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Around the Diocese

Ordinary Time is less than ordinary

by Elizabeth Clyons

An Epiphany blessing
TRUMBULL—As is customary on the Feast of the Epiphany, Father Marcello, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull blessed pieces of chalk and inscribed the door of the church with the Epiphany blessing: 20+C+M+B+22. He then invited everyone to take some chalk together with instructions and prayers home to inscribe their own homes. The blessing places a reminder of God’s presence at the entrance of a home, and places an entire family under His protection. What a beautiful way to begin the new year!

Looking forward to Lent
SHELTON—During the Season of Lent, St. Joseph Parish in Shelton will be hosting its Lenten Speaker Series on March 8, 15 and 22 at 7 pm in the main church. This year’s speakers are Dr. Joan Kelly, Reverend Brian Konzman, S.J. and Sr. Sally Norcross, C.N.D. “I look forward to our annual Lenten Speaker Series at St. Joseph,” said Father Michael Dogali, pastor of St. Joseph’s. “My goal is to offer different Lenten perspectives over the years from Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, diocesan priests, lay theologians and women religious.”

Joy in the Sacraments
NORWALK—Joy abounded for the children and families at St. Thomas the Apostle on Saturday, January 22, as the children received their First Reconciliation. “Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions. Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me” (Psalm 51: 3-4).
TRUMBULL—In a divided world, Dan and Kelly Anne Murphy, the chair couple of the 2022 Bishop’s Appeal, see an opportunity for Catholics to build bridges to one another and the community after two challenging years of a global pandemic.

They are urging the faithful to support Bishop Frank J. Caggiano’s vision by building “A Bridge Home.”

“That theme is meant to highlight hope and renewal underway in our Church and lives,” the bishop said in his December Pastoral Exhortation titled, “Let Us Go Forth from the Upper Room.”

Joe Gallagher, chief development officer of the diocese, said he is grateful that the Murphys accepted the Bishop’s Appeal leadership challenge, and he’s looking forward to partnering with them.

“We’ve been blessed by the faith and dedication of our past chair couples, and both Dan and Kelly Anne are adding to the proud tradition within our diocese,” he said.

The Murphys believe the campaign offers the diocese an opportunity to bring healing and hope to families, friends, neighbors and others who are weary from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also help reunite the Church, reaffirm our faith and welcome others back.

“We speak of the Body of Christ, and we have to gather all our resources and bring people back who may be on the other side of an obstacle,” Kelly Anne said.

“We need to work on our formation by knowing and understanding what we believe. For example, many Catholics don’t believe in the True Presence. We have to get back to our roots and also reach out to people in need.”

The Murphys, who are members of the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull, served as the vice chair couple in the previous two campaigns and have been active in ministries in their church and the diocese.

“There is nothing more important than serving our Lord, and it has become more evident to me, with the pandemic, that a lot of people took a pause and a break,” Dan Murphy said.

“But our faith is one of community, and we need to do this together. It’s not done in isolation; we have to bring people together, particularly in our divided world.”

In his letter, Bishop Caggiano outlined three tasks that will be the focus of the appeal: to teach and preach the Gospel with clarity and conviction; to transform local parish and school communities into spiritual families united in faith; and to create bridges to people who feel neglected by the Church or who the world considers “outcasts.”

The Bishop’s Appeal, formerly the Annual Catholic Appeal, high-lights hope, renewal and evangelization, Kelly Anne said. It will invest in services to engage people in their faith by offering opportunities for discipleship, in addition to helping those who are struggling.

The goal of the appeal is $8.1 million, which is the same as last year. Each parish will be allowed to determine how funds are used that are raised in excess of its goal.

“We are blessed to be serving in the line,” she said.

“We’re not in the line, and we are blessed to be serving in the line.”

She believes that many people are eager to support the charitable works of the diocese through Catholic Charities of Fairfield County.

“When Kelly Anne talks about the good works the Church does, she recalls her grandmother Margaret Conlisk, an immigrant from County Mayo, who like many others came to America from Ireland and brought their faith with them. They took jobs as housekeepers and laborers and lived lives centered on Christ.

“My grandmother always said that you never miss anything you give to the Church,” Kelly Anne recalled. “You went to Mass and put your money in the basket...and it better not jingle.”

“Our parents raised us in a Catholic house and it has carried on down the generations,” said Dan, who admits to becoming more immersed in the faith after their oldest daughter Alana started asking theological questions at six-years-old, which he describes as “pretty deep.”

The Murphys are members of the Order of Malta and also volunteer during the organization’s annual pilgrimages to Lourdes for the sick, visiting the shrine to Our Lady.

Dan, a CPA with more than 20 years of executive finance and accounting experience, is a Fourth Degree Knight of Columbus and belongs to the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

He and their son Sean, a junior at Trumbull High School, are on the Welcome Team of St. Catherine of Siena, and Kevin is a master of ceremony at the parish.

The couple also has two daughters—Alana, a graduate of Boston College, who is getting her master’s degree in English at Fordham University, and Bridget, who is working on her master’s in teaching at Fordham while teaching math at Cristo Rey High School in New York City. All four Murphy children attended St. Catherine of Siena School.

(As we begin the 2022 Bishop’s Appeal, A Bridge Home, thank you for your support. To make your gift or learn more, please visit, 2022BishopsAppeal.org or text the word, APPEAL, to 475.241.7849. If you have questions, please call 203.416.1470.)
St. Joseph Church

‘A place of reverence & beauty’

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

SHELTON—“I hope that you are proud of all that you have accomplished here at St. Joseph’s, for you are a parish of great generosity, great dedication and great faith. And you have made your church ever more a beautiful place and a place of reverence, great dedication and great beauty—w e offer the best we can to our God,” said Bishop Caggiano.

And that is why I am delighted to be here, to re-dedicate the church, and Father Dogali, to again thank you for the work you have done to bring the church to ever greater beauty and reverence,” the bishop said.

Bishop Caggiano was joined around the altar by St. Joseph pastor, Father Michael F. Dogali; senior priests and weekend assistants Msgr. Matthew Bernelli and Father Raymond Petrucci; and Permanent Deacons Guillermo Bernal and Bradford Smythe.

In his homily the bishop reflected on the visitation of Our Lady with her cousin, Elizabeth. He said that as an older woman, Elizabeth fully expected that she would not survive childbirth. As a result, Elizabeth had gone into seclusion, a time of loneliness and isolation, but Mary risked her own health to visit Elizabeth.

“Our Lady having conceived the one who is love himself, even though she herself would be in need, felt impelled to go to her cousin in the hour of her greatest need, and in that very act, she begins to explain the powerful mystery of her own life,” the bishop said.

“My dear friends, it is that great gift that empties us for the beloved. It’s the occasion and opportunity, the choice and decision to do what is good and right for the other, not expecting anything in return. It is self-gift and our way of carrying the love of Jesus himself.”

At the end of Mass, Father Dogali was visibly moved by the celebration and expressed his personal gratitude to all parishioners, benefactors and parish leadership.

“Everyone here has done something—and this is why tonight is your night of joy,” Father Dogali said in brief and gracious remarks.

“This is your parish and I want you to always be proud of it. God bless you, my dear friends.”

Father Dogali personally recognized St. Joseph Parish trustee Mr. Joseph Kudravy and Ms. Mary Jane Paris along with the lay staff including the receptionists, custodians, and “all those who come in each and every day to make every parishioner and everyone who dials our telephone number feel welcome. And they show everyone the face of Jesus to all.”

“Every person here in one way or another has been a benefactor,” he said in gratitude to all who made the renovation a success.

Before giving the final blessing Bishop Caggiano thanked Father Dogali “for his great leadership of St. Joseph Parish,” as parishioners offered spirited applause.”

Music for the celebration was provided by the St. Joseph Church choir under the direction of Dan Horstmann.

In a reflection Father Dogali wrote for the parish bulletin following the Mass and dedication, he said that “While every year in the life of the parish is special, 2021 was extra special as we celebrated 115 years of Catholic faith with the blessing of our new church pews and renovations. The blessing today by Bishop Caggiano is a reminder of those who have gone before us, leaving a splendid example of faith, prayer and stewardship…. As we pass the Catholic faith on to our children, may they see us recommit ourselves to the work of evangelization, love of neighbor and a more fervent celebration of the Holy Eucharist. May St. Joseph, pastor of the Universal Church intercede for us.”

(St. Joseph Parish is located at 50 Fairmont Place in Shelton. Phone 203.924.8611. On the web: www.sjcshelton.org.)
Religious Life

She took an unexpected path to the contemplative life

By JOE PISANI

For most of her young life, Brianna Farens was convinced she would pursue a career in medicine, inspired by the witness of her father, Dr. John Farens—except for that short interlude as a four-year-old when her passion was to drive an ice cream truck.

Throughout those years, she would often work at her father’s office in Shelton, and all the road signs pointed toward a life of caring for people as a doctor. “I loved to accompany him on his rounds to the hospital and nursing homes and see the tenderness and compassion he shared with others, to see him helping to heal others,” she recalls. After graduating from St. Joseph High School, she began a pre-med major at Providence College.

But then something happened. She started to grow closer to Jesus in her spiritual life…and she realized she wanted to get even closer. Her prayer was a simple request: “Lord, I just want to be closer to You.”

Jesus took her at her word. She never realized how close she would become.

Today, Brianna’s mother Donna says the young woman whose smile lit up a party, who was known for her contagious laughter and her tender hugs, who traveled to Latin America to work with the poor in mountain villages and to Denver to help the homeless, is Sister Maria Antonia of the Holy Wounds of Jesus, a member of the cloistered religious order at the Poor Clare Monastery of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Roswell, New Mexico.

Donna said. “She came back changed. The experience moved her. She knew she wanted to help people and work with them.”

Sister Antonia, in a written response to questions, said the great turning point in her life—her “radical moment of conversion”—occurred on that trip to Peru, where she worked with the poor in shantytowns.

“Up until this point, I thought I knew what happiness was, for I had all of the circumstances in my life that easily allowed for it,” she said. “However, it was in encountering the radiating joy of the destitute that I was confronted with the fact that these people possessed something that I lacked: They had a joy that was not dependent on circumstances—their joy came from their relationship with Christ. And during that trip, the same joy was poured into the depths of my heart and filled it to overflowing. I personally encountered God’s overwhelming mercy and love for me, and it was everywhere. It was everything. I was all in.”

During this time, she said, “It felt like this little prayer of mine was cast out into the darkness. Although it seemed like nothing was really changed in my life, it was a time of patient waiting.”

That summer she made plans to join the Christ in the City program in Denver, where she worked as a missionary with Fraternas and lived with 20 young adults serving the homeless. It proved to be a period of discernment. She had stopped dating and considered joining the religious community.

At that time, she embraced the Lord’s call to the consecrated life. She stayed there for several years, serving in different capacities—leading youth and women’s groups, assisting at a Catholic OB/GYN and family practice, helping at retreats and giving talks.

“All the while, my prayer life was deepening and intensifying,” she said. “I was spending more and more time before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and I... CONTINUED ON PAGE 19
Safe Environments

Monthly update

By ERIN NEIL

BRIDGEPORT—Each week the Office of Safe Environments will post a frequently asked question or tip on the topic of child safety, abuse prevention, VIRTUS training, mandatory reporting, criminal background checks, victim assistance, vulnerable adults and information from our Safe Environments Handbook.

Did you know?
Every U.S. State has a hotline for reporting abuse of a minor. If you call the Department of Children and Family Services (DCF) Care-line here in Conn., at: 1.800.842.288, they will provide you with the number to call in the State where the incident took place. There are many resources for reporting abuse online so to be sure you have the correct one, call DCF. The U.S.C.C.B. Office of Child and Youth Protection is a resource for dioceses, including international contacts. Victim Assistance Coordinators in every US diocese may be found at: www.usccb.org/resources/victim-assistance-coordinators-around-us.

Additional Information:
The child abuse hotline in each state will ask for your name and contact information, the name and contact information of the perpetrator, the name, date of birth and contact information of the victim and his or her parents’ information. The more details you are able to provide, the more likely they can accept a report for further review; however, this should not stop you from reporting what you know and this does not mean that you should investigate since this may interfere in a police investigation. You can start a report and if you receive more information then you should call in a new report. You may also ask a hotline operator to keep your information confidential. When contacting the police in a non-emergency, begin with the police department in the town where the incident occurred.

Several Catholic dioceses outside of the US have a dedicated person in place to assist with an allegation of abuse that occurs internationally, and they may be able to provide you with a contact in local law enforcement. If you don’t know what to do with an international report of child abuse, start with the local police department in the town where you received the information. The USCCB Office of Child and Youth Protection is also a resource for dioceses. Victim Assistance Coordinators in every US Diocese may be found at: www.usccb.org/resources/victim-assistance-coordinators-around-us.

(To report abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult or an incident of child pornography in the Diocese of Bridgeport involving any person from the Church, call DCF at: 1.800.842.2288 and Erin Neil, L.C.S.W. at: 203.650.3265 or Michael Tintrup L.C.S.W. at: 203.241.0987. You may also contact a Third-Party reporting hotline: www.lighthouse-services.com/diobpt or call: 833.990.0004.)

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Catholic Radio

Veritas Network expands to include 103.9 FM

By JOE PISANI

RIDGEFIELD—Since he began Veritas Catholic Network three years ago, Steve Lee has prayed for EWTN’s founder, Mother Angelica, for guidance, and also to St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Franciscan friar martyred by the Nazis, who was an early champion of mass media to spread the faith.

The network, which is an affiliate of EWTN and broadcasts at 1350 AM and 103.9 FM, recently received a first-class relic of St. Kolbe, the Polish priest who was killed by a lethal injection at Auschwitz. St. Pope John Paul II called him the “patron saint of our difficult century,” and he is venerated as patron of radio operators and journalists.

