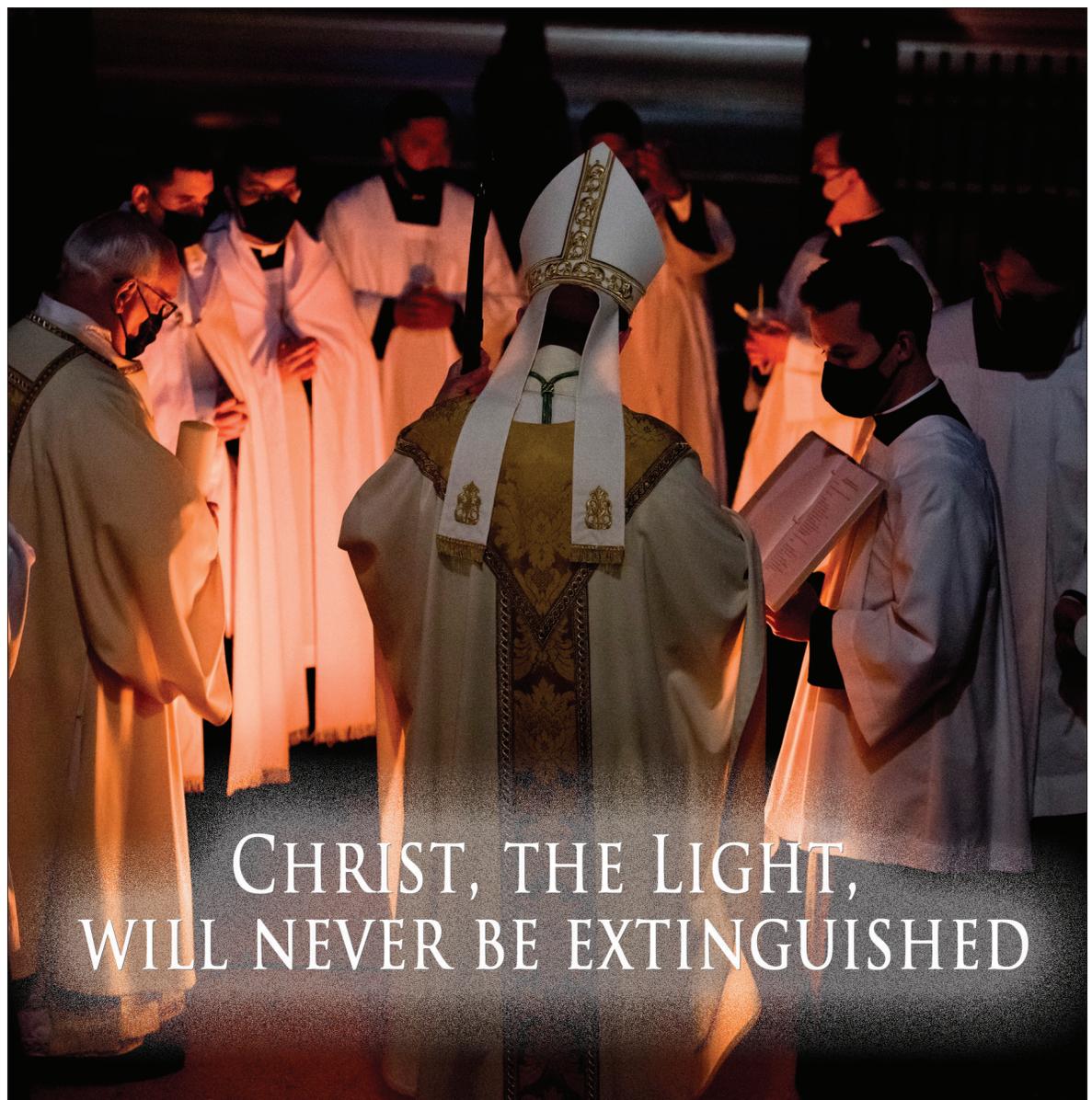


FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

digital edition

APRIL 2021 | VOLUME 38, NUMBER 4 | EASTER/SPRING ISSUE



CHRIST, THE LIGHT, WILL NEVER BE EXTINGUISHED

Inside this issue



8 *St. Vincent's Health reflecting back on COVID-19*



10-13 *Easter hope surges in parishes*



32-36 *A new era for Catholic cemeteries*

| ON THE COVER | CONTENTS | | | |
|---|----------|--|-------|--|
| Bishop Frank J. Caggiano lights the Paschal Candle to begin the Easter Vigil Mass at St. Augustine Cathedral. PHOTOS BY AMY MORTENSEN | 6-7 | SMALL LOANS HELP FAMILIES <i>Catholic Charities Family Loan Program</i> | 27-29 | DIocese RELEASES FINANCIALS <i>A year of challenges & steps forward</i> |
| | 17 | GRANT BRINGS NEW TECHNOLOGY <i>To Blessed Sacrament Parish</i> | 30-31 | PATH OF FAITH AND SERVICE <i>St. Mary, Ridgefield, Men's Ministry</i> |
| | 19 | TWO STATUES DEDICATED <i>Celebration of the Year of St. Joseph</i> | 36 | A WOMAN'S PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE <i>Visiting the 'Seven Churches' in Stamford</i> |
| | 21-24 | 'ARISE' ANNUAL CATHOLIC APPEAL <i>The donors are also the recipients</i> | 40 | NOTRE DAME SWEEPS SWC <i>Girls' & Boys' Basketball teams triumph</i> |

Around the Diocese

Lifting of restrictions and spirits

C4Y welcomes new director

BRIDGEPORT—Emily Lomnitzer of Trumbull has recently been appointed director of C4Y, the diocesan youth choir.

A parishioner of St. Pius X in Fairfield and an avid lifelong cho-

During her graduate studies, she directed music ministry at campus ministry, including conducting the student singers in major televised liturgies on EWTN. Throughout her professional singing career, she has

C4Y auditions will be held Wednesday, June 2 and Thursday, June 3 from 4:30-6 pm in room L13 at the Catholic Center (238 Jewett Avenue, Bridgeport). Sign up for a slot at the C4Y webpage (www.bridgeportdiocese.org/c4ysings/)



ral singer, Lomnitzer is thrilled to be bringing her passion for sacred choral music to the young choristers of Fairfield County.

Her first directing experience was leading a choir of her peers in concert when she was in high school. She went on to study opera, getting her bachelor's and master's in vocal performance from The Catholic University of America.

sung at major venues such as the Washington National Cathedral, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the French Embassy to the United States, and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Lomnitzer is excited to introduce the rich musical tradition of the Roman Catholic Church to the next generation of choral singers.

youth-choir-catholic-diocese).

The final choir roster will be sent out by the end of June and rehearsals are planned to begin in August. Please email Emily.Lomnitzer@diobpt for more information or for questions. Incoming 8th through 12th graders are invited to audition for a spot in the choir.

(Follow the Instagram page for updates: @C4YSings.)

Relics used to celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday at St. Jude Church

MONROE—St. John XXIII Council 5987 of the Knights of Columbus hosted a unique presentation in celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday on April 11 at St. Jude Parish in Monroe, Conn.

In partnership with the Apostolate for Holy Relics, Reverend Henry Hoffman and Deacon John Tuccio participated in presenting a one-hour program highlighting a series of excerpts from *The Diary of St. Faustina*. The readings provided the source material for meditations focused on the topics of the Passion of Our Lord and of the Holy Eucharist, complemented by the traditional recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and musical interludes.



Around the Diocese

SEEK21 at St. Pius X

FAIRFIELD—St. Pius X Parish in Fairfield was recently a host parish for SEEK21, a bi-annual conference that is hosted by the Fellowship

of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). SEEK usually takes place at one designated location in the country and is open to college students who desire to learn more about themselves, their faith,

and grow in their relationship with God. This year, due to the impact of COVID-19, the format of the conference looked a little differently. Universities, parishes and communities throughout the country were invited to serve as host sites for participants to attend the conference locally. All of the content, including keynote talks, impact session and sponsor information was available via an online platform. Registration for the conference was also opened to a wider age range, as high school students and adults were invited to attend. This year, over 27,000 people participated from around the world, making this year's conference the largest yet.



St. Rose Kindergarteners on parade

NEWTOWN—On Monday, March 29, Kindergarten students at St. Rose School in Newtown were decked out in their Easter finest, including handmade Easter bonnets, hats and bow ties.

Students and their parents paraded around the school parking lot, calling out Happy Easter! They then brought their joy across the street to Church Hill Village, an assisted living facility.

Many residents were seated in front of the building with a special guest—the Easter Bunny!

Students waved and called out Happy Easter, giving high fives to the Easter Bunny. The Bunny led students to the back of the facility where they waved to other residents who were watching from their windows.

Their little feet walked many steps and warmed many hearts with Christ's love!



Latest News

ACA supports bishop's 'Call to Renewal'

By **BRIAN D. WALLACE**

BRIDGEPORT—The 2021 ARISE Annual Catholic Appeal (ACA) has passed the 50 percent mark with \$5 million pledged on its way to the overall \$8.1 million goal to fund the critical ministries and ongoing programs of the diocese.

"The response is well ahead of last year and is very encouraging on many levels" said Joe Gallagher, chief development officer of the diocese. "I'm very grateful for our donors, the leadership of our bishop and pastors and for the overall generosity of the people of the diocese."

In addition to lowering the ACA goal this year as a result of the success of the We Stand With Christ capital campaign, the diocese has also shortened the time for the campaign. The goal is to bring the ACA to a close by the end of June.

Gallagher said he believes that the faithful have responded to the words of Bishop Frank J. Caggiano that this year's appeal is crucial because of the need to reach out to those still suffering from the pandemic, while also helping the diocese to move ahead in its renewal efforts.

In announcing the Arise theme of this year's appeal in February, the bishop said "We arise by standing together in prayerful hope to strengthen the mission of the Church which we form, a people of the light in darkness, a people of hope despite challenge."

"I pray that, as we go forward, we will not lose this unique moment to aid our sisters and brothers in need, and place our Church on the path of growth and renewal," the bishop said who issued a diocesan "Call to Renewal" in his recent pastoral exhortation, "Let us Enter the Upper Room with the Lord."

Gallagher said that in addition to the overall amount

collected and pledged to date toward the goal, he is very pleased to see the level of participation. The number of donors to the ACA is up considerably.

"Participation is up dramatically across the diocese and that's a very positive trend," said Gallagher, who noted that

through the pandemic.

Pam Rittman, director of the Annual Catholic Appeal, said one noticeable change to campaign this year will be the timing of in-pew weekend.

Rather than all parishes conducting the in-pew on the same weekend, the bishop has given

pastors the discretion to conduct the in-pew on a weekend that works best for them. Envelopes will begin arriving in parishes on April 30, and all in-pew will be held by the end of May, she said.

"It's a very hopeful time because many people have been vaccinated and have begun returning to Mass in person," said Rittman, who noted that people often prefer to make their pledge during the in-pew weekend.

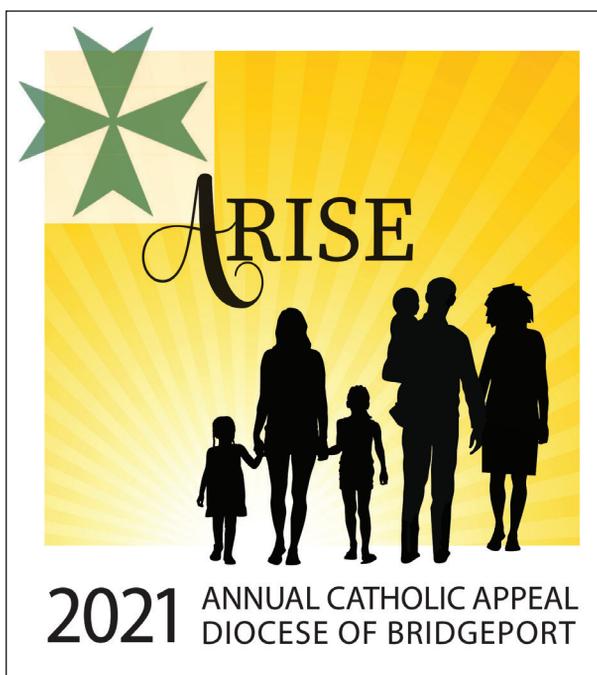
However, those who are unvaccinated or concerned about returning to Church, can make a gift online

or use the envelope enclosed in *Fairfield County Catholic*.

Rittman said she believes the pandemic stirred a deeper understanding of the role the Annual Catholic Appeal plays in the diocese, because the services it provided last year touched the lives of so many people—many of them who never needed help before.

"When the need arose to feed more people, bring the sacraments to hospitals and convalescent facilities, expand scholarship support to students whose parents lost their jobs, and improve communications to make online Masses possible, the ACA was the vehicle for this emergency response," she said.

(Gifts can be made securely either on-line on the Annual Catholic Appeal website: 2021ACABridgeport.com donate page tab or by texting the word, APPEAL to 475.241.7849 on a smart phone or calling 203.416.1470. ACA gifts can be mailed to the Catholic Center at 238 Jewett Avenue, Bridgeport, CT 06606.)



some parishes have already seen a sixty percent increase in the number of those who are giving.

"That's a significant increase coming out of the pandemic and a very positive signal about the faith and generosity of the people of the diocese. Both large and small donors are eager to support the bishop's plan for renewal and continue to help those in need."

Gallagher said that people who contribute to the ACA understand that as donors they are also beneficiaries because the appeal reaches into every aspect of life in the diocese by making so many charitable, education and faith formation programs possible.

Among last year's highlights were the more than 1.1 million meals served to the poor and food insecure through Catholic Charities, and more than \$2.7 million in financial aid given to Catholic school students through the Bishop's Scholarship Fund. The appeal also supported counseling and mental health services that have helped people get

Latest News

Masses to honor health workers and ambassadors

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano will celebrate special Masses this spring for all participants in the Ambassador Formation Program and for healthcare workers throughout the diocese.

The special celebration of Mass to honor workers will take place on Saturday, May 29, 2021

pandemic.

Bishop Caggiano said he felt it was important that the diocese recognize healthcare workers and participants in the Ambassador program called for in his pastoral exhortation, "Let us Enter the Upper Room with the Lord."

"Over this past year, many of our healthcare workers offered

"As you continue your formation towards serving the people of your parish, I very much wish to gather with you to pray and to hear firsthand the fruits of your formation to date. For this reason, I write to cordially invite you to attend a special celebration of Mass," he said to the ambassadors.



at 11 am in St. Joseph Church, Brookfield.

The two Masses for ambassadors participating in the new diocesan formation program will be held Tuesday, June 8, 2021 at 7 pm at St Augustine Cathedral, Bridgeport; and Wednesday, June 9 at 7 pm at St. Edward the Confessor Church, New Fairfield.

The upcoming Masses represent a further step in the reopening and renewal of the diocese after more than a year of

heroic service on behalf of those who fell ill with the coronavirus, often risking their own lives to care for those who were sick. While I am sure that we have kept them in our prayers each day, we also look forward to this opportunity to affirm their healthcare ministry," he said.

Likewise, the bishop said he wanted to offer his sincere thanks for those participating in the ambassador formation program through online training modules and group reflections.

Following the ambassadors' Mass, there will be an opportunity for those who attend to share their experiences of formation and to explore in greater detail the nature, scope and exciting pastoral opportunities of invitational ministry.

(Registration Healthcare Mass: Given the limited capacity in Church due to the pandemic, participants will be required to register online. The link for registration is: www.signupgenius.com/go/health-care-workers).



Tune in every Wednesday at noon to hear Bishop Frank Caggiano's live show

let me be frank

on 1350AM or 103.9 FM

For advertising information please call: Ralph Lazzaro, authorized sales representative 203.416.1462 | Cell 203.667.1622 rlazzaro@diobpt.org



Catholic Charities

Small loans keep families independent

By **KATHY-ANN GOBIN**

DANBURY—Valuable life lessons and financial education are an integral part of the Catholic Charities Family Loan Program.

The program, which is on the eve of celebrating 20 years of ser-

Silliman helped launch the program in 2001. It is offered through the non-profit entity of Catholic Charities, a more approachable forum than a bank for many families in need.

“Unfortunately, the way our system works, unless you have

getting and investing in themselves, their family and their future.

Recently, data mining technology was used to determine program criteria eligibility for people living in the Danbury and New Milford area. It is a new way technology is helping the program



CAROLYN SILLIMAN (left) stands with Yesenia Sanchez (right) in front of a 2011 Mitsubishi Outlander Sanchez purchased through the Catholic Charities Family Loan Program.

vice to the greater Danbury area community, assists working parents in obtaining small bank loans to prevent the loss of employment.

Oftentimes, what is needed is a small loan to repair or purchase a used car.

Program Coordinator Carolyn Silliman says reliable transportation is key to opportunities that will allow families to be gainfully employed or attend school.

“Our whole mission is to help working parents. They really do appreciate it,” Silliman said adding, the small loans which are approved for up to six-thousand dollars, depending on income, can be the lifeline low-income families need to keep going.

“It’s really a fantastic program for hard working people with families that need some help to maintain employment,” said Mike Donoghue, director of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County. “It’s a hand-up not a handout.”

really good credit you can’t borrow any money from traditional banks,” Donoghue said, adding that predatory lenders often lend at high interest rates making situations worse.

The Family Loan Program started loaning money at 6.9 percent interest. The success of the program and the economy has recently allowed the program to lower the interest rate to 5.25 percent.

“This is the kind of program that helps break the cycle of poverty,” Donoghue said.

The program, which is backed by four local banks, has grown from seven loans in the first year to more than 650 loans to date.

“It’s not just about a car or the money,” Silliman said. “It’s about the people.”

Silliman, who has a background in banking, wants everyone to understand the value of money and the importance of bud-

expand and a far cry from its beginning when Silliman went door-to-door visiting non-profit organizations to help spread the news about the new program.

A postcard mailing was sent out to dozens of households and non-profit organizations to help generate awareness about the program.

The response showed there is still a need for the program, especially during these uncertain times.

In fact, the program has been so successful that it is being expanded in the new year.

“Now, we are in the process of moving this program to other areas of the county,” Donoghue said. “We just got a commitment from five local banks in the Stamford/Norwalk area and we’ll be starting a program there in January 2021.” Donoghue said a program in the Bridgeport area is also expected to rollout later next year.

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Catholic Charities

SMALL LOANS FROM PAGE 6

“It’s a great testament to what Carolyn has done,” Donoghue said, adding that Catholic Charities was able to show the success of the program through her efforts.

“Unlike banks, we are not trying to make any money on these loans,” he said. “As people pay us back, we are able to make more loans to others in need.” The program averages an 85-90 percent payback on loans.

Silliman says she gets a lot of calls from all around the state and since the program is currently only offered in the greater Danbury area, she must inform them, they are not eligible. She does, however, use the opportunity to listen and help educate people about finding programs that may be available to them in their own hometown.

For the Family Loan Program, Silliman helps clients understand their finances and establish a budget using income sources including food stamps, social security and child support.

“You have to be working in order to qualify for this program,” Silliman said, adding that the bank cannot use unemployment as an income.

Through one-on-one budget meetings, where Silliman reviews a client’s bank statements, bills and spending habits, she imparts her financial and practical knowledge to those who may not see the big picture.

