, a world that has diminished the role of fathers and is suffering from a spiritual pandemic of fractured and broken families.

As Pope Francis says, “Each of us can discover in Joseph—the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence—an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble. St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.”

Father George F. O’Neill, pastor of St. Joseph Church in Brookfield said that the loving patronage of St. Joseph “is never far from our thoughts and prayers at St. Joseph Church. His seemingly quiet and gentle spirit as reflected in the Gospels of Saints Matthew and Luke are powerful examples for us today of his selfless compassion and understanding.”

This year, as the Church celebrates St. Joseph by dedicating the year in his honor, Father O’Neill said that his parish will be having a beautiful prayer card printed with a picture of St. Joseph holding the Infant Jesus on the front and the Litany of St. Joseph inside, along with a short synopsis of his life and the Brookfield parish. The card will also contain a concluding prayer that was created collectively by the clergy staff for the parish family to pray throughout the year.

Father O’Neill said his parish is looking forward to celebrating the feast day of St. Joseph on March 19 and that even though COVID-19 restrictions have prevented group celebrations, the parish will revisit the matter in the fall and consider scheduling additional observances and events.

Father Michael J.V. Clark, parochial vicar of St. Joseph Church in Danbury, who is in charge of the Year of St. Joseph devotions and Masses, said it is a gift for the



FATHER GEORGE F. O'NEILL



FATHER MICHAEL J.V. CLARK

Universal Church “to spend a year contemplating the mystery of the man chosen by God to teach Our Lord authentic masculinity.”

“The idea that the Lord needed to be taught anything is itself quite shocking—scandalous even,” he said. “The whole universe, visible and invisible, is the intricate work of the Holy Trinity—indeed ‘by the Word of the Lord were the heavens made’ and to be truly God, the Lord Jesus loses nothing of his divinity in taking our flesh, yet the Lord chose to do so as a real human baby—to experience in himself the vulnerability of childhood—and with it, the need to learn. It was thus Divine Will that the Supreme Educator should himself experience education.”

Father Clark marvels at the type of father St. Joseph must have been and the care and protection he showed the Holy Family.

“He is a thinker, a strategizer—he works out a plan before committing to a course of action,” he said. “Yet much remains unsaid, in that discrete deference to the interior life of the Holy Family so characteristic of Sacred Scripture. But the absence of such data reveals another gift for us: Just as we all receive our true identity in Christ, this year invites us to look to Our Lord as we meditate on the character of St. Joseph.”

Father Clark said that the Lord “would have known the tenderness of maternal care unalloyed by sin and self-interest with the Immaculate Conception for his mother.”

“But it is our deep belief that human beings need the love of two parents, and thus St. Joseph was prepared by God for this role from all eternity,” Father Clark said. “Men cannot fully learn how to be men from their mothers. They need the loving care of a father to grow

in integrity and confidence. God entrusted that nurturing role to St. Joseph—and just as the Blessed Mother was prepared for her role through the singular privilege of being conceived without sin, we can be in no doubt that St. Joseph too lived without sin, since he was to be the head of the Holy Family in a way that has not been explicitly revealed to us.”

“In the Incarnation, God is made both visible and vulnerable—and the Word made Flesh relied upon the wisdom of St. Joseph as guardian and protector to navigate the dangers of this world. Thus, St. Joseph is not just the builder of humble dwelling places in Galilee but rather the very craftsman of the eternal dwelling we call the Church,” Father said. “In his life on Earth, St. Joseph provided shelter for the Immaculate and Immanuel by his humility working in concert with his ingenuity. He it was who found shelter in Bethlehem; he it was who found refuge in Egypt; and he again who gave the Lord a dwelling in Nazareth. Thus, if Our Lady is the first Tabernacle, St. Joseph is the first Baldacchino, protecting the very presence of the Lord in our midst now, as then, with his fatherly care.”

St. Joseph Church in Danbury is in the consultation phase of planning for the year and parishioners are sending in their ideas about what they would like to do to, Father Clark said. At present, the church will be open for people to visit the beautiful shrine of St. Joseph from February 15, which is one of the days the 33 Day Consecration to St. Joseph may start, Father said. In addition, the Litany of St. Joseph is available in the church for people to pray and light a candle. More liturgical observances will be announced in the coming months, he said. ■

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Ashes in a year of pandemic

FAITHFUL THROUGHOUT the diocese turned out in large number out for Ash Wednesday Masses and distribution of ashes. In order to ensure the safety of clergy and the lay faithful, distribution of ashes this year took the form of sprinkling dry ashes on the top of people's heads or using a cotton swab rather than the thumb to make a cross. In photos (l-r) Father Joseph Marcello, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull and Father Samuel Kachuba, pastor of St. Pius X Parish in Fairfield, distribute ashes to those of all ages who came forward. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return," the priests intoned during this solemn rite that marks the beginning of Lent.

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Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
*Publisher***Brian D. Wallace***Executive Editor* bdwallace@diobpt.org**Elizabeth Clyons***Writer/Editor* elizabeth.clyons@diobpt.org**Renéé Stamatis***Art Director* rstamatis@diobpt.org**Ralph Lazzaro***Advertising Manager* rlazzaro@diobpt.org**John Grosso***Social Media Leader* jgrosso@diobpt.org**Ronnie Lazzaro***Copy Editor (Consultant)***Advertise**

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Editorial

EDITORIAL

A Call to Renewal

This issue of *Fairfield County Catholic* includes “Let Us Enter the Upper Room with the Lord,” the first Pastoral Exhortation by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano (see pages 13-15).

Along with the homilies for his Installation Mass and the Synod Closing Mass, his exhortation is one of three major reflections the bishop has delivered at critical moments in the life of the diocese. It urges us to move forward in faith and provides the framework that will make it possible.

The bishop issued the letter on Ash Wednesday: “On this day, we accept ashes on our foreheads as a sign of our mortality and an invitation to conversion. It begins the holy season of Lent, during which we journey with Christ into the desert so that we can be purified and made ready to celebrate the Easter Sacraments.”

The bishop’s exhortation is first and foremost a call to personal and communal renewal of faith. His encouraging words come at the right time after a year of suffering and anxiety that has left people feeling dispirited and uncertain about their lives, and perhaps about the future of the Church in light of the prolonged pause from Mass and the sacraments experienced by so many of the faithful.

However, he writes, “As hope begins to grow that the grip of the pandemic may ease in the months ahead, we must begin to discern a path by which we can address the long-term consequences created by the pandemic. In many ways, these unprecedented times are also a moment of great opportunity, that will allow us to address not only the effects of the pandemic, but those trends in our secular society, at work for many years, that have created obstacles to living our Catholic faith.”

While the pandemic has given new urgency to the bishop’s call for renewal, it is a theme he has sounded from day one: “When I first came to the diocese, in my installation homily, I spoke about my deep desire to build bridges to those who were seeking meaning and direction in life. It seems to me that the time has come when we are all called to be bridge-builders to the people around us, leading them to Christ, for whom we serve as his ambassadors.” The bishop also notes that the synod discernment has paved the way for renewal by building the foundation that will assist the diocese and its parishes in the work of recovery and revitalization.

The bishop asks us to reflect on the image of the Upper Room in the Gospel of Luke (22: 7-12), and reminds us that it was “where the Lord often gathered with His apostles in times of challenge or decision, to strengthen them for what lay ahead.... In the Upper Room on the night before he died, the Lord fed His apostles both His Word and His Sacred Body and Blood. The same gifts await you and me, if we are willing to receive them.”

While liturgies and other activities are planned for the year, the bishop makes it clear, the call to the Upper Room is not a program, but an invitation to join him on “a spiritual journey, seeking the Lord’s grace to transform this time of suffering into a springtime of renewal for the life of the Church.” Because of the uncertainty of the pandemic, he envisions the first part of the year as a time of prayer and intense spiritual preparation that will hopefully lead to more in-person missionary outreach in the fall—an active going out into the community by “ambassadors” to welcome all back and invite others in for the first time.

As we walk the path together, he instructs us that there is a role for everyone, because the renewal is based on personal prayer, reconciliation with Christ, and reception of the Holy Eucharist—all within our grasp as members of his Church who believe faith can transform our lives and change the world.

“We must be bold, imaginative and faithful to the truth of our Catholic faith.... As Christians, we believe suffering and death can lead to new life,” the bishop writes. “Let us work together to craft a future that will bring unity, renewal and new life to ourselves, our families and our a “culture of care,” by sharing our blessings and our time with others. ■

CLERGY
APPOINTMENTS

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

PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATOR

REVEREND FRANCIS T. HOFFMANN, appointed to Parochial Administrator of Saint Matthew Parish, Norwalk. Effective date was January 13.

REVEREND ANTONIO DE AZEVEDO, appointed as Parochial Administrator, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Danbury. Effective date was January 15.

NEWLY ORDAINED

REVEREND BRENDAN H. BLAWIE, newly ordained to the Diocese of Bridgeport to Priest returning to Rome for continued studies. Effective date was January 2.

EPISCOPAL VICAR

REVEREND CYRUS M. BARTOLOME, appointed to Episcopal Vicar for Filipino Catholics. Effective date was January 19, for a term of three years.

MINISTER FOR PRIESTS

REVEREND MONSIGNOR KEVIN ROYAL, appointed to Minister for Priests. Effective date was February 1, for a term of three years.

DEANERY APPOINTMENTS

REVEREND MICHAEL JONES, appointed to Dean of Mary, Mother of the Church Deanery, Greenwich. Effective date was January 2, for the remainder of the term ending September 1, 2023.

REVEREND BIRENDRA SORENG, appointed to Dean of Mystical Rose Deanery, Stratford and Shelton. Effective date was January 31, for the remainder of the term ending September 1, 2023.

REVEREND JHON GOMEZ, appointed to Dean of Queen of Peace Deanery, Bridgeport. Effective date was January 31, for the remainder of the term ending September 1, 2023.

DIACONATE

DEACON TIM BOLTON, resigned as Coordinator of Diaconate Vocations. Effective date was January 13.

DEACON JOHN DITARANTO, end of assignment as Episcopal Deacon Chaplain, to Kolbe Cathedral High School, Bridgeport. Effective date was January 15.

*Reverend Francis T. Hoffmann
Vicar for Clergy, February, 2021*

Editorial



‘Traveling’ during a pandemic

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.

When the pandemic hit, my biggest regret was not traveling more. Looking back, I wish I had taken every opportunity to see the world and experience new things. There are so many places I want to see and cultures I want to learn more about.

During this time, I’ve had to find other ways to broaden my worldview and step outside my comfort zone.