St. Kolbe believed in the power of the media to deliver the Gospel message, Lee said. The saint, who published a magazine and built the first Catholic radio station in Poland, told his friars, “Remember, the purpose of every effort is to disseminate the faith by the written word, the spoken word, and perhaps someday through producing films.”

That’s a mission Lee, president & CEO, has embraced since founding Veritas, which broadcasts Catholic programming 24 hours a day throughout Fairfield County, parts of Long Island and New York.

His spiritual director, Msgr. Kevin Royal, was the one who suggested that Lee begin a devotion to St. Kolbe.

“He was a big-time media guy with a million readers a month, and his radio station was broadcasting the truth, battling Nazi propaganda,” Lee said. “He was like Mother Angelica 50 years before her time.”

The more Lee learned, the more he prayed. Then, he petitioned St. Kolbe’s monastery in Poland for a first-class relic. With the help of Father Samuel Kachuba, the chaplain of Veritas, they drafted an official request, which was granted.

Lee and his wife Roula went to Holy Cross Parish in New Britain to receive the relic.

Perhaps it was the intercession of St. Kolbe, when four days later, the station’s application for an FM translator was approved after six months of waiting, allowing the network to also broadcast on 103.9 FM.

Lee says his goal is to move the network into the rest of Connecticut, Long Island, possibly Rhode Island and deeper into New York. During 2022, Veritas is looking to launch two to three new shows to complement its five local programs. He also hopes to hold a Catholic conference and sponsor a pilgrimage.

“This is the year we hope to get out into the community to cover parish and school activities in addition to secular festivals and events,” he said. “Our goal is to offer the peace Jesus can offer through the teachings of the Church.”

Lee said he is very pleased with the listener response to Veritas’ programs, particularly “Let Me Be Frank,” hosted by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, who recently interviewed theologian Scott Hahn.

“They are like desserts when he interviews people,” he said. “The real attraction is the bishop himself, when he goes in depth and, for example, talks about the Eucharistic document the U.S. bishops put out or how to prepare for Advent or growing up in Brooklyn or when he lived in Rome.”

New local programming includes “The Frontline with Joe & Joe,” “Restless,” a talk show with Liv Harrison, who is a Catholic media personality and comedian, and “Focus on Veritas.”

“Focus on Veritas,” a half-hour weekly show brings committed Catholics on the air to talk about their work.

“There is so much bad news out there that we wanted to focus on some of the good things that people are doing,” Lee said.

“Restless” explores topics pertinent to young adults, such as how to evangelize in the workplace and how to navigate the single life with an eye toward marriage. Father Joseph A. Gill, pastor of St. Jude Parish in Monroe, is joined by Lauren Doyle, Diane Krenzle and Javier Tremarali.

“Restless’ is a great show, and I love listening to them,” Lee said. “I smile, I laugh, I nod my head. They are doing a great job, and their audience is growing.”

Liv Harrison, a Catholic comedian and mother of two children, hosts a nightly talk show from 8 to 9 pm once a week.

“She does a monologue and interviews guests and talks about what’s happening in the world,” Lee said. “It has the feel of a late-night talk show. I love her energy. She has a great personality.”

“The Frontline with Joe & Joe” features Joe Pacillo and Joe Recinello. It is described as “a fearless culture commentary from America’s kitchen table.”

Lee says the listener response he has received has reaffirmed his commitment to the mission of Veritas.

“Do you know why we’re doing this?” Lee asked. “We’re doing it for the man who sent me an email and said, ‘Since I began listening to Veritas, I started to learn the reasons behind Catholic teaching and devotions…and my faith has gotten so much deeper.’”

A woman told him that she was in the car with her middle-school son when they got into a conversation about something they heard on Veritas, and their discussion continued over dinner with the rest of the family.

“We’re also doing it for the family who had Veritas on their father’s radio as he lay in bed those final weeks before he passed away, when there was no one to keep him company.” Lee said. “We are doing this for everybody in our listening area and for their families. By listening you strengthen your faith and you strengthen your family…and your family strengthens the community.”

He also encourages people to listen through the Veritas app, which is available for Apple and Android devices and offers great reception, along with podcasts and live-streaming. The app has listeners all over the world, from South Africa to England, Canada, Florida and California. It is available at the Apple App Store and Google Play by searching for Veritas Catholic Network. Or you can visit www.veritascatholic.com/listen.

There are currently some 400 EWTN Radio affiliate stations in the United States. Lee says Veritas reaches an estimated audience of 900,000 people, including 400,000 Catholics in the Bridgeport Diocese.

EWTN programming includes “Catholic Answers Live,” “Called to Communion” with Dr. David Anders, “Kresta in the Afternoon,” “The Doctor Is In” with Dr. Ray Guarendi and “Women of Grace” with Johnette Williams. Veritas also simulcasts “The World Over” with Raymond Arroyo and classic programs featuring Mother Angelica and Father Benedict Groeschel.

Lee, who left his job in finance on Wall Street to start Veritas, credits his wife Roula with providing him the spiritual and moral support to undertake the venture. Residents of Ridgefield, they are parents of three children.
EDITORIAL

Where do we go from here?

In this reflection, which was originally posted on his Facebook page, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano focuses on the challenges the New Year brings along with our hopes and dreams for the future:

As the New Year begins in earnest, the question that seems to be on everyone’s mind is: where do we go from here? For the pandemic, which seemed to be diminishing through mid-fall, stubbornly refuses to end and the quest for a more normal return to life has been upended with the surge created by the Omicron variant. I know that many feel worn down by these last 20 months and yearn for a time when we can visit friends and family without fear and enjoy the simple blessings of life that we often took for granted. I know our collective prayer is that the latest surge will be the final crescendo in this pandemic and that the spring of this new year will finally bring real relief.

However, the question remains: Where do we go from here? It seems like an odd question to repeat. However, I believe it is the most pressing question that we face. For the answer may be as simple as the question: to go out in mission and to serve those around us, in small and great ways. Going out in mission does not necessarily mean to physically travel out into the world. Rather, you and I can go out in mission in our own homes and among our closest friends. In these cases, mission can take the form of compassion, patience and understanding with those with whom we live, many who are hurting as much as we are. It can mean picking up the phone to reach out to neighbors, fellow parishioners and friends, assuring them of our love, thoughts and prayers. Mission can also mean that we go out into the world prudently, carefully and courageously, connecting with people who feel abandoned or isolated, suffering from 20 months of anxiety and fear.

Whatever the pandemic brings, our mission is to be agents of healing and hope. That is our Christian mission. That is what the Lord is asking from us.

To read more of the Bishop’s reflections, you can follow him on Facebook: www.facebook.com/BishopCaggiano.

‘Ordinary’ time

Mgr. Thomas Powers, vicar general of the Diocese of Bridgeport, and pastor of St. John Parish, Darien, delivered this beautiful reflection at the recent general staff meeting for Catholic Center employees. We are honored to share his thoughts, which are an invitation to deeper holiness and gratitude for the mystery of Christ in the “ordinary.”

The Christmas season is over and all the decorations are down. Easter is still three months away. We now find ourselves in what is called “Ordinary Time” in the Church’s liturgical calendar. “Ordinary Time” is a period when we ponder deeply the earthly life and ministry of Christ. It is during this liturgical season that we hear the Gospel stories that we have come to know and love, including the miracles, the parables, the Sermon on the Mount and the Bread of Life Discourse.

We should not confuse the word “Ordinary” in this context, however, to mean plain, unimpressive or unexciting. (In fact, the root word “ordinal” suggests that this season is “ordered” according to the life of Jesus and also refers to the ongoing and rhythmical nature of everyday life.) And really, since the moment of the Incarnation, everything is “extraordinary!”

This season is an invitation for us to allow the mystery of Christ to penetrate more deeply into our hearts and recognize that much of our faith is lived out in the “ordinary,” even mundane activities of life.

I invite each one of us to make a concerted effort as we begin this liturgical period to find Jesus in the daily occurrences of life and to seek Him and His holy will in the midst of them. Along with finding the Lord in our worship at Mass and in our prayer, may we also seek Him and also refer to the ongoing and rhythmical nature of everyday life. (And really, since the moment of the Incarnation, everything is “extraordinary!”)

Editor’s Choice

Catholic Charities distributes COVID-19 rapid tests

BRIDGEPORT—The diocese received some good news when Catholic Charities executive director Mike Donoghue was informed by the State of Connecticut that it would be receiving 10,000 COVID-19 Rapid Test Kits. Catholic Charities will distribute 5,000 kits to its own clients throughout Fairfield County, and share 5,000 tests with parishes throughout the diocese. Each parish will receive 12 boxes with two tests in each box. In addition, 300 kits will go to each missionary parish in the diocese, where many people do not have access to the tests and have been hardest hit by the pandemic. In the photos: guests of Morning Glory Breakfast program in Danbury, sponsored by Catholic Charities, receive COVID-19 test kits.

CLERGY APPOINTMENTS

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

- Episcopal Vicar
  - REVEREND GUY DORMEVIL, appointed to Episcopal Vicar for Haitian Catholics for a term of three years. Effective date was January 1.
  - RETIREMENT
  - REVEREND GERARD-FRANTZ DESRUISSEAUX, retired Vicar Emeritus from the ministry of Episcopal Vicar for Haitian Catholics. Effective date was January 1.

- Vicar for Clergy, January 2022
  - Reverend Francis T. Hoffmann

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We should not confuse the word “Ordinary” in this context, however, to mean plain, unimpressive or unexciting. (In fact, the root word “ordinal” suggests that this season is “ordered” according to the life of Jesus and also refers to the ongoing and rhythmical nature of everyday life.) And really, since the moment of the Incarnation, everything is “extraordinary!”

This season is an invitation for us to allow the mystery of Christ to penetrate more deeply into our hearts and recognize that much of our faith is lived out in the “ordinary,” even mundane activities of life.

I invite each one of us to make a concerted effort as we begin this liturgical period to find Jesus in the daily occurrences of life and to seek Him and His holy will in the midst of them. Along with finding the Lord in our worship at Mass and in our prayer, may we also find Him by simply fulfilling our duties at home, work or school, by practicing virtue when no one is watching, by offering any suffering or inconvenience for the intention of others, or maybe just by smiling charitably to the stranger on the street. Very ordinary situations, yes, but when approached with the mind, heart and will of Christ, we can expect extraordinary things.
We are inherently worthy

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@docbpt.org.

I am writing to you from day five of my quarantine with COVID-19, and I can tell you right now it is not something you want to get. After now having first-hand experience with the virus, I have an even greater appreciation for all who worked to make vaccines and boosters readily available. From the way my body is reacting, I can tell that I would be much worse for wear if I weren’t fully protected. Our frontline workers are doing important, life-saving work right now and they deserve our love, our prayers and our unwavering support. When I think of them, I think of how Jesus would heal those who would come to Him. The paralytic (Matthew 9:1-7), the woman with the 12-year affliction (Mark 5:25-34), the man with leprosy (Matthew 8). Would He not provide healing whenever and wherever He could?

As I isolate out of love for others, I am actively working to remain grateful. I started chronicling at least one moment of joy and gratitude each day as I recuperate. The flowers my mom dropped off, adding beauty to my space. The soup a friend made, accompanied by a sweet personalized note. An at-home yoga video to keep my body moving even when it is hard. A beach I can walk to to see the sunset. A book a friend sent, reminding me they care.

Friends who journey to the store for late-night medicinal needs.

Although I am physically isolated, I feel an outpouring of love from those around me. They remind me I’m not alone and that my well-being matters to them.

As I isolate out of love for others, I am actively working to remain grateful. I started chronicling at least one moment of joy and gratitude each day as I recuperate.

Don’t be afraid to talk about your faith

Swimming Upstream

By Joe Pisani

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

Do you remember those good ole days when your parents told you that respectable people don’t talk about politics, sex or religion in polite society? They were three taboos you never mentioned.

I suspect the old-timers knew something we don’t, and if we heeded their advice, this world would be a happier place. Well, if not a happier place, at least a more harmonious place.

Times have changed. Just a casual observation of society will tell you that sex is the only thing the entertainment industry, the advertising industry, the celebrity class and countless others want to talk about, to the point that it has permeated all aspects of modern life and led to a pandemic of por-nography and sexual harassment. And for the past eight years, politics has been a national obsession that’s tearing us apart and destroying our spiritual and emotional equilibrium. We talk a great deal about politics, but it doesn’t seem to do any good because, as they say, talk is cheap. I’ve always thought that time could be spent more profitably in prayer, which produces decidedly more positive results. It’s reached a point where we don’t merely talk about politics.

We constantly argue about it in heated and sometimes violent confrontations. I have a lawyer friend who’s so obsessed with political causes he spends a large part of his day defending COVID-19 mandates, Build Back Better and abortion rights. I suspect he loses sleep thinking about them. He also believes there’s no place for religious beliefs in politics.

I have another friend in the medical profession, who believes liberals are responsible for the demise of everything good in America and the rise of everything bad, from secular humanism to militant atheism and persecution of the Catholic Church by the media and the entertainment industry.

Both of these people are believers, but they make me wonder, “What Would Jesus Do?” Does Jesus judge us by our political views? Is he willing to write off half of America because they’re conservative? Or will he turn his back on the other half because they’re liberal?

That brings me to the third traditional taboo—religion. For the most part, discussions about religion in secular society are derogatory. There’s been such a perversion of traditional values that the media often accuse religious people of being the cause of the country’s problems and of obstructing the democratic process because they put their faith first. They would probably have Christians burn a pinch of incense in honor of Caesar to demonstrate their true loyalties.

More than once, I’ve heard politicians and commentators blame religion for America’s unrest. Unfortunately, they often point their finger at the Catholic Church, contending that religion is a major obstacle to “progress,” as they try to push God out of modern life, with tragic results.