“I’m trying to show clients how to keep money in their pocket and not give it to anybody else,” she said. That is why she even inquires about eating habits. “I try to show them how the trend of eating out, quickly gobbles up their money.”

Saving just \$10 a week by cooking at home instead of eating out or by not buying something simply because it is on sale when it is not really needed, adds up, she said. “If you saved \$10 week you would have \$520 at the end of the year that could be used to plan a vacation and make special memories with your family.”

“It’s a new concept to many people. Most families we help were never taught basic money skills,” Silliman said. I try to get them to think about their money in a totally different way: to value it more, to think more and to do more.”

A six-thousand-dollar loan,

paid off in three years, would require a monthly payment of less than \$185. Repaying the loan with on-time monthly payments, offers a way for people to improve their credit score.

“The only way they can change their credit score is to have someone give them a chance,” Silliman said. “This program gives them that chance.”

After budget analysis, education and qualifying for the loan, a committee approves the loan. Silliman often sits in on the closing of the loan and then helps her clients learn how to research and buy a reliable car or find a reputable repair shop.

“I’m not teaching you anything I don’t do myself,” she said. “I want them to leave here with information that can change their

lives forever.”

“They are so grateful to have a chance to rebuild their credit. They are very good at making payments and they want to see their improved credit score when they pay off their loans.”

The program also offers assistance with housing. A small loan of up to \$800 with a payback period of 12 months or \$70 a month is offered to help clients trying to make a security deposit for a place to live in the greater Danbury area.

“I feel really blessed to meet so many people through the program,” Silliman said. “I am blessed to be a part of their life.”

(For more information about the Catholic Charities Family Loan Program please call Carolyn Silliman at: 203.743.4412 x 242, or visit www.ccfairfield.org/programs/family-loan.) ■



Family Loan Program expands to Stamford/Norwalk

The Family Loan Program that has operated successfully in the Danbury area for 20 years is expanding to Stamford/Norwalk this spring. Similar to the program in Danbury, the Family Loan Program of Stamford/Norwalk will offer low-interest rate (5.5%) loans of up to \$10,000 to working families. The loans (backed by five local banks) can be used for car purchases or repairs, childcare expenses, security deposits, immigration fees, or any type of expense that may prohibit a parent from working.

All applicants will receive comprehensive one-on-one financial education and counseling and will be supported throughout the entire loan process. Applicants can save thousands of dollars in interest (versus non-traditional lenders), establish a positive track record and improve their credit rating.

The program will be managed by Diane Barston and will operate out of the Catholic Charities office at 120 East Avenue in Norwalk (across from Norwalk City Hall).

(For more information, please contact Diane Barston at 203.767.4854 or dbarston@ccfc-ct.org.) ■

Health News

Reflecting back on COVID-19

By EMILY CLARK

BRIDGEPORT—Creating a sense of community, bonding together and reaching out to those most in need became the inherent philosophy for residents of Fairfield County, along with people around the globe, as they lived their lives amid the uncertainty of COVID-19 during the past year. Few lived it as routinely though, as the frontline workers and medical professionals, including those at St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport. Now, as the world emerges from the pandemic, those same profes-

Marcu added, calling it a reflection of the way this Catholic hospital, now part of Hartford HealthCare, has operated for over 100 years. Helping people through telemedicine, mobile units, pastoral services and Urgent Care provides tangible evidence of how they treat everyone in need—and how they learned to do so differently as the coronavirus altered their lives. When visitation restrictions were in place, supporting families became paramount, aided by the use of iPad technology and telephonic outreach so loved ones could communicate. Father Hyginus Agu, the

hospital staff. "I thought that was so touching."

As the one-year mark of the pandemic passes, medical professionals at St. Vincent's are working to support their community in a new way: the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. From mobile units in area locations to vaccine clinics at several schools and parishes, the staff aims to reach as many people as possible, especially the under-served populations. Both Marcu and Hoey commented that some cannot access the vaccine because of transportation issues, a hesitation to come out, or because



sionals reflect on what they and their colleagues endured and how what they learned gives them confidence going forward.

"This was a journey from the fear and unknown to one of courage and hope," said Corina Marcu, M.D., associate vice president of medical affairs at St. Vincent's. "We all came together in a beautiful way, and that carried us through the uncertainty."

As Marcu and her staff began battling "this horrible virus" when it first hit the region, she said the need to adapt quickly became evident, but it was their reliance on shared experiences and combined talents that enabled them to best treat their patients.

"This pandemic taught us that some of the principles we've learned and applied [for years] came in handy in the face of so much fear. Because of that, it became easier to pivot from day to day and minute to minute," she remembered. "Everyone who had something to offer put it on the table. We were able to carry through knowing we had very strong people around us."

That sense of coming together is part of the fabric of St. Vincent's,

full-time chaplain at St. Vincent's, would regularly call to update relatives, which helped to alleviate families' frustration, for as Bill Hoey, the hospital's vice president of mission integration, said, it is so devastating to be alone.

"The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the awareness of good communication with families and patients. It is ingrained in the staff, and it reinforced the importance of a faith-based medical center," Hoey said, adding how pastoral care has played such a significant role in how they assist those they serve.

On-going support, visits from Father Hyginus and the newly-created CareGrams, a service that allows friends to send customized greetings to those at the hospital, show "the myriad of ways that we provide for the spiritual needs of families, patients, and colleagues," Hoey said. That became clear on Easter Sunday 2020 when Father Hyginus, Deacon Tim Bolton, Dr. Jemi Samuel and Hoey himself went floor to floor at St. Vincent's with a special Easter blessing.

"They held hands with the nurses working on Easter, sang and read prayers," Marcu said of the

they are simply unaware of its availability. "We know that people are in need of this, and we have a mission to get all vaccinated against this disease," said Marcu. "We are here and we are coming to you."

Though the vaccine is available to so many now, Hoey said the hospital offered it early to all priests and deacons in the diocese, as they are considered frontline workers ministering to patients in need of a sacrament. "St. Vincent's has an understanding of the prominent role that clergy play," he added.

In turn, St. Vincent's itself has played a prominent role in bringing faith-based healthcare to the greater Bridgeport community for over a century—serving its patients during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 and the coronavirus pandemic of today. And along with the uncertainty that accompanies such crises comes the courage and the knowledge to serve that community even better.

"We are very hopeful and have learned so much," said Marcu, acknowledging the respect she has for this virus. "We have pulled together to do our part for patients and families. I am humbled to be part of history." ■

Health News

Vaccine brings hope to parishes

BRIDGEPORT—“I feel fortunate that our parish can open a door for people to get vaccinated,” said Father Juan Gabriel Acosta, newly named pastor of the Cathedral Parish in Bridgeport.

Through a joint effort between the Diocese of Bridgeport and St. Vincent’s/Hartford Health Care, more than 200 parishioners of the Cathedral Parish and St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bridgeport received the Moderna vaccine.

“So many of our parishioners have had a tough and difficult time in the past year. They’ve lost loved ones and had other hardships,” said Father Acosta. The positive reception to the vaccination on the part of parishioners has made him feel happy that the parish can make things easier for parishioners. “It’s something the parish and the diocese have been able to do for the people.”

St. Charles Borromeo families received the vaccine in the McGivney Center, which shares the East Side campus with the church.



of mission integration at St. Vincent’s Medical Center/Hartford, said the event, and others like it sponsored by Hartford Health, is part of a concerted

founding in 1903, St. Vincent’s Medical Center has a history of bringing much needed medical services into the community and responding to health crises as it



“Our mission as a Catholic Church is to save souls and lives,” said Father Abelardo Vasquez, administrator, St. Charles Borromeo Church. “Working in community with St. Vincent’s and Hartford Health, we were able to distribute these vaccines to the parish community, and we are so grateful for that. It was a very busy day, but it was a joyous one.”

Bill Hoey, vice president

effort to eliminate barriers to access and achieve more equitable distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

“As part of the Bridgeport diocese, we are eager to bring the vaccine to parishioners of Catholic churches located in areas of Bridgeport that have disproportionately low rates of vaccination,” he said.

Bill Hoey said that since its

did during the 1918 pandemic.

Both pastors personally called parishioners and encouraged them to register. “Once we were working from the pulpit, they were able to trust that the vaccine can be trusted,” Father Abelardo said.

(To learn more contact HartfordHealthCare.org/vaccine or call Hartford HealthCare’s dedicated Bridgeport Resident Community Care Center 860.827.7400.)

Easter Hope Surges

Christ, the Light, will never be extinguished!

By JOE PISANI

BRIDGEPORT—After the long darkness of the pandemic, people are questioning the mean-

ing of their lives and looking for answers, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano said at the Easter Vigil Mass celebrated at St. Augustine Cathedral.

its mission and destiny—Christ, the light that will never be extinguished.”

During his homily at the Easter Vigil, Bishop Caggiano

there what it means to follow in the footsteps of the crucified and risen Savior.”

The Easter Vigil, which is the greatest liturgy of the year,



called upon the faithful to be heroic witnesses to the light and not be afraid to preach the Gospel in a world that is often hostile to it.

He said that at times we can block the light of Christ “with our complacency, our familiarity, the fact that perhaps at times in our lives we become lukewarm or make peace with the world around us, when in fact we are called to be heroic in our witness to the light, to not fear the consequences of preaching this light of Christ to a world that sometimes does not want

to hear it, does not want to see it, does not want to see it in you and me.”

Bishop Caggiano said that many people who are searching, hoping and looking for Christ, especially after the darkness of the pandemic, will find him in those who give faithful witness to the Gospel.

“He will come to them through you and me, and the light we shine in our hearts,” he said. “Let us show the world out

the “mother of all vigils,” as St. Augustine said, began with the Liturgy of Light. The cathedral was in darkness while outside a holy fire was lit called the Lucernarium and blessed by Bishop Caggiano. The new Paschal candle was then lit, representing Christ, the light of the world. The priest led a procession into the dark church and stopped three times, proclaiming, “Christ, our Light!” as the candles of the congregation were lit from the Easter candle.

After the Easter candle arrived in the sanctuary, a Redemptoris Mater seminarian sang the ancient “Easter Proclamation,” also known as the Exsultet from the Latin “rejoice.”

This was followed by the Liturgy of the Word—seven readings from Genesis through Exodus and the Prophets to the New Testament, which were read in English and Spanish and chronicled God’s unfolding plan of salvation. Between the readings, psalms were chanted.

Since earliest times at the Easter Vigil, catechumens received the Sacraments of Initiation. Bishop Caggiano

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Easter Hope Surges

CHRIST, THE LIGHT FROM PAGE 10

announced, “Tonight, Daniel, our brother, will be baptized, confirmed and receive the Sacred Body and Blood of Our Lord.”

After the blessing of the baptismal water, the young man received his sacraments and later was the first person to receive Holy Communion.

The entire congregation renewed their baptismal promises and received a blessing from Bishop Caggiano with the newly blessed baptismal water.

The Easter Vigil culminated with the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

In his homily, Bishop Caggiano reflected on his early mornings at his former residence in Trumbull, where he would begin his day with a cup of coffee and sit on the sofa in his sitting room, “enjoying a perfect view of the cemetery that abuts the property and the rising of the sun every morning.”

“It was in days like these in the beginning of spring that I

dawn—a light that is more brilliant than a thousand suns. For it is the light of the one Son that is eternal.”

“For this is the sacred night when you and I have our spirits renewed, our hearts emboldened by a light that has pierced away the darkness of sin and death,” he said. “Your sins and my sins, your death and my death. For this is the night of our victory in Jesus Christ, a light that will never be extinguished, a light that brings hope and glory to all God’s children.”

The light of Christ comes to us in our baptism, he said, when we enter into the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ by grace, which enlightens our minds by the gift of the Holy Spirit, giving us the gifts of faith, hope and love, along with the promise of everlasting life. It makes us adopted daughters and sons of God and members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

“We celebrate that great gift,

“needed to fight its way to be seen through the branches until it rose high enough that the trees could no longer block it, to shine pure, unencumbered and clear for the eye to see.”

“Many a day I thought how beautiful it would be if those trees were not blocking it, if the light could be seen from its very beginning,” he recalled. “I wonder about that in your life and mine, for do we believe that the light has conquered darkness in Jesus Christ? Yes, we do believe it. We are here to celebrate it. But I must ask you, my friends, how often do you and I block the shining of that light in our lives like those trees do in Trumbull?”

Bishop Caggiano said that now, more than ever, we need to trim away whatever is in our lives that blocks the light of Christ.

“My friends, as we leave this church, let us resolve to take all that is withered, all that is dead in our lives, all that blocks us from being true witnesses of the light



had the great privilege to look upon those first rays of light that pierced the darkness, a light that steadily grew in power, color and beauty,” he recalled. “That light gave strength to my spirit and many times joy to my heart to prepare for what the day would bring. You and I, my friends, have come here tonight to celebrate a different type of

perhaps the greatest of all gifts given us, this night when the darkness finally failed and the light conquered forever,” he said.

Recalling his early mornings at sunrise in Trumbull, Bishop Caggiano said the first light of dawn was blocked by a row of evergreen trees that were planted to separate the residences from the cemetery, and the sunlight

in the world and cast it aside and burn it away so that the light can shine brightly.”

At the conclusion, he said it was a great blessing to celebrate the Easter Vigil of the Lord together, and the congregation applauded.

“It is, please, Heavenly Father, a sign of hope for what is to come for us in the months ahead.” ■

Easter Hope

St. Mary celebrates the Risen Lord at Sunrise Mass!

By **KATHY-ANN GOBIN**

BETHEL—Hundreds gathered in the pre-dawn chill of Easter morning to celebrate the Risen Lord at a sunrise Mass at Blue Jay Orchards, hosted by St. Mary Parish in Bethel.

“I love to watch the sunrise come up during Mass,” said Vicki Wish, who attended the service with her family. “It’s a great way to start the day.”

Wish and hundreds of others felt the same way as cars arrived in the early morning hour with headlights piercing the darkness. Lanterns lit the path to the outside altar as footsteps crunched gravel on the way to set up chairs in a field illuminated in moonlight.

“We have a very good crowd here this morning, despite the pandemic,” said St. Mary pastor Father Corey Piccinino, as he welcomed the congregation, who respected social distancing protocols and wore masks during the outdoor service.

Many people came prepared

for the early morning Mass with chairs and blankets to keep warm. Easter bonnets were replaced with more practical knit hats and gloves. Some people wore knit hats with lights to help them navigate the darkness, others used the light from their cell phone.

The occasional birds chirping were interrupted only by the joyous greetings of “Good Morning,” and “Happy Easter” as people passed each other on their way to sit down.

During the homily, Father Piccinino told the story of how Jesus paid for our sins with His life and related how Mary Magdalene was the first to see the Risen Lord.

“She couldn’t wait until the sun came up and neither could we,” he said to the gathered faithful, some of whom were huddled under blankets.

But the chilly temperature could never deter the hopeful.

“There’s nothing like seeing this beautiful sky, this beautiful sunrise,” said Karin Deshan, ges-



FATHER COREY PICCININO CELEBRATES Easter sunrise Mass at Blue Jay Orchards in Bethel.

turing to the pink and lavender hues peeking over the horizon. “If you can’t be at the real tomb, this is an incredible experience.”

“We arrived here in the darkness here and we are leaving in the light with Jesus in our hearts,” said Deshan, who is a member of the choir and a parishioner of St. Mary’s for more than three decades.

Father Piccinino encouraged by attendance to the early morning Mass, said to the departing crowd, “I hope to see you all in church next week.” ■

Holy Thursday at St. Gregory

By **KATHY-ANN GOBIN**

DANBURY—A symbolic act of service and a reminder to not only follow the example of the Lord but to call on Him and trust Him, was the message at the Holy Thursday Mass at St. Gregory the Great Parish in Danbury.

“What our Lord did that evening was very powerful and meaningful. He wanted to do

ly about the Last Supper.

“The Son of God chose to take the role of a servant,” Father Dunn said. “Our Lord wants to take that role in our lives too. What we are to understand is that our Lord loves us so much, he wants to serve us and like the apostles, we are to allow Him,” Father Dunn said.

Father Dunn explained in Jesus’ time it was a job for the slave, servant or children of a

apostles called Jesus master it was hard for them to grasp why he would want to wash their feet. The reenactment of the washing of the feet, imitates the humility and selfless love of Jesus, who washed the feet of the Twelve Apostles at the Last Supper, the night before his Crucifixion.

“I am so humbled and honored to be able to follow the example the Lord has given to us,” Father Dunn said before he washed the feet of six teachers from St. Gregory the Great School assisted by parochial vicar Father Christopher Ford.

Father Dunn said when asked to participate most people are either honored, surprised or uncomfortable, much like St. Peter who at first did not want the Lord to wash his feet. But when he understood the significance of the act, a spiritual cleansing and gift of love, he readily agreed. ■



something the apostles would not forget,” said Pastor Father Michael Dunn during his homi-

household, not the master of the house, to wash the feet of a visitor as an act of hospitality. Since the

Easter Hope

Blessing of Food at St. Edward the Confessor

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

NEW FAIRFIELD—Dozens of people gathered at St. Edward the Confessor Parish to receive a Blessing of the Food on the eve of the celebration of Easter.

“For 40 days we have been preparing by works of charity, fasting and self-sacrifice, in preparation for the great feast of the Resurrection,” said Father Robert Wolfe. “This Vigil of the Lord’s Resurrection is a time when all things are made new. Let us pray that the Lord will bless these Easter foods so that we may celebrate with hearts renewed on this feast of our salvation.”

Dozens of baskets of food were laid at the foot of the altar in the parish hall. The altar was adorned with Easter lilies surrounded by a variety of white, pink and yellow flowers. It is a Slavic tradition, when baskets containing a sampling of Easter foods are brought to church to be blessed on Holy Saturday.

Father Wolfe blessed the Easter baskets that were filled with bread, eggs, meat and other food items. Many of the baskets were adorned with embroidered white linens, sprigs of boxwood, the typical Easter evergreen and ribbons, woven through basket handles.



There was even a whimsical touch of a child, who attached a stuffed animal to one of the baskets.

“Our Lenten fasting is a reminder of our hunger and thirst for holiness, which is satisfied only by Christ who feeds and nourishes us by His Word and sacraments,” said Father Wolfe. “When we gather at our first meal of Easter may this food be a sign for us of that heavenly banquet to which the Lord calls us.”

The blessing of food on the eve of Easter is a very meaningful tradition for many in the parish.

“It’s a tradition I grew up with,” said Ella Palac, a parishioner of St. Edward the Confessor for 17 years. “Once you bless the foods, the Easter tradition begins. It’s something to look forward to after Lent.”

Father Wolfe prayed over the Easter bread that symbolizes Christ the Living Bread to feed us on our journey through life, the Easter

cheese to teach us that Christians should have moderation in all things, the Easter ham, kielbasa and meats as a symbol of sacrificial animals of the Old Testament and Easter eggs as a symbol of new life, abundance, and prosperity.

After praying over them, Father Wolfe sprinkled Holy Water over the parishioners and the baskets of food.

“This was my grandpa’s tradition because he was Slovakian,” said Jennifer Marra, who attended the afternoon blessing with her family. “It makes us feel like he is with us and it makes us feel closer to him.”