One of my favorite ways to “travel” is through books. I’ve always been a big reader. I remember sneaking Harry Potter books under my desk in grammar school (sorry to any of my teachers reading this). Having more time at home has given me the ability to read more than I could before. I read 81 books in 2020 and my goal is to reach 100 in 2021. I have been able to start writing and sharing more book reviews, which is something I really enjoy.

My reading has taken me everywhere from fictional lands to Regency England to Chicago in 2008.

There is so much to be said for taking a look beyond where we grew up. There is so much to

learn from other cultures, religions and from looking back on history itself. We can learn from the mistakes that were made in the past, gain understanding of the struggles of people different than us and use that insight to inform the way we live our lives.

Another way I’ve “traveled” during the pandemic is through cooking.

I’ll admit, I’m not a very good cook. I can make basic meals, but my favorite is the “just throw it all in a pan” method. If it doesn’t require a ton of preparation or clean-up, that’s a good option for me.

I have begun to look at entering into both reading and cooking as I would entering into prayer—with a steadiness and a reverence. Like time spent in prayer, each ingredient is meant to nourish my body and keep me healthy, each page is a salve to a soul that longs to be somewhere new.

Instead of viewing cooking as a chore that needs to be

done, I’ve found it helps to view it as something fun, where I can learn and discover new things—about food, but also about patience and the power of “letting it go.” Yes, I just spilled that flour all over the counter, but that’s okay. Sharpening my knife skills can be a way to sharpen my mind.

Entering into cooking in this way has also been a way for me to learn about different cultures. I typically enjoy Asian and Mediterranean dishes, so it has been fun to learn about what kinds of ingredients are used in these dishes and why. At a time when travel isn’t possible, viewing cooking new dishes as a way

to experience different lands and cultures has been a healthy respite.

So, during this Lenten season, I’ll continue to travel through books and poems, and I’ll work on the virtue of patience. There is something to

be said for not rushing through the dinner experience, but rather savoring the moments of it—the good and the bad. The same goes for savoring a good book—really delving into the scenery and getting to know the characters. I guess the same could be said for life itself. Lent teaches us to wait, to prepare, to learn gratitude—and that life isn’t meant to be rushed through. ■

“During this time, I’ve had to find other ways to broaden my worldview and step outside my comfort zone.”

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Editorial



A Lenten journey for the weak-willed

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

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

My wife Sandy gave me the bad news—Ash Wednesday is early this year.

“What are you giving up for Lent?” she asked. I shuddered because that meant I had to start my annual soul-searching, trying to think of something to give up. I hate that phrase “giving up” because quite honestly I don’t want to give up anything. I’m too weak-willed. Besides, isn’t that an old-fashioned, medieval concept unsuited for our ‘enlightened’ age?

You see, we’re from a generation that thought Lent was all about giving up something, and over the years, I’ve had my experiences—most of them unsuccessful—with giving things up, starting with candy and ice cream, then smoking and drinking, and later television and swearing, along with a few other things I better not divulge.

For much of our marriage, my wife has been pleading with me to give up spending or leaving my clothes on chairs and doorknobs. (Here’s an embarrassing confession: I’ve never been able to completely give up candy.)

I was often unsuccessful because I came from a generation—those notorious Baby Boomers—who never understood the concept of self-denial or delayed gratification because from the time we were toddlers, we were more accustomed to immediate gratification. Let me put it another way: I would not have done well in a Carthusian monastery as one of St. Bruno’s recruits.

So when Sandy asked, “What are you giving up?” I promptly responded, “Giving up? I’m just getting through a year of penance called COVID-19, which was probably the most prolonged self-denial I’ve endured in my life.”

It taught me to look at the world differently. I learned to like tuna sandwiches. I helped charitable organizations. I shared. I cared. I gave up. Worst of all, I often couldn’t go to Mass, Sunday or daily and that was particularly painful.

The year of COVID-19 taught us about sacrifice. About charity. About spiritual priorities. About turning to God. But many of those lessons, like the ones we learned after 9/11, were quickly forgotten. We’re like the Chosen People. We’re wayward and God

This year, it’s especially important to walk with Christ through Lent to the “happiness that will be ours in the future.” Is there sadness in your life? Is there disappointment? Is there grief? Is there fear? Is there illness? Is there anxiety about our country? Then, imagine someone beside you on the journey who tells you everything is going to be all right. That someone is Jesus.

So what’s my Lenten resolution? I’m making a list and I’m checking it twice. It’s a list of people I dislike, even if I don’t know them personally. Needless to say, that list has gotten long over the past 12 months of national acrimony.

Last year was especially painful, made worse by divisive politics that tore apart families and friends and still does. If that isn’t the work of Satan, I don’t know what is.

I’m keeping that list on my

“The year of COVID-19 taught us about sacrifice. About charity. About spiritual priorities. About turning to God. But many of those lessons, like the ones we learned after 9/11, were quickly forgotten. We’re like the Chosen People. We’re wayward and God has to keep calling us back from the enticements and false promises of the world. That’s why we need Lent.”

has to keep calling us back from the enticements and false promises of the world. That’s why we need Lent.

Lent is a time for penance, fasting, almsgiving, prayer and hope. Did I say hope? More than 1600 years ago, Saint Augustine offered an observation that speaks to us today: “The season before Easter signifies the troubles in which we live here and now, while the time after Easter signifies the happiness that will be ours in the future.”

I look at it this way: Before Easter we walk with Christ on the road to Calvary. After Easter, we walk with Christ on the road to Emmaus.

nightstand, where my wife won’t see it because it includes people from her side of the family. And I’m going to pray the rosary for them every night with an ulterior motive that they might finally see the light and think the way I do. However, my true motive is spiritual. I’ll really be praying that despite our differences, we can move closer to Christ together... even if it’s along different paths.

This Lent is a time for all of us to pray for people we don’t like because I suspect their numbers have increased over the past year. So let’s get started.

I’m also going to give up something. It just might be candy. ■

We Stand With Christ

A vibrant St. Gregory's finally gets a parish hall

By **JOE PISANI**

DANBURY—When Michael Dunn was in high school, there was talk in his home parish of St. Gregory the Great about building a much-needed parish hall. But after the faith community built a new

benefits parishes and Foundations in Education, Foundations in Faith and Foundations in Charity, which support efforts in education, charity and pastoral ministries. Because St. Gregory's surpassed its campaign goal of \$709,510, it was eligible to receive 75 percent

know where the offices were, but now we have a nice parish hall right next to the church."

After Father Dunn graduated from St. Gregory the Great School, he went to Immaculate High School and then Sacred Heart University, where he majored in criminal justice with a minor in religious studies. He later took a job counseling troubled youth at an agency in Norwalk and did graduate work in counseling at Fairfield University.

"Then I started thinking about the priesthood," he recalled. After years of study beginning at St. John Fisher Seminary, he was ordained in 1994.

Father Dunn, who previously served as pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Weston, was named pastor of St. Gregory in 2018 and is pleased to be back at his home parish.

One of the first projects he undertook was a complete renovation of the church, which was financed with parish funds. The tabernacle was moved to the center of the sanctuary. The renovation also included new carpeting, a marbleized sanctuary, refurbished pews, and a new crucifix, statues, candle racks and Stations of the Cross.

St. Gregory the Great was founded in 1962 to serve the Danbury community, Father said. The parish originally worshiped in a barn and in 1981 the church was built.

Father is proud of what his parish has accomplished in the past three years.

"I was very well embraced when I got here," he said. "There is a lot of life and energy in the parish. People are coming back and new parishioners are joining. There is really good spirit here." ■



rectory, the funds ran out and their dream was never realized.

Today, Father Michael L. Dunn, now the pastor of St. Gregory the Great Parish, has seen that dream come true with the recently completed parish hall and a new roof for the church, made possible through the We Stand With Christ capital campaign.

"This is long overdue," Father said. "There are so many positives for us as far as parish life and providing meeting space."

The recently completed center can easily seat more than 125 people and will be used for social functions, family religious education and parish ministries in addition to housing the parish offices.

The enthusiasm and commitment of the community was evident in its response to the diocesan capital campaign, which

of future funds for capital projects, which amounts to well over \$300,000, Father said.

"The parish hall made sense for us because it had been a dream for so long," he said. "That is one of the reasons the campaign was so successful, because people wanted this to finally get done."

Previously, the parish offices had been in St. Gregory the Great School, which is pre-K to 8th grade, but they will now move into the new hall, freeing up space in the school for more students to receive a Catholic education.

"The school is doing very well and can do even better," said Father, who graduated from St. Gregory in 1978. "Our enrollment has gone up every year for the past three years, and this project will benefit the school. Before, if you came here, you wouldn't even



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Pastoral Exhortation

Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2021



‘Let Us Enter the Upper Room with the Lord’

My dear friends in Christ,

For the last year we have faced an unprecedented time that has dramatically changed every aspect of life, in ways known and unknown. One can say that we have lived a time of spiritual twilight, when we experienced a growing sense of darkness, mixed with moments when the light of charity and kindness broke through to encourage us.

letters to seniors to quell the lonely days as the world entered quarantine. Neighbors have run errands and gone shopping for neighbors unable to leave their homes. Doctors and nurses and other frontline workers have sacrificed their own health and safety to care for those who have fallen ill, forgoing vacations and overtime pay to make sure those who are critically ill are not left alone. Families have gathered

personal faith may be strengthened, the unity of our Church deepened and we are ready to go out in mission and witness to the Gospel in new and courageous ways? As Christians, we believe suffering and death leads to new life. Let us use the months ahead to work together to craft a future that will bring greater unity and renewal to ourselves, our families and our Church. As we anticipate the grip of the pandemic to slowly



For who among us has not wrestled with fear and anxiety as we tried to deal with the uncertainties caused by a pandemic that upended our lives without warning? How many of our family members and friends suffered deeply because of the loss of a job, sudden illness, living in long periods of isolation or the fear of the unknown? Who has not been moved to tears when we looked at the sight of family members visiting relatives in hospitals, unable to be with them in their hour of sickness? How difficult it was to spend birthdays, anniversaries and holidays separated from parents and grandparents, unable to visit them so as to keep them safe! How many have endured the sadness and disappointment of making the hard decision to remain at home and not attend Sunday Mass, not simply to avoid risking their own health but to protect the well-being of their loved ones?

Yet, throughout these difficult days, we have also experienced moments of great joy and light. We have been moved by the sight of young children writing

virtually, talking more during the pandemic than perhaps they would otherwise, simply to check in and check up on one another. Indeed, the virtual means of communications have brought so many closer together. Finally, how can we forget those faithful men and women, clergy and laity alike, who kept our churches clean when Masses resumed, who reimagined faith formation so that our young people could remain connected, who worked so tirelessly to keep our Catholic schools open? These moments of hope and light have reminded us that, even in the darkest times, we are a people of light.