A friend of mine worked for many years in a privately owned home-care company that had as its mission statement “Put God first in all we do.” Over the holiday, he called to tell me a West Coast technology company had acquired them, and on the first day of the new ownership, the “Put God first” rule got tossed out. Profits and progress were probably more important. It’s a common occurrence in a society that’s antithetical to faith.

That attitude presents a challenge for Catholics who aren’t afraid to talk about their faith in an age when saying something as offensive as “God bless you” can get you hauled into the Human Resources department and brought up on charges.

The goal of any Christian who wants to spread the Gospel should be to break the taboo and bring Christ into a conversation. Talking about Christ is a lot more productive than talking about sex or politics, and in the process you might help Jesus save some souls, which should be the goal of every Catholic.

Countless people are wandering in darkness, and they don’t even know it. They’re oblivious of the Good News, and talking about your religion might be the only encounter they’ll ever have to open the doors of their hearts to Jesus and introduce them to an entirely new life. All you have to do is plant the seed and Jesus will do the rest. So in the new year, make a resolution to share your faith.
Eucharistic Exhibit of Bl. Carlo Acutis

MONROE—When Fran Bifulco of St. Jude Church heard about Blessed Carlo Acutis, the 15-year-old who documented Eucharistic miracles around the world before dying of leukemia, something stirred in her heart.

She began researching the Italian teenager, whose cause for sainthood is before the Vatican, and learned about the exhibit he created, which has been viewed in dozens of countries across five continents and in thousands of parishes and university campuses.

Through her efforts, the Vatican International Exhibit of Eucharistic Miracles, designed and created by Acutis, will be on display at St. Jude Church at 707 Monroe Turnpike on Saturday, January 22 from 1 to 6 pm and on Sunday, January 23 from 8 am to 2 pm.

Because of his intense love of the Blessed Sacrament, he used his computer skills to document Eucharistic miracles throughout the centuries. He spent four years on the project, which was made into an exhibit after his death and has been received praise throughout Europe and the United States.

Although his parents were not religious, Acutis developed a love for the Eucharist at an early age and often said, “The Eucharist is my highway to heaven” and that “being close to Jesus” was his life plan.

“Something stirred in my heart,” Bifulco said. “And I thought this is what we need to bring our youth back. They really need to see this exhibit because so many Catholics are unaware of the many miracles that prove the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.”

Bifulco said that Acutis, who was born in England and raised in Italy, was an ordinary teenager with a special love for Jesus. He played soccer, enjoyed computer games and doing practical jokes. He was declared blessed on October 10, 2020 after a miracle in Brazil was attributed to his intercession, and in a short time, he has earned the nicknames of “God’s influencer,” “Cyber-apostle of the Eucharist” and the “First Millennial Saint.”

As an amateur computer programmer, Acutis was able to catalog the miracles before he died, and they can be found on a website he designed—www.miracoleucaristici.org. The website has been translated into 17 languages, including Vietnamese and Swahili.

The exhibit at St. Jude consists of 159 panels with photographs and historical descriptions that provide a virtual visit to the places where the miracles occurred and prove that Jesus is really and truly present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Blessed Sacrament.

Bifulco, who is a “media missionary” for EWTN and promotes the network’s seasonal programming, recently retired after 21 years as parish secretary at St. Rose of Lima Church in Newton. She previously attended the exhibit at St. Louis Church of St. John XXIII Parish in West Haven.

“I was so moved that I felt this was something the Lord was telling me to do something about,” she said.

She approached Father Joseph Gill, parochial administrator of St. Jude, about bringing the exhibit to Monroe, and he agreed because of its importance to Catholics, especially young people.

“You can’t just look at the exhibit without knowing about Carlo,” she said. “He was a faith-filled young person, a regular kid who did something on his computer that will resonate with youth. That’s why I feel so strongly about this. This is a teenager. This is not an old person talking. Carlo is part of their generation.”

She said that ever since Acutis made his first Holy Communion he was in love with the Eucharist and received it as often as possible, in addition to praying the rosary every day because of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Acutis loved Assisi and would often go there. In the tradition of St. Francis of Assisi, he used his money to buy sleeping bags, which he distributed to the homeless living on the streets.

He died of leukemia in 2006 at 15, and his body was interred at Assisi. It was later exhumed and put in a tomb in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Assisi, where he is dressed in jeans, a track suit jacket and sneakers. His heart, which is considered a relic after his beatification, is in a reliquary in the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi.

Pope Francis has called Acutis a model of holiness in the digital age and suggested that his use of the computer resembles the efforts of the first disciples who traveled on foot to bring the Good News of Christ to people.

Pope Francis said Acutis is a role model for young people today, who are victims of “self-absorption, isolation and empty pleasure.”

“Carlo was well-aware that the whole apparatus of communications, advertising and social networking can be used to lull us, to make us addicted to consumerism and buying the latest thing on the market, obsessed with our free time, caught up in negativity,” the pope wrote. “Yet he knew how to use the new communications technology to transmit the Gospel, to communicate values and beauty.”

After examining the miracles in the exhibit, Bifulco believes they have a common thread—someone doubted the Real Presence or a Eucharist was defiled because of disbelief.

“All these miracles took place over the centuries, but I believe miracles are still happening today, and we need to recognize them,” she said. “Carlo was so moved by the Eucharist that he used his computer skills to bring these miracles to the world so that you can believe if you have doubts. We need something positive in the world today—something to give us hope.”

There is no admission fee for the exhibit, but visitors are encouraged to make a free will offering, and to wear a mark, she said. Those interested in bringing the exhibit to their parish, may contact Bifulco at fran_gargano@hotmail.com.
Parish News

St. George Children’s Choir debuts

By Rev. Andrés Alexis Moronta,
pastor of St. George Church in Bridgeport

“Ask and it will be given
to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be
opened to you” (Matthew 7,7).

Since arriving at St. George Catholic Church on July 1, 2020, my dream and prayer was to have a children’s youth choir composed of voices and instruments. The divine providence of God, the Virgin Mary and the intercession of St. Joseph made this small dream become a reality this Christmas Eve, December 24, 2021. I knocked on the door of the Diocese of Bridgeport when I applied for a grant of $8,000 to help begin the children’s youth choir and the youth ministry at St. George. It is thanks to the leadership of Bishop Frank J. Caggiano and the generous assistance from the Foundations in Faith organization that this dream has become a reality.

Thanks to God for giving me the opportunity to work with generous parishioners filled with the love of God and great zeal to preach the Gospel of the Risen Christ. In September 2021, we began rehearsals with a group of 16 children, youth and adult voices and instruments. The children and youth of St. George have a great desire to share their musical talent and their love for God, and they do this all for His Glory and Honor, and God blesses their love for him with great spiritual fruits.

Thanks to the Divine Providence of God, and the Virgin Mary, and all the volunteers (Edward Carrillo, Aura Pineda, the children, youth and adults, and their supportive families) we were able to accomplish this mission of Evangelization through sacred music. With fraternal love, thank you to all of you for sharing your talents and time for the Glory of God and Salvation of Souls.

RAISE YOUR VOICES—The children’s youth choir at St. George Parish in Bridgeport was debuted on Christmas Eve, fulfilling the dream of Rev. Andrés Alexis Moronta, pastor.

‘God made us for joy’

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

NEW FAIRFIELD—The joy of the Christmas season should be experienced and lived every day throughout the year.

That’s the message hundreds of people gathered at St. Edward the Confessor Church heard from author and evangelist Chris Stefanick.

“God made us for joy,” Stefanick said. “The joy of God, the joy powerful enough to create the universe, is with you.”

Stefanick, author of the book, “Living Joy: 9 Rules to Help You Rediscover and Live Joy Every Day,” was invited to speak at the parish by the young adults’ ministry of St. Edward’s. The event drew parishioners from throughout the Bridgeport diocese and beyond. Each attendee was given a copy of the book.

The joy of God is an unstoppable force,” Stefanick said, recalling how when he was younger his parents sent him on a retreat that changed his life. He said he walked into a room and, “there was joy I had never seen before from a person praising God and I thought, I want what that guy has.”

Stefanick offered practical tips such as thanking God every morning upon awakening.

“Say, ‘Thank you for the struggles that will purify me today,’” and praise God every time you are annoyed,” said Stefanick, adding that those are opportunities to grow in faith and live in joy.

Fourteen-year-old Teresa Harkins, a parishioner of St. Patrick in Yorktown Heights, N.Y. who attended the event with her family, thought that was good advice.

“I’m going to start giving thanks to people who annoy me,” she said. “I want to change. I want to be happier and other people will be happier, too.”

She also liked his advice about loving yourself.

“Love yourself,” Stefanick said. “To receive love well, you have to claim that you’re lovable.”

Stefanick said many people suffer from negative self-talk and say things to themselves that they would never say to another person.

“You need to lay claim to your truth,” he said, as he encouraged the crowd to turn to each other and recite personal affirmations of, “I am loved, I am a child of God, I am blessed.”

“His message to accept that you are lovable, that you don’t need to earn God’s love, that He already loves you is awesome!” Harkins said.

Stefanick also spoke about friendship.

“It will help you grow and rebuild the Church,” Stefanick said, suggesting that bringing people to events to show how you live your Catholic faith every day, will be the light that attracts others to want to also live in the light of Christ.

As for life’s challenges, Stefanick said, welcome them with grace.

“Frame your mind with faith,” he said, adding life happens but it’s all part of a beautiful picture framed in the faith of Jesus Christ.

Juliana Oyola, a parishioner of St. Mary in Bethel, who attended the event with other parishioners from her parish, said she was impressed with Stefanick’s message of joy.

“You fill yourself with God, there’s a joy no one will take away,” she said. Her friends and fellow parishioners Kathleen Keener and Matilde Cafferty agreed. “The frame is your faith, and the idea is that we let God make the masterpiece,” Keener said. “We have to be joyful in all the circumstances in life,” Cafferty added.

Stefanick, whose presentation was punctuated with laughter, nods of agreement, an occasional Amen and applause, posed for photos with participants and signed copies of his book at the end of the night.

As the crowd exited the church, brothers, Marc and Greg Pin, reflected on Stefanick’s message of living joy.

“I was amazed at just how simple and basic it is,” said Greg Pin, a parishioner of St. Edward, who encouraged his brother to attend. “He’s basically saying get up, give thanks to God, be faithful and surround yourself with friendships.”

His brother Marc, a parishioner of St. Elizabeth Seton in Ridgefield, agreed.

“Put your faith in Jesus,” he said, “everything else will take care of itself.”
March for Life

It’s important to pray and make our voices heard

Editor's Note: As Fairfield County Catholic goes to press, hundreds from the diocese are planning to participate in the 49th Annual March for Life. This article takes a look at the preparation and goals of marchers from the diocese in a pivotal year of decisions.

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The 49th annual national March for Life on January 21 will bring tens of thousands of people to Washington D.C. as the Supreme Court considers a ruling that could weaken or overturn the Roe v. Wade decision, which since 1973 has led to 63.5 million abortions in America.

People of all faiths, denominations, races and backgrounds converged on Washington to march for life and stand against abortion. This year’s theme is “Equality Begins in the Womb.”

“There is a strong hope that the court will either overturn Roe or send the issue back to the states, which is a good thing because many states are already passing pro-life laws to protect the unborn,” said Maureen Ciardiello, coordinator of Respect Life & Project Rachel for the Diocese of Bridgeport.

She said that polls on abortion in recent years have indicated that up to three-quarters of Americans favor significant restrictions on abortion and that an increasing proportion oppose tax dollars going to support abortion facilities.

The Washington event includes a rally on the National Mall and a march to the Supreme Court. Last year’s march was a virtual event because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In previous years, attendance was estimated as high as 100,000.

Ciardiello said, “Some local efforts are planned this year despite the challenging times in which we are navigating.”

St. Theresa Church of Trumbull is sponsoring a bus to the march, and the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull will hold a live-streamed pro-life Holy Hour that day for those who are unable to attend the march but would like to participate prayerfully.

“St. Theresa Church of Trumbull is sponsoring a bus to the march, and the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull will hold a live-streamed pro-life Holy Hour that day for those who are unable to attend the march but would like to participate prayerfully. During Eucharistic Adoration, a Pro-Life Scriptural Rosary will be prayed, concluding with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.”

Dave Janny, a parishioner of St. Theresa’s who is coordinating transportation, said, “For those who have been to the march, you know what a spectacular and moving experience it is very important that we pray and make our voices heard.” He noted that later this year the Supreme Court will announce its decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, an appeal by Mississippi to remove a lower court’s injunction on a law that bans most abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy.

“It is so important that we persevere in prayer and make our voices heard in opposition to abortion to protect the lives of babies and to help mothers who are faced with the decision,” said Ciardiello.

“Prayer goes a long way. People should continue praying for an end to abortion even if they can’t get to a Holy Hour. Pray a rosary, last, do some penance or offer up good works to remember the day in some way.”

Ciardiello praised the pro-life efforts of St. Theresa, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Aloysius in New Canaan, St. Rose of Lima in Newtown, the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist in Stamford, and St. Edward the Confessor in New Fairfield.

She also praised the faithful who conduct vigils at the abortion clinics in Bridgeport, Stamford and Danbury. There are chapters of Sidewalk Advocates for Life in Stamford and Danbury, and she urged people to get involved in their counseling ministry, whose goal is to provide “a peaceful, prayerful, loving and law-abiding sidewalk outreach” to women and staff outside abortion facilities so they can pursue “life-affirming alternatives.”

Ciardiello also coordinates Project Rachel, a ministry of the Catholic Church that offers a program to help post-abortion women in the healing process.

In previous years, attendance was estimated as high as 100,000.