At the conclusion of the blessing, Father Wolfe was thankful for the gift of homemade cheese and kielbasa.

“May all of these foods,” Father Wolfe said, “remind us of the goodness of creation and the abundant blessings God has given to us.” ■

FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

Office of Communications Diocese of Bridgeport

238 Jewett Avenue
Bridgeport, Connecticut 06606-2892
telephone | 203.416.1461
email | fcc@diobpt.org
Web | www.bridgeportdiocese.com
Facebook | [BridgeportDiocese](https://www.facebook.com/BridgeportDiocese)
Twitter | [@diobpt](https://twitter.com/diobpt)

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano Publisher

Brian D. Wallace

Executive Editor bdwallace@diobpt.org

Elizabeth Clyons

Writer/Editor elizabeth.clyons@diobpt.org

Renée 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

To advertise call Ralph Lazzaro: 203.667.1622
© Copyright 2020, Diocese of Bridgeport

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Bishop visits St. James' rooftop



STRATFORD—Recently, Bishop Caggiano visited St. James Parish in Stratford. Father Peter Adamski has been celebrating Mass outdoors since the beginning of the pandemic—by riding a scissor lift to the rooftop! On Sunday, April 18, Bishop Caggiano did the same. Members of St. James Parish gathered in the parking lot to attend this special rooftop Mass. ■

Editorial

EDITORIAL

Ambassadors of Christ

In his recent video urging all to participate in the 2021 Annual Catholic Appeal, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano summoned a hopeful moment in our lives and the life of the Church:

“At the end of Lent, we hear the beautiful poignant story of Jesus resuscitating his friend Lazarus. And what did He say to him? “Untie him, and let him go free.” We are now beginning to be untied from the ravaging effects of this pandemic, but the Lord is sending his spirit to set us free, to allow His spirit, to capture our imagination, give strength and energy to our hands, to be bold and innovative, so that we can address the needs of our entire family of faith. And together we can do this. We can become ambassadors of Christ in the world.”

The bishop’s words are an invitation for all of us to become ambassadors of Christ in the world, but they are also pointedly a celebration of the new Ambassador Formation initiative called for in his recent Pastoral Exhortation, “Let us Enter the Upper Room with the Lord.” The response to the bishop’s call for Ambassadors has been enthusiastic and encouraging with more than 200 men and women from 30 parishes participating in the formation experience and preparing to join in a true invitational ministry.

Many thanks to Father Michael Novajosky, special assistant to the bishop, who is coordinating the formation, to the many pastors and priests who are participating, and to all the men and women who are working to serve as ambassadors by deepening their own faith and preparing to welcome all back to the Church. To read bishop’s exhortation visit: www.bridgeportdiocese.org/call-to-renewal/welcome.

This is where we are supposed to be

In this reflection by Emily Clark of Trumbull, a public school teacher, St. Theresa Parishioner and regular contributor to Fairfield County Catholic, she captures the hope and joy that many felt this Easter as they were able to return to Easter Sunday Mass in person in contrast to last year when the state was in lockdown because of the coronavirus.

The clouds, gray and heavy, greeted us as we stepped onto the front porch Easter morning. I had hoped bright sunshine, the kind that would match the daffodils nodding in the lawn, would accompany us to Mass, but we found that brightness elsewhere. Christ had risen, bringing with Him a sense of hope and a promise of rebirth we seemed to need now more than ever.

A year ago, like so many others, we celebrated Mass in the family room, watching our priest consecrate the Eucharist on live-streamed TV instead of in person, sitting on the couch instead of in a pew, reciting prayers in isolation instead of in community. Though we told ourselves at the time it was better than nothing, a feeling of emptiness prevailed. Technology could never truly capture the essence of this holy day. This year would be different, we said as Easter approached again. It would. It had to be.

And it was. The white lilies and periwinkle hydrangeas on the altar, the lingering trace of incense in the air, and the sounds of the children’s choir created a feeling of welcome and, indeed, of peace that had been missing for over a year. Though we went to Mass outdoors in the car last summer and were grateful to attend the very socially-distanced vigil on Christmas Eve, this felt different. The symbolism of resurrection and renewal was not lost on any of us as we gathered together, but it was that gathering together that made it so different. We were all emerging from our own personal darkness and our own personal suffering of the past year, yearning to do just that—gather together—once again!

“I love to see that the church is filled,” my daughter whispered. Filled? Not really, I thought. It couldn’t be—not yet. But it was. Not filled to capacity with parishioners, but filled with the hope and the joy of all that Christ’s resurrection means to us. The excited waves from across the pews and the bright smiles (even behind the masks) confirmed what our priest said during his homily: “We’re here, and this is where we are supposed to be.” As we bore witness to the suffering of the past year, we now see the promise in the rebirth of our lives.

And as we exited the church, another blessing greeted us bright sunshine, the kind that matched the daffodils nodding in the churchyard. ■

CLERGY
APPOINTMENTS

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

PASTOR

REVEREND JEFFREY COUTURE, from Pastor of Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, Weston, to Pastor of Saint Matthew Parish, Norwalk. Effective date was April 12 for a term of six years.

PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATOR

REVEREND AUGUSTINE NGUYEN, from Chaplain Western Connecticut State University Newman Center, Danbury, to Parochial Administrator of Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, Weston. Effective date was April 12 for a term of one year.

DEAN

REVEREND REGINALD NORMAN, appointed to Dean of Seat of Wisdom. Effective date was March 2 for the current term ending September 1, 2023.

PAROCHIAL VICAR

REVEREND CHRISTOPHER PERRELLA, from Saint John Parish, Darien, to Parochial Vicar, Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish, Fairfield. Effective date was April 12.

REVEREND LAWRENCE AMALRAJ GNANAPRAGASAM, appointed to Parochial Vicar Saint Rose of Lima Parish, Newtown. Effective date was April 1 for a term of three years.

DEACON

DEACON WILLIAM MURPHY, appointed to the Office of Advocate for marriage cases before the Tribunal of Bridgeport. Effective date was April 1 for a term of three years.

DEACON DANIEL IANNIELLO, appointed to the Office of Advocate for marriage cases before the Tribunal of Bridgeport. Effective date was April 1 for a term of three years.

DEACON WILLIAM SANTULLI, appointed to the Office of Advocate for marriage cases before the Tribunal of Bridgeport. Effective date was April 1 for a term of three years.

DEACON ERIC KEENER, appointed to the Office of Advocate for Marriage cases before the Tribunal of Bridgeport. Effective date was April 1 for a term of three years.

DEACON WILLIAM TIMMEL, appointed to the Office of Advocate for Marriage cases before the Tribunal of Bridgeport. Effective date was April 1 for a term of three years.

DEACON DAVID RIVERA, appointed to the Office of Advocate for Marriage cases before the Tribunal of Bridgeport. Effective date was April 1 for a term of three years.

DEACON DONALD NAIMAN, appointed to the Office of Advocate for Marriage cases before the Tribunal of Bridgeport. Effective date was April 1 for a term of three years.

DEACON THOMAS CURRAN, appointed to the Office of Advocate for Marriage cases before the Tribunal of Bridgeport. Effective date was April 1 for a term of three years.

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

Editorial



Should we be rushing to get back to ‘normal?’

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.

As vaccines continue to roll out, I’m starting to notice a sense of urgency in people to return to life as it was before the pandemic. While I understand the excitement to see friends and family again, and to once again enjoy certain activities we’ve missed out on, I find myself wondering what the rush is to get back to “the way things were before.”

If there is anything this time has taught me, it is that there are certain things in life that hold less weight in the grand scheme of things. I suspect all of us in one way or another have asked ourselves similar questions: When it comes down to it, are those extra hours in the office really going to make you happier? Do we trade too much of our time for “success” or things we want to buy or think we need to be happy? Have we learned anything about ourselves and our lives from the suffering and loss of the pandemic?

Many national surveys suggest that the “new normal” will be more difficult and challenging—maybe not a world we readily want to deal with. At the same time, we hear that people are reluctant to return to the “old” normal. They don’t want the rush hour commutes and sitting in traffic just a mile away from home or work.

They’d like to be able to work from home more often where possible and have time in their life for other things.

And we also know what people miss—the unmasked freedom of being with others, enjoying life without the anxiety of exposure; being able to gather with family and friends; to go back to church and other parish activities and live a purposeful life.

I was hopeful that experiencing a global pandemic would help people slow down and take stock of the things that are really important, and that it would spark an overall shift in what we value. I, for one, have learned so much about what those things are, and I hope it has changed the way I approach many things in my life.

I don’t think we should forget the more than 500,000 lives lost in our country alone, and many are still grieving even as those of us who went relatively unscathed are trying to recover what we lost and to move on.

While we’ve been inspired by the heroism of so many people during the pandemic, we’ve also been reminded that some lives have been worth more than others—that many of the poor and most vulnerable were far less healthy and did not have easy access to care. So we learn that a person’s value should

not be based in her or his job, but as Christians we know that God tells us we are valuable in and of ourselves. Matthew 10:31 says, “So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” God sees our inherent value, outside of what we do to make a living, can we do the same for ourselves and others?

In our rush to get back to life as we knew it, I don’t want us to forget what happened here. I don’t want us to forget these 500,000+ people who no longer get to live their lives. How can we honor them in the way we live our lives moving forward?

I hope the pandemic has helped people realize that the things that set our souls on fire are the pursuits that make life worth living. As Matthew 6:34 says, “Tomorrow will take care of itself.” God assures us of this. Can we trust Him and begin to live our lives the way He intended them for us?

Having the knowledge we do now of how the things of true importance can be taken from us so quickly, can we really go back to the way things were before? In his Pastoral Exhortation, “Let us Enter the Upper Room with the Lord,” Bishop Frank J. Caggiano offers us an answer. He urges us to find courage and strength in God’s love for us and to joyfully share it with others.

In his wise words, we realize that the way of the Gospel and the ways of the world are not one and the same. And faith gives us a fullness that is not found anywhere else. I guess the challenge is to remember what happened here and what we learned during this time. Let us be intentional about how we move forward, as a testament to the lives that were lost. ■

**Sell your unwanted/broken gold/silver jewelry and coins
Put money in your pocket now!**

Your Gold For Good, LLC
will come to your house, appraise what you want to sell, pay you and make a separate check to the diocesan charity, parish or school of your choice.

With gold and silver on the rise this is a good time to sell your broken and unwanted gold and silver jewelry.

To schedule an appointment or if you have questions, please call 203.433.1717
All CDC and CT COVID-19 regulations are being followed.

Editorial



A saint America desperately needs

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

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

I always thought it was an honor to share the same birthday in April as Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence, who penned the words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Several years ago, I discovered my birthday is also the feast day of a little-known woman who lived 700 years ago and will be canonized on September 19—a woman who, more than Thomas Jefferson, has a message for our age. Her name is Blessed Margaret of Castello, and she can best be described as “the patron saint of the unwanted.”

On my desk, I have a photo of her incorrupt body, which lies at the base of the altar at the Church of St. Dominic in Castello, Italy. It’s the face of a woman born blind, hunchbacked and lame, a woman of nobility whose family abandoned her as a child and forced her to beg on the streets to survive.

She is also a woman whose sanctity inspired thousands of people to attend her funeral when she died at 33 and whose intercession has led to many miracles over the centuries.

“Little Margaret,” as she was called, was born into a family of wealth and prestige in a castle near Perugia, Italy in 1287. Her parents wanted a son to carry on their noble ancestry, but instead God gave them a daughter who was blind and deformed. In our era of pre-natal testing and eugenic abortion, Little Margaret would never have been born.

At 6-years-old, her parents made her leave the castle and imprisoned her for 13 years to keep her out of sight. Despite her poor health and deformity, she was intelligent and full of goodness, and she loved God with a contagious fervor.

When she was 19, her parents took her to Castello to seek a miracle, but ended up abandoning her in the church. All alone, she lived as a beggar on the streets, until the poor townspeople adopted her as their own.

Little Margaret eventually became a lay Dominican and spent her final years doing acts of charity and mercy, visiting prisoners, assisting the sick and comforting the dying, until she died.

Did her life have purpose? To God it did. Despite her personal suffering, she brought joy and love to many others afflicted by a spiritual sickness common in the 21st century—they are “unwanted.”

In modern America, the unwanted have many different

faces. They’re the unborn, the incurably ill, the handicapped, the elderly, the poor and the dispossessed. And they share one thing in common: Their dignity as human beings is denied, and their right to life is threatened by a society that doesn’t value the weak and the infirm.

Every year, 1.2 million babies are aborted in America -- more than 20 percent of all pregnancies. In his encyclical “The Gospel of Life,” Pope John Paul II wrote, “Eugenic abortion is justified in public opinion on the basis of a mentality that accepts life only under certain conditions and rejects it when it is affected by any limitation, handicap or illness. ... It is possible to speak in a certain sense of a war of the powerful against the weak: A life that would require greater acceptance, love and care is considered useless or held to be an intolerable burden, and is therefore rejected. A person who, because of illness, handicap or, more simply, just by existing, compromises the well-being or life-style of those who are more favored tends to be looked upon as an enemy to be resisted or eliminated.”

In 1609, Margaret was declared blessed, and she will be canonized later this year. Over the centuries, her story has inspired countless people. Her life offers a telling lesson for our age: A child who had no value to her parents had inestimable value to God. And through her, God did great things.

Yes, even Blessed Margaret was endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Blessed Margaret, patron of the unwanted, pray for America. ■



magtype.com • 203.377.7908

**Working from Home
Remote Learning
How is that going?**

IT SUPPORT • NETWORKING • WEB DESIGN • PROGRAMMING • MAC & PC COMPUTER SUPPORT

We Stand With Christ

New technology grant helps Blessed Sacrament

By **JOE PISANI**

BRIDGEPORT—When Father Skip Karcinski looks back on the challenges Blessed Sacrament Church confronted during the COVID-19 lockdown, he says his parish benefited from a grant from Foundations in Faith that updated its technology and communications systems.

“COVID-19 changed everything,” he said.



“COVID-19 changed everything,” said Father Skip Karcinski, pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish in Bridgeport. A grant from Foundations in Faith helped the parish to upgrade its communication technology and live-stream Masses.

The parish phone system was outdated and couldn't receive or leave messages. A former employee, now deceased, who had worked at the church 18 years ago had recorded the prompts.

Because the parish technology was linked together, Blessed Sacrament needed an overhaul. In addition, the pandemic made it necessary to live-stream services and conduct religious education classes online with Zoom.

“They asked me, ‘How can you possibly function like this?’ You see, we are a very hands-on parish, and our people prefer to visit in person rather than use the phone,” he said. “We functioned well enough until COVID-19. This grant changed everything. It was providential and allowed us to continue to serve our people during very difficult circumstances.”

Blessed Sacrament is the first church in the Diocese of Bridgeport to receive the Francis Xavier Technology & Communication Enhancement Grant for missionary parishes, from Foundations in Faith, which is supported by the We Stand With Christ Campaign.

Kelly Weldon, director of

Foundations in Faith, said: “This was a huge success for us. The Blessed Sacrament team dug deep and embraced technology and all the learning and changes that go along with a significant upgrade. They were willing to step out of their comfort zone and the results speak for themselves.”

Weldon said that because of the pandemic, pastors had to shift gears quickly and embrace technology that would let them connect

technology.

“We even had a couple of Zoom retreats, which have been great fun, and the children are still receiving religious education online, which is overseen by Karen Soares-Robinson our director of religious education,” he said.

And while the children adapted quickly to the technological changes, Father Skip concedes that he and his staff “needed tutoring and mentoring and some personnel help, which the grant provided.”

The parish was also able to bring on a retired educator, Natalie Foust, to work with ParishSOFT, a church management software that interfaces with the diocese.

“We are coming along, and we needed a lot of patience,” he says, “so we're very grateful to Liz and her team.”

Father Skip, who has been a priest 42 years and pastor for nine, said he is especially grateful for the grant from Foundations in Faith and the patience of the people who completed the work over a period of nine months.

“They were troopers,” he said.

And what about that old phone system?

Tamarkin said that the new phone system allows people to call at any time and get the information they need from the auto-attendant on everything from Mass and Confession times to cancellations and parish events, in both English and Spanish. They can also leave messages for the parish staff, which is especially important when office hours are limited.

Tamarkin and her team have now begun work at St. George Church in Bridgeport, which will be followed by St. Mary of Stamford Parish.

The St. Francis Xavier grants are available to “missionary parishes,” which Weldon defined as those that are vibrant in their communities with strong pastoral and lay leadership, and excellent ministries and outreach. They are in urban environments and dealing with socioeconomic burdens.

(Weldon urges anyone who would like to donate or support the St. Francis Xavier Technology & Communication Grants or other initiatives of Foundations in Faith to contact her at kelly.weldon@foundationsin-faith.org.)

Diocesan News

Archbishop Blair, Kelly Weldon to be honored at Gala

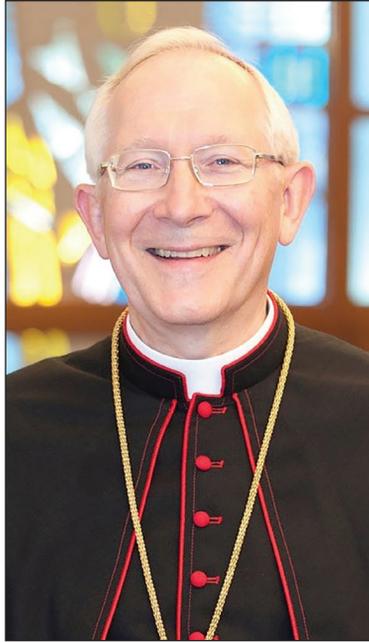
By BRIAN D. WALLACE

DANBURY—

The Fourth Annual Redemptoris Mater Seminary Gala Dinner will be held on Sunday June 6, 2021 from 5-9 pm at the Amber Room Colonnade, located at 1 Stacey Road in Danbury.

Dinner will begin with a cocktail hour at 5 pm followed by the main meal served at 6 pm. All safety protocols and distancing requirements will be observed to ensure that all who attend will remain safe.

Redemptoris Mater is the missionary seminary of the Diocese of Bridgeport. It is under the direction of Father Marco Pacciana, rector, and Father Giandomenico Flora, spiritual director and rector of St. Margaret Shrine in Bridgeport.



ARCHBISHOP LEONARD P. BLAIR



MRS. KELLY WELDON

Mrs. Kelly Weldon, assistant to the chairman of Foundations in Faith,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano.

The bishop said that in 2019, Archbishop Leonard P. Blair decided to join the Bridgeport effort and open a section of the Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Stamford for the formation of priests for the Archdiocese of Hartford.

“Archbishop Blair’s action elevated our seminary to the status of a regional one. For this reason, we wish to thank him for his support of our seminary and his commitment to the work of the New Evangelization,” he said

The seminary has also been supported in part through funds made available through Foundations in Faith under the direction of Kelly Weldon, a member of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Wilton.