For everyone who brought light in the midst of the darkness, I thank God each day for your witness and generosity.

Now as we begin to look to a time beyond the pandemic, many speak of a “new normal” that is a way of life that will be different because of what we have experienced together. If this is true, I ask you, should we not draw greater light out of this darkness by shaping the “new normal” so that our

loosen in the coming months, let us now begin with a quiet period of personal and communal prayer, study and renewal. For having been strengthened in mind and spirit, we will be ready later this year to go out into the larger world and bear witness to Christ in new, bold and creative ways.

I come to you now, my dear friends, when many may be wondering about the future direction of our Church, to invite you to begin this spiritual journey with me, seeking the Lord’s grace to transform this time of suffering into a springtime of renewal for the life of the Church. It will be a journey that will move us beyond the fatigue that has settled in as weeks turned into months and as what we hoped would be temporary began to change the world around us. It will be a journey where we will rise out of the darkness with the Lord Jesus at our side, and in obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit bring new energy and commitment to the preaching of the Gospel, in word and witness. It is a journey that will last for a lifetime.

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I. The Upper Room

“When the day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread arrived, the day for sacrificing the Passover Lamb, He (Jesus) sent out Peter and John, instructing them, ‘Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.’ They asked Him, ‘where do you want us to make the preparations?’ And He answered them, ‘When you go into the city, a man will meet you carrying a jar of water. Follow him into the house that he enters and say to the master of the house, ‘The teacher says to you, ‘Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large upper room that is furnished. Make the preparations there” (Lk. 22: 7-12).

Since every journey demands preparation, our journey of renewal will begin by accepting the Lord’s invitation to enter in the quiet of our hearts and rediscover His presence and power in our personal lives, our families and in our communities of faith. The image that comes to my mind is that of the Upper Room where the Lord often gathered with His apostles and disciples, in times of challenge or decision, to strengthen them for what lay ahead.

Recall that it was in the Upper Room that the Lord celebrated the Last Supper with His apostles, to feed them in anticipation of the sufferings that they would endure by proclaiming His Passion and Death. It was in the Upper Room where the apostles, having seen the Risen Lord, could not overcome their fear until the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit gave them the courageous strength to become fearless missionaries in a harsh and cruel world. It was also in the Upper Room where the apostles learned to discern the Spirit’s plan for each of them and to go out in mission.

My friends, the Lord is inviting you and me into the Upper Room to receive the same gifts He gave to His apostles and disciples. In the months to come, in courageous and prayerful silence, the Lord will feed us, teach us and prepare us to go out in mission into our divided world to bring the light of Christ’s love to everyone we meet.

If we accept this invitation to spend time in the Upper Room with Him, He will offer us the

same spiritual gifts already in our midst that will prepare us for the mission ahead. These are the same gifts that our recent Diocesan Synod highlighted, including the need for daily personal prayer, to seek forgiveness of our sins and to receive and adore the Eucharistic Lord. These gifts, which lie at the heart of our Catholic faith, are not new but will take on new power and purpose as together we celebrate their power to heal us, feed us and give us strength. This letter will explore how these gifts can bring us renewal and prepare us for the larger mission to come.

My friends, the Synod was guided by these words spoken by the Lord: “Remain in me as I remain in you” (Jn. 15:4). In this moment of preparation, may these words echo in our minds and hearts. For if we wish for true renewal and to be ready to go out into the larger world, nothing can be accomplished apart from the Lord and His grace.

II. Upper Room: A Place to be Fed

“Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn. 17:3).

In the Upper Room on the night before He died, the Lord fed His apostles both His Word and His Sacred Body and Blood. Recognizing that the Lord cannot force us to accept His gifts, these same gifts will feed you and me only if we are willing to receive them.

1. Personal Prayer

We can begin our preparations by making a conscious, daily decision to spend time in prayer with the Lord, with no short cuts and no excuses. We must not allow the fear of silence to dissuade us from prayer. Rather, if we have the courage to enter into the silence, the Lord will gently whisper the assurance of His love for us. He will speak to our hearts and remind us that He is always with us, in every moment of every day.

We can pray in any manner we wish, whether reciting the rosary, novena prayers, the Liturgy of the Hours or simply in unstructured conversation with the Lord. We can choose whatever time and place is most conducive to allow us to settle our minds and hearts

to enter into the Lord’s presence. However, our commitment to pray—not as an addendum to a busy schedule but as a foundational part of our day—is crucial for the work that lies ahead of us. For if we wish to invite our children, grandchildren, neighbors and friends to share the joy of Catholic faith, how can we lead them to Christ if we do not spend time with the Lord each day deepening our own personal relationship with Him?

I ask that you consider including the Word of God in whatever prayer you choose. As we take our place at the Lord’s feet, as the apostles did in the Upper Room, we will be fed by listening to His Word. Unlike the apostles who had the privilege of hearing the Lord’s words with their own ears, you and I can hear the Lord’s words in and through the Sacred Scriptures. In our prayer and study, we can listen to the Lord’s teachings from His own lips, learn to follow in His footsteps and be inspired by the examples of the holy women and men of faith who followed Him.

Praying with the Scriptures can take many forms, including *Lectio Divina*, or engaging in Scripture sharing and study, whether online or in person. I call upon all pastoral and Diocesan leaders to make available whatever resources they can to unlock the beauty, meaning and power of the Word of God. For the admonition of Saint Jerome must never be forgotten: “Whoever does not know Scripture does not know the power and wisdom of God, then ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” (Prologue of the Commentary on Isaiah: 1, CCL 73, 1).

2. Reconciliation with Christ

In the quiet of the Upper Room, we will also find the strength to seek the Lord’s word of forgiveness from the sins that may haunt us, sometimes hidden deep within our heart.

For we live in a time when sin is equated with “committing a mistake,” “making a poor choice” or “attending to my private business.” Sin is denied because to admit it may “impose guilt” that is perceived to be harmful. If the human person is considered the standard of truth and morality, what place does sin have in such a life? Yet, in the quiet of the Upper

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Room, the foolishness of these presumptions will be laid bare. For it was in the Upper Room where the Lord cast aside His outer garment, tied a towel around His waist and proceeded to wash the feet of His apostles, in anticipation of the Last Supper to follow. By this task, usually reserved for slaves to perform, the Lord reminded His apostles of their need to be cleansed, in order to receive His sacred Body and Blood and to serve others worthily.

If we enter the quiet of His presence, the Lord will gently hold up a

Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (2015), be re-established in every deanery. These Centers of Mercy will be parishes that will offer the Sacrament of Penance in the evenings, with the help of the priests of the area, so that no one need wait more than two days in order to receive this healing sacrament. These Centers, along with the parishes already offering the Sacrament of Penance throughout the Diocese, will observe every protocol needed to maintain the safety of penitent and priest alike.

Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. The Lord fed them His Body and Blood so that they could anticipate through grace the mystery of His Passion and Death, and to strengthen them for the sufferings that lay ahead.

My friends, each time we have come to Mass, we have taken a seat at the table in the Upper Room, like the apostles, to be fed the sacred Body and Blood of our Savior and Redeemer. Through grace, we participate in an unbloodied way in the one



mirror into our souls so that we can gaze upon our sins without excuses or pretense. At those moments, we will encounter a Savior who does not seek to condemn us but to forgive. He will whisper the same words to us that He spoke to the woman caught in adultery: "Has no one condemned you?... Neither do I condemn you. Go and from now on do not sin anymore" (Jn. 8:10-11). Our gentle and merciful Shepherd will offer to wash away our sins so that we can receive His Body and Blood with hearts and minds renewed.

Before we invite others to experience the liberating word of God's forgiveness, should we not take this privileged time to relearn how to examine our conscience, admit our sinfulness and seek the forgiveness of our sins through the Sacrament of Penance?

I recognize that the pandemic has created obstacles for many who wish to approach the Sacrament of Penance. It is for this reason that I am asking that Centers of Mercy, once established in our Diocese during the

These new Centers of Mercy will begin their work no later than March 1st and a comprehensive list will be published in every media platform of the Diocese.

On Monday, March 29th, we will hold our annual observance of Reconciliation Monday. As you may know, on this day, Confessions will be heard in many parishes throughout the Diocese, both in the afternoon and evenings, so that everyone who wishes to receive the sacrament can do so before the Easter Triduum. I ask you to consider participating in this unique opportunity to receive the gift of forgiveness that only Christ can give.

My friends, the Lord wishes to free each of us from the burden of our sins. Should we not then use this time to shed the baggage of our sins and accept His freedom with joy?

3. The Holy Eucharist

Finally, and most importantly, it was in the Upper Room that at the Last Supper the Lord Jesus fed His apostles His Sacred

sacrifice of the Lord's death on the Cross. At Mass, we enter in the mystery of our redemption and salvation in Christ. It is celestial food that gives us the strength to go into mission wherever that may lead us.

I recognize that among the many disruptions caused by the pandemic, none has created greater hardship, sadness and disappointment than the inability of many to come to Sunday Mass. It was with great sorrow that I suspended Sunday worship last year, to ensure that the lives of our people, especially the sick and elderly, were protected from an unknown and unseen menace. Ever since public worship has resumed, we have maintained our health protocols to allow those who are ready and able to attend Sunday Mass to come to church as safely as possible. I understand the burden that many may feel because of these measures and I deeply appreciate your cooperation. As I write this letter, more than 25,000 Catholics have returned to Sunday Mass,

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and we await the return of many more Catholics to Sunday Mass as conditions improve.

I also wish to thank those individuals who have remained connected to the celebration of the Mass by viewing it online due to their inability to return to church at the present time. Christian prudence demands that every person carefully examine the circumstances of their life and to make decisions that will keep them safe and protect the well-being of their loved ones. The Lord feeds you His grace through the Spiritual Communion you now receive, until the day comes when you can return to receive His sacred Body and Blood without fear. When that time comes, your parish community will welcome you home with open arms.

My friends, let us also use this quiet time of preparation to ask the Lord to reawaken in our hearts a passion, respect and reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. Our reverence is deepened as our understanding and appreciation of the “Mystery of Faith” that is the Eucharist grows. Sadly, many adult Catholics have not had the opportunity to explore the depth, breadth and richness of this central mystery of our faith. I call upon our clergy and pastoral leaders to offer sustained and comprehensive adult catechesis on the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the coming months so that our love and passion for the Eucharist can grow. Diocesan resources will also be published soon, including a detailed theological reflection on the mystery of the Eucharist, as fuel to awaken the fire of our Eucharistic faith. Let us use the months ahead to deepen our knowledge and appreciation of so great a divine gift.