Catholic Cemeteries names bereavement director

By JOE PISANI

Dean Gestal, director of Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport, has announced a bereavement initiative that will provide support to the families and friends of the almost 2,000 people who are interred in the diocesan cemeteries each year.

It will be organized by Carolyn Killian, who was recently named director of bereavement for Catholic Cemeteries. Killian ran the bereavement program of the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena and St. Agnes in Greenwich and has trained facilitators in other parishes who can lead the nationally recognized New Day bereavement support group in which participants are guided through the grieving process.

“With Carolyn’s guidance, we will integrate the New Day program into the training that our family advisors receive,” Gestal said. “We look forward to collaborating with the deaneries and parishes as this program is rolled out. We also hope to partner with funeral homes in the diocese by extending them support and assistance.”

“I am thrilled to have this opportunity,” Killian said. “Our mission is to serve God by serving others. Dean hired me to meet the unmet needs in the diocese to offer bereavement services. We have a program that is award winning and road-tested. It’s just a matter of rolling it out.”

As a member of the Parish Partners Ministry of St. Catherine parish, Killian organized a bereavement training initiative several years ago based on the New Day program, along with parish volunteer Father William F. Platt and Jeannemarie Baker, who began Parish Partners.

New Day is a faith-based program, written by Sister

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14
Discipleship

How Catholics can learn to evangelize

By JOHN J. KENNEDY

Mention the word “evangelization” to the average Catholic and the reaction will likely include a range between confusion and fear. To many, evangelization evokes conservative zealots—or it’s what other sects do, not Catholics. Catholics do not fully understand what the term means, which is odd because the word “evangelical” derives from the Greek meaning the familiar “gospel” or “good news.”

Yet we evangelize all the time. When we recommend a restaurant, movie, podcast or other things to friends, that’s a form of evangelization—sharing the good news of something we like, experience and that which makes us happy. We want to share it with others. The same goes for our faith.

The gospels are quite clear that Christians are called to evangelize—anything we say about Christ, our lives and how we live our life. (John J. Kennedy is a business development executive and a member of St. Leo Parish in Stamford, Conn.)

The Catholic Church remains the largest single religious denomination in the U.S., with over 72 million people self-identifying as Catholic (23% of the population). We don’t have to look too far to find worthy pilgrims. According to some polls, over 50% of Catholics have lapsed at some point in their lives, with only 11% returning. Granted, there have been plenty of self-inflicted reasons for people to leave the Church.

Yet the hunger for spirituality is growing. While participation in organized religion is dropping, including an increase in those not following any religion (“the nones”), more are describing themselves as “spiritual”.

So what holds us back from sharing the faith with others (evangelization)? Here are some common misperceptions:

1. It’s not my job. It’s the (fill-in-the-blank’s) job—priests’, holy-rollers’, Pope’s, etc. My job is to obey the commandments, none of which says specifically to evangelize. And to show up sometimes and give some money, right? But it is our job. It’s our Church (with God); it’s our job to keep it vital and share its hope.

2. It’s awkward to evangelize. It doesn’t have to be. We don’t want to be “that person” that people run from, who turns others off by spouting out their views. Sharing God’s gift and joys can be quiet, subtle and engaging. It can be done easily in comfortable conversation.

3. I’m not qualified. We don’t need an advanced degree in theology to guide people in the faith. Simply share your experiences, what works for you.

So now that we know we’re called to evangelize, what do we do?

1. Live with a glow. Let others see what you love and enjoy and how you live your life. Perhaps invite them to Mass or a Church-related function with you, then go for coffee or breakfast. The invitation/suggestion does not have to be a big, complex deal, though the effects may be.

2. Ask/suggest/invite vs. tell. Let’s say a friend is struggling with an issue. At the right time, ask if they have considered placing the issue before God and the Holy Spirit, asking for help. If sincere, how can that hurt or be offensive?

3. Pick your spots. Practicing evangelization does not mean going door-to-door. In opportune moments with someone, raise the suggestion. Perhaps invite them to Mass or a Church-related function with you. At the right time, ask if they have considered placing the issue before God and the Holy Spirit, asking for help. If sincere, how can that hurt or be offensive?

4. Be patient. If they don’t respond, that’s ok. You have planted the seed. God will help it germinate.

It’s not about the numbers; it’s about spiritual nourishment. Jesus said “Feed my sheep”, not “count them”. What if a third of active Catholics brought one new or lapsed Catholic to the faith? That’s a lot of nourishment to sustain people and help them in their lives! And isn’t that why we’re all here?

So, yes, it is part of our role as Catholics to share the good news with others. The Church is in our hands, with God’s. The vitality of our Church is our job. Let us be wise stewards of that responsibility.

And, by the way, you have to try this awesome new restaurant...

(Please contact us for a FREE consultation, print samples & quote. We also offer a simple online quote request form.)
Obituaries

Father Robert J. Maty, 90

Father Robert J. Maty, remembered by many as the long-time pastor of the former St. John Nepomucene Parish in Bridgeport, passed away on Monday, January 17, 2022. He was 90 years of age.

He was ordained to the priesthood by the Most Reverend Lawrence J. Shehan, first Bishop of Bridgeport, at St. Mary’s Church in Bridgeport on May 25, 1957. During his many years of ministry, Father Maty served on the Priests’ Retirement Board, the Priests’ Council and as a member of the Board of Consultants.

Father Maty was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut on November 15, 1931. He was baptized at St. John the Baptist Greek Catholic Church on November 29, Bridgeport Connecticut in the Byzantine Rite. As a result, Father Maty received First Communion and Confirmation on the same day.

He transferred to the Latin Rite in 1953.

Father Maty attended grammar school at Sts. Cyril and Methodius School in Bridgeport and high school at Fairfield College Preparatory School in Fairfield, Connecticut, graduating in 1949. He attended college at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield from 1949-1951. Father Maty studied philosophy at St. Bernard Seminary in Rochester, New York, continuing there for his theology studies, which were completed in 1957. He was ordained to the priesthood by the Most Reverend Lawrence J. Shehan, Bishop of Bridgeport, at St. Mary’s Church, Bridgeport on May 25, 1957.

After his ordination, Father Maty first served as assistant at St. John Nepomucene Church in Bridgeport. In 1960, he served for one year as a teacher at Notre Dame High School while continuing to reside and assist at St. John Nepomucene Church. From 1961-1967, he taught at St. John Nepomucene Commercial High School. In 1967, he was transferred to St. Benedict Church in Stamford, serving as assistant. From 1968-1974, he served as assistant at Holy Name Church in Stratford and St. Thomas the Apostle in East Norwalk, and, for a brief time, the administrator of St. Gabriel Church in Bridgeport. He returned to St. John Nepomucene as Assistant in 1974 and in 1978, Bishop Walter W. Curtis appointed him pastor of that church serving in that capacity until its closing in 1991.

He next served as parochial vicar at St. Teresa Parish in Trumbull from 1991-1996. Upon his appointment as director of the Office of the Propagation of the Faith, he took up residence at Holy Rosary Church in Bridgeport. He retired from active ministry in 2001, but continued to assist at Holy Name Church in Stratford for a number of years.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano celebrated Father Maty’s Funeral Mass at Holy Name of Jesus Church in Stratford on Friday, January 21, with interment at St. Michael Cemetery in Stratford.

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Deceased Clergy of the Diocese of Bridgeport January 23—February 19

January
23  Rev. James J. McCormick .......................... 1965
27  Msgr. Thaddeus F. Malanowski .......................... 2020
28  Msgr. Francis G. Gallu .................................. 1996
30  Msgr. Joseph R. McCarthy .................................. 1964
31  Rev. James F. Cavanaugh .................................. 1990
31  Rev. James F. Desmond .................................. 1963
31  Rev. Addison George Wright, PSS .......................... 2017

February
2  Rev. Joseph W. Kupec .................................. 1978
  Deacon Bartholomey J. Mauceri .......................... 2004
3  Msgr. Martin F. Doran .................................. 1967
  Rev. Robert F. Albert .................................. 1995
4  Msgr. William F.X. Casey .................................. 1978
  Rev. Francis Sangiovanni .................................. 2019
6  Msgr. Martin J. McDermott .................................. 1986
  Rev. James F. McGrath .................................. 1971
10  Rev. William R. Nagle .................................. 1979
12  Rev. John J. Filip .................................. 1984
13  Deacon Matthew Ashe .................................. 2008
  Deacon Rodney L. Varney .................................. 1988
17  Rev. George M. Karcinski .................................. 2006

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Three diocesan teams make presence felt in state football

By DON HARRISON

For the first time in recent memory, three high school football teams from the Diocese of Bridgeport put forth excellent seasons and advanced to the CIAC State Tournament.

Top-seeded Fairfield Prep fared the best, reaching the championship game of the Class LL field where it lost to perennial power Darien, 42-7, on December 11. Coach Keith Hellstern’s Jesuits finished 11-2 and third in GameTime’s final Top Ten state poll.

Top-ranked St. Joseph, which had captured three straight state titles—the COVID-19 pandemic abolished the 2020 season—was stunned by Windsor, 35-31, in the Class L semi-finals on Dec. 5 after edging Hand, 21-20, in overtime in the tournament opener. Coach Joe Della Vecchia’s Cadets finished 10-2 and placed sixth in the final GameTime poll.

Notre Dame-Fairfield, which hadn’t competed in the state playoffs since 2003, surprised onlookers by winning eight of 10 regular-season games and putting forth a noble effort against eventual champion Cromwell/Portland in the Class S state opener before bowing, 29-20. Still, coach John Johnson’s Lancers could find considerable solace in their 8-3 season.

Ryan O’Connell, senior co-captain and lineman extraordinaire, provided much of the leadership and a sizable number of tackles (80, including five quarterback sacks) for Prep. He also scored five touchdowns as the occasional fullback, returning an 80-yard kickoff for a TD and even passed for a TD.

Aidan Graham made the Register’s 89th All-State Football team as well as the Coaches and Walter Camp All-State squads. Prep’s senior wide receiver, Tim Pearson (51 catches, 640 yards, 11 TDs), was named to the Coaches All-State team and senior placekicker Tim Pearson (51 catches, 640 yards, 11 TDs), was named to the Coaches All-State team and senior placekicker with three interceptions in the Cadets’ 35-7 win over Trumbull on Thanksgiving.

With a roster of just 21 players (only 12 of whom made significant contributions), it’s remarkable that Notre Dame achieved so much this season, Senior co-captain Tayshawn Dixon, a compactly built 5-10, 185-pounder, was an omnipresent factor as linebacker and running back, a major component in a defense that shut out two opponents and made life tough for other teams. Offensively, Dixon averaged 102.7 per-game rushing and topped the Lancers in scoring with 14 touchdowns.

Notre Dame’s 390-pound senior tackle and co-captain, Rakaigh Petway, was named to both the Coaches and Walter Camp All-State teams and was a third-team selection on the Register squad. Dixon joined Petway on both the Coaches and Camp teams, while senior center-defensive lineman Jaidyn Cummings, another co-captain, was chosen to the Coaches’ squad.

“Going into the season, I wondered how our roster size would impact us,” said Johnson, “but the type of kids we have made a lot of good things happen.”
Column: Thomas Hicks

Street Mysticism

POTPOURRI
By Thomas H. Hicks

“Mystical moments” can be taken to refer to “epiphanies.” Epiphany in Greek means an unveiling, there is some appearance of divinity among mortals. Someone grasps a deeper, more essential reality. There is a sudden illumination, a moment of transcendence. These mystical moments occur to many (most) of us. I can remember a couple particular such brief instances in my life.

I particularly remember an early Sunday Spring morning. I was visiting my sister, and was alone on her porch. I sensed the fresh dawn, and it is the sounds I particularly remember: the chirrup of grasshoppers in the sunshine; the clicking dishes from the kitchen; the radio purring in the background; the yells and laughter coming from a basketball court. Again, there was a sensation of intense happiness and a union with a “Greater Vitality.”

I’m convinced that these brief, priceless moments happen to most of us. In 2016, the Gallup organization asked Americans if they had had a mystical experience, a moment when they went beyond the ordinary self and felt connected to some infinity. Eighty-four percent of the respondents said they had had such an experience at least once.

There is such a thing as “street mysticism,” moments of divine illumination. Most of us are momentary mystics, “street mystics” who have mystical moments that come now and again upon us, moments of sudden divine illumination.

Street mysticism involves only a small portion of what is given to the great mystics, but God does take an opportunity for breaking into human times. Life gives us moments, and there are times when time withdraws and boundaries blur, and there is a personal experience with God. Something is glimpsed. There is a kind of expansion of consciousness to a greater reality, an expansion beyond image or actual thought. There is a kind of intuition, an immediate awareness. Something is revealed beyond ordinary seeing, and there is a feeling of integration with that reality.

T.S. Eliot, in “Little Gidding,” spoke of “the timeless moment” and the particular place where it is experienced as “the intersection.”

Unfortunately, in our times mysticism has been neglected or shelved or ignored.

Merton spoke of “street mysticism,” and Thomas Merton spoke of “street mysticism,” by which he meant “mystical moments,” which many (most) people have.

“The time is fast approaching when one will either be a mystic or a non-believer (Karl Rahner).

I have long been fascinated and intrigued by mysticism and mystics. A certain state of prayer is termed “mystical.” It affirms the possibility of a direct contact with God, that is, without intermediaries. That statement amounts to saying that it is possible for a human being to “touch” the absolute, the ultimate Reality. There is an experiential knowing of God. The Divine Essence makes itself palpable. There is the fascinating terminology mystics use: they speak of a “transforming union,” of a “spiritual fusion” of the soul and the Divine Essence. The mystics speak metaphorically of “spiritual espousals.”

Mysticism is not a peculiarly Catholic phenomenon. There are the mystical systems of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism; and the mystical phenomena have a striking resemblance. As Simone Weil stated metaphorically of “spiritual espousals.”