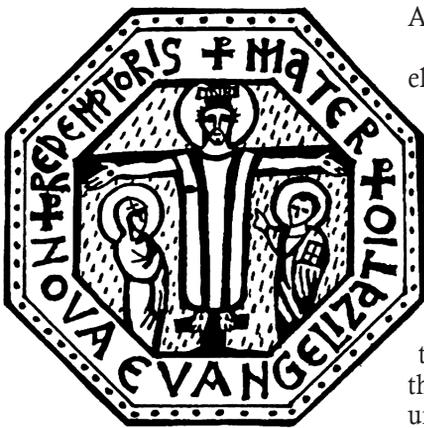
“We receive this support through the tireless work of many people and in particular of Mrs. Kelly Weldon, assistant to the chairman of the Foundation and I would like to this special occasion to thank her for her commitment to the seminary, great pastoral vision and tireless work,” the bishop said.

Bishop Caggiano invited the Redemptoris Mater Seminary

to the diocese in December 2015, with the purpose of preparing priests for missionary work anywhere in the world—from China to Europe and the Philippines and even the streets of Bridgeport. The Redemptoris Mater Seminary in the Diocese of Bridgeport was the ninth in the United States. Today there are young men there are from many different nations including USA, Brazil, Colombia, Kiribati and Honduras.

Redemptoris Mater (Mother of the Redeemer) seminaries are under the auspices of the Neocatechumenal Way, a 57-year-old charism in the Church, dedicated to Christian formation and the New Evangelization. They were inspired by St. Pope John Paul II and his call for a “New Evangelization.” The first seminary opened in 1987 in the Diocese of Rome and today there are 123 on five continents. Since their inception, more than 2,000 men have been ordained to the priesthood and some 1,500 seminarians are in formation worldwide.

(Redemptoris Mater Seminary is located 894 Newfield Ave. Stamford, CT 06905. For tickets or ad book information for the gala, call 203.588.1785 or visit www.rmbridgeport.org/seminarians.) ■



Each year, the gala gathers friends and supporters of Redemptoris Mater from the tri-state area to raise funds to support its work and also to honor a number of persons who have distinguished themselves in their witness of Catholic faith and in their support of seminary formation.

“This year I will have the pleasure to honor the Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair, Archbishop of Hartford and

Diocesan News

Bishop blesses statues of St. Joseph & Sacred Heart of Jesus

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—On Sunday, May 2, at St. Augustine Cathedral, Bishop Frank J.

world that does not always welcome faith, Christ, or even God. He explained that this was his reasoning behind wanting to consecrate the diocese when he first

we will need to be reassured in the work that Christ has given us. So we ask his prayers and intercession so that we might be faithful, quiet workers to bear Christ into



Caggiano celebrated a special Mass to bless two statues generously donated to the diocese.

A beautiful statue, which depicts St. Joseph holding a young Jesus and a bouquet of white lilies, was gifted to the diocese by generous donor, Connie Von Zwehl, parishioner of St. Pius X in Fairfield. A new statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was also generously donated on behalf of Joseph and Mary Gauci.

In his homily on this special Fifth Sunday of Easter, Bishop Caggiano spoke of his visit to Clonmacnoise, a monastery in Ireland. He described a ritual that the monks engaged in when they lived there: blessing the perimeter of the monastery with Holy Water, asking the angels to keep that place safe and sacred. Giving context, Bishop Caggiano explained that at the time there were many pagan religions in Ireland, who may not have wanted other religions to be in their midst and live among them.

The bishop likened this time to what Christians are experiencing now, saying that we live in a

became bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport. “To create a safe and sacred perimeter, in which you and I can live and work and pray, and gather each other in strength, so that we may go out, equally as missionaries into a world to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.”

Bishop Caggiano said that the process of consecration began at the synod and was completed today.

At the diocesan synod, the bishop consecrated the diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A statue of Mary was placed in the sanctuary of St. Augustine Cathedral at that time, which the bishop explained was the first step of asking the Holy Family itself to be our protector. “Each member of the Holy Family gives us a tool, which we will need to go out into the world to be safe and sacred.”

“Our Lady reminds us that if we are to go out into the world that it must always be Christ first, Christ always first,” the bishop said.

“Under the care of St. Joseph, we consecrate ourselves, because

the world,” he continued.

“And so we consecrate ourselves to the Lord’s Sacred Heart so that we might be His heart in the world. For we are not going to bring people to faith by arguing with them, chastising them, punishing them or judging them. We are going to bring them to the feet of Jesus by loving them.”

In His Sacred Heart, the bishop said, we have every confidence that His victory will be ours.

“I am very grateful for the gift of these two beautiful statues,” the bishop said, thanking Mrs. Von Zwehl and the Grimes family. “For it now can physically remind every person in this diocese under whose care we now live.”

The bishop thanked both donors for their generosity and their faith. “These statues will do us no spiritual good if we do not use them to remind ourselves of what it is the Lord is asking of us.”

“We must pray every day to Our Lady, to St. Joseph and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus that we will never falter, that we will never waiver, and with His grace we will not fail,” said the bishop. ■

Parish News

New Administrative Manual

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—The Diocese of Bridgeport has released its new Parish Administrative Manual, a guide to the key processes and procedures required for use in the day-to-day and long-term operations of parishes.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano formally promulgated the new Parish Administrative Manual in a decree issued on March 19, the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of Mary. The manual was issued *ad experimentum*, effective for one year.

“I am pleased to present the final Parish Administrative Manual which applies to all parishes and quasi parishes of the Diocese of Bridgeport,” said Bishop Caggiano. “I pray that it will help us become the loving family of God’s people who rejoice not only in our holy

work but in the companionship of those who work with us.”

The bishop thanked pastors and administrators who provided valuable input, feedback and changes that have been incorporated within the manual.

In his decree, the bishop states that over the past year the curial offices of the Diocese of Bridgeport have spent much effort to revise the manual “in order to offer necessary enhancement and updates for the best practices need for proper and transparent administration of parish resources.”

The new manual replaces the original Parish Administration and Finance Manual promulgated by Bishop William E. Lori, Fourth Bishop of Bridgeport on February 15, 2008. Since that date, parish administrators have been served by

the valuable provisions the manual offered, the bishop said in his decree.

Deacon Patrick Toole, episcopal vicar for administration, who coordinated the effort, said the manual serves as a baseline for administrative processes at the parish which are mandated by the diocese.

The 141-page manual provides parishes with direction and support on several topics including Safe Environments, Employment and Personnel, Sacramental Records, Parish Governance and Legal Administration, Communications, Technology and Development.

Deacon Toole said a general calendar follows the table of contents in section one and provides an overview of key dates. A checklist is also included at the beginning of each section to highlight salient points in the narrative that follows. ■

Knights welcome faithful home

NORWALK—The Knights of Columbus St. Matthew Council 14360’s favorite week of the year is Holy Week. Since the council started in 2007, they have helped prepare the parish for Holy Week and the commemoration of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Last year, due to

parish after being closed to in-person Masses but conducting food drives, donating winter coats for those in need, sending food to the frontlines of the pandemic as well as helping repair and beautify Catholic schools in the area.

“I love my Brother Knights. This group of men truly loves to

projects around the parish.

“Father Sunil is a great priest and did such a phenomenal job keeping our parish running seamlessly and we wanted to help our Brother Knight to help make his job easier. St. Matthew Parish is so blessed to have Father Sunil,” said Ribellino

During Holy Week, the council cleaned the church, set up signs promoting Easter Masses, led the outdoor Stations of Cross on Good Friday, changed the banners from spring to Easter around the campus, cleaned and painted all of the outside statues, helped prepare for triduum services and supplied ushers and readers for the Holy Week Masses.

“In the most important time of our liturgical year and in the midst of such uncertainty, my Brothers did what they do best—serve their parish, community and our priests with unceasing energy. It was such a beautiful and inspiring Holy Week in every aspect including and especially the opportunity to attend services together in public—an option not available at this time last year. Truly, a Happy Easter,” Armentano reflected as the last Easter Mass had ended.

(For more information, please go to www.saintmatthewknights.com. To join the Knights of Columbus, go to kofc.org/joinus. Free first year membership; use promo code MCGIVNEY2020.) ■



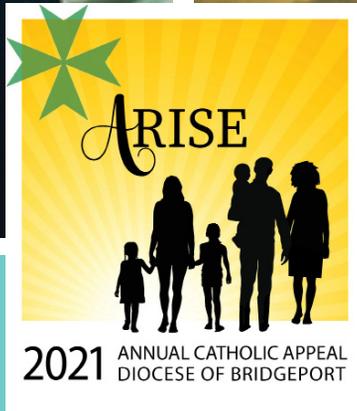
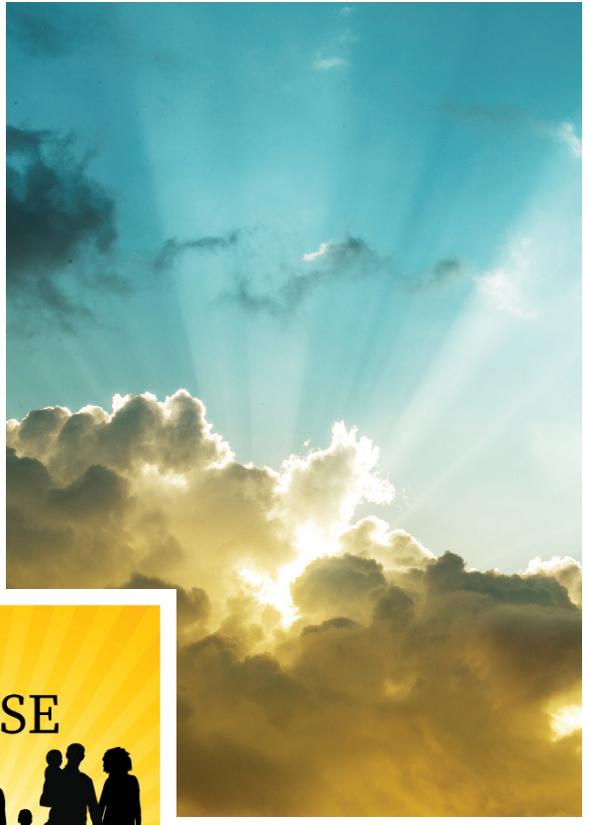
the beginning of the pandemic, the parish was not open for in-person Masses so it was nice to welcome everyone home for the holiest week of the year.

“As Knights, we are the Church’s right arm. It is our responsibility to ensure we do all we can to help our parish priests, staff and fellow parishioners as they journey to the parish on such a Holy Week. In some cases, this also marked the return to a bit of normalcy as the pandemic has altered many people’s plan to attend weekly Mass,” said Council Grand Knight Anthony Armentano.

The council really stepped up at the start of the pandemic, not only helping with the re-opening of the

assist our parish and those in need. They truly love to put their faith into action,” said District Deputy and Past Grand Knight George Ribellino.

In a year already affected by a global pandemic, the parish also experienced a great loss when St. Matthew Pastor Msgr. Walter Orłowski, who had taken ill during the early stages of the pandemic, sadly passed away in December—just a few days before Christmas. Parochial Vicar Father Sunil Pereira, who had assumed the leadership role in parish during Msgr.’s illness and eventual passing, sought out the Knights and the council stepped up to assist him with ushering the Masses and assisting with various



When you make a gift to the **2021 Annual Catholic Appeal**, you are touching the lives of thousands of people across Fairfield County.

Your gift supports a variety of critical programs and ministries in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

PLEASE JOIN OTHER GENEROUS DONORS IN MAKING YOUR GIFT TODAY!



WAYS TO GIVE

When contemplating your level of sacrificial giving, please consider using the Pledge Plan. Pledging will allow a greater sacrifice by extending the payment of your gift through December 31, 2021.

CHECK

Make payable to the **Annual Catholic Appeal**. Please do not send cash.

CREDIT CARD

Payable online or by pledge card.

ONLINE GIVING

2021ACABridgeport.com.

TEXT TO GIVE

To make a gift via text messaging, text the word **APPEAL** to (475) 241-7849. Msg&Data Rates May Apply.

MATCHING GIFTS

Many organizations will match gifts to Catholic Charities and Schools, and the Bishop's Scholarship Fund. Please contact (203) 416-1312 for more information.

GIFTS OF SECURITIES

If you own securities that have appreciated in value, they can be given to the Appeal and their full market value becomes a tax-deductible gift. Please contact (203) 416-1470 for more information.

COURT OF HONOR

Recognizes donors who have demonstrated extraordinary generosity to the Annual Catholic Appeal. Membership is extended to any individual or family that contributes an Appeal gift of \$2,500 or more.

- Bishop's Leadership Circle (\$25,000 and above)
- St. Teresa of Calcutta Society (\$10,000 - \$24,999)
- St. Katharine Drexel Society (\$5,000 - \$9,999)
- Court of Honor Partner (\$2,500-\$4,999)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit: 2021ACABridgeport.com

Call: (203) 416-1470

Email: 2021ACA@diobpt.org

WHEN YOU MAKE A GIFT TO THE 2021 ANNUAL CATHOLIC APPEAL,
you are touching the lives of thousands of people across Fairfield County.

Your gift supports a variety of programs and ministries in the Diocese of Bridgeport.



2021 ANNUAL CATHOLIC APPEAL

Providing works of charity, formation in faith, education and catechesis.



Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

My Dear Friends in Christ,

“**Arise**” is the theme of the 2021 Annual Catholic Appeal and is a statement of hope for renewal and recovery this year. The story of Lazarus continues to come to mind in my reflections. The Lord’s words to Lazarus are, “untie him and let him go free,” and that is precisely the invitation from the Lord to each of us — to arise from the darkness of this pandemic and to seek new life in Him.

As I look upon the past year, during a time of unexpected and historic crisis, I am deeply grateful for your generous response to the Appeal, which brought the mercy of Christ to so many.

This year’s goal is \$8.1 million, 10% less than last year due to the success of the We Stand With Christ Capital Campaign, and will allow the Diocese to maintain the immediate works of charity, formation in faith, education and catechesis, while the Capital Campaign sustains the long-term mission of the Diocese. Please join with me in making a gift to “**Arise**.”

May the Lord bless you and your family.

Faithfully in Christ,

Frank J. Caggiano

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

PLEASE JOIN OTHER
GENEROUS DONORS
IN MAKING YOUR
GIFT TODAY!

WHEN YOU MAKE A GIFT TO THE 2021 ANNUAL CATHOLIC APPEAL, you are touching the lives of thousands of people across Fairfield County.
Your gift supports a variety of programs and ministries in the Diocese of Bridgeport.




Charity and Pastoral Services

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

- The Annual Catholic Appeal supports Catholic Charities programs that serve the poor and most vulnerable members of our community through nutrition outreach that feeds the hungry and homebound, shelters the homeless, counsels the mentally ill, assists immigrants and strengthens individuals and families.
- Priests, Deacons and Religious Sisters provide pastoral ministry to the sick and elderly in nursing homes and hospitals.
- The Saint Catherine Center for Special Needs cares for and educates individuals with disabilities.

Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.

— Matthew 25:40

Faith and Ministry *Celebrating the gift of the Eucharist in our lives and parishes...*

The Leadership Institute provides for sacramental preparation, Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), in addition to new online programs for marriage formation, and an enrichment series on the various stages of married life, called *True Love That Lasts*; Resources, webinars and video programs for bereavement, *Mourning in the Pandemic*; an Easter program in English and Spanish for in-home formation; and conversations on race.

Seminarians discern their vocation while receiving formation at seminaries chosen by the Bishop, including the *Redemptoris Mater* Diocesan Missionary Seminary of Bridgeport.

A call to Eucharistic renewal will include new adult faith formation courses, Centers of Mercy and Eucharistic Adoration, and new pastoral centers that will focus on family life, entrepreneurship for young adults, evangelization, and Catholic culture.

Elderly priests living at the Catherine Dennis Keefe Queen of the Clergy Residence receive care in their retirement.

Mass is celebrated in 15 languages, programs help ethnic ministries, and financial assistance is provided for parishes with exceptional needs.



The Annual Catholic Appeal is a celebration of faith by funding evangelization and ministry efforts that ensure the vitality our Catholic faith.

Annual Catholic Appeal



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.

- Enhanced strategy for academic excellence for students and ongoing professional development for educators ensuring best practices for Catholic education.
- Over 4,600 students in all 19 diocesan elementary schools receive excellent personalized instruction through cutting-edge technology and faith-based moral development to achieve academic and personal goals.
- The Bishop's Scholarship Fund provides over 1,000 students with tuition assistance at diocesan elementary schools who could not otherwise afford a Catholic education in Fairfield County.
- The Catholic Academy of Bridgeport serves the inner-city elementary schools in a faith-based learning environment.
- More than \$89,791,381 in college scholarships was awarded to 585 graduating seniors from our diocesan schools, with a 100% graduation rate year after year.

GOAL - \$8,100,000 ALLOCATION OF 2021 FUNDS

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| FAITH AND MINISTRY | \$3,841,000 |
| • Catholic Leadership Institute and Faith Formation | \$ 477,000 |
| • Formation of Priests and Deacons | \$ 1,417,000 |
| • Eucharistic Call to Renewal | \$ 100,000 |
| • Pastoral Care of Retired Priests | \$ 1,622,000 |
| • Mission Parishes | \$ 125,000 |
| • Pastoral Centers | \$ 100,000 |
| EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS | \$1,972,000 |
| • Bishop Scholarship Fund | \$ 700,000 |
| • Catholic Academies of Bridgeport | \$ 400,000 |
| • Youth | \$ 215,000 |
| • Communications | \$ 657,000 |
| CHARITY AND PASTORAL SERVICES | \$1,712,000 |
| • Catholic Charities of Fairfield County | \$ 550,000 |
| • Pastoral Care of Sick and Elderly | \$ 912,000 |
| • St. Catherine Center for Special Needs | \$ 250,000 |
| Fundraising Expenses | \$ 575,000 |
| Total ACA Goal Allocation | \$8,100,000 |

Each year, the Diocese of Bridgeport assesses its financial resources, the needs of parishioners and its ability to respond effectively and with compassion. The following list is an overview of how Appeal contributions will be distributed.

In the spirit of financial transparency, the cost to conduct the Annual Catholic Appeal totals 7 cents on the dollar based on the 2021 ACA goal. Fundraising expenses may also provide additional support to a number of these areas.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit: 2021ACABridgeport.com
Call: (203) 416-1470
Email: 2021ACA@diobpt.org



St. Jude Parish

Monroe parish lives Gospel message in appeal effort

MONROE—During the COVID pandemic, the Annual Catholic Appeal responded to urgent needs throughout Fairfield County, from homelessness and hunger to mental health. With this year's appeal, the Diocese of Bridgeport looks toward renewal and recovery with a vision of hope.

"As I look upon the past year, during a time of unexpected and historic crisis, I am deeply grateful for your generous response to the appeal, which brought the mercy of Christ to so many," Bishop Frank J. Caggiano 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 the immediate works of charity, formation in faith, education and catechesis, while the capital campaign sustains the long-term mission of the diocese.

The story of St. Jude Church is emblematic of the hope and generosity of Catholics throughout the diocese who contribute to the appeal, which funds essential ministries, programs and agencies that deliver pastoral care and human services where they are most needed.

In less than a month since the appeal began on February 27, St. Jude met its goal of \$84,600, inspired by the leadership of Father Henry Hoffman, pastor, and his Annual Appeal team, who provided parishioners with an understanding of how important the campaign is in supporting programs, which no single parish can provide on its own.