We must also acknowledge the debilitating spiritual effects created by the celebration of Mass that lacks reverence or beauty. For it is the power of beauty that engages the heart, allowing the grace of the Eucharist to move its participants to remember that their destination is heaven and to embrace their mission to preach the Gospel in the world. A beautiful and reverent celebration of the Mass demands a proper disposition by the celebrant and lay faithful alike. We cannot allow the distractions of the world to draw our attention away from the mystery before us. Each of us must relearn the power of prepara-

tion before Mass, interior silence and thanksgiving at the conclusion of Mass so that the gift given can yield its proper fruit.

I have also asked that every deanery establish at least one Center of Adoration—a local parish that will offer Eucharistic Adoration throughout the day, so that everyone who wishes can be fed by the Eucharistic Lord in a personal and powerful way. These Centers will also afford those who remain uncomfortable with attending Mass on Sunday an opportunity to encounter the Eucharistic Lord in quiet throughout the day. It is my desire that every deanery will have at least one such Center of Adoration operating no later than the start of April.

III. Upper Room: A Place to Listen

“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own but he will speak what he hears and will declare to you the things that are coming” (Jn. 16:12-13).

In addition to being fed, the Lord wishes for us to enter into the Upper Room with Him to relearn how to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, often spoken in and through the lives of the people around us. For we cannot be effective in mission unless we can address the concerns that believers and non-believers hold in their hearts.

Some believers continue to have questions of faith for which they have never received adequate answers. Others have wounds that burden them or hurts from past failures in the Church that tempt them to walk away in indifference. Each of us must ask the Lord to teach us how to listen to those concerns so that in our personal encounters with the people we meet, we can be effective in leading our brothers and sisters to find the answers that they seek in Jesus.

IV. Upper Room: A Place to Recommit to Mission

“When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared

to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim” (Acts 2: 1-4).

Finally, like the apostles, we must be prepared to reenter the larger world as courageous missionaries of the Gospel.

In our Baptism and Confirmation, each of us was given the mission to be a disciple of Christ who can speak an effective word of salvation to whom-ever we meet, whether they be our family members, co-workers, friends or even strangers. This word of salvation that comes from Christ invites every human person to become “a new creation” in Him (2 Cor. 5:17).

To speak an effective word of salvation does not always require spoken words but can be powerfully conveyed by the example of a joyful, faithful life. It often does not require that we leave our homes or places of work to be missionaries. In fact, it is in these familiar places that our mission begins. This means that at every moment of every day we are called to be missionaries, even during these days of the pandemic. In fact, these past months have given us unique opportunities to offer help, consolation and care in the name of Jesus. In those occasions, we lived the vision attributed to Saint Teresa of Avila who taught her sisters:

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

Saint Paul describes this mission by using the word “ambassador.” He writes, “So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us” (2 Cor. 5:20). Who are these ambassadors? Simply put, they are you, me and all who have encountered the person of Jesus Christ. Where are we to go? We serve as ambassadors of Christ in our homes, classrooms, workplaces, clubs, ball fields, and when we shop, travel, and spend time with friends. For the work of

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an ambassador is to build a living bridge to the people we meet, accompanying them in their struggles, answering their questions and allowing them to experience how much they are loved by Christ, through you and me. When I first came to the Diocese, in my installation homily, I spoke about my deep desire to build bridges to those who were seeking meaning and direction in life. It seems to me that the time has come when we are all called to be bridge-builders to the people around us, leading them to Christ, for whom we serve as His ambassadors.

At times we have all failed to be true ambassadors of Christ. Such failure has a familiar look. As Saint Ignatius of Antioch describes it: “Do not have Jesus Christ on your lips and the world in your hearts” (Letter to the Romans, Chpt. 4:7). We must resolve to learn from any past mistakes we have made and serve with new zeal in this work the Lord has given us.

Furthermore, the time is coming when we will be able to leave the safety of our homes and reenter a world forever changed by the pandemic—one that may not welcome the message we will bring. We must recognize that we live within a post-Christian world, in which many do not understand the Christian faith nor have had an encounter with the Lord and His mercy. It is a world where many may not readily welcome the Gospel or may even actively oppose it. It is a world that will nonetheless be surprised by the power of the Gospel and its ability to bring joy and hope where the world cannot give it.

Let us draw hope from our knowledge that the world did not welcome Jesus in whose name we were baptized. Indeed, we are in good company as we go out into the world.

As we begin preparations for a great evangelical outreach into the larger world that will begin in the fall of 2021, the pastors of our Diocese and I will need the assistance of co-workers who will not be afraid to go out into their communities to invite people to encounter the Lord and His mercy. We will need people to echo the prophets and saints who have gone before us, willing to see light through the darkness and willing to say to the Lord, “Here I am. Send me” (Is. 6:8).

Such co-workers, drawn from the laity and clergy alike, must be willing to use the months ahead to undergo intensive personal and spiritual formation to prepare themselves to be missionary ambassadors of Christ. When ready, they will be sent out into their community, under the care of their local pastor, to invite those who have left active participation in the life of the Church to return home. In time, this same invitation will be extended to people of good will and anyone searching for the real meaning of life. For such meaning is found only in the Lord Jesus.

Our pastors have been asked to discern who among their people they can recommend to enter this formational experience, which will be done both online and in person. Formation will include a period of discernment for those who might wonder if this particular opportunity is something the Lord is calling them to do.

If the challenge of serving as a missionary ambassador stirs your heart, I ask that you contact your local pastor and discuss this pastoral opportunity. Evenings of information will be held in the first week of March to provide prospective candidates further information. Furthermore, I call on everyone to pray for those who will respond to this important invitation.

Conclusion: Saint Joseph, “A Righteous Man” (Mt. 1:19)

As we reflect upon the challenges we face and the mission that lies ahead, we may be tempted to be discouraged. Join me to seek the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, give joy to our hearts, strengthen our will and shake off all discouragement. Let us prepare ourselves to respond boldly and courageously to whatever awaits us. Let us enter into the Upper Room with Christ so that He can strengthen us for the task that lies ahead.

May these words attributed to Saint John Henry Newman stir our hearts, “Teach us, dear Lord, frequently and attentively to consider this truth: that if I gain the whole world and lose you, in the end I have lost everything; whereas if I lose the whole world and gain you, in the end I have lost nothing.” For if we place our hope in the Lord and not in the world, what do we have to fear?

As you know, Saint Joseph, the

righteous one, is being honored this year throughout the Church. For he was a man well acquainted with unexpected change, having his life upended by visits from the Archangel Gabriel and flight into an unknown land. Yet, it was his courage, strength of faith and quiet perseverance that allowed him to overcome the challenges the Holy Family faced. He quietly and faithfully guided and protected the Lord Jesus and our Lady until his death.

On March 19th, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, the Husband of Mary, I will consecrate the people of the Diocese to the protection and intercession of Saint Joseph during a solemn celebration of Mass at Saint Augustine Cathedral at 7 pm. This celebration will be livestreamed as well. I have also asked all the pastors of our Diocese to offer the same Mass and consecration in their local parishes, also at 7 pm. A plenary indulgence will be available for all those who participate in either the Diocesan or parish celebrations. The spiritual requirements needed to receive this extraordinary grace will be published shortly. As we begin this journey of renewal, I can think of no better guide and protector to whom we can entrust our journey than Saint Joseph. May he help us quietly and faithfully to fulfill the work that lies before us.

My friends, I offer you these reflections on the day when we accept ashes on our foreheads as a sign of our mortality and an invitation to conversion. It begins the holy season of Lent, during which we journey with Christ into the desert so that we can be purified and made ready to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord at Easter. It is a season, for many, reminiscent of the twilight we have been enduring for some time. Still, we are gifted with the knowledge that Good Friday is followed by Easter Sunday. We know that Easter joy follows the Lenten twilight.

May we bring the ashes we receive today into the Upper Room where we will discover that the Lord can bring light into darkness, lead twilight to dawn and raise ashes to new life. ■

Frank J. Caggiano

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2021

Foundations News

FIFF announces St. John Paul II funding available

BRIDGEPORT—As St. John Paul II said to young people, “The Church needs your energies, your enthusiasm, your youthful ideals, in order to make the Gospel of Life penetrate the fabric of society.”

Foundations in Faith recognizes that parishes in the diocese are currently poised to begin making plans now for fall Religious Education and Youth Ministry programs. Faith Formation teams are invited to imagine what the youth programs will look like post pandemic. It will be exciting to see how parish teams leverage the new technologies that they used during the pandemic and enhance those tools with in-person community fellowship to draw the youth back in.

According to Kelly Weldon, director of Foundations in Faith, “we have a historical and unique opportunity as we re-emerge and hit the reset button on how we approach our youth. How do we best empower them in their lifelong journey of encountering Jesus? It is imperative that we take time to ask the youth what they need and how they envision programs that will help them heal as they re-enter into community and actively participate in the Catholic Faith.”

Religious education Youth Ministry programs

JP II Fund Applications for Parish support go live Feb 10th

For link visit www.foundationsinfaith.org

Foundations in Faith, through the St. John Paul II Fund, has funding available for parishes in the Diocese of Bridgeport for fall Religious Education, youth ministry and Faith Formation programs. Applications go live on February 10 and are due April 2. Creativity, youth engagement in planning and innovation are

encouraged.

Sign up to receive grant announcements and updates by visiting www.foundationsinfaith.org. Follow us on Instagram @foundationsinfaithbpt. Contact Kelly Weldon at: kelly.weldon@foundationsinfaith.org with questions or interest in supporting or volunteering. ■

Foundations in Education Gala scheduled for May 6

BRIDGEPORT— Foundations in Education’s gala returns to Woodway Country Club in Darien, Conn. on May 6, 2021 with honorees Lynn and Francis X. Mara of the New

York Football Giants, Inc. and



FOUNDATIONS IN EDUCATION

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH EDUCATION

Dr. Julia M. McNamara, president emerita, Albertus Magnus College.

Gala co-chairs Barbara Ripp and Xandy Duffy met with Foundations in Education staff to begin planning this year’s unique event. The full gala committee will meet virtually later this month. Celebrity auctioneer Pat Tully will provide an

entertaining evening of humor and high energy as guests bid on exclusive packages, including a priceless experience with Bishop Frank J. Caggiano. The evening will include cocktails and dinner at Woodway Country Club, with a virtual option for the formal program.

Foundations in Education supports the mission of Catholic education in the Diocese of Bridgeport. The annual gala brings together business, political and charitable leaders throughout Fairfield County.