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A legacy business: Patrick Baker & Sons adapts to changing market

By JOE PISANI

When Patrick Baker and his wife Patricia began their religious supply store 40 years ago, it was a family affair. Their seven children regularly helped with the business and learned the secrets to success from their parents.

Daughters Mary and Maureen still recall sending out catalogs, setting up display windows and answering phone calls. Most importantly, they remember their father’s admonition about the importance of good customer service.

They were lessons well-learned. Today, Mary Pat and her husband David Threlkeld, along with Maureen Baker Kelly and their siblings Sean and Michael, carry on the family tradition. They honor the legacy of their parents, and Patrick Baker & Sons, the premier church supply company in the Northeast, continues to evolve.

Still family-owned and operated, it serves churches and customers throughout New England and the country, reaching as far as England, Bermuda and the Caribbean.

“We pride ourselves on providing value with quality and service,” says Mary, president of the company.

Her husband, David, who is chief operating officer, said Patrick Baker & Sons has continued to respond to the needs of customers as the market changes.

“The passing of Patrick and Patricia, it became apparent the company would need to rationalize having a large brick-and-mortar showroom, especially since much of the business was migrating to the internet,” he said. “We had to make the difficult decision to withdraw from the retail store business in order to concentrate on the wholesale and internet business.”

In 2013, the Baker children took over the company and implemented new accounting and computer systems and developed a complete inventory system. They revamped communications, expanded the internet presence for retail and wholesale customers, and made efficiencies that ensured the customer experience would be a smooth one.

Most recently, they leased warehouse space from the new owners of the Southington building and created a system that lets retail customers purchase online or through a “let-us-shop-for-you” model, David said.

“Despite not having a shop front, we can still cater to our retail customers either through the website or by phone,” he said. “Customers can call a direct number, and one of our retail associates will help with the purchase, which can either be shipped to the customer or picked up by them,” said Mary, who manages the day-to-day business with David, Maureen, who is vice president, and Linda Salmon, operations manager.

Patrick Baker has two websites—churchgoods.com is the catalog site, and churchGoods-Gifts.com is for retail customers.

“Our goal is to provide quality products with exceptional service efficiently and at a reasonable price,” said Maureen, who recalls the mantra that her parents established: “Respect your customers and treat them the same way you would want to be treated.”

Their mission remains the same—to be the principal supplier of religious goods and services in the Northeast and beyond, while delivering quality service at a fair price.

The immigrant success story that became Patrick Baker & Sons began in 1954, when Patrick and Patricia with their daughter Posey came to the United States from Dublin and settled in Connecticut. Patrick was employed as a candle salesman for Emkay Candles of Syracuse, N.Y., and would be away from home for weeks at a time, covering his New England sales territory.

Patrick later joined Jack Lenehan, who was Patricia’s uncle, in his church goods business, which eventually became the business they started and loved so much. We’re thrilled to be continuing it in honor of them.”

As the business climate changed, the company made a strategic decision to concentrate on the core business in Southington and close the other stores, Mary said. Today, 80 percent of the business is wholesale and 20 percent retail.

“As kids, everybody had a part,” Maureen said. “We always have been involved in some way and somehow—unloading boxes and sending out catalogs. My dad would always say, ‘Know your product’ whenever someone didn’t know something about a product.”

“We respect our parents for all the years and hard work they put into the business,” Mary said. “We were able to continue the business they started and loved so much. We’re thrilled to be continuing it in honor of them.”

Mr. and Mrs. Baker were known for their integrity and service throughout New England. Among the many honors they received over the years was the St. Joseph Medal of Appreciation from the Archdiocese of Hartford for their service and devotion to the faith.

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With the closing of the Southington retail showroom, nothing has changed, Maureen said.

“The warehouse is at the same location on 1650 West Street and pick-up days are Tuesday and Thursday. Customers may order and pick up their merchandise, which was commonly done during the COVID-19 pandemic, or have it delivered. Orders for retail customers are shipped out.

“Many places were forced to shut down, but our church goods business is busier than ever,” Maureen said. “We also personally shop for people. Cindy Thomas is in charge of internet and retail fulfillment, and if people have an issue or need to speak to someone, she will have the answer.”

This proves especially helpful for those who may have difficulty navigating the internet.

David said the company’s success is attributable to a committed, hardworking staff, known and respected in the industry, particularly Mike Sebetta, who has been delivering to customers for over 30 years; Jody Kowalczyk, who manages the day-to-day business with David, and Mike Chambers, who is in customer service and is knowledgeable and helpful; Mike Baker, who is in outside sales and is well-regarded in Southern Connecticut and the New York City area.

“We’re optimistic about the future,” David said. “We are reacting to changes as companies must react to change and looking to have partnerships with all our customers. One thing we know—Patrick and Patricia will be looking down on us.”

Lenehan & Baker in Hartford. When his partner retired, he formed Patrick Baker & Sons. In 1983, he moved the business to 1650 West Street in Southington, where they built a new store and warehouse.

Several years later, the company expanded the showroom and retail space to nearly 8,000 feet. The business was so successful, they added a satellite store in Fairfield in 1988, and nine years later a showroom on Madison Avenue, a block from St. Patrick Cathedral in New York City. At one point, six of their seven children were working in the business.

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Parroquia ‘Sacred Heart’

Siete años de hablar español en el corazón de Stamford

Por MARICARMEN GODOY

STAMFORD—Hace siete años el P. Alfonso Picone, un carismático sacerdote que venía desde su natal Italia y siguió aun el P. Alfonso llegó a la parroquia. marcha desde el primer día que (Sagrado Corazón) fue puesto en que en la iglesia Sacred Heart produce alabar a Dios a través iglesia atraídos por la alegría que este sector con el apoyo de varios hizo al inicio de su traslado a escritó al Obispo fue en base a la parroquia Sacred Heart, ubi- pidiéndole autorización para debido a que a la misa en inglés o italiano y posteriormente inicio una jornada especial para invit a

“Cuando llegué a la iglesia de Sacred Heart (Sagrado Corazón de Jesús) me di cuenta que tenía vecinos que tenían puelquerias dominicanas, ecuatorianas, que habían tiendas puertorriqueñas, restaurantes guatemaltecos, y que en las paradas de buses escolares los niños y sus padres hablaban español. Entonces me dije: ¡este no es solamente un barrio de adultos mayores italianos, éste es un vecindario hispano de la primera misa en español.

En forma humilde, como es su personalidad, el P. Alfonso aclaró que hablar en español es parte de la lengua obligada que debió aprender siendo seminarista y como fue estudiante de Literatura y Letras francesas y Latinas, los idiomas para él son fáciles de apren- der. “Hago lo que puedo. Antes de oficiar la Misa dominical hispana de la 1:30 de la tarde estudio en español la Biblia, el orden de la homilía, las oraciones y escuché el Angélus que pronuncia el Papa Francisco y le pido fervorosamente al Espíritu Santo que venga en mi auxilio y que el Sagrado amoroso corazón de Jesús y María me acompañen”, cuenta en forma natural mientras encoge sus hombres. Declaraciones que ofreció en el 2016 en una entrevista especial a este rotativo.

Ya con el permiso del Obispo en mano, decidió tocar la puerta de las casas de sus vecinos y se dio cuenta que no solamente era necesario la misa de la 1:30 pm, sino que era hora de implementar la oración comunitaria, la confesión personal, un coro parroquial, monaguillos, lector y ayudantes para todas las celebraciones religiosas.

Por lo que los catecúmenos, agrupados y organizados en ese momento, animaron el hombro para lograr que los niños sirvan de monaguillos mientras estudiaban para la Primera Comunión y a los amantes de la oración en español les dio cabida los viernes a las 7 pm como parte de un horario especial y les pidió que le ayuden en el Ministerio de la Misa Hispana.

Según el P. Alfredo, las necesidades esenciales de su parroquia se van presentando acorde con el día. Hace unos años atrás parecía tarea difícil restaurar la escuela parroquial, pero gracias a que a la escuela privada “chárter” de New York alquilar ese espacio, ellos se están encargando de la reparación y la restauración, sin que a la iglesia le cueste ni un solo centavo. “Dios prepara sus caminos y lo único que debemos hacer es ponernos en sus manos con mucha fe y devoción”, dijo el sacerdote cuando estaban realizando las reparaciones.

Esa obra de infraestructura escolar le dio la opción de pedir a los directivos escolares varios salones para dictar catequesis, abrir clases de estudios bíblicos y hasta fomentar el apego comunitario, mientras sus fieles se reunían en el sótano de la iglesia. La iglesia que está consagrada al Corazón de Jesús también cuenta con una consagración especial a la Virgen Inmaculada Concepción. Después de cada celebración el sacerdote se inclina a los pies de la imagen de la Virgen y reza el Ave María como parte del ritual católico, apostólico romano.

Desde enero del 2015 que inició el Ministerio en español, el religioso ha podido registrar a 240 personas de origen hispano que acuden constantemente a las celebraciones eclesiásticas. De un total de 2000 feligreses en su mayoría de origen italiano y polaco. El grupo étnico que reside en el West Side y que acude a su parroquia en forma regular es de origen guatemalteco, seguido por dominicanos, peruanos, ecuatorianos, mexicanos, salvadoreños y hondureños. Desde el primer año frente al Ministerio Hispano ha podido celebrar por pedido de la comunidad mexicana la fiesta de la virgen de Guadalupe; pero también ha logrado que en la Semana Santa acudan cientos de feligreses hispanos al Vía Crucis, a la Hora Santa y a la Misa Pascual porque ofreció estos servicios en español y a las nueve de la noche del 24 de diciembre a la misa de Navidad. Y se prepara para celebrar la fies-

del seño de Esquipulas, patro- no de Guatemala. Lucas Romero coincidió con varios feligreses de que el Padre Alfredo es una bendición para las familias del West Side y dijo haberse conmovido cuando acudió a la Primera Misa en español en febrero del año pasado y escuchar que el sacerdote admitió que oró mucho para que el Ministerio Hispano sea una realidad y la forma en cómo le pidió a Dios señales para saber si estaba por buen camino. Durante la pandemia, el P. Alfonso ofreció decenas de misas a todo el mundo por Zoom. Estaba sorprendiendo cómo sus feligreses le solicitaban oficiar homilías de horas fúnebres, para familiares que morían con COVID en otros países.

Vocations

‘Do whatever He tells you’

By FATHER CHRIS FORD

It may be one of the saddest lines in all of scripture: “They have no more wine.” Although they speak to a specific challenge at a particular time and place, these words of Our Blessed Mother to her son at the Wedding Feast of Cana really underline a larger problem in our world today: the ways in which we seem to have lost sight of the Good News. It is something that we are all readily aware of; that there is a shortage of “wine” in the world, a shortage of the joy and peace for which our hearts thirst.

But as she diagnoses the problem, Mary (always the caring and attentive mother) also gives us the ultimate solution: Do whatever He tells you. The path to restoring and renewing the joy in our own hearts and in the world runs right through the very will of God. Each of us is filled with the presence of God, with grace and the Holy Spirit, by virtue of our baptism. The jars of our hearts are filled to the brim with the loving water that flows from the heart of the Father. At Jesus’ command, notice that the water does not disappear or even lower. But it is transformed. The call of Jesus in our lives takes the waters of baptism and activates them in a new way, transforming it into an occasion of true grace. The gifts that were given at our baptism are given new life in our vocation, as the water is transformed into the wine through which we can bring joy to the world in proclaiming and living our witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

As St. Catherine of Siena said, “Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.” To do that, we must first be willing to discover what God is asking of us, to ask what is the gift that has been entrusted to us to share with the world? In the First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul makes it clear that we have all received the gift of the Holy Spirit in a particular way: “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the spirit the expression of wisdom; to another, the expression of knowledge… faith… gifts of healing… mighty deeds… prophecy…discernment of spirits…varieties of tongues…interpretation of tongues.” What will your gift be? How will you set the world on fire?

We live in a world and an age that seeks freedom. “Doing whatever He tells you” isn’t always the most appealing thing. But we forget what Jesus commands ultimately brings about the sweetness of the wine! We forget that Jesus desires that His joy may be in us and that our joy may be complete. Just as in His healings, as in the Cross, as in the Sacraments, so too the commands and calls of Jesus reveal the depth of His love for us and how precious we are in His eyes.

When Mary turned to Jesus, she knew His heart is always with His people. She knew what we too must come to experience in our own lives: that when we turn to the source of living water, we find that our thirst will never go unquenched.

When we open our hearts to the possibility that God is calling us to something remarkable, we will discover that His will never leads us to sip any old or inferior wine, but to drink in abundance the very best He has to offer.

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thrive amidst challenges

By ELIZABETH CLYONS

BRIDGEPORT—As schools around the diocese gear up for Catholic Schools Week, it is important to reflect on the many continued achievements of our diocesan schools, even amidst the difficult days of the pandemic.

“While there can be no doubt that the pandemic has challenged our schools, our leaders, our teachers and our families, we must acknowledge the many blessings that have come from everyone’s commitment to mission and focus on academic success of students,” wrote Dr. Steve Cheeseman, superintendent of schools, in a letter introducing Diocesan Schools Office’s 2021 Annual Report.

Readers can peruse the annual report in more detail in the following pages, and will find many encouraging statistics that Catholic education is alive and well. In fact, student enrollment increased by 11 percent in 2021, which is the highest increase in enrollment in decades.

The fact that our diocesan Catholic Schools are thriving is especially evident when Dr. Cheeseman visits and gets to see students and teachers in action!

When Dr. Cheeseman visited St. Joseph School in Danbury, they kept him busy with a Saint project, games, violin, making the tallest tree in Innovation Lab, and reviewing math and reading skills.