Pamela S. Rittman, director of Development and Annual Catholic Appeal, said she is grateful to Father Hoffman and his team. "The value of a strong leadership team, who assists the pastor in the mission of the Church, provides an understanding of the Church in full circle. Our faith, the good works we do and how we make the Gospel known through our giving of time, talent and treasure are the gifts our Lord provides to each and every one to spread the Good News. Our Annual Catholic Appeal does that every day, whether it is providing faith formation, feeding the hungry or instructing children and adults in the faith."

Father Hoffman began working on a plan in mid-February with Joe Gallagher, chief development officer

of the diocese, and Deacon Patrick Toole, episcopal delegate for administration. He later met personally with the parish's biggest donors. Then, Gallagher launched the campaign at all the parish's Masses at the end of the month. A comprehensive website was developed to

need to help where we can."

"Our message was delivered to everyone, including the children," Norma and Doug Bissell said. "To our adults, we emphasized the online process, and for the children a 'PENNIES FROM HEAVEN' bucket was placed in the lobby. The



(l-r) RICH LANE, PARISH COUNCIL chair; Doug and Norma Bissell, ACA co-chairs; Father Henry Hoffman, pastor; Joe Gallagher, chief development officer.

explain the goals and benefits of the appeal.

Gallagher said: "I was honored to be invited by Father Hoffman to help kick off the 2021 Annual Catholic Appeal. I was immediately struck by the strong leadership offered by him and the lay leaders at St. Jude. The diocese is very appreciative of how the parish of St. Jude actively and generously supports the vital ministries, including Catholic Charities, the Bishop's Scholarship Fund, seminarian formation and care for our retired priests."

Commenting on his strategy for the appeal, Father Hoffman said: "I made loads of personal one-on-one phone calls to parishioners during the first weeks of March and sent out video messages of me promoting the appeal to the 900 emails we have for our parishioners. I suspected that the more personal phone calls I made, the more successful we would be, and it worked! And I expect more to come in."

His efforts were augmented by those of the other members of the parish ACA team—Rich Lane, parish council president; Norma and Doug Bissell, co-chairs for the St. Jude appeal; and Deacons John Tuccio and David Flynn. The team launched the appeal in mid-February using the theme of Jesus' commandment to "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

The co-chairs spoke at every Mass on March 6 and 7, and their message was simple—"Many are in need, many who helped can't help this year and may need help. We all

children were encouraged to donate loose change and to take a sticker, thus engaging them in helping others. It is wonderful to hear the clinking at the end of each Mass."

Because it is important to let parishioners know how the appeal is doing, weekly progress announcements are made from the pulpit, and there is a tracking thermometer in the church lobby, which is updated weekly so that when parishioners enter, they can see how well they are doing.

"St. Jude Church is blessed to have wonderful parishioners who are sacrificing to help the ACA and their neighbors in need," the Bissells said. "We are profoundly thankful to those parishioners who have taken us this far."

The parish is exceeding the diocesan goal and plans to split the overage with its sister parish, Blessed Sacrament Church in Bridgeport.

"As a parish, we derive a fulfilling sense of peace that comes from doing God's work," the Bissells said. "Our parishioners are generous with their time, money and desire to help others. We have had a long and lasting relationship with Blessed Sacrament. We work with our extended family at Blessed Sacrament to provide assistance when needed, strong hands to work on projects, friendship, a warm heart and smile as we work hand-in-hand."

The team continues to reach out to parishioners who have not yet made a pledge, asking them to prayerfully consider giving. They say that 300 additional pledges of

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

Local News

Bishop to kick off young adult conference

By JOE PISANI

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano will give the welcoming address at a conference for young adults sponsored by Crossroads 4 Christ, a Connecticut-based organization that focuses on developing communities of young disciples through fellowship, faith formation, prayer and Eucharistic adoration.

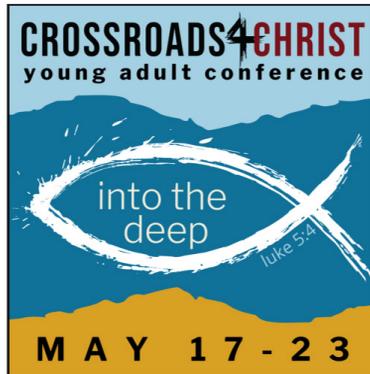
Crossroads 4 Christ will hold its Second Annual Young Adult Conference from May 17-23. The hybrid event, with in-person and virtual talks, is open to young adults, 18-39, and anyone interested in learning about young adult evangelization and the “abundant life Jesus offers us,” said Cofounder and Executive Director Alex Soucy. For free registration and more information, visit www.c4conference.org.

Among the talks will be one about the Sacrament of Confession titled, “Being Forgiven and Forgiving Myself” by Father Samuel Kachuba, pastor of St. Pius X Parish in Fairfield.

John Midy, co-leader with his wife Maria Vazquez Midy of the C4C chapter at Church of the Holy Spirit in Stamford, will participate in a live panel discussion on Saturday and provide an overview of C4C and its mission.

Vázquez Midy will give a pre-recorded talk titled, “Immigrating into a Family of Faith” about how the Catholic community in the area welcomed her and provided a spiritual family away from her own family when she came to America.

Paola Pena, director of Student Ministries at St. Pius X, will join a panel discussion on evangelization and living a life of mission as a young adult, Soucy said. For the last 5 years she has been outreaching, serving, and mentoring disciples



who reflect the different generations in church life.

Soucy and his wife Jessica will co-host several of the live conversations, including one with Archbishop Leonard P. Blair and Auxiliary Bishop Juan Betancourt of the Archdiocese of Hartford. In addition, Archbishop Blair will be the principal celebrant at a special Pentecost Vigil Mass at the Church of St. Mary in New Haven, and Auxiliary Bishop Betancourt will lead a Holy Hour before the Mass.

Throughout the week, participants will be invited to listen to local and national speakers give online talks and hold virtual Q&As, in addition to joining members of Crossroads 4 Christ at in-person events, he said.

Virtual talks were conducted by well-known Catholic speakers, including Chris Stefanick, Leah Libresco and Immaculée Ilibagiza. There will be two opportunities for young adults to be together to enjoy a Faith on Tap event and celebrate the Pentecost Vigil Mass.

“This year’s theme “Into the Deep” will “bring young people deeper into the abundant life Jesus offers through a life lived with him and in his Church,” Soucy said. “This is a timely theme because we are living in a time when life can be very difficult after a year of pandemic and social unrest in a country that is having a spiritual crisis.”

“Jesus is calling us all into the deep, as he invited Peter in Luke 5:4 to ‘put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch,’” Soucy said. “Despite protesting that he has fished all night and caught nothing, Peter does as Jesus asks and finds himself catching so many fish that his nets are tearing.”

It is an invitation to evangelization and to live in the abundant life that is Jesus, Soucy said.

“For a lot of people, especially in the Northeast, practicing Catholics can go to Mass on Sunday and look around and be discouraged by the lack of young people,” he said. “They ask questions like ‘Where is our Church going to be in 20 years?’ But the beautiful reality is that God is drawing young adults to himself here in Connecticut, and he is inspiring those young adults to go out and lead others to Christ. Our desire is to provide a stage for young adults to share their testimony about how Jesus changed their life, and in doing so inspire others to be open to the possibility of Christ changing their life as well.”

Last year’s virtual conference had more than 1,000 attendees from 46 states and 28 countries, Soucy said.

Crossroads 4 Christ has chapters around the state, including two in the Diocese of Bridgeport, at St. Pius X Parish in Fairfield and Church of the Holy Spirit in Stamford.

C4C Fairfield meets at St. Pius X on Tuesday at the Faith Center Community Room with fellowship from 7-8 pm and with adoration in church sanctuary from 8-9 pm. For more information, contact ppena@st-pius.org.

The Church of the Holy Spirit chapter in Stamford meets Wednesdays with fellowship from 7:30- 8:30 pm followed by adoration from 8:30- 9:30 pm. For more information, contact c4cstamford@gmail.com. ■

ST. JUDE PARISH FROM PAGE 26

\$15 per month for 10 months (\$150 total) will carry them to more than \$100,000 in pledges.

“We are acutely aware that parishioners’ financial circumstances vary greatly,” they said. “Father Henry always stresses that no pledge is too small, and a lot of parishioners, committing what they can, make a huge difference.”

Through the appeal goal of \$84,600, the parish will help address the immediate needs of diocesan

charitable works; schools will be strengthened; youth programs will be funded; and the needs of retired clergy, priests, seminarians, and deacons will be addressed, the Bissells said.

Charitable organizations such as Catholic Charities, whose resources have been heavily impacted this past year, will help address the needs of others by feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and caring for those struggling with

developmental and physical issues.

The theme of the 2021 Annual Catholic Appeal is “Arise,” and Bishop Caggiano says it is a statement of hope for renewal and recovery.

“The story of Lazarus continues to come to mind in my reflections,” he said. “The Lord’s words to Lazarus are ‘Untie him and let him go free,’ and that is precisely the invitation from the Lord to each of us—to arise from the darkness of this pandemic and to seek new life in him.” ■

Diocesan Finances

Diocese releases audited Financial Statements

BRIDGEPORT—In the continued practice of full transparency, the Diocese of Bridgeport has released its Consolidated Financial Statements for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2020.

The consolidated audited report is posted online on the diocesan website (www.bridgeportdiocese.com). The audit report confirms that the diocese has continued its strategy of prudent management and stewardship in all areas of financial activities.

Michael Hanlon, CPA, chief financial officer of the diocese, said the audit report presents a financial position with an increase in assets and net assets and a slight decrease in liabilities.

“We are striving towards our goal of long-term financial sustainability for the diocese in which transparency is key. We are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that we are good stewards of all resources entrusted to us and prudent decision making on the use of those resources,” he said.

“The annual release of this report should give confidence to our faithful Catholics who want to view how their donations are being recorded and used to fulfill the diocesan works of mission and administration,” he said.

“Our priorities continue to be the presentation of clear, timely and comprehensive financial picture of the diocese, particularly as Bishop Frank J. Caggiano moves forward with the work of renewal through his mission-related programs, initiatives for growth, and investments in the future,” Hanlon said.

The audit report was issued by our auditors on December 22, 2020, meeting the issuance deadline established by the diocesan audit committee.

The diocesan fiscal policy continues to focus on a strategy of financial stability, viability, long-term growth and sustainability, he added.

Financial Transparency

Hanlon said he was again pleased to learn that the Diocese of Bridgeport ranked again near the top of a recently released Voice of the Faithful (VOTF)



MICHAEL HANLON, CPA

nationwide annual report on diocesan financial transparency practices and policies.

The VOTF study reviewed the financial transparency and accountability of 145 dioceses and 32 archdioceses by analyzing transparency practices and policies. On a scale of 0-100, the Diocese of Bridgeport received a score of 92 for its policies and disclosures toward financial transparency. This is consistent with prior year ratings and the VOTF analysis affirms the fact that we continue to follow transparency and not-for-profit industry best practices mandated by Bishop Caggiano upon his arrival in 2013.

“Under Bishop Caggiano’s leadership, we remain committed to full financial transparency and best practices,” he said.

The newly released Consolidated Statements of Financial Position reports total assets of \$97.7 million, liabilities of \$43.2 million and net assets of \$54.5 million as of June 30, 2020. This is compared to total assets of \$96.5 million, liabilities of \$43.9 million and net assets of \$52.6 million as of June 30, 2019.

The Consolidated Statement of Activities reports revenues, support and other changes totaling \$45.4 million and total expenses of \$43.7 million resulting in income from operations before depreciation of \$1.7 million for the year ended June 30, 2020. This is compared to revenues, support and other changes totaling \$44.2 and total expenses of \$41.1 million, resulting in

income from operations before depreciation of \$3.1 million for the year ended June 30 2019.

Hanlon said the consolidated financial statement includes activities related to diocesan operations, employee benefits and insurance programs, cemetery operations and other activities.

Hanlon explained that major changes in revenue are decreases from the Annual Catholic Appeal and the Cathedraticum assessment. Increased revenue is related to employee benefits and insurance programs and cemetery operations.

Impact of the Pandemic

In a year where all were affected by the pandemic, the diocese felt this impact also. The Annual Catholic Appeal efforts were suspended within the last quarter of the fiscal year which Appeal resumed in the fall of 2020. Revenue recognized as of June 30, 2020 decreased to approximately \$7.5 million from \$10.0 million as of June 30, 2019. Although some of this decrease is a result of goal reduction the pandemic did effect the fiscal year revenue reported.

The suspension of masses in March 2020 greatly reduced parish offertory and their operational cash flows balances. This resulted in slight decrease in Cathedraticum revenue (an assessment on parishes based on certain revenue to support the administration of the diocese). Cathedraticum revenue decreased to \$6.6 million as of June 30, 2020 from \$6.8 million as of June 30, 2019.

Many parishes, schools and other related entities in the diocese were able to take advantage of governmental support through the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) during this difficult period. Funding received kept employees employed and provided cash flow injections at time when contributions, offertory and tuition payments decreased. The PPP allowed for timely payments of medical payments which attributed to increased employee benefit revenues.

The diocese did receive PPP funding of \$2,642,200. These

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

Diocesan Finances

DIOCESAN FINANCES FROM PAGE 27

funds attribute to the increase in cash balances and notes payable within the consolidated statements of financial position. A PPP loan forgiveness application will be submitted in the near future and expectations are that this loan will be fully forgiven.

Cemetery revenues increased to \$8.1 million as of June 30, 2020 compared to \$6.3 million as of June 30, 2019. This increase is attributed to the leadership and vision of Dean Gestal, cemeteries executive director as well as the unfortunate increase in burials related to the pandemic. This revenue growth is expected to continue with the construction of a needed mausoleum within the Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Trumbull. Other needed projects and services are being planned.

Nonoperating activities include pension related changes, financial support to schools, bad debts and other miscellaneous changes. A major change is related to pension related activity, a positive change of \$3.2 million compared to a decrease of \$2.9 million as of June 30, 2019. This change is related to actuarial assumptions as well as a change in the Postretirement Priests' Medical and Dental Plan.

The Consolidated Schedule of Activities reports an increase in net assets totaling \$1.9 million for the year ended June 30, 2020 compared to \$1.7 million for June 30, 2019.

"Although this year has been difficult we were able to post positive results and also keep our dedicated employees employed while maintaining all benefits," Hanlon said.

Controlling Expenses

Hanlon said an annual focus of the diocese has been to control operational expenses and to be prudent in our spending.

The Consolidating Schedule of Activities reports diocesan operations total revenue and support and other changes of \$20.0 million, expenses of slightly less than \$20.0 million, resulting in a gain of approximately \$10,000 for the year ended June 30, 2020. This is compared to total revenue and support and other changes of \$22.8 million, expenses of \$20.7 million, resulting in a gain of approximately \$2.1 million for the year ended June 30, 2019. The audit reports positive

operational results for the fourth consecutive year, a goal targeted by the bishop and the diocesan finance council several years ago as part of the turn-around strategy.

Employee benefits and insurance programs continue to be the largest expense recorded within the diocesan Consolidated Statement of Functional Expenses totaling \$20.1 million, or 46.0% of \$43.7 million in total expenses before depreciation (\$17.4 million, or 42.4% of \$41.0 million – 2019). Religious and lay personnel costs totaled \$10.9 million or 25.0% of total expenses (\$10.7 million or 26.1% – 2019). And grants and contributions totaled \$4.7 million or 10.8% of total expenses (\$5.5 million or 13.4% – 2019).

Grants and contributions support seminary formation, mission related, educational and youth programs include the St. John Fisher and Redemptoris Mater Seminaries, Bishops Scholarship Fund within Foundations in Education, Catholic Charities, the Cardinal Shehan Center and other diocesan-related programs.

With the success of the We Stand With Christ (WSWC) capital campaign, the diocese plans a strategic shift of funding sources from annual operational fundraising to distributions from endowment funds. Our donors have been overly generous to the campaign. WSWC distributions to the three foundation's: Education, Faith and Charity will greatly supplement diocesan support and enhance various mission related programs. These endowment assets to the foundations will secure permanent annual funding sources for mission related programs.

The diocese continued its commitment to reduce the outstanding Knights of Columbus obligation, which remained at \$3.5 million as of June 30, 2020 and 2019. This was reduced to \$3,250,000 within December 2020 and the remaining balance was paid in full on March 29, 2021 (see related article). This will save approximately \$130,000 annually in interest expense from the diocesan operational budget.

Future Focus

Our efforts will now focus on the following key areas: the unfunded liability related to the

postretirement priests' medical and dental plan (this obligation is paid from current cash flow) and the underfunded diocesan lay pension plan.

A funding strategy will be developed for the postretirement medical benefits for our retired priest. Although the priest pension plan is sufficiently funded, their postretirement medical benefits are paid as incurred and exceed \$300,000 annually. Future liabilities account for approximately \$10.1 million or 23.4% of total liabilities as of June 30, 2020 (\$14.1 million or 32.1% as of June 30, 2019). This decrease is related to costs of actuarial projections for future medical costs with a change in postretirement medical benefits.

The multi-employer lay pension plan (frozen to new participants in 2008), will continue to be a focus of a sub-committee of the Diocesan Finance Council which was formed early during 2017 to explore alternatives and develop recommendations to resolve the underfunding of the lay pension plan. As of June 30, 2020 and 2019, the lay plans projected benefit obligation exceed the fair value of its assets by approximately \$99.8 million and \$92.5 million, respectively. The lay pension plan is approximately 54% funded as of June 30, 2020 and 2019. A decrease in a discount rate used in actuarial valuations, an annual adjustment based on discount rates, resulted in an increase in this liability. This liability is only required to be disclosed in the diocesan audited financial statements due to accounting rules for a multi-employer plan.

Programs included within the diocesan financial statements include: the Catherine Dennis Keefe Queen of Clergy Retirement Home for Diocesan Priests; the Newman Center at Western Connecticut State University; Teresian Towers and Carmel Ridge Estates, life use and rental properties for elderly residents; pastoral care services for residents in nursing homes formerly owned by the diocese and cemetery operations.

(The complete audited reports are available online. To learn more, visit the diocesan website: www.bridgeportdiocese.com/financialreports.)

Diocesan Finances

The Diocese of Bridgeport pays the balance of a \$15 million loan from the Knights of Columbus

BRIDGEPORT—On Monday March 29, the Diocese of Bridgeport paid the remaining loan principal balance of \$3.25 million on a promissory note to the Knight of Columbus originally obtained in December 2011.

“This is a very positive step forward for the diocese, particularly as we celebrate a year of renewal and revitalization,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano. “Faithful financial stewardship is the key to trust and the growth of the diocese.”

The bishop said he was grateful to Chief Financial Officer Michael Hanlon, to members of the diocesan Finance Council and to all those throughout the diocese who have worked toward a balanced budget along with ongoing financial transparency and accountability.

“This was a very significant moment in the financial life of the diocese and one that we have been working toward for more than five years,” said Michael Hanlon. Paying off this note has been forefront in our annual

financial viability strategies.