Proceeds from the gala benefit Foundations in Education, including the Bishop’s Scholarship

Fund and Innovation and Leadership Grant Program. This year Foundations awarded 1,271 children \$2,700,000 in tuition assistance to attend Catholic schools throughout the Bridgeport Diocese. The Foundation also makes grants to teachers for innovative and leadership initiatives in our Catholic schools. This year the Foundation recognized all teachers and staff with an Amazon gift card for their innovation and leadership while teaching throughout the pandemic.

(If you wish to volunteer, sponsor, contribute or learn more about Foundations in Education or the Gala, please visit www.foundationineducation.org or contact Megan Quinn at 203.416.1671 or mquinn@foundationineducation.org.) ■

Catholic Education

Educators and staff recognized for innovation and leadership

BRIDGEPORT—Foundations in Education, Inc (FIE) is pleased to announce the 2021 Innovation and Leadership Grants awards totaling nearly \$140,000 to benefit Catholic schools in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

FIE awarded \$56,683.56 to educators for their transformative grant projects. In light of the heroic innovative contributions of faculty and staff, FIE for the first time awarded \$82,600 to all faculty and staff within Diocesan Catholic schools and the Office of the Superintendent. The Foundation’s Board took the extraordinary step of recognizing the frontline workers for their demonstration of innovation and leadership amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since its inception, Foundations in Education has awarded more than \$500,000 in grant funding.

FIE’s executive director Holly Doherty-Lemoine shared, “In addition to the annual grant program, this year our committee recognized in a special way the heroic innovation and leadership exhibited by all faculty, staff and administrators of the diocesan Catholic schools during this tumultuous year of the coronavirus. In appreciation for their personal sacrifices and perseverance in providing students the excellent education which they deserve, whether in person or virtually, we awarded an Amazon gift card to each permanent employee of our diocesan Catholic schools.”

The annual competitive Innovative and Leadership grant cycle takes place from September 15-October 31.

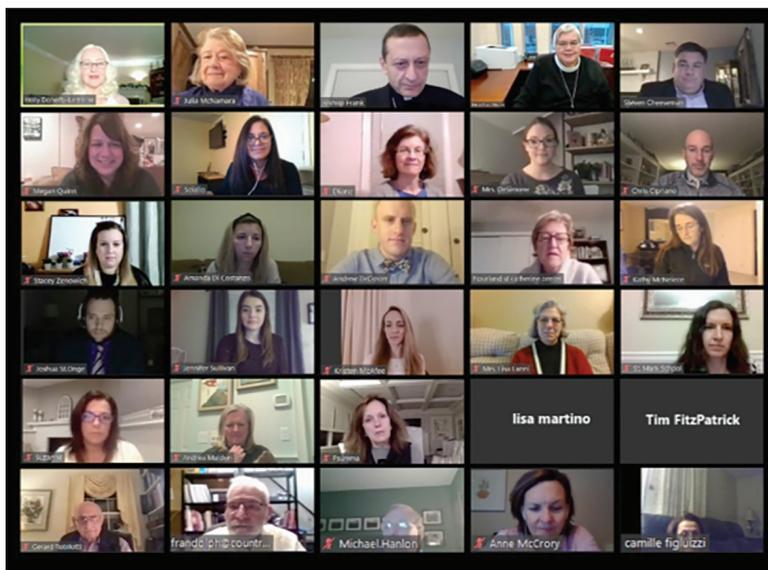
Each year, a grants committee of the board of trustees reviews and evaluates each grant proposal and submits recommendations to the FIE Board for approval. Projects must align with the foundation’s mission to strengthen and transform Catholic education and include unique and innovative approaches to teaching that will maximize impact on student learning.

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Steven Cheeseman, commented, “We are extremely grateful to Foundations in Education for continuing to make valuable investments in our schools, teachers and students. Across the diocese, educators are working hard to provide robust learning with limited resources. This latest round of grant fund-

ing will help support students with both online learning and in-person instruction.”

FIE’s executive director, Holly Doherty-Lemoine, remarked, “We are happy we can bring so many of these innovative projects to life and provide an initiative that gives teachers something to look forward to in the midst of all the uncertainty of COVID-19. This initiative is

- St. Catherine Academy for Special Needs, Fairfield: Classroom Robot for Students with Autism by Helen Burland \$4,550
- Kolbe Cathedral High School, Bridgeport: Kolbe Urban Vegetable Garden by Andrew DeCoster \$4,000
- Holy Trinity Catholic Academy, Shelton: Distance Learning - Owl



an opportunity for us to celebrate teachers, who are among the unsung heroes of this pandemic.”

This year the awards reception took place virtually. In addition to awardees and their principals, attendees included Bishop Frank Caggiano, Foundations’ board of trustees, grants committee & donors.

Each awardee had the opportunity to acknowledge their award and explain their project and vision.

After listening to each presentation, Bishop Caggiano shared his reflections with awardees.

“The creativity is extraordinary! The fact that this is happening when we are constricted in so many other ways portrays heroic leadership. I am deeply impressed that these challenges have not prevented, but inspired such imagination and creative proposals. This is Catholic education as it has always been imagined!”

For more information or to learn how you can donate to support innovation and leadership in the Diocese of Bridgeport Catholic Schools, please visit www.foundationsineducation.org.

2021 Innovation and Leadership Grant Awards

- Labs by Kristina DeSimone \$11,000; and World Language Lab by Lisa Lanni \$9,765
 - St. Gregory the Great School, Danbury: Together at the Heart: Creating Art Six Feet Apart by Jennifer Sullivan \$3,500
 - St. Mark School, Stratford: Document Cameras to Reach, Teach and Engage Students by Amanda Di Costanzo and Stacey Zenowich \$1,278.56
 - Catholic Academy of Bridgeport-St. Ann Academy: Lights, Camera, Action! by Kathy McNeiece \$3,500
 - Notre Dame High School, Fairfield: Social and Emotional Learning at Notre Dame High School by Chris Cipriano \$12,090; Virtual Dance in the Community by Kristen McAfee \$6,000; and Real Estate 101 Enrichment Course by Joshua St. Onge \$1,000
- All Diocesan and Diocesan-Sponsored Catholic Schools in Fairfield County: Demonstration of Innovation and Leadership Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic by all faculty and staff (full-time and part-time) and the Office of the Superintendent \$82,600

Parish News

St. Patrick Parish and Sacred Heart Parish merge

By **BRIAN D. WALLACE**

BRIDGEPORT—The two parishes of Sacred Heart Parish, Georgetown, Conn., and St. Patrick Parish, Redding, Conn., have been merged.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano issued a decree formally merging the two parishes, which will be named Sacred Heart and St. Patrick Parish. The decree was effective on January 31.

The decree states both churches will remain open as worship sites and that Father Joseph Cervero will serve as pastor of the newly formed parish.

The decree indicates that the parishes were merged “to strengthen

the pastoral care of the people of God in this area of the diocese, to enhance the pastoral vitality and to improve the management of material resources.”

All sacramental registers, seals and parish files of the parishes will be properly transferred to, preserved and safeguarded by Sacred Heart and St. Patrick Parish in accord with the norm of canon law.

Father David Leopold retired as pastor of Sacred Heart on August 31 and is now serving as spiritual director at St. John Fisher seminary. Father John Inserra began a three-month sabbatical on September 1 and will return to a new assignment in the diocese at

the end of November. Father Peter Lenox, former pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Norwalk and the newly appointed episcopal vicar for liturgy and worship for the diocese, began an additional temporary assignment on October 1 as parochial administrator at Sacred Heart to assist in bringing the merger to a successful completion.

Sacred Heart Parish was founded in 1881 in the Georgetown section of Redding. It is located on 30 Church Street. St. Patrick Church, opened in 1880, is located at 169 Black Rock Turnpike, Redding. A new church was dedicated in 2006, and the original church remains on the grounds. ■

Gloves and ear muffs for outdoor Mass

STRATFORD—Shortly after the pandemic struck in early 2020, Father Peter Adamski, pastor of St. James Church in Stratford wanted to make sure that he was caring for his parishioners in every way possible.

He remembered the Beatles last concert on the roof of Abbey Records, which gave him an idea. He looked around and realized that the roof over the sacristy of St. James was flat and could provide him with an area to erect an altar and say Mass, overlooking the parking lot.

Father Peter and Deacon Joe Koletar came up with a map in order to fit the maximum number of cars safely in the parking lot, giving each car a clean line of sight to the altar and, also, allowing enough space for parishioners to walk between the cars to go up to receive communion.

Father Peter found an open channel on the FM dial (FM 91.5), now called WSTJ “The Home of the Holy Spirit,” that could be used on Sunday mornings and arranged to use that channel every Sunday.

“Rooftop” Masses, as St. James parishioners affectionately call them, started on Ascension Thursday and were followed by weekend Masses on May 24.



Since then, two Masses have been celebrated every Sunday. When the cold weather arrived, Father Peter purchased two heaters to put on the rooftop to make sure that he, Father Philip Lanh Phan and Deacon Joe could comfortably celebrate Mass.

Overall, weather has been the result on only three Masses not being celebrated on the rooftop since May. (At those times, the celebration of the Mass was moved indoors.) There have even been times when gloves and ear muffs have been seen as the weather grew colder, but that has never deterred the clergy at St. James from going up to the rooftop.

Even with “Rooftop” Masses being celebrated, St. James also offers two indoor Masses (4:30 pm on Saturday and 6 pm on Sunday) to give parishioners a choice of attending either an indoor or outdoor Mass.

All of this would not be possible without the efforts of a very dedicated corps of volunteers who are there Sunday after Sunday

to direct cars to parking spots, direct Communion lines, collect offertory envelopes, pass out bulletins and make sure that everything runs smoothly. These same volunteers can even be seen on the rooftop and in the parking lot using a squeegee to remove as much water as possible or using a shovel to remove snow.

This tradition has become so beloved that when the state of Connecticut opened up churches to allow more parishioners inside, everyone wanted to continue with the rooftop Masses.

Aside from the horn honking, indicating that the priest and deacon are coming down from the roof to distribute Communion, the final honks of the Mass also signal the time you will see Father Peter running across the parking lot to the exit to say goodbye to everyone who attended Mass, and to guide the cars to a safe and orderly exit. ■

Ministries of Lector & Acolyte

New Ministries open to women and lay men

By **BRIAN D. WALLACE**

VATICAN—On Monday, January 11, 2021, Pope Francis formally amended Canon Law (Can. 230 §1) so that women, as well as men, can be formally installed in the lay ministries of lector and acolyte.