At St. Raphael Academy in Bridgeport, first-graders couldn’t wait to show off their improved handwriting, and second-graders class couldn’t wait to share what they’d learned about Christmas in France and invited Dr. Cheeseman to make a yule log cake with them.

In the third grade classroom, they put his math skills to the test and in the Innovation Zone, there was nothing short of creative ideas going on. In preschool, he didn’t shy away from making slime and helping a group match their colors and shapes.

It didn’t matter which grade he visited, it was clear that the students and staff were just as happy to see Dr. Cheeseman as he was to see each and every one of them.

At St. Augustine Academy in Bridgeport, each classroom had a student representative excited to share with him what they were learning—the middle schoolers were working with Exact Path, running through their station rotations in reading and math, studying for their Spanish quiz by playing a game, where Dr. Cheeseman scored a point—buen trabajo!

One of the fifth-grade classes was working through a life science lesson and was able to talk through the plant life cycle, while the other fifth-grade class enjoyed showing him how to play We Wish You A Merry Christmas with maracas.

The fourth graders enjoyed talking to him about his role as superintendent and they all agreed they enjoyed his school visits as much as he did! With that, he ended his visit in grade 4 where he got blessed with Kindness Sprinkles, ranked in first place during their Kahoot game, and was told how grateful the students were to him for always protecting the schools.

With that, he wrapped up the visit with a special announcement for a dress-down day as an appreciation for all the student’s hard work!
Catholic Schools

A Dream is Launched:

Building for the Future campaign goal is met

By VIRGINIA WEIR

FAIRFIELD—As 2022 begins we are elated to announce that the $5M goal for the Building For the Future Campaign has been met. “Our families and friends came together to make this happen,” said Helen Burland, executive director. “They recognize how important this expansion is to the future of St. Catherine Center, and we are so grateful for their generous response.”

While plans have been in motion for more than two years, fundraising for the campaign actively began in March 2021. “To meet our campaign goal in less than a year is clearly a testament to the generosity of the Saint Catherine community and the leadership of the board and staff,” said Charles Chiusano, chairman of the board. “This is truly an exciting time for the Center.”

Campaign pledges and contributions will support an expansion that will double the size of St. Catherine Center, creating much-needed space for group and individual activities, including a commercial grade kitchen and hydroponic garden. Expanded programming will also be supported through the reserve account funded by the campaign.

Final plans are being developed, initial meetings with town officials have begun, and the project timeline is being reviewed. As the program moves forward, regular updates will be posted on the Project Updates webpage.

While the original goals for Building For the Future have been met, there are still opportunities to be part of the project. Contributions may be designated to the expansion and will be included in the project and reserve fund. (To learn more about the project or contribute, visit: stcatherinecenter.org.)

St. Catherine Center pageant: Starring role for students

By VIRGINIA WEIR

FAIRFIELD—The gym at St. Catherine Center for Special Needs in Fairfield was transformed into a beautiful starry night in Bethlehem, as students from St. Catherine Academy presented the annual Christmas pageant to an enthusiastic audience of parents and friends of the center.

In her welcome, Helen Burland, executive director, shared a quote often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.” “Our actors today will personify this,” she said. “We will be touched by their message…. Our students live the Gospel message, and they teach us every day—using as few words as possible—that there is value in every life.”

The familiar Nativity story has been presented each year since St. Catherine Academy opened in 1999. Roles are announced after Thanksgiving, and four weeks of rehearsals begin. Sr. Cheryl Driscoll, RSM, a teacher at the school, directs the play each year. In creating the script, she considers the abilities and personalities of the students. “Each student has their own unique gift to bring to this story. That’s part of the beauty of the pageant,” she said.

All students have a role. New students are usually angels or shepherds, while more prominent parts such as Mary and Joseph are played by those who have been in the pageant before. “We switch roles, so everyone has a chance to play someone different,” Driscoll said. “Those who have been in the pageant for several years now really understand the story and their parts. They’ve grown tremendously and are able to help the others.”

This year, Nyah Holmes was Mary and Vincent DiProperzio played Joseph.

Staff are also part of the cast, assisting students and helping with staging, lighting and costumes. Christmas songs move the story along and the audience is encouraged to join in singing.

“We look forward to this event,” said Michelle Rivelli, a board member and parent of a participant in the Center’s Adult Program. “It really begins the Christmas season for us, as I know it does for many others who come every year. Watching every student participate helps us focus on the real meaning of the hope and joy the season brings.”

As the pageant narrator announced at the beginning of the play: “This is the story of God become human, so it’s not the sort of thing whose meaning we can exhaust in one telling. Every time we listen to this story, our hearts are touched in a new way.”
Catholic Schools

Small but mighty: FIF expands mini grant program

By ROSE BRENNAN

BRIDGEPORT—Sometimes ministries need a little bit of help to reach their full potential. Luckily, Foundations in Faith is ready and willing to provide that little boost.

This helping hand comes in the form of the foundation’s “mini grant” program. Originally, the program was exclusively available through the St. John Paul II Fund for Religious Education and Faith Formation. But the new year means new beginnings for everyone, including Foundations in Faith.

Now, the mini grant program is available through all nine of the foundation’s funds. This means the impact of the program can extend beyond religious education and faith formation to other programs like Catholic nursing homes, vocations and seminarians, retired priests, evangelization, and much more.

“Mini grants are small but mighty,” said Kelly Weldon, Foundations in Faith’s director. “Unlike other grants, there are no lengthy applications with deadlines and no long waiting periods to hear back. These grants are for creative thinkers with great ideas to bring people closer together as disciples and missionaries in kinship with Christ.

Another program benefiting from the mini grant program is the Catholic Adventures program in Stamford. Members of this young adult ministry are also a part of Restless Catholic Media, which includes a podcast. Through a mini grant, Restless was able to purchase microphones to record their podcast at a higher standard of quality.

Foundations in Faith is hoping to provide more support through the mini grant program. Applications for mini grants are received on a rolling basis until the funds are exhausted, but they are offered by invitation only.

So how can you get an invitation to apply? Foundations in Faith wants you to “pitch” your idea to them by emailing kelly.weldon@foundationsinfaith.org. If the staff feels your idea fits one of the nine Foundations in Faith ministries and demonstrates exceptional innovation or need, you will receive the online application, and you’ll be on your way to applying for a mini grant.

Weldon is especially looking for applications that describe young people’s ideas for programs that build bridges.

“Think Cupcake Wars with the seminarians, or a rosary group for runners, or plans to organize another parish study of ‘Open Wide Our Hearts’ to further conversations on anti-racism, or an art exhibit where all cultures are represented in holy art,” Weldon said. “It should all start with ‘Wouldn’t it be cool if we ...’ or ‘If only we had ...’ statements.”

Weldon also encouraged collaboration between the nine ministries Foundations in Faith funds, recalling a project where participants at St. Catherine Center for Special Needs created a book filled with art and heartfelt messages for the retired priests at the Catherine Dennis Keefe Queen of the Clergy residence during the coronavirus pandemic.

Foundations in Faith is hopeful expanding the mini grant program will help drive collaboration and innovation in the Diocese. And now, that can happen across all nine of the foundation’s ministries.

(To learn more about the mini grant program, visit foundationsinfaith.org.)

ST. CHARLES BORROMEO PARISH in Bridgeport received a mini grant to fund the construction of a fire pit on church grounds.

Students honor Dr. King

NEWTOWN—Students at St. Rose of Lima School honored the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his legacy through reading and hands-on projects.
Catholic Schools

Immaculate High School students are commended

By WENDY ANN MITCHELL

DANBURY—Principal Wendy Neil of Immaculate High School announced that William Doran and Julong Williams have been named Commended Students in the 2022 National Merit Scholarship Program. A Letter of Commendation from the school and National Merit Scholarship Corporation, which conducts the program, will be presented by the principal at an awards ceremony to these two exceptional students. About 34,000 Commended Students throughout the nation are being recognized for their exceptional academic promise. Doran and Williams placed among the top 50,000 students who entered the 2022 national competition by taking the 2020 preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT).

“Those being named Commended Students have demonstrated outstanding potential for academic success, commented a spokesman for NMSC. “These students represent a valuable national resource; recognizing their accomplishments, as well as the key role that their schools play in their academic development, is vital to the advancement of educational excellence in our nation. We hope that this recognition will help broaden their educational opportunities and encourage them as they continue their pursuit of academic success.”

Immaculate High School is a private, non-profit Catholic college-preparatory institution serving students from 28 communities in Connecticut and New York. Founded in 1962, Immaculate High School also allows students to focus on their spiritual development, personal moral commitments and service to others. Located in Danbury, Conn., Immaculate High School is part of a diocesan-sponsored school.

Open House

Mater Salvatoris
College Preparatory School

Champions of their own lives

926 Newfield Ave
Stamford, CT 06905
(203) 489 0977
stamford.matersalvatoris.org
Catholic Schools

Bishop’s Scholarship Fund applications to open

BRIDGEPORT—Foundations in Education, Inc is pleased to announce that applications to the Bishop’s Scholarship Fund open February 1, 2022.

The mission of the Bishop’s Scholarship Fund is to help families afford a Catholic education at diocesan elementary schools in Fairfield County.

In the 2021-2022 academic year, the Bishop’s Scholarship Fund received 2,257 applications for tuition assistance and awarded 1,197 students in Kindergarten through Grade 8 nearly $2,500,000. Awards ranged from $300-$3,500 per student.

A composite of this past year’s average Bishop’s Scholarship Fund recipients includes:

- 49% raised by single parents
- 52% qualify for free or reduced lunch
- household average gross income = $58,724

The nineteen elementary schools welcomed 1,510 new students this year and continue to attract families looking for an exceptional in-person education.

“There’s no better time to experience the difference a Catholic School can make for your child,” remarked Foundations in Education Executive Director Holly Doherty-Lemoine. “We encourage all families who need financial assistance to apply to the Bishop’s Scholarship Fund. Consideration may be given to families with multiple elementary school-aged children.”

Applicants apply online via the FACTS Grant and Aid application and complete all questions relative to Bishop’s Scholarship Fund. The deadline to apply is March 15, 2022 for families with a child currently enrolled in K-8 at any of the diocesan schools and April 15, 2022 for families new to our schools.

Foundations in Education is a non-profit initiative created to assist the Diocese of Bridgeport’s ongoing mission to support Catholic education in Fairfield County.

(To learn how you can support Catholic education or for more information, visit www.foundationsineducation.org.)

YLA grants: ‘by youth and for youth’

By ROSE BRENNA

BRIDGEPORT—Back in October, Foundations in Faith announced the continuation of its Youth in Action grant program, designed to be a “by youth and for youth” initiative that encourages young people to step into the driver’s seat when it comes to their faith formation.

Foundations in Faith received a record number of applications this year, and is excited to announce the three ministries that were selected for the Youth in Action grant program in 2022.

First is the St. Ed’s Young Adult Ministry at St. Edward Church in New Fairfield. Their first event in July 2021 drew 70 young adults from the greater Danbury area, and they even had a write-up done in the Fairfield County Catholic. They’re hoping participation in the Youth in Action program will help them plan more events and engage more people.

Next was the St. James Teen Ministry at St. James Parish in Stratford. Unlike St. Edward’s, St. James’ teen ministry appears to be in its early stages of development into what’s sure to be a powerhouse of an organization. The adult leaders of the ministry believe participation in Youth in Action will both increase the program’s membership and longevity. They also hope to get involved with CONECT (Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut), which is an interfaith organization focused on social justice, and it’s very exciting to see young people get involved in such an organization.

The last grant recipient was the Youth Without Borders Retreat at Our Lady of Aparecida Parish in Danbury. This program stressed the importance of retreats to the young adults in this Brazilian parish, and that making it happen each year is a collaborative, multigenerational effort from everyone there. Our Lady of Aparecida also demonstrated interest in opening the retreat to young adults in other Brazilian Catholic communities at different parishes, exemplifying the collaboration element we wanted to see in potential programs.

Congratulations to this year’s Youth in Action grant recipients! We can’t wait to see all the great work you do!

St. Rose of Lima School

Rooted in Faith. Thriving in Academics.

Where Children in Preschool-8th Grade BLOOM in Mind, Heart and Soul

Come see why St. Rose School could be the right fit for your family.
Email admissions@srles.com to arrange a personal tour.

Join us for Open House January 30, 2022, 11:00 am - 1:00 pm

www.strosexschool.com | 203-426-5102
40 Church Hill Road, Newtown, Connecticut 06470

A Warm Welcome Awaits You!
St. Raphael Academy hosts vaccine clinic

By SUSAN CECERE

BRIDGEPORT—Earlier this month, on Catholic Academy of Bridgeport’s St. Raphael campus, CT Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz held a press conference with Deputy Commissioner Heather Aaron, Mayor Ganim, Executive Director Angela Pohlen, principal Sr. Elizabeth Doyle, and several state and local officials to discuss the importance of getting children vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to keep schools in person.

The conference was followed by a free vaccine clinic at St. Raphael for children and adults. Bysiewicz said the clinic location was a natural choice since a benefit of being vaccinated is greater resistance to COVID-19 and a shorter, milder illness in the event of a breakthrough case. All of this means children stay in school instead of being home either sick or quarantining, she said.

“Now, when we’re seeing this huge spike in cases, the governor and I are really focusing on how we can best protect our children,” Bysiewicz said. “We know in-person learning is the most effective. We are here to highlight that in Bridgeport, as of December 29, only 50 percent of children 12 to 17 are fully vaccinated. It’s even less among children 5 to 11, so that’s why we’re here.”

St. Raphael offers instruction for children in grades K-3, so its students are statistically the least likely segment of the population to be vaccinated. State Deputy Health Commissioner Heather Aaron said the vaccines had proven effective in keeping COVID-19 at bay.