In December 2011, the diocese issued a promissory note to the Knights of Columbus for the \$15 million loan. The proceeds were used to repay in full a loan called from another financial institution as well as reduce other long and short term liabilities.

Hanlon said the Knights stepped forward at that time and gave the diocese a lifeline as it struggled with considerable debt.

The original note included a term loan for 20 years, an interest rate of 5%, and five years of interest-only payments with the principal balance amortized over the remaining 15-year term. The Knights have been accommodating in its annual modification of loan terms to continue the interest only provisions and the reduction of the interest rate, reflecting market conditions. The diocese is particularly grateful to the Knights and Anthony Minopoli for these modifications, which helped to reach the goal of closing out the loan.

The diocese collateralized the loan with certain liquid assets and real estate. The terms of the

original agreement earmarked proceeds from real estate sales for principal payments. In 2013, the diocese began paying a portion of the principal balance of the loan. Nearly \$3.0 million was repaid from the sale of some properties. Additional principal payments occurred in the subsequent years until the final payment was made in March. This final payment is one critical part of the diocese’s long-term plan for financial viability.

Hanlon said a plan was established by the Finance Council to eliminate the debt balance and save approximately \$130,000 annually in interest expense from the diocesan operational budget.

“As Bishop Caggiano continues to inspire the faithful with his vision for the diocese through his Call to Renewal,” our ability to pay off the Knights loan is very good news and will help us to ensure the adequate resources for completing initiatives, mission-related programs and investments in the future,” Hanlon said. ■

**CATHOLIC
CEMETERIES**
DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

**WE ARE HERE
FOR YOU
IN YOUR TIME
OF NEED!**

TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT CALL: **203.610.3414**

St. Mary, Ridgefield

Men's Ministry follows path to faith and service

By JOE PISANI

RIDGEFIELD—Every Saturday morning at 6:30 am, the men of St. Mary Church in Ridgefield turn on their computers and get together via Zoom to discuss issues that have an added urgency in 21st century America... questions such as “What does it mean to be a man and faithful father?” And “Where can a guy turn for support when he’s confronting a life crisis?”

In these troubled times, an increasing number of families can be fragmented, and a growing number of men find themselves adrift in a society that’s uncertain about the definition of manhood, and what it means to be a man of faith. They are fundamental questions to the St. Mary Men’s Ministry.

“The ministry provides a forum where men can share things that are difficult in their lives, that they can’t share anywhere else because people might look at them as unmanly,” said Tim O’Connell, a member of the leadership team. “But in this place, it is safe, and we are all going through the same things. We get a powerful witness at the meetings of the personal struggles men go through—a wife’s long battle with cancer and then her passing, a child’s addiction, how to deal with the teenage years or difficulties in marriage and work, like losing a job. These are all the things that happen to men...but they usually aren’t allowed to talk about them.”

O’Connell, who is also a Fourth Degree Knight of Columbus, said the group helps “parish men of all ages explore what it means to be a Catholic man in today’s world and to help them enrich their relationships with Jesus Christ and apply their faith to their daily lives.”

The vision of the St. Mary

Men’s Ministry is to help men move more consciously toward ongoing transformation and conversion, to see their faith lives as more than a set of beliefs, doctrine or dogma they profess, but also as participation in community, lived experience and conscious personal relationship with God.

A member of the group for 12 years, O’Connell said that he has 20 to 30 men he knows well and could go to in order discuss just about anything in his life. (Some 230 men are members of the ministry.)

“These guys are like brothers,” he said. “Most men have only two or three guys they can talk to, but this ministry has created a band of brothers. Men’s Ministry is the anchor in their lives. It’s all about helping men develop relationships and not being afraid to dig deeper.”

Before COVID-19, the group met regularly at St. Mary’s, where up to 40 men turned out for the early-morning meeting with bagels and coffee.

The sessions are centered around the weekly Gospel reading and exegesis that provides further understanding of the passage. The men then gather in small groups to discuss how it applies to their lives, their families, their children and their work. After 40 minutes, the captains from each table share the reflections with the entire group. The meeting, which runs from 6:30 to 8 am, ends with closing prayer intentions and some men giving their personal witness. The program follows a six-week cycle centered around a particular theme, such as forgiveness.

“It has opened up people’s eyes to their faith and helped them understand what it means to be a Catholic man and to lead your family. We leverage each other’s experiences in dealing with difficult situations,” O’Connell said. “It’s a little bit support group, a little catechetical, a little service and a lot of fun.”

Steven Toia said that over the years, the prayer intentions at the end of the session have led to true miracles.

“Men’s Ministry is today’s version of the Apostles in the Upper Room, except the room is in Ridgefield, Connecticut, and the Apostles are fathers from all walks of life with a focus on faith, com-

munity and each other,” he said. “The Holy Spirit moves through these guys and allows them to put their guard down and share with one another...and navigate through the challenges of life.”

Tom McCrohan had been searching for years for a men’s group, but most of them that studied the Bible and explored the faith were Protestant. “It really bothered me that I could not find a group of Catholic men also willing to explore their faith,” he said. “I went to my first Men’s Ministry meeting in the fall of 2016 a few weeks after moving into our home in Ridgefield. I went by myself,

“These guys are like brothers... Men’s Ministry is the anchor in their lives.”

had low expectations, and expected a handful of men present at best. I was totally shocked at the size and diversity of the group that early Saturday morning.”

For Joe Boland, joining the group was the best thing he ever did in the pursuit of a richer spiritual life. “For me, Men’s Ministry has provided a very important social connection to a group of upstanding people who want to do better and who are very supportive,” he said. “Conversely, it has sometimes provided opportunities for me to help others in some humble fashion. I have also made a number of friends in the group at a time of life when such connections are extremely important.”

Almost 12 years ago, Joe Bellacosa was invited to attend the group’s Saturday morning meeting, and it proved to be what he called “a great gift during my retirement years.” He said, “The diversity in age range and perspectives on the individual faith journeys have a paradoxically unifying effect. I am grateful to the friend, the recently deceased Tom Castellani, and to Holy Spirit for inspiring this gathering of a very special community of faith.”

Bob Saraceni, who helps establish men’s ministries in other

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

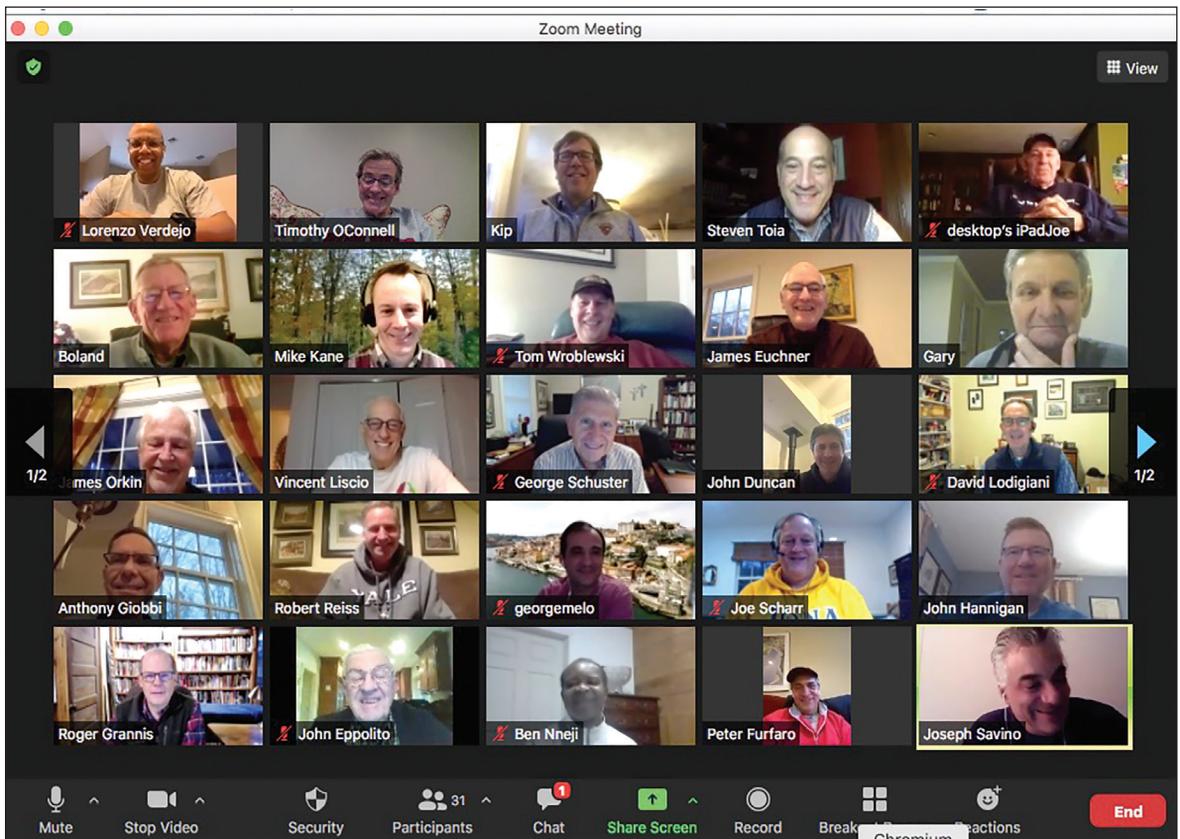
St. Mary, Ridgefield

MEN'S MINISTRY FROM PAGE 30

parishes throughout Fairfield and Westchester counties said, "When we started this journey, we had a hunch it would meet the needs

they haven't gone through yet, and some of the experiences I've had can help them get through them, whether it involves marriage or

talked about at the meeting stays at the meeting and confidentiality is a fundamental precept of the group. Another one is service. There are



ST. MARY, RIDGEFIELD, MEN'S MINISTRY GATHER virtually during the pandemic.

of men searching for a new experience of 'faith as experience and community.' As we begin our 13th year, we are inspired and blessed by the ripple effects this has had in men's lives and in the lives of their families. Clearly, the Holy Spirit is at work. Certainly, with all we are going through in the world right now, Men's Ministry will continue to be an important part of our faith journey."

John Eppolito, who moved to Ridgefield with his wife Joanne in 1978, has been active in the Men's Ministry for eight years and also served on the finance council and as a hospitality host. He is a transplant from Brooklyn, where he attended the same elementary school as Bishop Frank J. Caggiano—St. Simon and St. Jude. He and Joanne are parents of two grown daughters, Pamela and Veronica.

"I looked at this as an opportunity to join a group of men who share their life experiences and faith journey," he said. "Women are always getting together, sharing their stories, but men are a different breed and don't do that easily. Having lived longer than most of the guys, I've gone through things

how to deal with your teenage children or grandchildren."

The Men's Ministry gives him an opportunity for camaraderie. He often tells the younger guys that today their lives are centered on their children and their work, but as they get older and leave their jobs, their network will get smaller, and the ministry will let them associate with people who are like-minded and faith-filled.

The men range in age from the late 20s to the mid-50s and beyond, with many of them fathers of teenagers who are going off to college. Others are thinking about retirement and trying to figure out what their next step in life will be.

The ministry lets them practice their faith in a real way, Eppolito says. For example, several years ago during the Great Recession a number of their ranks found themselves without jobs.

"The Men's Ministry was there to help them and talk to them," he recalled. "They were able to speak to someone about issues that maybe they couldn't discuss with others...about how to pay your bills or mortgage or whatever."

Eppolito says that whatever is

dozens of causes that the ministry assists throughout the diocese, from food drives to the Midnight Run and the soup kitchen, distributing Advent and Lenten meditation booklets to fellow parishioners, and signing up for Eucharistic Adoration or even assisting an elderly resident who needs help with moving or yard cleanup.

One member helped out at a homeless shelter in Danbury once a month. He would go there on Saturday night and wash the clothes of the residents, Eppolito said. He spent the entire night washing clothes and drying them. Later, he would return and put them back on the beds.

"We are on a faith journey," Eppolito said. "The purpose of the Catholic Church is to help us get to heaven, and the faith journey is not easy. You get knocked off the path a lot of different times. In my own life, I don't want to be known as a Republican or a progressive or whatever, but I want to be known as a faithful Catholic, and that is determined by how you put your faith in action...and the Men's Ministry brings you back to that. It is a prayer journey, but it's also a journey of action." ■

Catholic Cemeteries



Dear Friends,

This special section of *Fairfield County Catholic* is meant to provide information on some important new developments in our Catholic Cemeteries as we respond to current needs and plan for the future.

It is also my hope that it will help guide you and your family in making decisions about your own burial intentions along with your loved ones.

The events of the past year have perhaps put a new emphasis on the importance of pre-need planning, so that our survivors are not burdened with additional challenges and uncertainties at a time of grief and loss.

While these are not issues that are easy to discuss, they can ensure your wishes are honored and also unite a family in the clarity of your intentions concerning Catholic burial.

At the Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport, we are committed to providing cemetery property for the sacred religious function of burial. We are also committed to preserving these resting places as a symbol of our Catholic belief.

Catholic cemeteries offer a range of burial options beginning with traditional full-body interment in a ground plot or entombment in a mausoleum. Since 1963, cremation has also been accepted by the Church, and now accounts for about 50 percent of the burials in our cemeteries.

I invite you to look over plans for the new St. Catherine of Siena Mausoleum at Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Trumbull, which will

offer beautiful and reverent burial options for both above ground, and to meet our new team of counselors who can assist you in pre-need planning as well as in your family's moment of need.

I am also pleased to say that in recent months, we have also launched a major beautification initiative at the diocesan cemeteries, which celebrates them as peaceful and communal places to visit and reflect in their beautiful surroundings.

(For further information about the Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport, please contact us by visiting the website: www.bridgeportdiocese.org/cemeteries or calling: 203.416.1491.)

Sincerely,

Dean Gestal,
Executive Director,
Catholic Cemeteries

Cemeteries new governance model

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has issued a decree formally creating a new management and governance structure for diocesan cemeteries.

Under the decree issued on March 25, the cemeteries will transition to a limited liability company with an independent board of directors within the Corporation of the Diocese of Bridgeport.

The diocese maintains 14 cemeteries in Fairfield County. The largest and most active include St. Michael in Bridgeport, St. Mary-Putnam in Greenwich, St. John in Darien, St. John-St. Mary in Norwalk, Assumption Greens Farms in Westport, Gate of Heaven in Trumbull, Resurrection in Newtown, Queen of Peace in Stamford and St. Peter in Danbury.

Up until this point the cemeteries have been managed as an operating unit under the Corporation

of the Diocese of Bridgeport. The new model is consistent with the governance structure of diocesan schools, Catholic Charities, foundations and other operations.

“As the business of the cemeteries has grown and become more complex, the Diocesan Finance Council has been considering the way to best manage the

administrative practices,” the bishop said.

The bishop said he is grateful to the Diocesan Finance Council, Catholic Cemeteries management and the diocesan finance office for their efforts to prepare for and structure the transition.

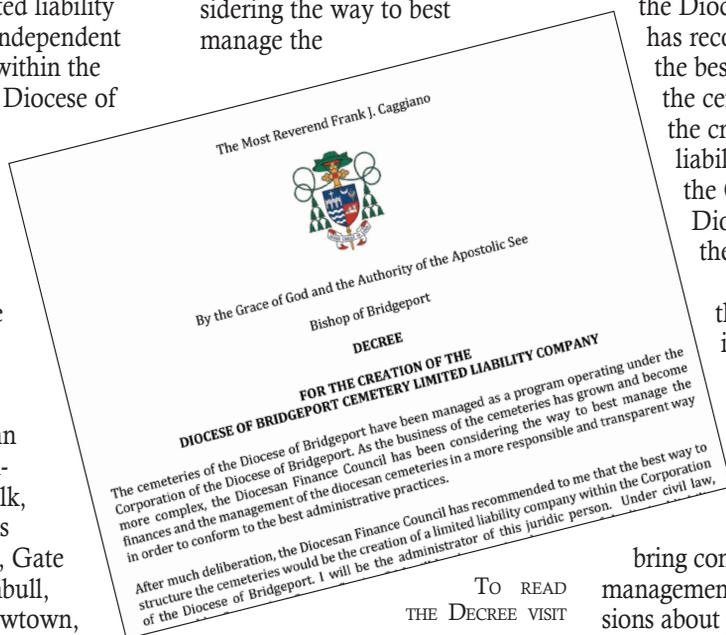
“After much deliberation, the Diocesan Finance Council has recommended to me that the best way to structure the cemeteries would be the creation of a limited liability company within the Corporation of the Diocese of Bridgeport,” the bishop said.

The bishop said the new structure will improve the stewardship of the cemeteries, bring in additional resources and further engage the talents of the laity who as board members will

bring considerable business and management experience to decisions about planning for the future.

In accordance with Canon Law, the bishop will be the administrator of this juridic person. Under civil law, governed by Connecticut Statute Section 34,

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 33



TO READ
THE DECREE VISIT
WWW.BRIDGEPORTDIOCESE.ORG

finances and the management of the diocesan cemeteries in a more responsible and transparent way in order to conform to the best

Catholic Cemeteries

Mausoleum under construction at Gate of Heaven Cemetery

TRUMBULL—The Diocese of Bridgeport has begun construction of the St. Catherine of Siena Mausoleum at Gate of Heaven Cemetery, which will have 600 full-body crypts and 550 niches for cremains, centered on a bronze life-sized statue of the Risen Christ from Italy.

The project, which involves a partnership with the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena and St. Theresa Parish, is expected to be completed in the fall, according to Dean Gestal, director of Catholic Cemeteries.

“It will be a beautiful granite building with a glass atrium from the floor to the ceiling in the middle,” he said. “The mausoleum will have three alcoves and be in the shape of a cross. The front of the building is granite and open glass.”

At the entrance to the mausoleum will be a magnificent bronze life-sized statue of the

Risen Christ, to be sculpted in Italy by Cody Swanson, a recognized sculptor who teaches at the Florence Academy of Art, said Father Joseph Marcello, pastor of the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena. It will be based on Gianlorenzo Bernini’s statue of the risen Christ, which stands atop the tabernacle in St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City.

“When families come to this mausoleum for committal services or to visit the tombs of their loved ones, they will be greeted by this statue, and it will remind them very powerfully of the victory of

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



NEW GOVERNANCE MODEL FROM PAGE 32

the bishop will be the appointed manager of the limited liability company and as manager, he will appoint a board of directors who will manage and oversee the operations of the cemeteries.

The membership of the board of directors will be announced later this spring as the diocese finalizes the transition to the new governance model.

The Finance Council agreed to the proposed creation of this juridic person unanimously at a special meeting on March 12, 2021 and the diocesan College of Consultors also gave its approval on March 17, 2021.

Dean Gestal, director of Catholic Cemeteries, said that the new management structure represents a new era that will strengthen the mission and ministry of Catholic cemeteries and hopefully will lead to

expanded beautification projects and improvements, a higher level of services including newly hired counselors to guide people through the process, and more burial options for families.

For Gestal, who retired after a successful finance career, the cemeteries are a ministry that supports “the sacred religious function of Catholic burial, while reaching out to families by building a closer relationship with our parishes.”

He said that at a time of great change in society including burial practices, Catholic cemeteries can play an even more important role in memorializing loved ones, bringing families together and reaffirming the importance of Christian burial.