In the Motu proprio Spiritus Domini, which modifies the first

cent of those who completed our diocesan formation program and received a mandate to serve were women.

However, there is a great difference for those in our diocese who are mandated readers and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and what the Holy Father is now permitting, he said.

The new formulation of the

more information and guidance are available, we will have the opportunity to discuss how best to move forward with this important liturgical change,” said Dr. Donovan.

“When we began the face-to-face formation, many people asked me why we used the term reader for those who read at Mass, when lector had become ubiquitous. My explanations was that lector was



article of Canon 230, Pope Francis is permitting lay women and lay men to be formally installed into the ministries of lector and acolyte through a public liturgical act.

According to Dr. Patrick Donovan, director of the diocesan Leadership Institute, throughout the United States, there is nothing new about women proclaiming the Word of God during liturgical celebrations or serving as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

When the Diocese of Bridgeport published its Revised Liturgical Norms in 2019, more than 65 per-

cent of those who completed our diocesan formation program and received a mandate to serve were women. However, there is a great difference for those in our diocese who are mandated readers and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and what the Holy Father is now permitting, he said. The new formulation of the

more information and guidance are available, we will have the opportunity to discuss how best to move forward with this important liturgical change,” said Dr. Donovan. “When we began the face-to-face formation, many people asked me why we used the term reader for those who read at Mass, when lector had become ubiquitous. My explanations was that lector was

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more information and guidance are available, we will have the opportunity to discuss how best to move forward with this important liturgical change,” said Dr. Donovan, who said the diocese will await direction from the USCCB in Washington, which is expected before the end of the year.



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Leadership Institute

Lapadula joins Institute

BRIDGEPORT—Please join us in welcoming Andrés Lapadula, who has begun his ministry as program manager at The Leadership Institute.

Though he is originally from Miami, Andrés spent his teenage years in Greenwich and is a graduate of Trinity High School. He has a bachelor's in Philosophy from Barry University in Florida.

Andrés will work with Dr. Patrick Donovan, director of The Leadership Institute on many projects, but his main focus will be working with faith formation leaders and youth ministry coordinators to discern the best way to engage youth and young adults in the life, mission and ministry of our parishes.

“Andrés will play a crucial role as The Leadership Institute enters its sixth year,” said Dr. Patrick Donovan. “He will work specifically with parishes who wish to implement experiences of discipleship beyond Confirmation and will create a network of young adult ministries throughout the diocese. We had dozens of people who

applied and the committee chose Andrés, in part, because of the great passion he has for building the Kingdom of God in new and creative ways.” ■



ANDRÉS LAPADULA

Donovan receives St. John Bosco Award



DR. PATRICK DONOVAN

Dr. Patrick Donovan, founding director of The Leadership Institute of the Diocese of Bridgeport, recently received The Saint John Bosco Accompaniment Award from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. The award, conferred during a virtual national ceremony, recognizes innovative gifts that empower, equip and accompany young people as they navigate the path of growing into missionary discipleship.

Dr. Donovan was named first director of The Leadership Institute in 2016, after serving as executive director for Youth and Young Adult Ministry in the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware.

He earned a master's in theology at University of Notre Dame, and his doctorate in theology at LaSalle University in Philadelphia. He and his wife, Maureen and their four children reside in Fairfield and are members St. Anthony of Padua Parish. ■

CATHOLIC CEMETERIES

DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

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Parish News

Novena prayers ‘pay it forward’

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

SHELTON—When Joanna Rogers had her Novena prayer sponsored in December, she knew she had to pay-it-forward. She got in touch with Fairfield County Catholic ad manager Ralph Lazzaro and offered to sponsor a Novena ad herself for someone else in January.

Rogers, a parishioner of St. Joseph Parish in Shelton, explained that Novenas are prayers that are very close to her heart. “Mary is my go-to person for everything,” she said.

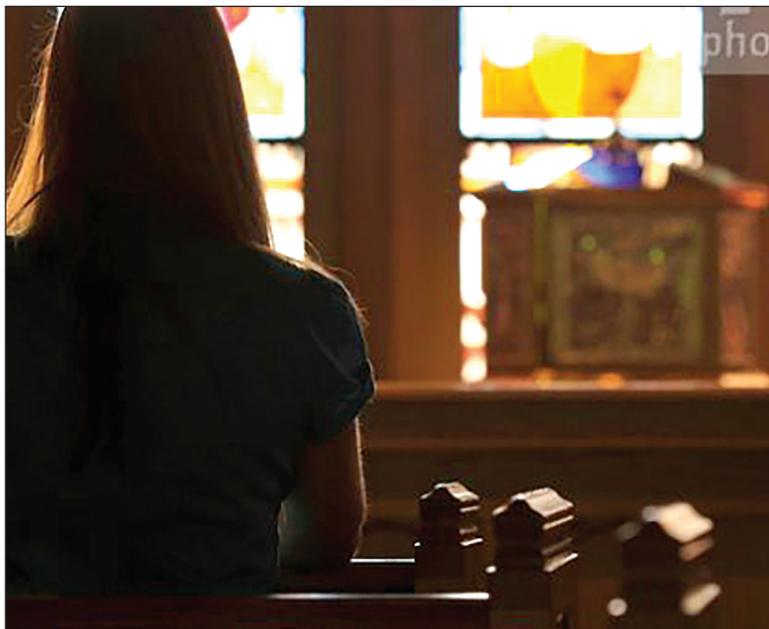
“Part of the Novena process is to publish it,” Rogers explained, and she was very grateful when Ralph offered to find a sponsor for her own Novena prayer.

“People always have something going on in their lives that they are praying for,” said Rogers.

“I would hate to hear that someone couldn’t publish due to lack of funds.”

Rogers shared that Ralph reassured her that he would be joining her in prayer and thanked her for paying it forward. “I got goosebumps,” she said.

“It is nice to know that people can offer this sponsorship for someone’s prayers to be published,” said Rogers, adding that she felt more consolation after sponsoring a Novena than after her own was published. “It is better to give than



to receive.”

Rogers explained that whether a Novena prayer is sponsored or not, Mary isn’t going to turn a deaf ear to what we’re praying for. “But the fact that it is something that someone wants to do for someone else gives it that extra boost,” she said.

In early October, Ralph Lazzaro got a call from someone wanting to publish a Novena ad...now he is receiving more than 20 requests a month.

“People love it,” he said. “Now, we’re even receiving news from people who’ve had their prayers answered.”

Ralph shared how uplifting it is

to hear stories of people who are being helped through these Novena prayers.

He explained that after placing the first ad, in the following months the flood gates opened wide.

“This is an opportunity for people to express and share their faith in communion with others,” Ralph said. “It is giving people a sense of connectedness at a time when they really need it. Most importantly, the Novenas reflect the need for and the power of prayer.”

(To place a Novena prayer ad or to share a story about an answered prayer, contact Ralph Lazzaro at: 203.416.1462 or rlazzaro@diobpt.org.)

Dr. Cheeseman praises teachers

Dear Catholic Educators,

I found it fitting that the daily reflection for January 31, the first day of Catholic Schools Week, in the Essential Teachings of Mother Teresa, a Christmas gift I received this year, read: “Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action, and that action is service.” Today, I write to you to thank you for your service, your love in action, for all that you do each day to support your students and their families. This past year presented us with challenges but it also afforded us an opportunity to demonstrate one of the key differentiators of Catholic schools—our teachers, administrators and staff. As Catholic educators, YOU showed up for our kids. YOU



showed up, ignoring your own fears and anxieties. And, while many give lip service to “doing it for the kids,” YOU showed up and put the love of Christ in action. By meeting these challenges with compassion and flexibility, you placed the needs of students and families above all else.

Whether they were sitting in front of you or joining your class from home, you made sure that

your students were safe. You found creative and innovative ways to meet the diverse academic needs in your classroom, you used every inch of your classroom and every tool at your disposal—many that you learned on the fly these past few months. But most importantly, YOU showed up for them. Please accept my gratitude for your service, for all that you have done and continue to do for the young people of the Diocese of Bridgeport. Know you are in my prayers. May God bless you and your family and may Our Lady continue to shower her blessings on our Catholic school family.

Sincerely,

Dr. Steven F. Cheeseman
Superintendent of Schools

Obituary

Reverend Joseph F. Palacino, 93

TRUMBULL—Reverend Joseph F. Palacino, age 93, of Trumbull passed away peacefully on Tuesday, December 1, 2020 at Bridgeport Hospital.

Ordained at age 55, after serving his country as a veteran of two wars, working as a chemist and running owning his own market, Father Palacino is remembered for his kindness, compassion and willingness to accompany others on their journey of faith.

"Father Palacino had a long, remarkable and blessed life, and equally important he was a blessing to all those who knew him and were served by his gracious and loving ministry," said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano. "We should all live so well, so long, so faithfully as Father Joe."

Father Palacino is best remembered by many parishioners of St. Jerome Parish in Norwalk, where he served his final assignment. In a beautiful tribute to Father Paladino published in the December 26, 2020 parish bulletin, Father Dave Blanchfield, retired pastor of St. Jerome's, fondly recalled Father Palacino's courage, kindness and decency.

"Although when he came to us he was already 67, he stayed working as a full time priest for another 21 years. Our retirement age is 75, but Father Joe loved the people of St. Jerome so much that he stayed on until health issues at age 88 forced him to retire," said Father David Blanchfield, who continues to live in residence at "A turning point in his life was when he was drafted for the second of two wars. After already serving as a sailor during the last days of World War II, he was again drafted as a soldier in the Korean conflict. As part of God's plan and because he was a practicing Catholic, he was assigned

to guard the Catholic chaplain when he was giving what we then called 'the last rites' to soldiers on the battlefield. In those moments, he got to see both the power of the Sacraments as well as the difference a priest can make in people's lives," said Father Blanchfield.

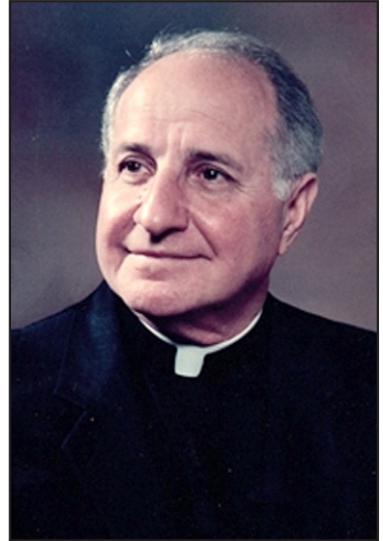
Father Palacino was born in Bridgeport on June 14, 1927, a son of the late Luigi Palacino and Provvidenza (Allegra) Palacino. Father Palacino is survived by his loving sister, Mary Grace Corica, of Trumbull and a devoted brother, Frank Palacino and his wife Martha, of Ocala, Fla., as well as many loving nieces, nephews, great-nieces and nephews and great-great-nieces and nephews.