Angela Pohlen, executive director of the city’s Catholic Academy, which includes St. Raphael, agreed. With children starting to require hospitalization, she said vaccinating the youngest members of the population was the highest priority.

Catholic Academy will be hosting numerous clinics in the coming weeks, and Pohlen invited anyone in the community to attend. “We welcome everyone,” she said.

CT LT. GOV. SUSAN BYSIEWICZ HELD a press conference with Deputy Commissioner Heather Aaron, Mayor Ganim, Executive Director Angela Pohlen, principal Sr. Elizabeth Doyle, and several state and local officials to discuss the importance of getting children vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to keep schools in person.

THE FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS at Greenwich Catholic School participated in the Great American Mail Race. After receiving an invitation from Sage at St. Thomas Aquinas School in Webster City, Iowa, each GCS 5th-grader was assigned two states. Students had to choose a Catholic School in each state, write a letter to the fifth-grade, complete a questionnaire about their fifth-grade experience and invite the other 5th-graders to participate!
The percentage of our students that graduate from our high schools.

The percentage of our high school students that go onto college or the military.

The percentage of our schools that are fully accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.
The Diocese of Bridgeport school system transforms the lives of 8462 students—preschool through high school. This includes students in 19 elementary schools, 5 high schools, 1 special needs school and 5 independent Catholic schools, all located throughout Fairfield County.

The content of this article is from our recently published Annual Report, which can be read in full on our website: DOBCatholicSchools.com

WHAT A BLESSING IT HAS BEEN TO RETURN TO OUR SCHOOL BUILDINGS! You can feel the excitement of students, teachers and administrators as you enter the building. The pandemic has certainly shown us the importance and the beauty of the connections that our school communities offer to each of us. It is a gift of community that has helped our schools through the rough times caused by this pandemic. While there can be no doubt that the pandemic has challenged our schools, our leaders, our teachers, and our families, we must acknowledge the many blessings that have come from every person’s commitment to mission and focus on the academic success of our students. In addition to increased enrollment across the diocese, we have also been able to commit resources to student’s educational and social-emotional wellness by adding counselors and academic interventionists.

The pandemic has also taught us that we are not always in control. Sometimes, though we try to control every facet of life, we realize that it is truly God that is directing our lives and our experiences. Acknowledging that and surrendering to His will are not always easy. However, finding the time to BE STILL, to surrender, to listen for His voice and to place our trust in Him is essential as we continue to navigate the sometimes-turbulent waters of our life’s journey. It is in these moments of stillness and surrender that we can truly experience the glory of God and enter a deeper relationship with Christ.

As we begin the new year, let us all find moments of stillness to offer our gratitude for all the blessings of our school community and let us listen for His voice so that we may truly encounter the Christ Child throughout the year. May you and your family have a year filled with God’s blessings of peace, health and happiness and may Our Lady continue to shower Her blessings on our Catholic school community.

Dr. Steven Cheeseman
Superintendent of Schools

PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Though the year was an unpredictable one with many obstacles and challenges, the Diocese of Bridgeport continued to achieve the goals set forth by the personalized learning initiative: to develop positive attitudes and interests of all students to better personalize their learning and to refine instructional practices in the classroom.

Our coaches have been working through the pandemic to support our students and our teachers pour care, love and hard work into their craft to support our students.

Having now completed the phased implementation, all elementary schools are currently offering a personalized learning initiative. Last year, the building out of innovation zones in the schools is continuing this year.

CLASSICAL CURRICULUM

Classical education has been introduced into the Diocese of Bridgeport with the establishment of classical charter schools that provide an education in the classical method. Classical education is centered in Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and shown students how to perform their peers.

ATHLETICS ASSOCIATION

One of the goals of our 2020 Strategic Plan was to create an athletic consortium to offer competitive sports programs within our schools.

THE SETON COLLABORATIVE

Another 2020 Strategic Plan initiative was the development of The Seton Collaborative (OSN) and help strengthen our Catholic school system. The goal is to assess ways in which we can drive down costs while simultaneously improving the quality of education.

In July 2021, St. Joseph High School (Trumbull, CT) unveiled the school’s 2nd annual student-led, year-round, 6-week, and community of friends. All are welcome to review our Strategy Plan online at sjhs.com. We are currently accepting applications for the 2022-2023 academic year!

Kolbe Cathedral High School (Fairfield, CT) is happy to offer the ECHO Perfect 10 Experimental Training to 11 and 12th graders this year. The program is designed to help students develop the skills they need to be successful in the workforce.

Cardinal Kung Academy (CKA) is now in its fourth year and has grown from 62 students in 2020-2021 to 105 students in Grades 7-12. This year, they welcomed a new Principal and several new teachers. The teachers have achieved a number of degrees and, in keeping with the liberal arts tradition, teach a broad curriculum.

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The Diocese of Bridgeport school system transforms the lives of students enrolled in our 19 schools through our commitment to health and happiness and may Our Lady continue to shower your family have a year filled with God's blessings of peace, joy, and love.

In turbulent waters of our life's journey, it is important to surrender, to listen for His voice and to place our trust in His will. It is not always easy, but finding the time to do so can bring a sense of peace and fulfillment.

Life's challenges are not always easy. However, finding the time to meditate and pray can bring a sense of peace and add richness to our lives. It is important to find moments of quiet reflection to connect with God and enter a deeper relationship with Christ.

With the help of Foundations in Education, we have been able to make great progress towards achieving the goals of the Personalized Learning initiative. 

- Understand and align learning with the gifts, talents, interests, and needs of each child.
- Use data-driven practices to provide students with individual and small-group instruction at their readiness level.
- Increase student ownership over their own learning.
- Create a personalized learning plan and profile for each student.
- Engage students in hands-on activities to develop their creative, computational, and design thinking skills.
- Improve digital infrastructure to support personalized learning goals.

More than $89 million in college scholarships were awarded to 530 graduating seniors from our diocesan high schools. The percentage of our Diocesan elementary schools that have student support professionals this year, which includes social workers, counselors, school psychologists, content and special education interventionists.

DID YOU KNOW?

Our student enrollment has increased by 11% this year which is the highest increase in enrollment in decades.

Our coaches have been working through the pandemic to support our teachers to drive instructional improvement. Every teacher in the Diocese of Bridgeport has had access to the Open Online School (OOSN) platform to facilitate virtual learning. The Open Online School provides a comprehensive program within all schools to honor our Catholic heritage and faith, and to address the specific needs of every student. The starting point is to identify what each student needs for success.

DID YOU KNOW?

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 
11 Corinthians 9:8

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In Education and Foundations In Faith that allow for our Diocesan high schools like Cardinal Kung Academy and St. Theresa School, to thrive and expand, and in our schools like St. Joseph High School, which has been able to attract students interested in nursing/physical therapy, graphic arts to give students the ability to transfer their learning to the real world. 

The 2021-2023 Strategic Priorities of the Diocese are to be published in the upcoming annual report. With unceasing determination, the Diocesan community, will make great strides toward this goal with purpose.

The Martire Student Leadership Institute is a primary focus of the Institute. The program seeks to provide leadership skill development to emerging student leaders. The skills learned during students' time at Notre Dame in Fairfield. Leadership skill development is a primary focus of the Martire Student Leadership Institute at Notre Dame in Fairfield.

Developing leaders who will contribute to the community and the greater good of society is the goal of the Martire Student Leadership Institute. The Institute seeks to provide leadership skill development to emerging student leaders. The skills learned during students' time at Notre Dame in Fairfield.

Classical education has been introduced into the Diocese of Bridgeport with the goal of embracing a philosophy of education that is ordered in Truth, Beauty and Goodness. It points to God in all aspects. Studies have shown that students who are classically educated are more likely to succeed in life and enter a deeper relationship with Christ.

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DISCOVER THE IMPACT OF OUR SCHOOLS BY VISITING AN OPEN HOUSE IN-PERSON*, VIRTUALLY, OR SCHEDULE A PRIVATE TOUR.

*The COVID-19 activity in Connecticut continues to evolve therefore we ask that you please check the schools website, or contact any school directly that you plan to tour for any updates regarding in-person visits.

BETHEL
St. Mary School | 203.744.2922
Open House: Wednesday, Jan. 26, 6:00pm-7:00pm
Registration is not required.
Visit stmarybethelct.org for more information.

BRIDGEPORT
Catholic Academy of Bridgeport | 203.362.2983
Virtual Open House for all four campuses:
Thursday, Jan. 27, at 6:30pm
Register at: catholicacademybridgeport.com
St. Andrew Academy | 203.373.1552
St. Ann Academy | 203.334.5856
St. Augustine Academy | 203.366.6500
St. Raphael Academy | 203.333.6818

BETHEL
St. Thomas Aquinas School | 203.255.0556
Open House: Sunday, Jan. 30, 1:00pm-2:00pm
Registration is not required.
Visit stasonline.net for more information.

GREENWICH
Greenwich Catholic School | 203.869.4000
Open House: Sunday, Jan. 30, 11:00am-12:00pm
Registration is required.
Visit casct.org for more information.

STAMFORD
The Catholic Academy of Stamford | 203.322.6505
Open House: Sunday, Jan. 30, 11:00am-12:00pm
Registration is encouraged but not required.
Visit CasCt.org for more information.

STAMFORD
Cardinal Kung Academy | 203.329.8296
Personal tours available by appointment.
Visit cardinalkungacademy.org for more information.

DANBURY
St. Gregory the Great School | 203.748.1217
Open House: Sunday, Jan. 30, 1:00pm-3:00pm
Registration is required but not required.
Visit saintgregoryschooldanbury.org for more information.

STRAFORD
St. James School | 203.375.5994
Two sessions being offered: 9:00am and 10:00am
Registration is required.
Visit stjamesstratford.org for more information.

STRIFFORD
St. Aloysius School | 203.966.0786
Personal tours available by appointment.
Visit sasonline.net for more information.

NEW CANAAN
St. Aloysius School | 203.966.0786
Personal tours available by appointment.
Visit sanconline.org for more information.

NEW CANAAN
St.rose of Lima School | 203.426.5102
Open House: Sunday, Jan. 30, 11:00am-1:00pm
Registration is encouraged but not required.
Visit stroseschool.com for more information.

NORWALK
All Saints School | 203.847.3881
Open House: Sunday, Jan. 30, 12:00pm-2:00pm
Registration is required.
Visit alsansnorwalk.com for more information.

Wilton
Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Academy | 203.762.8100
Open House: Sunday, Jan. 30, 12:00pm-2:00pm
Registration is not required.
Visit olfacademy.org for more information.

FAIRFIELD
Assumption Catholic School | 203.334.6271
Open House: Saturday, Feb. 5, 12:00pm-2:00pm
Registration is required.
Visit assumptionfairfield.org for more information.

Wilton
Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Academy | 203.762.8100
Open House: Sunday, Jan. 30, 12:00pm-2:00pm
Registration is not required.
Visit olfacademy.org for more information.

RIDGEFIELD
St. Mary School | 203.438.7288
Open House: Tuesday, Feb. 8, 9:00am for Preschool,
Wednesday, Feb. 9, 9:00am for K-8.
Registration is required.
Visit smsridgefield.org for more information.

RIDGEFIELD
Holy Trinity Catholic Academy | 203.929.4422
Personal tours available by appointment.
Visit holytrinitycatholicacademy.org for more information.

DISCOVER THE IMPACT OF OUR SCHOOLS BY VISITING AN OPEN HOUSE IN-PERSON*, VIRTUALLY, OR SCHEDULE A PRIVATE TOUR.

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Catholic Schools

St. Margaret Mary students share Christmas with seniors

By JOE PISANI

SHELTON—What started as a project for St. Margaret Mary Alacoque students to bring some Christmas joy to the residents of Gardner Heights Health Care Center spread throughout the community in the spirit of the season until hundreds of gifts were collected, from pajamas and socks to crossword puzzles and personal care items.

“What began as a little idea blossomed and grew rapidly,” said Heather Moura, director of Religious Education. “This is the result of the mustard seed that grew into a beautiful bush.”

It all began when Deacon David Sochacki and his wife Kathy made their regular visit to the home to pray the rosary and distribute ornaments to the residents and were approached by the recreational therapist Morgan Lovell who told them, “I wish you could do something for them for Christmas because many of them don’t have family.”

Deacon Sochacki approached Moura, who emailed the families of the 80 students in her religious education program. Many of the parents, in turn, spread the word to organizations they were involved with, including ambulance services, the Knights of Columbus, the Walking With Purpose Bible study group, Mary Kay beauty products and even the University of Connecticut dental clinic, which donated dental supplies.

Moura said the wide variety of gifts for the residents of Gardner Heights included toothbrushes, soap, cosmetics, lotions, perfumes, cologne, eyeglass chains, pajamas, slippers, socks, hats, gloves and bags of candy from the Girl Scouts. In addition, $400 in donations was collected, which will be used to finance an event for the residents.

There was such an outpouring of giving that each of the 100 residents received two bags of gifts with enough left over for people who move there in the future. “The students also made Christmas cards and helped me wrap the gifts over two weekends,” Moura said.

She was joined by parishioners Sarah Graham, Deacon Sochacki and Thomas Jensen of the Men’s Group, who loaded up four cars and brought them to Gardner Heights. Because of COVID-19 concerns, the students did not go to the home.

“It was the cutest thing. They ran out and hugged us and were shocked that the cars were piled to the top with gift bags. They unloaded them and brought them to the recreational room, where they will be distributed. And they’ll send pictures of the residents opening their presents to the students.”

The best gift of all is the one the students received, which was a lesson about giving. “It’s about giving and caring for the elderly.”

Continuing to grow a strong and talented board is an ongoing priority for us,” remarked Holly Doherty-Lemoine, executive director.