Catholic cemeteries offer many options and services including estate lots to accommodate current and future generations of

the same family, special areas on which to construct family mausoleums, entombment in community mausoleums and memorial design services. For those thinking of cremation, cremation graves and columbarium niches are available to accommodate the reverent disposition that the Church desires

Gestal encourages people to consider “pre-need” planning for themselves and their loved ones, so that decisions do not have to be made when they are dealing with loss and emotional stress.

Pre-planning also gives families more time to visit and select a cemetery, meet with cemetery representatives and review the many burial options available to them.

(For further information about the Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport, visit the website: www.bridgeportdiocese.org/cemeteries/home or by phone at: 203.416.1491.) ■

Catholic Cemeteries

MAUSOLEUM UNDER CONSTRUCTION FROM PAGE 33

Jesus Christ over death, which is the bedrock of our faith,” Father Marcello said.

A committee headed by Father Marcello and Deacon Patrick Toole, episcopal delegate for administration of the Diocese of Bridgeport, is conceptualizing religious art for the mausoleum. Among the features that will be incorporated into the building will be panels containing the Beatitudes.

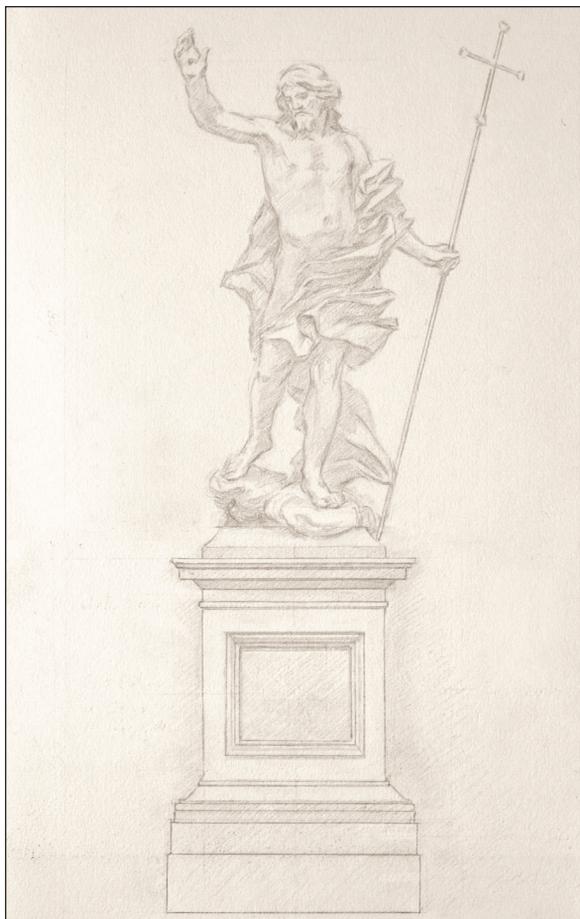
“One aspect of the design that I think will be especially meaningful will be the eight mosaic panels placed in the interior of the mausoleum, which will list the eight Beatitudes,” Father Marcello said. “Back in 2014, Pope Francis said, ‘At the end of the world, we will be judged. And what questions



indigent and the outcast, in those who suffer and are alone.... This is one of the fundamental criteria for evaluating our Christian life, which Jesus calls us to measure up to every day.”

at the cemetery are important to our faith. The body deserves respect in our commodity-oriented world.”

St. Theresa’s has more than 100 funerals a year, and the new



AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE MAUSOLEUM will be a magnificent bronze life-sized statue of the Risen Christ, to be sculpted in Italy by Cody Swanson, a recognized sculptor who teaches at the Florence Academy of Art

will we be asked there? What will these questions be? What is the protocol by which the judge will evaluate us? We find it in Chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew. The Beatitudes...are the questions that we will be asked on Judgement Day. We will not have titles, credit or privileges on which to stake our claims. The Lord will recognize us if, in our turn, we recognized him in the poor, in the hungry, in the

Emphasizing the importance of Catholic burial services, Father Brian Gannon, pastor of St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull, said: “From a Catholic perspective, the body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit and consecrated to God, and we will be resurrected with a glorified body just as our Lord has a glorified body and bears the wounds of his Passion. So the funeral rites and the committal

mausoleum at Gate of Heaven Cemetery will offer parishioners more choices for interment, he said.

Construction of the mausoleum is being done by Northeast Mausoleum LLC of New Hope, Penn., a general contractor specializing in the cemetery industry.

The St. Catherine of Siena Mausoleum will be adjacent to

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 35

Catholic Cemeteries

MAUSOLEUM
FROM PAGE 34

the St. Monica Mausoleum, built 25 years ago with 550 crypts and a number of niches, which have all been sold. The current project also entails refurbishing the existing building, which will include a sales office and a portable altar.

Gestal says half of all interment services are cremation but that 75 percent of them do not receive a final resting place and are often kept in homes or dispatched outside instead of in a sacred place.

As a result, Catholic Cemeteries has begun an outreach with bereavement programs to reach people who may have strayed from their faith and are unaware of the rules for a proper Catholic burial.

Father Marcello said: "Every time I pray the committal prayers at the cemetery for the interment of the body of a deceased person, I am moved by the words the Church provides: 'Lord Jesus Christ, by your own three days in the tomb, you hallowed the graces of all who believe in you and so made the grave (or tomb) a sign of hope that promises resurrection, even as it claims our mortal bodies.' Burial in a Catholic cemetery or mausoleum is an expression of our faith in Christ's resurrection, and our recognition that our own death and burial is a participation in the death and burial of Christ. And we know that death and burial are not the end of the story for Christ—or for us."

Most of the niches in the new mausoleum will have a glass front and be lit from the inside, where the urn will reside. They may also be personalized with a place for mementos of the deceased person. In addition, vase holders and picture frames will be available for the shutter fronts of the crypts.

Catholic Cemeteries has been reaching out to parishes because Gestal wants to encourage the faith community to participate in the diocese's ministry to the families of the deceased.

After the St. Catherine of Siena Mausoleum is completed in the fall, plans will be developed to construct additional mausoleums in Darien, Danbury and then Greenwich, Gestal said. The demand for above-ground burial is growing, and is a practice that is widely accepted in Southern European countries, he said. ■

McCurdy is named director

BRIDGEPORT—Joseph McCurdy of Norwalk has been promoted as the new director of sales and marketing after almost three years of service in cemetery management for the diocese.

McCurdy first came to the diocese after a finance career on Wall Street and work in the construction industry. For the past three years he has served as a member of the Catholic Cemeteries management team for the diocese.



JOSEPH MCCURDY

"Joe is committed to the culture of faithful service we seek to provide families who come forward to bury their loved ones," said Dean Gestal, Director of Cemeteries. "He understands the needs of families during a time of crisis, while also being committed to the value of pre-need planning and its role in preparation for Christian burial."

McCurdy credits his Catholic education that directed him to serve in the ministry of cemetery work. The New York native attended Our Lady of Grace School and Archbishop Molloy High School in Queens, N.Y. and then received his BS degree from the University of Scranton, a Jesuit university located in Scranton, Penn.

His takeaway from Catholic schools was the importance of helping those in need. Having experienced the personal loss of two brothers in the prime of their lives, he knows all too well the suffering families endure. Joe and his wife Gabriella, have two children, Juliana, 10 and Colin, 8. Colin just received his First Holy Communion at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, East Norwalk, where they are parishioners. In his spare time, Joe manages to coach softball and baseball and help out with his son's cub scout troop.

McCurdy and Decelle Totten, manager of Cemetery Operations, hold biweekly zoom meetings with counselors to ensure the team network is in place. Moreover, the team meets to discuss improvements, COVID precautions and new ideas for the betterment of cemetery operations and service. All meetings begin with a prayer petitioning God for strength, safety and courage to meet the many workday challenges. The diversity of backgrounds of the counselors lends to interesting discussions and solutions to issues. ■

SURVEY

Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport
Please help with this online survey

- 1 In what ways has the turmoil of 2020 changed how you view your end of life needs?
- 2 What questions can we help you answer about planning for your eventual funeral and burial wishes?

We would appreciate it if you would email your answers to: dtotten@diobpt.org

Catholic Cemeteries

Help to apply for FEMA aid for COVID-19 burials

By **BRIAN D. WALLACE**

TRUMBULL—The Diocese of Bridgeport is reaching out to the families who had a loved one die of COVID-19 last year to let them know they can receive up to \$9,000 for related funeral expenses from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“We see this as an opportunity to reach out to the families of the 1,600 people we buried last year to inform them,” said Dean Gestal, the director of Catholic Cemeteries. “We can identify 350 we know died of COVID-19, and there are obviously many more who will be able to recoup some money for funeral expenses and burials.”

In addition, a letter will go out from Bishop Frank J. Caggiano for pastors to read and publish in their parish bulletins, announcing the

related funeral expenses incurred between January 20, 2020 and December 31, 2020.

You must meet the following conditions to be eligible:

- The death must have occurred in the United States, including the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.
- The death certificate must indi-

lowing documentation:

An official death certificate that attributes the death directly or indirectly to COVID-19 and shows that the death occurred in the U.S., including the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.

(You can obtain one by contacting the State Vital Records Office or vital records office where the death occurred.)



FEMA program.

Gestal’s office is also sending letters to the 1,600 families that buried a loved one in the Catholic cemeteries during 2020 to explain the requirements to obtain the financial assistance.

He said the Catholic Cemeteries Office of the Diocese of Bridgeport is available to assist with any burial information required to file for this assistance, as well as discuss and plan for future needs. (For more information, visit: bridgeportdiocese.org/fema or call the Catholic Cemeteries office at 203.416.1494 or email dtotten@diobpt.org.)

The new FEMA program provides up to \$9,000 for COVID-19

cate the death was attributed to COVID-19.

- The applicant must be a U.S. citizen, noncitizen national or qualified alien who incurred funeral expenses after Jan. 20, 2020. *(There is no requirement for the deceased person to have been a U.S. citizen, noncitizen national or qualified alien.)*

FEMA will reimburse families up to \$9,000 for COVID-related funeral and burial costs; however, different factors will determine who is eligible to receive the full amount or a portion of the funds.

Before applications open up in April, FEMA recommends those who may be eligible gather the fol-

Sometimes a cemetery, funeral home, or a third-party provider can also request this information).

Documents that detail funeral expenses, such as receipts, cemetery contract, funeral home contract, etc. They must include the applicant’s name, the deceased person’s name, the amount of funeral expenses, and the dates the funeral expenses were incurred.

Proof of funds received from other sources specifically for use toward funeral costs. FEMA will not duplicate benefits received from burial or funeral insurance, financial assistance received from voluntary agencies, government agencies or other sources. ■

Leadership Institute

‘True Love That Lasts’ webinar

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—Beginning on February 11, many couples joined the “True Love That Lasts” webinar series, a collaboration between Dr. Jim Steffen, author of “The Secret of Growing True Love That Lasts,” and Dr. Patrick Donovan, director of The Leadership Institute.

Maria Mullen, who participated in the program with her husband Ted and did not miss a single session, explained that the “method” that both the book and webinar present is clear, concise and easy to use. “Many books on marriage and love come across as self-help books, with ideas, but no set plan, said Maria. “This book gives a concrete format with an easy to use method. The questions are set, but the answers are numerous.”

Steffen’s book, the webinar, and the accompanying follow-up video series focuses on how couples can grow true love that lasts by asking just a single question a day.

“In their book, Jim and Carol Steffen outline a very simple recipe for a strong and healthy marriage, said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano. “By asking just one question a day, husbands and wives can work together to build a relationship that endures. I invite couples of all ages and experience to take up Jim and Carol’s challenge of growing true love that lasts.”

“It encourages communication and closeness when the question of the day is asked,” explained Mullen. “If you want to bring your marriage to the next level, this is the program with which to do it as it is a gradual unveiling of the ‘masks’ we are all so good at hiding behind.”

Steffen explains that one can participate as a couple or as an individual.

Nithya Jacob, a member of the Catholic Psychotherapy Society, said that she enjoyed sharing with the other webinar participants. “I felt so connected with everyone over this period of five weeks. I learned a lot from each one of my teammates and it was very insightful to share with each other under the direction of Coach Jim.”

Jacob shared that she would encourage others to join in the next webinars to help them live a life of greater joy, understanding and love for their spouse and family.

Greg McGinn, former director of deacon training in the Diocese of Manchester, enjoyed the flexible program, finding it helpful but not over-demanding. “I would endorse the program not only for married couples as participants, but for serious consideration by diocesan catechetical leaders looking for a practical program that contributes to life-long faith formation,” he said.

On June 25, 2020, The Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization released a new Directory for Catechesis, providing guidelines for the Church’s mission of proclaiming the Gospel through catechesis and evangelization.

“In the new directory, Pope Francis challenges us to ‘make use of the valuable help of other couples with long-standing experience in marriage,’” said Dr. Patrick Donovan, quoting the New Directory. “The document goes so far as to challenge parishes and dioceses to lose the terminology, ‘marriage prep’ because it undermines the true meaning of marriage formation: an ongoing journey that takes a lifetime. What Jim and Carol have done is to take their own story and put it at the disposal of others. It will be a perfect tie-in to our renewed formation for the sacrament of marriage, which launches in early September.”

Steffen’s book is the culmination of the author’s sixty-year quest to understand how couples can stay together and enjoy marriages that thrive. “The problem has a dual nature,” Steffen says, “the first is to discover what to do to grow true love that lasts and the other is remembering to do it.” In the book and habit builder, Steffen offers a solution to both.

The book provides practical tips for couples to follow and simple questions to ask each day. The included habit builder solves the second part of the equation. With his background in time management, Steffen uses what he calls the QEP method: Quick-to-learn, Easy-to-use, Proven-to-

work Method.

“My relationship with God and my wife has grown,” said John Setear, who participated in the webinar series with his wife JoAnne. “All marriages can benefit from this program,” said JoAnne. “It’s very smart of the Catholic church to embrace this and support couples and marriage today.”

Father Chip O’Neil, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Brookfield, has watched the development of the True Love That Lasts Movement for a long time. He has encouraged his parishioners to participate in the webinars and was pleased that so many who did came away with life-changing insights.

“I am convinced that the simplicity of asking just one question a day can help the person asking the question live a happier, healthier, holier and even longer life,” said Father Chip.

“The True Love That Lasts Movement (book, habit builder, webinar and follow-up video series) is a very simple yet powerful process to help couples grow in the enjoyment and love of their spouse even daily,” says author Jim Steffen. “Participants in the webinar have experienced benefits as soon as they ask the first question. In so doing, we hope young people see and are convinced how simple and happy a daily growing married life can be, thereby responding to Pope Francis’ concern.”

“This movement is unique insofar as there is no diocese that has such an effort,” said Donovan, explaining that this is not just a premarital program but a program of continuing formation.

“Our diocese created this unique True Love That Lasts webinar and follow-up video series for our own parishioners. However, responding to Pope Francis’ concern for the world crisis of the family, other dioceses and people of all religions are invited to join. This program has changed people’s lives forever,” said Donovan.

(The Diocese of Bridgeport will offer another True Love That Lasts Webinar Series beginning May 27. Free to all. For detail and to register, go to: www.TrueLoveThatLasts.us/register.html).

Lenten Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage to the ‘seven churches’

STAMFORD—Martha Dombroski, a member of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Stamford, provided these photos of her “Seven Churches” pilgrimage to churches in Stamford on Holy Thursday.

Visiting the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament at seven churches on the night of Holy Thursday is both an ancient custom and part of Martha’s family tradition.

“My parents were long-time members of the choir at Holy Name of Jesus Church in Stamford. And as I child, I remember after Holy Thursday Mass we’d spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament and then drive to a few churches to “see

their altars or reposition.”

“I don’t really remember if we went to seven churches in total and I never thought of it as a pilgrimage either. In my seven or eight year old mind, we were just going to see the altars.”

As she got older and lived on her own, Martha says she fell out of the practice of visiting the seven churches...but about 10 years ago, when she started attending Bible Study, other members of her group were talking about “making the pilgrimage.”

“I realized quickly that this is much more than just going to see how each parish chose to decorate their altars of reposition. It is a



MARTHA DOMBROSKI

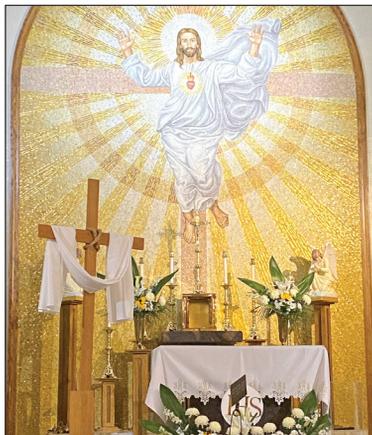
chance to join Peter, James and John and “stay and watch” with the Lord, spend time with Him and not scatter. It is an opportunity to join Mary and ponder all that happened that night in the Upper Room and in the garden and all that was about to happen on Good Friday.”

Martha Dombroski says the Seven Churches Pilgrimage was an opportunity “to shut out the distractions and concentrate on Jesus and all that He has done for me.”

The evening pilgrimage also connects her with her beloved parents. “It is for me, my most prayerful time of Holy Week and the Triduum, because, like my parents, I sing in the very same choir that they did.”

In preparation for her pilgrimage, she took the extra step of visiting the websites of local parishes to get information. She hopes that many churches will participate next year and invite pilgrims on Holy Thursday.

Her pilgrimage included stops at Holy Name of Jesus Church, St. Cecilia Church, St. Bridget of Ireland Church, Sacred Heart Church, St. Clement of Rome Church, St. Mary Church and the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist. ■



Obituaries

Deacon Heidenreich

RIVERSIDE—Deacon Vincent J. Heidenreich of Greenwich passed away on Monday, March 22 at the age of 79.

“It is with great sadness I must inform you of the death of Deacon Heidenreich. Please pray for the repose of the soul of Deacon Vincent and for the consolation of his family,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano.

Deacon Vince was ordained a deacon for the Diocese of Bridgeport in 1990 and since that time had been assigned to St. Catherine pastoral staff. He also served as the property manager for St. Catherine.

Vincent J. Heidenreich was born in Pittsburgh on June 15, 1943. His father was a general practitioner and his mother a nurse. He is the eldest of twelve, seven boys and five girls. He was educated in parochial schools, grade, high and at The Catholic University of America.

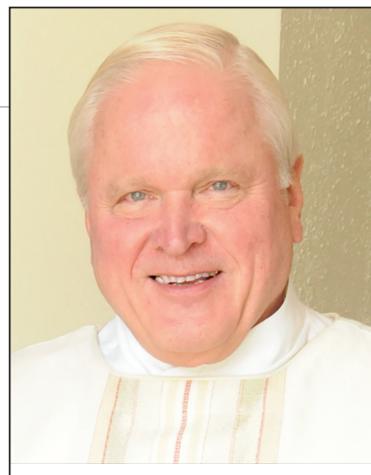
Deacon Vince spent 35 years in the pharmaceutical industry.

One of his earlier promotions to pharmaceutical marketing management prompted the relocation of his family to Greenwich in July 1978, and first joined St. Catherine of Siena Parish.