He was also predeceased by three brothers, Liborio, Salvatore and Angelo Palacino. Father Palacino was educated at Central High School in Bridgeport before serving honorably in both the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy. He later graduated from Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn. and was proud to be a 4th degree member of the Knights of Columbus, Assembly 100 of Norwalk for many years.

Throughout his life, Father Palacino had many occupations, including owner of Palacino's Market and he was a chemist for nearly 20 years before he embraced his calling as a priest.

Father Palacino studied Theology at Sacred Heart School of Theology in Hales Corner, Wis., before being ordained to the priesthood by the Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis at St. Augustine Cathedral, Bridgeport on December 4, 1982.

After his ordination, Father Palacino first served as parochial vicar of St. Joseph Church in Shelton. In 1987, he was transferred



REVEREND JOSEPH F. PALACINO

to St. Augustine Cathedral Parish. In 1994, Father Palacino moved to his last assignment, St. Jerome in Norwalk, where he continued to serve even after his retirement.

Father Palacino's body was received at St. Jerome Church to lie in repose. Parishioners and friends observed social distance guidelines and greeted the family. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Monday, December 7, by Bishop Caggiano. Interment with military honors followed in Gate of Heaven Cemetery, Trumbull.

Memorial contributions may be made to St. Jerome Church or Father Joe Appalachian Project Scholarship c/o Notre Dame High School, 220 Jefferson St., Fairfield, CT 06825.

Editor's Note: Fairfield County Catholic regrets the inadvertent omission of Father Palacino's obituary in the January issue of the paper. We are proud to remember this remarkable priest servant who brought the healing of Christ to so many people in the diocese. ■

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Obituary

Sister Theresa Fitzgerald, IHM

Sister Theresa Fitzgerald, IHM, (formerly known as Sister Mary Lena) of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary died on Monday, February 8, 2021, at Our Lady of Peace Residence in Scranton.

She was born on September 5, 1932, in Dushore, Penn. She was the daughter of the late James and Lena Stiff Fitzgerald. She entered the IHM Congregation on September 8, 1950, and made her temporary profession of vows on August 2, 1953, and her final profession of vows on August 2, 1956.

Sister Theresa served as a teacher in the following schools: St. John the Evangelist Elementary School in Binghamton, N.Y., from 1953 to 1954; St. Ambrose Elementary School in Bridgeport, Conn., from 1954 to 1963; St. Rita Elementary School in Dundalk, Md., from 1963 to 1968; St. Ephrem Elementary School in Brooklyn, NY, from 1970 to 1976; Holy Rosary Elementary School in Scranton, Penn., from 1976 to 1979; Bishop Neumann High School in Williamsport, Penn., from 1979 to 1984; and Archbishop Neale Elementary School in La Plata, Md., from 1984 to 1985. Sister also served as a teacher and library assistant at



SISTER THERESA FITZGERALD, IHM

St. Agnes Elementary School in Baltimore, Md., from 1994 to 2004.

Sister served as principal at St. John the Evangelist Elementary School in Binghamton, N.Y., from 1968 to 1970.

Sister Theresa also served as assistant registrar at Marywood College in Scranton, Penn., from 1985 to 1994; and accounting assistant in the Business Office at the IHM Center in Scranton, Penn., from 2004 to 2013. Sister was a volunteer and also an Educational Enrichment Institute instructor at the IHM Center in Scranton, Penn.,

from 2013 to 2014.

From 2014 until the time of her death, Sister Theresa was a prayer minister at Our Lady of Peace Residence.

She received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree both in elementary education from Marywood College.

She is preceded in death by seven brothers, William, Joseph, James, Edward, Paul, Patrick and Peter; and two sisters, Catherine Muller and Helen Tourscher.

She is survived by a sister, Cecilia Lapinsky of Wilmington, N.C.; a brother-in-law, Francis Muller; four sisters-in-law, Carleen Fitzgerald, Melinda Fitzgerald, Donna Fitzgerald and Dorothy Fitzgerald; nieces and nephews; and grandnieces and grandnephews. She is also survived by the members of the IHM Congregation.

Interment will be at St. Catherine's Cemetery in Moscow, Penn. Due to restrictions related to the coronavirus, the funeral mass and graveside service are private.

Memorial contributions may be made to support the retired IHM Sisters c/o the IHM Sisters Retirement Fund, IHM Center, 2300 Adams Avenue, Scranton, Penn. 18509. ■

DECEASED CLERGY: DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT FEBRUARY 14—MARCH 20

FEBRUARY

17	Rev. George M. Karcinski.....	2006
20	Msgr. Andrew J. Hajus.....	1988
22	Msgr. George B. Curtiss.....	1982
23	Msgr. Miroslav J. Myszshyn.....	1980
24	Rev. Joseph E. Russo.....	1998
	Rev. Walter J. Seekamp.....	2012
26	Msgr. Henry E. Flanagan.....	1966
28	Rev. Stanley N. Koziol.....	2013

MARCH

1	Rev. Leonard M. Conlon.....	1976
	Deacon Timothy Sullivan.....	2015
5	Msgr. John J. Pitonak.....	1990
8	Rev. Martin J. Nikodem.....	2018
	Rev. Boleslaus Rarus.....	2005
10	Rev. Raymond H. Stephenson.....	1990
12	Rev. Martin Hitchcock.....	2014
	Rev. Leo Suwinski.....	2005
13	Deacon Joseph L. Cross.....	2003
14	Rev. Vincent P. Cleary.....	1989
	Rev. Edward A. Colohan.....	2019
15	Msgr. Francis J. Sugrue.....	1977
	Msgr. Edward G. Zibell.....	1978
	Rev. William J. Galya.....	1994
16	Rev. Emeric Szlezak, OFM.....	2019
17	Rev. Daniel F. Golden.....	1955
	Msgr. John F. Murcko.....	1975
	Msgr. Francis X. McGuire.....	1993
18	Msgr. Donald M. Paolucci.....	1990
	Rev. John Fay.....	2006
19	Rev. Bartholomew J. O'Shea.....	1959
20	Msgr. Francis A. Campagnone.....	2003

Sports

Athletes make do during the pandemic

By DON HARRISON

The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact the lives of most Americans, including student athletes and their respective seasons.

It wasn't until mid-January that



ANNA FLAHERTY

the state's governing body for high school athletics, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC), authorized an abbreviated winter schedule: 12 regular-season games and meets; post-season competition limited to conferences. Much to the chagrin of most players and coaches, the traditional CIAC state championships were scratched.

How has the pandemic affected student athletes at high schools in the Diocese of Bridgeport? Three young people share some thoughts.

ANNA FLAHERTY,

Immaculate-Danbury, junior, soccer and basketball:

In the third game of the Mustangs' 2020 soccer season, Flaherty, a center, midfielder and honors student, suffered a concussion and was forced to sit out the remainder of the abbreviated schedule. She's been cleared for basketball.

"We were playing New Milford and a girl was taking a free kick. The ball hit me in the head and I fell down," she recalled. "Although I couldn't play, I went to the rest of our games." She was pleased that Immaculate finished with a winning record: 4 wins, 3 losses, 2 ties.

As a sophomore, Flaherty was "one of the first subs off the bench" during Immaculate's 2019-20 basketball season, but now she's hopeful of cracking the starting lineup.

"With so much free time (due

to the pandemic), I've been putting in the time on my game. If I keep working hard, I think I can become a starter," says the 5-foot-1 point guard. "We're wearing masks when we're on the bench and when we're practicing. It makes you more mindful of what you're doing."



MAC STONE-FOLMAR

MAC STONE-FOLMAR, Notre Dame-Fairfield, senior, basketball and softball:

This outstanding two-sport athlete made a dramatic debut as a Notre Dame sophomore, walloping a state-record 19 home runs while propelling the softball Lancers to a 22-5 record and a semi-final berth in the Class M state tournament.

Her skills at shortstop elicited this comment from ND coach Jeff Bevino: "In the field, she makes plays others don't get to."

Enter the dreaded pandemic in March. The basketball Lancers had won all but one of their 24 games and appeared on a path to the Class L state title, but the CIAC cancelled the tournament prior to their quarter-final matchup with Windsor.

"This whole thing was definitely frustrating and hard to believe," says the 5-foot-5 shooting guard, who served as a tri-captain as a junior.

The pandemic also wiped out Notre Dame's 2020 softball season, and Mac (given name MacQuarrie) felt the worst for her senior teammates, star pitcher Breana Brown and outfielder Clare Teskey. "So devastating and sad," she noted.

So now Stone-Folmar is gearing up for basketball (12 games, South-West Conference playoffs) and, she anticipates, a 20-plus-game softball season capped by a state tournament.

"We return everyone in basket-

ball," she says, and that includes 5-9 junior Aizhanique Mayo, "who might be the No. 1 player in the state."

The future? Stone-Folmar has signed a letter of intent at Barry, a Catholic university in Miami Shores, Florida.

JACK WALLACE, St. Joseph-



JACK WALLACE

Trumbull, senior, football and baseball:

St. Joe's had captured three straight CIAC state titles, and led by Wallace and two other seniors—wide receiver Brady Hutchison and two-way end Owen DaSilva—appeared poised to make a run at a fourth. Alas, both the fall season and the replacement spring season were cancelled.

"We were practicing a lot in the fall. Cohorts, social distancing. You couldn't get away from the pandemic," says Wallace, who as a junior was voted Connecticut's Gatorade Player of the Year, selected to the Coaches' All-State team, passed for 36 touchdowns and set a school record for pass completion percentage (65.4).

And yet, he adds, "all of us knew (the season) wasn't going to happen. It's sad for the seniors on our team and the state."

So, Jack Howard Paul Wallace will turn his attention to baseball. As a sophomore, he played second base on the Cadets' Class M state championship team, but COVID-19 forced the CIAC to eliminate the entire 2020 spring season. He's "hopeful" the pandemic will continue to subside, and St. Joe's will hear "play ball!"