“The staff was waiting outside for us, jumping up and down they were so excited,” Moura said. “It was the cutest thing. They ran out and hugged us and were shocked that the cars were piled to the top with gift bags. They unloaded them and brought them to the recreational room, where they will be distributed. And they’ll send pictures of the residents opening their presents to the students.”

The best gift of all is the one the students received, which was a lesson about giving.

“It teaches the kids about the importance of giving,” Moura said. “It’s not just about receiving. It’s about giving and caring for the elderly.”

Philanthropic response to “mustard seed” result of Catholic education

Innovation and Leadership Committees.

During her career she has held positions as CEO of IBM Digital Sales and CFO posts in IBM’s Global Geographic Units and Global Financing, Latin America Unit and Small and Medium Business Units, as well as other financial executive roles.

Paula holds a bachelor of arts degree and a master’s degree in Accounting, as well as an MBA in Accounting and Finance from Pace University. Ms. Summa was a member of the Pace University Lubin School of Business Advisory Board and volunteers with Foundations in Education as a member of the Finance and Innovation and Leadership Committees.

“I am looking forward to working with such a group of dedicated and talented people on this board. They have positively impacted the lives of so many children, and are tireless in their efforts of providing an opportunity to receive a Catholic education to those who may never have had that chance. I am humbled to serve with such a remarkable team of people,” commented Ms. Summa.

“Continuing to grow a strong and talented board is an ongoing priority for us,” remarked Holly Doherty-Lemoine, executive director.

“We are exceedingly grateful to Paula, who brings her many professional talents as well as a personal commitment as a trustee, given she too is a product of Catholic schools. Paula is ideally positioned to help make a significant difference for our students.”

The newest member joins the existing Board of Trustees led by Chair Thomas McInerney. Other members include David Cappiello, George Coleman, R. Bradford Evans, Lisa Ferraro Martino, Timothy FitzPatrick, Michael Hanlon, Leslie Lopez, Andrea Maldon, Anne McCrory, Thomas McDevitt, Dr. Julia McNamara, Michele Mitola, Joseph Purcell, Geoffrey Raker, Bernard Redy, Barbara Ripp, Gerard Roblotti, Henry Rondon, Robert Scinto, Michael Shea, Jennifer St. Victor-de Pinho, Sr. Mary Grace Walsh, and Holly Doherty-Lemoine, ex officio.

Foundations in Education is the realization of the Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano’s vision to support the Diocese of
Catholic Schools

Nativity pageant brings community together

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

NEWTOWN—A community living spirit of Christmas gathered at Newtown High School to celebrate the birth of Christ.

St. Rose of Lima parish celebrated the Christmas Vigil Mass at the Berkshire Road school building with a children’s nativity pageant, a tradition that has been bringing the community together for more than 20 years.

“This is a time to open ourselves to the needs of other people,” said Msgr. Weiss, as he commended the congregation for a successful coat drive, toy drive and food drives for both Thanksgiving and Christmas.

He also offered prayers for those in need. “It takes a lot of humility to accept help,” he said, adding, “You are really beautifully living the story of Christmas that these children just brought to life.”

Children in grades kindergarten through third-grade dressed as shepherds, angels innkeepers and wise men. Pre-kindergarten aged children were dressed as a cow, camel, lamb or donkey. The children depicted the story of Christmas after the Gospel reading.

Gosselin said it’s nice to see children and grandchildren come back every year to participate in the pageant. It’s a reunion of sorts for people in the community.

“I really enjoy the pageant,” said Terri Scinto, whose husband, Richard, is a deacon and assisted at the Mass. “It’s one of my favorite things at Christmastime.”

At the end of Mass Santa Claus made an appearance, kneeling before the children portraying Mary and Joseph and presenting Mary with a rose.

“It’s a powerful moment when Santa presents Mary with a rose and kneels,” said Scinto, adding it’s a good message and reminder about the reason for the season.

Wess said he was grateful for all the children for participating in the pageant and to the parents and grandparents for encouraging them to do so.

“Children, thank you for bringing alive the beautiful story of Christmas,” Weiss said.

Foundations in Education announces auctioneer

By MEGAN QUINN

BRIDGEPORT—Foundations in Education’s gala returns to Woodway Country Club in Darien, Conn. on May 5, 2022 with honors Barbara and Peter Ripp, Mutual of America and Dr. Steve Cheese, superintendent of Diocese of Bridgeport Catholic Schools. Our Gala Committee, chaired by Barbara and Bob Scinto are hard at work. They will be joined this year by professional auctioneer, Mr. Bobby D. Ehlert.

Bobby D. is a World Champion Auctioneer and expert fundraiser who co-founded Inspire Hearts Fundraising with his wife, fellow auctioneer Erin Ward, in 2017. He helps nonprofits around the nation to strengthen communities, fund missions and inspire hearts along the way. His clients include the Overlook Foundation, Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, American Heart Association, Susan G. Komen and many more.

Foundations in Education raised over $875,000 in 2021 and seeks to raise even more in 2022! Thanks to the generosity of our donors we have some one of a kind auction items that will help reach our goal. We are excited to feature wonderful and unique items in our live auction, most notable are the following:

Private reception with Bishop Frank J. Caggiano at your home bridgeport's ongoing mission to advance Catholic education in Fairfield County. The primary purpose of this non-profit initiative is to support Catholic education by providing tuition assistance for elementary school students and Innovation and Leadership grants for teachers and administrators that promote classroom innovation and professional leadership development and other education-based programs. This year Foundations in Education has awarded nearly $2.5 million in tuition assistance. Since its inception, the Foundation has awarded thousands of children more than $18 million in tuition assistance.

(For more information about Foundations in Education, visit www.foundationsineducation.org or contact Megan Quinn at 203.416.1671 or mquinn@foundationsineducation.org.)
Catholic Schools

Notre Dame students spread holiday cheer

FAIRFIELD—The Campus Ministry students from Notre Dame High School celebrated the Christmas season with Big Brothers/Big Sisters holiday events at Assumption School in Fairfield. The first group partnered with seventh and eighth-grade students to create gingerbread masterpieces and are super appreciative of Ms. Zembrzuski for her generous donations. The second group worked with the kindergarten and first-grade classes to create crafts, play games, dance, and receive special treats from Santa’s Helpers.

Be Ignited!

Congratulations to the Fairfield Prep Class of 2022 on your early acceptance to:

Albertus Magnus College  Marquette University  Suffolk University  University of Pennsylvania  
Boston College  Merrimack College  Tufts University  University of Scranton  
Butler University  Miami University Ohio  Union College  University of South Carolina  
Case Western Reserve University  Michigan State University  University of Alabama  University of Tennessee  
DePaul University  Middlebury College  University of Bridgeport  University of Vermont  
Duke University  Northeastern University  University of Dayton  Wake Forest University  
Fairfield University  Penn State  University of Denver  Wentworth Institute of Technology  
Fordham University  Providence College  University of Louisville  Winthrop University  
Georgetown University  Roger Williams University  University of New Haven  Worcester Polytechnic Institute  
Harvard University  Salve Regina University  University of Notre Dame  Xavier University  
Indiana University  Santa Clara University  University of Oregon  
John Carroll University  Siena College  
Lafayette College  Southern Methodist University  
Loyola University Chicago  St. Bonaventure University  
Loyola University Maryland  St. Joseph’s University  
Lynn University  St. Peter’s University  

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**Catholic Schools**

**St. Mark celebrates faith, excellence and service**

STRATFORD—Students and staff at St. Mark School will take a break from their normal routines during the week of January 30 in order to celebrate National Catholic Schools Week.

The annual weeklong celebration focuses on the value Catholic education provides to young people and its contributions to our church, communities and nation. This year’s theme is “Catholic Schools: Faith. Excellence. Service.”

Students do not have to be Catholic to attend St. Mark School. “There are a number of students who are not Catholic,” shares Principal Melissa Warner. “However, many do practice their faith inside and outside of the school day. In fact, 34 students participate as altar servers at weekend Masses, weddings and funerals.”

The week kicks off on Sunday, January 30, with the school’s annual preschool-grade 8 open house. Student ambassadors will showcase the school to prospective families by providing them with tours and their personal experiences and testimonials. Students also read essays at Mass on what their Catholic education means to them.

Some of the highlights of the school week include dress-down days, community service projects, making valentines for seniors, no-homework days, and fun-filled surprise activities aimed at celebrating students, parents, faculty and staff.

“Our students look forward to Catholic Schools Week,” states Janet Rodriguez, grade 4 teacher and coordinator of the Catholic Schools Week activities. “The whole school gets involved with the planning. It’s a really fun week which encourages students to reflect on the benefits of their Catholic education and how the grounding in faith, excellence and service will help them throughout their lives.”

Despite declining Catholic school enrollment, Diocese of Bridgeport Catholic Elementary Schools have experienced a growth of 10 percent over the last year. At St. Mark School alone, enrollment increased by 18 percent this year with many classes at wait-list status.

The current enrollment of 234 is an all-time high for St. Mark School! “We are proud of the work we do educating the whole person,” comments Warner. “We have wonderful students and so much to celebrate!”

**OPEN HOUSE - February 3rd, 6-8pm**

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**IHS inducts 37 to Honor Society**

DANBURY—Immaculate High School recently inducted 37 students into the St. Thomas Aquinas Chapter of the National Honor Society, an affiliated chartered chapter of the National Honor Society at a ceremony held at the Amber Room. Students who are inducted into the National Society are required to have a minimum 3.5 GPA. They must also have a leadership role in either the school or community, inspire positive behavior in others, have served at least 75 hours (juniors) or 100 hours (seniors) of community service and consistently demonstrate respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring and good citizenship. Membership is offered to juniors and seniors who meet the criteria established by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in the areas of scholarship, leadership, service and character. Once accepted, members are expected to uphold the criteria of excellence in all four areas.

“These students should be proud to be members. It’s more than just academics: these students provide many hours of service to the community and are leaders among their peers,” says Dana Pickney, advisor of the National Honor Society. Keynote speaker Kat Keeley, an English teacher at the school, told students to always remember to use their knowledge, compassion and talents to make a difference in the lives of others.

Students inducted include Julia Babcock (Ridgefield), Colleen Blackman (New Fairfield), Gavin Buttufuooco (New Fairfield), Dominic Chila (Danbury), Julianna Chronakos (Brookfield), Julia CironE (Newtown), Carina Clark (Danbury), Caitlin Conley (Ridgefield), Isabella Desintonio (Patterson, NY), Chase Dietter (Brookfield), Aidan Doolabh (Danbury), Olivia Esposito (Danbury), Joseph Falcao (Danbury), Nicholas Garcia (Danbury), Benjamin Gasparrini (Ridgefield), Alyssa Hartnett (Ridgefield), Amanda Hoyt (Danbury), Sadie Jarboe (Danbury), Anna Kopek (Bethel), Qianhui Liao (New Milford), Michaela Martin (Ridgefield), Patrick McKenzie (Newtown), Madison Moreau (Redding), Kayla O Marra (Bethel), Angela Pacheco (Danbury), Talia Pereira (Brookfield), Elise, Quartano (New Fairfield), Abbe Radigan (Ridgefield), Mia Romano (Bethel), Cole Ross (Brookfield), Connor Sahl (Danbury), Caleb Schmidt (Ridgefield), Sarah Tallaksen (New Milford), James Toscano (New Milford), Kerry Tuccinardi (Bethel), Sofia Velez (Danbury).

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

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

NEWTOWN—Dozens of children were smiling Christmas morning thanks to the generosity of the community and donations to the Caroline Previdi Toy Chest.

The toy drive spearheaded by the Newtown Knights of Columbus and in honor of Caroline Previdi, one of the young victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary tragedy, received more than two-thousand donated toys this year.

“It’s really special because she used to come to bring gifts with her mom and family. That’s one of the reasons we renamed it after her,” said Joe Rahtelli, a Knights of Columbus volunteer.

The Knights of Columbus started the toy drive about 15 years ago and renamed it to honor Caroline in 2013. Donations were received through Amazon purchases and sent directly to St. Rose of Lima Parish as well as new and unwrapped toys were dropped off at the parish beginning in November from individuals, local organizations and area school toy drives.

“A lot of people turned out to help us this year,” said Matt Velsmid, the chairperson of the five-member committee of the Knights of Columbus organizing the event.

About 30 volunteers helped to arrange the toys on rows of tables in the Monsignor Weiss Gathering Hall. Toys were arranged by age and gender to make it easier to find the perfect toy for someone special.

“I feel blessed,” said Pam, as she picked out toys for her two-year-old twin grandsons and eight-year-old grandson. “It’s been a rough time for a lot of people. I thank God these people are here because of them I know when my grandkids come to my house there will be presents.”

“I have a tree and now I have something to put underneath it,” said the grandma of three from Danbury. “God is good.”

More than 150 families welcomed the opportunity to provide toys for children in their lives through this event. Three toys could be chosen for each child with a maximum of 10 toys per family.

There was something for everyone. The tables were lined with Legos, toy trucks, dolls, puzzles, building blocks and painting sets. Families participated in a lottery to select a time slot to choose toys. They were assisted by volunteers who would place the toys in bags for them to take home.

“We had a couple of bikes, they went very fast,” Velsmid said.

Caroline’s family is involved in the toy drive as well as The Caroline Previdi Foundation, which was established to honor her memory and giving spirit, especially her enthusiasm for extracurricular activities and her compassion for others. The Foundation’s goal is to support children in the Newtown and surrounding communities with the financial means to participate in extracurricular activities, including dance, art, music and sports.

Any toys that remain will be given to local social organizations as the need arises. Toys are also distributed for birthdays throughout the year for families in need.

“The best part is we are living Caroline’s legacy by serving the community and that’s what it’s all about,” Velsmid said. “People bring not only presents but hope to their homes. I think that’s what Caroline would have wanted.”
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