In 1983, he joined the healthcare division of BBDO on Madison Ave., supervising the development of prescription-drug advertising. His last eleven years in the industry were as advertising head at Bayer Pharmaceutical. He retired from Bayer in November 2000.

Deacon Vince served as director of Religious Education at Notre Dame Parish in Easton from 2001-2011. He was very involved in marriage-preparation work for the diocese and for the parish.

He is survived by his son, Vincent Heidenreich, Jr., and his wife, Wendy, of Braintree, MA, and his daughter, Beth Santa, and her husband, Devin, of Fairfield, CT. He



DEACON VINCENT J. HEIDENREICH

will be missed by his four loving grandchildren, Victoria and Zachary Heidenreich and Alyssa and Heidi Santa, all of whom he had the privilege of baptizing. He also leaves behind his loving companion of several years, Carole Walt. He was predeceased by his former wife Margaret whom he met while attending Catholic University.

(Condolences may be sent to: The Heidenreich Family c/o St. Catherine of Siena Parish, 4 Riverside Avenue Riverside, CT 06878.)

DECEASED CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT APRIL 25—MAY 22

APRIL

| | | |
|----|----------------------------------|------|
| 25 | Msgr. William A. Nagle | 2013 |
| | Rev. John F. Smolko | 2020 |
| 28 | Rev. Msgr. Thomas J. Green | 2018 |
| 29 | Rev. Joseph F. Cleary | 1971 |
| | Rev. Andrew Dube..... | 2006 |
| | Rev. Austin R. Saunders..... | 1986 |

MAY

| | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1 | Rev. Gregory J. Huminski..... | 2010 |
| | Rev. Canon Albert W. Watts | 2020 |
| 2 | Msgr. James F. Murphy..... | 1958 |
| 3 | Msgr. Michael J. Carnicke, P.A. | 1980 |
| 6 | Msgr. John Bernard Hossan..... | 2018 |
| 9 | Rev. John B. Fonseca | 2002 |
| 10 | Rev. Robert J. Hyl..... | 2015 |
| 13 | Deacon Joseph M. Melita | 2018 |
| 17 | Rev. Miroslav L. Sultus | 1992 |
| 18 | Msgr. Charles B. Ratajczak, O.F.M. | 1957 |
| 19 | Rev. William H. Sullivan..... | 1980 |

Sister 'Peggy' Brennan

SINSINAWA, Wis.— Sister Margaret Ann “Peggy” Brennan, OP, died April 5, 2021, at St. Dominic Villa, Hazel Green, Wis. Her religious name was Sister Eunice.

Sister Peggy taught and served as registrar at St. Mary High School in Greenwich, 1963-1965.

Sister Peggy made her first profession as a Dominican Sister of Sinsinawa Aug. 5, 1958, and her perpetual profession Aug. 5, 1961. She ministered in education as a teacher for 41 years. Sister Peggy served as secretary to the prioress of the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa for nine years.

Sister Peggy was born May 20, 1935, in Sioux City, Iowa, the daughter of Charles and Kathryn (Fleming) Brennan.

(Memorials may be made to the Sinsinawa Dominicans, 585 County Road Z, Sinsinawa, WI, 53824-9701 or at www.sinsinawa.org/donate online.)

Sports

Notre Dame sweeps basketball

By DON HARRISON

FAIRFIELD—Notre Dame High of Fairfield dominated South-West Conference basketball this winter—the winter defined by a pandemic—but there were two distinct story lines.

The Lancers' boys squad featured a new head coach, Brian

opening 10 points of the closing period, and Saint-Louis scored six of his 15 points—including four crucial free throws down the stretch—to secure Notre Dame's fifth SWC title.

"Saint-Louis was our glue all year long. He was handling the ball, hitting big baskets, playing a mistake-free season," Kriftcher said. "Kolbe came in undefeated. We had

most opponents fairly easily.

The 5-foot-9 Mayo was named MaxPreps' 2020-21 Connecticut High School Player of the Year and was selected to the Connecticut High School Coaches Association All-State team for the second season. She averaged 20.4 points, 6.8 rebounds, seven assists and five steals.

According to Conlon, "some 30 to 40 schools have shown an interest in her," but they'll have to wait. Mayo is just a junior.

Two of Mayo's classmates, Sara McCary and Kayla Tilus, joined her on both the 2021 Coaches All-State team and the SWC all-star team. McCary averaged 15.5 points and eight rebounds this winter, while Tilus checked in with 14 points, nine rebounds and nearly six steals per game.

Kolbe Cathedral (11-2), which had bowed to Pomperaug in the SWC semifinals, placed senior Ciara Brown on the Coaches All-State team and both Brown and Mishell Pringle on the conference all-star squad.

Notre Dame was runner-up to



NOTRE DAME HIGH'S GIRLS basketball team, led by coach Maria Conlon, won its second straight South-West Conference title by routing Pomperaug in the championship game.

Kriftcher, formerly of Trinity Catholic, and he brought three of his players with him, seniors Akim Joseph, Andrew Saint-Louis and Rassoul Abakar. His predecessor had won just a handful of games the previous season, and so there were question marks galore.

The Notre Dame girls team, coached by former UConn star Maria Conlon, returned many of its key players from the previous season's 23-1 unit, including All-State guard Alzhanique Mayo and all-around athlete Mac Stone-Folmar. They knew they'd do well.

Kriftcher's debut exceeded expectations, as the Lancers stumbled just once en route to an 11-1 record capped by a 70-62 decision over defending champion and top-seeded Kolbe Cathedral in the SWC title game on March 25. Conlon's squad was equally dominant, winning 12 of 13 games, and dismantled Pomperaug, 57-27, in the conference's championship game on March 26.

"Our only loss was to Masuk, but due to COVID protocols, none of our varsity players were in uniform," Conlon explained. "I played freshmen, and we only lost by three (36-33)."

The Notre Dame boys trailed by eight points early in the final quarter of the SWC championship game, and both Joseph and Saint-Louis were saddled with four fouls. But Joseph, who finished with a game-high 24 points, netted the Lancers'

to match their intensity level, their talent level. This year was a function of people coming together."

Both Joseph and Saint-Louis were selected to the 2021 All-SWC



NOTRE DAME HIGH'S BOYS basketball team, led by new coach Brian Kriftcher, celebrates its 2020-21 South-West Conference championship victory over Kolbe Cathedral.

team, as were Kolbe senior point guard Dan Wellington and junior Ty Staples-Santos. Wellington scored 20 points against Notre Dame in the title game. Immaculate of Danbury placed senior Joao Pedro Miranda on the all-conference squad.

Meanwhile, the Notre Dame girls surprised their coach in one respect. "We entered the season knowing there would be no state tournament. I was prepared to have some kids who checked out," Conlon said. "But this team came to play every day. They didn't pack it in."

Indeed, the Lancers dispatched

undefeated Norwich Free Academy in GameTimeCT's girls state basketball poll, while in the boys state poll, the Lancers placed sixth and Kolbe (13-1) was 10th.

On the hockey front, Fairfield Prep (11-1-1) finished first for the fourth straight year in GameTimeCT's Boys ice hockey poll. The Jesuits' Luke Noonan and Mason Whitney and Notre Dame-Fairfield's Brian Essing were selected to the Coaches Division-I All-State hockey team. Named to the All-State second team were Prep goalie Tommy Martin and Immaculate's Tim Hayden. ■

Column: Thomas Hicks



Solid Food

POTPOURRI

BY THOMAS H. HICKS

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

For many Catholics, the Letter to the Hebrews is an unknown text. Yet it is one of the most meaningful Scriptural writings. It has much to offer to the modern church. As one commentator put it: “Prepare to be changed when you drink deeply from Hebrews. It will leave you better than when you started.”

Hebrews is not a letter, it is a sermon that has been written down, and it is not a writing of St. Paul but by an unknown author. The reason for the “letter” was that a sizeable number of Christians were falling away from the faith, and many were beginning to stay away from Christian worship. Sound familiar? The preacher wanted to encourage them to persevere. He begins by reminding them of some benefits that come with Christianity, gives some cautions and warnings, and tells them to encourage one another. Then, in chapter 5, verse 11, he suddenly and unexpectedly breaks off from what he’s been saying and takes a new direction. He makes an attempt to shake up his listeners. He confronts his audience with the problem of their spiritual immaturity, the problem of their immaturity in the faith, and tells them that the main reason for Christians leaving the faith is their “lethargic” Christianity. They do not try to understand the faith at a deeper level. There is culpable negligence and “sluggishness.” Even though they have been engaged with the Christian faith long enough to now be teachers of others, they are still like infants at a mother’s breast. They are negligent of their responsibilities to study, to learn and to teach the faith. They still need someone to teach them the first principles of the faith.

The preacher accuses his listeners of being recipients who can still take only milk, not solid food. By “solid food” he means deeper truths, more advanced, substantive doctrines. This

situation is insufficient for perseverance in the faith. This ignorance leads to ineffectiveness in communicating the faith. They are not able to speak intelligibly. Hebrews 5:13: “for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the way of righteousness, for he is a child.” Such a situation makes believers vulnerable to leaving the faith. The preacher challenges his audience to move beyond a few basics of Catholic doctrine. Their Catholic development has been arrested.

With solid food one experiences new kinds of life and love.”

A famous Catholic Scriptural commentator, Raymond Brown, commented: “I have a fellow-feeling for what the writer of Hebrews says in this sudden and surprising passage. The author gives his analysis of where his audience was spiritually and intellectually and has the courage to say it straight to them. He clearly wants to wake up his audience.

In our churches today we need to recognize the same tendencies Hebrews comments about. So many Catholics are not only eager to stay with a diet of milk, but actually get angry at the suggestion that they should be eating something more substantive. This has puzzled and bothered me for years. I meet settled prejudice against making any effort at all to learn what the Catholic faith is about. As a result, we find an extraordinary ignorance about lives being transformed by the power of the scriptures and scholarly theology. Here and there I meet an eagerness to take in as much teaching as one can. Some Catholics are indeed eager for solid food. But I deeply regret that in most churches it seems that most people can only be persuaded to take another small helping of warm milk.”

(Research indicates that in places where substantive Bible classes and Catholic scholarship presentations are offered, they are attended by one-half of one percent of Catholics they are intended to reach. There

seems to be a certain indifference to learning deeper aspects of the faith.)

Raymond Brown goes on: “Most Catholics today don’t even know much about the milk—the ABCs of the faith. Many (most) couldn’t tell you why we baptize people, or what precisely the resurrection is. It’s not that they learned their ABCs long ago and forgotten it. No: they haven’t ever learned it in the first place.”

Here are some disturbing statistics. One in five children who are baptized will not receive their first holy Communion, two in five will not make their confirmation, and by all accounts, we can expect about 85 percent of our youth and young adults to stop the practice of the faith by age 21.

Here’s another statistic: the majority (71 percent) of people who have drifted away from the faith have left not in anger, but in disappointment. They say, “I never felt that my spiritual needs were met by the church.”

The famous Catholic theologian Karl Rahner was once asked if those who leave the Catholic faith commit the sin of apostasy? He replied: “No, you can’t apostatize from what you don’t know.” Says a lot about what he thought was the depth of “regular” Catholics knowledge of the faith.

Thus, the preacher of Hebrews rebukes the immaturity of those who can still have only milk, not solid food. St. Paul did the same thing. First Corinthians 3:12: “And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready.”

Hebrews 6:1: “Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity.”

Advanced teaching is the means of producing maturity. Education is nurture. How does one get believers to develop an appetite for more solid food? Most preaching today seems to consist of trite rehashes of some ABCs clothed in predictable words.

Pope Francis often speaks of wanting an Adult Church.

Finally, I think the most important characteristic of evangelizing is that the evangelizers know their way around the Bible. One of the enduring legacies of the Second Vatican Council is its call to return to Biblical Theology as the primary source of Catholic spirituality. ■

Nuestra Voz

Catedral de San Agustín pasa a ser regentada por sacerdote colombiano

Por MARICARMEN GODOY

BRIDGEPORT—La parroquia-catedral de Saint Augustine, la iglesia que es el hogar y el centro de oración de Monseñor Frank Caggiani, Obispo de la Diócesis de Bridgeport, desde finales de febrero es regentada por el P. Juan Gabriel Acosta, nativo de Colombia, quien también recibió

los nuevos retos de los nuevos migrantes”, decidió que Saint Augustine, el templo y la parroquia donde básicamente se realizan las ceremonias especiales de la Diócesis con el Obispo, “tome un matiz familiar”, dijo. Es decir, que las necesidades espirituales sean vividas en un torno a la familia”.

Otro de los aspectos nuevos que está viviendo a diario el nuevo

y catecismo es el termómetro que el sacerdote necesita para poder revivir el Consejo Parroquial, la instancia, después del Obispo Caggiani, más importante porque ellos deciden cual es el rumbo a seguir de la parroquia y marcan el plan de trabajo.

Por eso el P. Acosta insiste que está en la etapa de conocer a todos sus feligreses para poder entender la dinámica de su nueva misión pastoral.

“Para mí este momento es un instante de acercamiento. Ese es mi plan. Acercarme a mi comunidad y conocerlos”, repuso. Plan que lo puso en marcha desde que también lo está realizando en la iglesia de Saint Patrick, iglesia que fue unida a la catedral para sacar adelante el trabajo pastoral de las dos comunidades en una sola.

Acorde con el P. Acosta, en Saint Augustine hay un registro de 600 familias registradas. De ellos un 50 por ciento es de origen hispano y el otro 50 la conforman afro descendientes (haitianos y estadounidenses) y caucásicos (blancos).

Los grupos de oración, el grupo de estudios bíblicos y el regreso de los niños a la catequesis para prepararse para los sacramentos, es la clave para planear lo que será la vida parroquial de la Catedral en los próximos años, dijo el P. Acosta.

La celebración de la misa diaria en inglés a las siete de la mañana en Saint Patrick (851 North Avenue) y a las 12:10 pm en la Catedral es parte del plan de seguimiento y acompañamiento a sus fieles. Pero, las misas en español de los sábados a las 7 pm y los domingos a las 11 am en la Catedral y la misa de 7 pm de los miércoles en Saint Patrick; es la medida de pulso para poder andar el plan de trabajo parroquial de los siguientes meses.

Por ahora, el sacerdote colombiano, está concentrado en acompañar y conocer a sus feligreses. Vive en la parroquia de Saint Patrick y aunque técnicamente la Catedral de Saint Augustine es el hogar de oración y refugio del Obispo, por encargo del mismo, él es el Rector de la llamada: Parroquia-Catedral de Saint Augustine junto a la iglesia de Saint Patrick. ■



a la iglesia de Saint Patrick como parte de la unificación de las dos iglesias.

Aunque el P. Juan Gabriel admite que está en el proceso de conocer a sus feligreses y que por la pandemia poco a poco están empezando a llegar a las celebraciones eucarísticas y a los grupos de oración, sin embargo, decidió –tomando todas las precauciones de bio-seguridad– salir a saludar a los suyos después de cada misa con el fin de conocerlos e iniciar un plan de trabajo pastoral a corto y mediano plazo.

El P. Juan Gabriel, que es muy querido en Norwalk, estuvo al frente de la iglesia de Saint Ladislaus por más de cinco años, sacando de la nada a una parroquia que había perdido a la casi totalidad de sus miembros y convirtiéndola prácticamente en una iglesia vibrante en un noventa y cinco por ciento hispana debido a que está ubicada en South Norwalk, un sector poblado de migrantes recién llegados de América Latina y Haití, en su mayoría.

Con este cambio a Saint Augustine, ubicada en 399 Washington Avenue, el P. Juan Gabriel, por pedido del Obispo Caggiani, empezó solo en esta nueva misión y con la experiencia del “reto de cómo responder

Rector de la Catedral, es la llegada de a poco de los adultos mayores.

Grupo que antes de la pandemia le daba vida a la Catedral, pero hoy, el P. Juan Gabriel, narra, que como ya han sido vacunados contra el Corona virus están viniendo a la misa diaria o bien la esposa o bien el esposo solos y también en pareja.

El caso de las familias con niños pequeños o grupos grandes para celebraciones de fiestas todavía no se está viendo porque la parroquia está tomando las medidas de bio-seguridad y una de éstas es no reunir a grupos grandes ni tampoco realizar fiestas patronales a lo que da el tope de la iglesia.

Pero si regresó la catequesis con 48 niños quienes cumplen a cabalidad el uso del cubre bocas, el lavado de manos y la sana distancia de seis pies. Además las misas en español con horarios especiales a la que hay un cupo promedio de 180 a 200 personas copando las tres naves de Saint Augustine que tiene capacidad para más de mil personas.

También regresaron los grupos de oración que se juntan entre semana y los fines de semana para las celebraciones eucarísticas. El regreso de los feligreses a las misas y de los grupos de oración

Vocations

Our world needs the presence and closeness of God

By FATHER CHRIS FORD

One of the funny things about technology, as much as it is an essential part of our lives today, is how quickly technology becomes obsolete. Almost as soon as a new cell phone, computer or tablet hits the market, it already begins to seem outdated and the world looks eagerly ahead to the next

Now it is certainly true that during the pandemic, many priests have shown immense pastoral creativity and that technology has helped us to reach people when we could not join together physically. But the temptation is to think that we are destined for this to be a part of the new normal. However, if the pandemic has shown us one thing, it is that

tangible: the very fact that God is involved in our lives. Because we can encounter Him personally in the sacraments, it means that when we speak of God's merciful love, we are not speaking in the abstract. We are instead speaking of something and, more importantly, someone, who has actually impacted my life personally, intimately and directly.



FATHER CHRIS FORD

version to come out. Indeed, the first thing many cell phones must do when we turn them on after taking them out of the box for the first time is to update the software. Old and outdated technology has become quaint —“When I was your age, we didn't even have cell phones” has been replaced by “When I was your age, I still had a flip phone.”

Some may even make the same argument for religion and especially the priesthood. Perhaps, organized religion and the sacrificial life of the priesthood are sentimental reminders of a bygone era. As the communion of the Church, especially a wounded Church, gives way to the relative comfort of an entire world seemingly at my fingertips, the role of the Church in my life is less certain and, therefore, the role of the priest is blurred even more.

a screen is not a replacement for a face and technology is not a replacement for a real presence.

The fact is that Catholicism is ultimately a religion of the Incarnation, of a God who loved the world so much that He sent His only Son in the flesh to be present to humanity and, ultimately, to suffer, die, and rise in the flesh for us and for our salvation. As a wise priest once said, this is why our parish priests live in the parish in which they work and do not commute in from out of town. The fact that the priest lives among us is a sign of the reality that God continually dwells among us though the Church and her sacramental life, administered primarily by the priest.

Especially in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession, the priest takes what can seem only theoretical and makes it

This is why the priesthood remains as relevant today as it was on the evening it was instituted! In fact, it may even be more relevant today than ever before. For all its immense benefits and gifts, technology has created an illusion that we have never been closer to one another, when the reality may be we have never been farther apart.

Our world needs the presence and the closeness of God, who remains with us even to the end of the age, in the midst of His Church. People need to know that, even when the world lets them down, there is always someone in whose eyes they are acknowledged, delighted in, and loved: Our Heavenly Father. Brought to life in the person and ministry of the priest, the real and true presence of God in our lives is one thing that will never be obsolete. ■