The future? Wallace is being recruited by Valparaiso (Indiana) University, and he's also considering three Ivy League schools, Pennsylvania, Yale and Princeton. ■

Column: Thomas Hicks



Carved on the palm of God's hand

POTPOURRI

BY THOMAS H. HICKS

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

As I grow older, I tend more and more to see so much that can make me sad and a bit discouraged. It can stir me with a deep sense of compassion. For instance, how many people come to stand, at some time or another, on Mount Nebo. Mt Nebo was the mount Moses stood on when God showed him the promised land and told him he would not enter it. Again and again God says to people, "I have caused you to see with your eyes, but you shall not go there." A couple makes plans for the future and their dreams of retirement, and then right on the threshold of it all, one is taken. Men and women struggle all their years in devotion to some cause, and just on the eve of triumph, they are gone. Again and again, we are allowed to see with our eyes but not allowed to go over. I wonder how many people have climbed their particular Mt. Nebo, saw something and learned it was not going to be for them?

And there is our likeness to Napoleon. After his great victories, Napoleon was shipped to a remote South Atlantic island named St. Helena. There's a St. Helena waiting for many (most) of us be it a hospital, nursing home or just a room somewhere.

Growing up, probably most of us were wronged in one way or another. No life escapes some wounding early on. Everyone, to a large or small extent, has felt rejection. No one is safe from trouble in the world. It seems to be true that there is no uninterrupted joy. There's what a poet called "the world's rain of tears."

On the other hand, the Psalms constantly urge us to look back and remember the things God has done for us. When I reflect on my own life, I do glimpse the hand of God. When I look back over my own life, I can see many "coincidences" or

"lucky breaks" which now I can see as the result of divine intervention. When I reflect on my own life, I can often say, when certain events are well-examined, that God acted there; in that particular time His hand rested upon me. There were the fingerprints of a providential hand.

One result of longevity is that one can look back and see how things fitted together to form a pattern. One of the consequences of growing older is that one develops a sense of how one thing leads to another. I have experienced God's grace and power in my life. Sometimes it takes time to understand things that happened. Meaning unfolds slowly. God's presence is sometimes seen only in a "rear-view mirror." There were moments when I knew that God cared for me personally. "You have kept an account of my wanderings; you have kept a record of my tears. Are they not written in your book?" (Psa. 56:9). I'm one of billions in the world yet I'm convinced God has paid special attention to me. The past makes me hopeful for the future.

I'm convinced that God will bring into my life what or whom I need. We are all objects of God's mercy, some in one way, others in another.

Isaiah tells us that we are carved on the palm of God's hand and will never be forgotten by God. Isa. 49:5-16: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the child of her womb? Even if a mother should forget her child, I can never forget you. Behold, I have written your name on the palms of my hands; you are continually before me." Isaiah also has God say: "I am aware whether you stand or sit. I know whether you come or go" (37:28). Isaiah also has God say "you are precious in my sight. I love you. Do not be afraid, for I am with you" (43:4).

The Scriptures tells us that fear, not doubt, is the opposite of faith. Fear indicates a lack of faith. Mt.8:26: "And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm."

Deut.31:6: "Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you."

St. Therese simply said, "everything is grace." Many spiritual writers also claim that nothing happens by chance or accident. Even the psychologist Carl Jung said that "nothing happens by chance." There are no coincidences; all is Providence. I'm convinced of that.

In Graham Greene's novel Brighton Rock, there's a fascinating statement, "You can't conceive the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God."

The ways in which God acts are generally inconspicuous. They usually don't come as a bolt from the blue. God's ways generally are not transparent. This is illustrated by the Biblical Book of Ruth, one of the great short stories that has come down from antiquity. The story of Ruth and Naomi often moves people to tears. God is never mentioned in the story, yet God's involvement in human events is hidden but continuous. God is the invisible force working behind the scenes.

God is continually operating in human coincidences and schemes. God is directing the play. God's hidden hand is at work creating opportunities for people, making meetings possible. Providence asserts itself in and through familiar happenings. Every prayer in the book finds an answer.

So, I pray the Lord to stay with me and keep me in His sight. Hold me tight, O God. I like something Hosea (6:13) said: "He will come like rain to us, like the spring rain that waters the earth." And finally, I pray:

Give us joy to balance our afflictions

For the years when we knew misfortune...

Give success to the work of our hands.

Give success to the work of our hands.

(Psa.90:17) ■

Nuestra Voz

Sacred Heart (Sagrado Corazón), Stamford

Por MARICARMEN GODOY

STAMFORD—El cierre parcial de las parroquias es el reflejo de cómo la iglesia fue afectada durante la pandemia y el asistir a los servicios religiosos vía “streaming” (pantalla de TV), fue una experiencia nueva que prefieren dejarla en el olvido aunque se haya convertido en una “nueva normalidad.”

El sacerdote cree que de las mil familias que conforman su parroquia, el 90 por ciento ha regresado a la iglesia en forma presencial; aun cuando en los meses de marzo a junio, tiempo en que estuvo cerrada la iglesia totalmente, pudo ofrecer, con el apoyo técnico y gratuito de un feligrés, misas vía Zoom, a familias de la parroquia que perdían familiares en otras partes del mundo y eso le dio fuerza a la iglesia para seguir viviendo, porque en momentos tan difíciles como la muerte de un ser querido, “la presencia de Dios estuvo más viva y vibrante que nunca”.

EL uso del sótano y del parqueo, en los meses de cierre total, también fueron vitales para las iglesias Sacred Heart. En estos espacios el P. Alfonso y P. Martín ofrecieron confesiones a pacientes con COVID que creían que la vida se les iba. El sótano era ocupado por la persona en confesión y el parqueo por la familia que esperaba en el automotor el tiempo que duraba la confesión. Lugares que debieron ingresar al pago de servicios de mantenimiento y de luz, agua, aire acondicionado y calefacción de tiempo completo.

“Talvez hemos perdido dinero. Si dentro del mundo de los negocios se ve así. Pero nunca perdimos la cercanía ni la fe de nuestro pueblo. ¡Al contrario!, la iglesia cumplió con su cometido de servir a su pueblo en tiempos difíciles y la presencia de Dios se ha manifestado en la esperanza de todo su pueblo de salir adelante”, dijo el Padre Alfonso.

Con el pasar de los meses la parroquia de Sacred Heart (Sagrado Corazón), ubicada en 37 Schuyler Avenue, en el centro de la ciudad, tomó la iniciativa de aumentar el sábado a las 7 pm una misa más en español, para lograr que los feligreses mantengan la distancia social y sigan fomentando la



“APARENTEMENTE en el mundo de los negocios perdimos dinero, ¿pero? en este tiempo de pandemia, ¡la iglesia está más viva y vibrante que nunca!”, dijo el P. Alfonso Picone, quien tiene a su cargo la iglesia de Sacred Heart que posee un gran sector de feligreses de minoría del centro de la ciudad.

fe que en estos momentos de pandemia se ha volcado con fuerza.

Con esto, la iglesia tiene dos celebraciones de la Palabra en español, una el sábado a las siete de la noche y la otra, la estipulada en el calendario habitual, el domingo a la una de la tarde. Lo que de acuerdo con el P. Alfonso Picone, párroco de la iglesia, ha dado resultado porque con el aumento de la misa y los grupos de oración, la dinámica parroquial comunitaria ha empezado a despuntar con fuerza, aunque la mayor parte de reuniones se están realizando en el templo principal para cumplir con el distanciamiento social, bajo registros previas.

Otro grupo que se ha reactivado es el de la oración. Los martes, miércoles y viernes por la noche estudian y celebran la Palabra. También están accionando los catecúmenos, por su naturaleza de cantar y alabar con furor alzando los brazos. A ellos les dan la parte del sótano o el templo principal cuando no hay ningún otro grupo operando.

“Están llegando muchos fieles. La gente está regresando. He tenido misas en inglés, italiano y en español muy seguido. En el caso de los italianos solo acuden adultos mayores porque sus hijos solo hablan inglés. En el caso de los hispanos, el aumento de las familias es notorio”, repuso el P. Alfonso.

Para reflejar todo el trabajo que la parroquia está emprendiendo en estos tiempos el P. Alfonso escribió en la página web parroquial una carta a sus feligreses pidiéndoles su apoyo: “Últimamente el P. Martín DeMayo y yo hemos estado muy ocupados con bautismos, primeras comuniones, confirmaciones. Todo va bien a pesar de la situación real del Covid-19, necesitamos continuar nuestra misión dentro de nuestras familias, nuestros seres queridos, nuestros amigos y las personas que encontramos todos los días. A pesar de todo, nuestra misión evangelizadora tiene que continuar en nuestros barrios y alrededores.”

Vocations

The desire to live a remarkable life

By FATHER CHRIS FORD

During the course of my ministry, I often have the opportunity to meet with young people from the diocese, both in high school and in college. Each and every time I do, I find myself constantly impressed and inspired by them. Their desire to

Basil, Chrysostom and Gregory. These men codified the things we believe, defending them from attack and preserving the deposit of faith for every generation to follow. In the middle ages arose the great orders—the Carthusians, the Franciscans, the Dominicans—that still exist today and show us by word and

conversion of heart throughout the world?

It seems that by the priesthood taking on this mantle of holy service to the Church, not only will the Church be renewed but the priesthood will be as well. The time for a relentless, unabashed, courageous pursuit of holiness in our own souls and



FATHER CHRIS FORD

grow in holiness, to live out ever more deeply their relationship with the Father is real. They also, like every young person does, have a deep desire to do something incredible in this life and to be someone remarkable. The challenge we face is coming to see that those two desires are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they go hand in hand.

In every age in the history of the Church, different groups of people have stepped forward to lead the Church into the next moment of history. The very first days of the Church were led by the faith of the early martyrs, willing to give their lives to this untested faith in the face of overwhelming persecution. In the centuries that followed, the age of the Bishop Fathers of the Church—Ambrose, Augustine,

example that it is possible to live a life on earth that mirrors the life we are called to live in heaven.

As we continue through this age of the Church, sometimes marked by turbulence and even scandal, it seems appropriate to ask the question: who will be next? Who will be next to guide the Church into a new era of growth and understanding? Who will be next to pick up the mantle that carries with it the only authentic authority in the church, the mantle of holiness?

Given the struggles and the scandals that the priesthood has endured in recent decades, perhaps the best answer is priests themselves. Can we learn to wield the great gifts that we have been given in such a way that it inspires true holiness in the people that we serve and true

in the souls of each and every person in our care has arrived and it will not go away quietly. We must shore up the front lines and inspire a new generation to rise up in the battle for souls. Whether we are priests or lay faithful, have we taken the moment to encourage a young man, clearly faithful to the Lord and striving for holiness, to consider that God needs him as a priest, perhaps now more than ever? Have we shown him that, for one who is called, the priesthood is a destiny, not a letdown?

Perhaps that will be the message young men need to hear, that they may come to see this heroic lifestyle not only as the answer to God's call but as the perfect marriage between the desire for holiness and the desire to live a remarkable life. ■