

THE MONTHLY NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

NOVEMBER 2025 | VOLUME 42, NUMBER 10 | THANKSGIVING ISSUE



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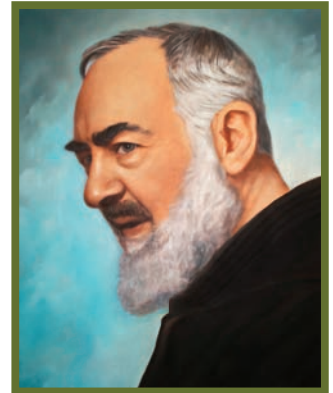


Wishing You a Happy Thanksgiving

As families and friends gather to give thanks, we are reminded that every blessing is a gift, and every moment of gratitude opens the heart to grace. Padre Pio encouraged all who came to him to trust in God's love and to live each day with gratitude and compassion.

This Thanksgiving, may your home be filled with peace, joy, and the quiet blessings that remind us of God's presence. May the example of Padre Pio inspire your heart and deepen your faith.

*From all of us at the Padre Pio Foundation of America,
we wish you a blessed and grace-filled Thanksgiving.*



The Padre Pio Foundation of America invites you to our Annual Christmas Open House



December 6th, 2025 | 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM | 463 Main Street, Cromwell, CT 06416

Padre Pio loved Christmas, from his deep devotion for the Infant Jesus to the childlike wonder that filled his soul during the season. He once said, *"All of the feasts of the Church are beautiful, but Christmas has a tenderness, a childlike sweetness that captivates my entire heart."*

As we enter the Christmas season, we would love to have you join us for our Annual Christmas Open House. Enjoy light refreshments, browse the Padre Pio Gift Shop and Book Store, pray in the Padre Pio Chapel, and enter to win special prizes. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to bring family and friends to share in the magic of the season!

The Padre Pio Foundation of America

Since 1977, the PPFOA and its benefactors have followed in Padre Pio's footsteps to alleviate suffering and care for those in need across the globe. This includes efforts to maintain the places near and dear to his heart, foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and continue his legacy of love and compassion through Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. The PPFOA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



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Diocesan News

‘Today is our festival of hope’

By ROSE BRENNAN

BRIDGEPORT—For a young Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, there was no penance more dreaded than washing the windows during his mother’s annual fall cleaning. It might not seem like a difficult task to an outsider, but the bishop recalled how his mother would indicate spots he’d miss over and over, only to each year finish the job to herself because it wasn’t quite clean to her liking.

It certainly made for a humorous anecdote during the bishop’s homily for the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed—also known as All Souls Day—on Sunday afternoon, November 2. Sponsored by Fairfield County Catholic Cemeteries, the annual outdoor Mass took place at Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Trumbull.

Bishop Caggiano said he realized many years later that his mother’s painstaking standards for window cleaning actually carried with it an important lesson on Catholic



theology. During the month of November, he said, Catholics are called to pray for the dead—most especially the souls in purgatory.

“We come here today to pray in a very special way for our wives and husbands, our children and grandchildren, our relatives and friends who are buried in this place, to pray that God will grant them eternal rest and peace and a place in the kingdom—a place that was promised for them at their baptism,” the bishop said.

The bishop then likened the human soul to the pieces of win-

dow glass his mother would have him clean every fall.

“Our souls are like a piece of glass that are given to us pure and crystal clear,” Bishop Caggiano said. “And through our lives, by the decisions we make, the words we speak, the values we embody ... we can muddy up the glass. And you and I as disciples of the Lord, we try our best to be able to keep that glass clean for the day of judgment, for when we stand before Christ ... there is no place to hide. And all that we bring with us comes with us.”

The bishop said that many of us try to keep the “glass” of our souls clean, but many of us still have regrets. Those regrets and sins can be washed away, certainly, but not through our own power.

“Our heavenly Father—in his great love—helps us, even in the mystery of death, to do what we did not do in this life: to be able to continue that cleaning until we are perfectly clean, perfectly pure, and perfectly ready to receive the promise of glory,” he said.

For many of the departed, the bishop said, the path to heaven after death is not instantaneous. Instead, they must have their souls purified before entering into the kingdom of heaven.

“We go through purification—what the Church calls purgatory—not as a punishment, but as a gift,” he said. “Because as we heard in the second reading, God does not give up on us at all. Ever. God’s love is merciful and everlasting. And even though you and I and those who are buried in this

cemetery try our best, whatever we could not do, God in his great love will do with us so that we can all join him in eternal life.”

For those of us who are still on this side of heaven, Bishop Caggiano said it is also up to us to pray for those who are in purgatory in order to help them along in their journey to God’s kingdom.

“We lift our prayers for those who have gone before us, so that God will take them the rest of the way to heaven, and those prayers matter and make a difference,” he said. “Today is our festival of hope, not only for those who are buried here, but for you and me as well. For where they have gone, you and I will follow. And, please God, for generations to come, there will be others sitting in these chairs that you and I are sitting in to pray for us, as we pray for those who have gone before us.”

Following the Mass, Catholic Cemeteries provided holy water from Lourdes, France for all who attended.

Two to be ordained to transitional diaconate

By ROSE BRENNAN

SHELTON—The Diocese of Bridgeport will ordain Herley Mendez and Br. Riccardo Varagnolo to the transitional diaconate on Saturday, December 6 at St. Peter Parish in Danbury at 11 am. All are invited to attend this joyous occasion.

Ordination to the transitional diaconate is typically the last hurdle a man in formation faces prior to being ordained as a priest. Mendez is on track for ordination to the priesthood in

June 2026, while Varagnolo’s will take place in August 2026.

Herley Felipe Mendez Torres is in his final year of seminary formation at St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y. Born in Medina, Colombia in 1988, he is one of nine children of Hector Mendez and Luz Torres.

He graduated from the Universidad Minuto de Dios in Bogota in 2017 with a bachelor’s degree in psychology. Prior to entering seminary, he worked as a visiting psychologist and as a social worker.



HERLEY FELIPE MENDEZ TORRES

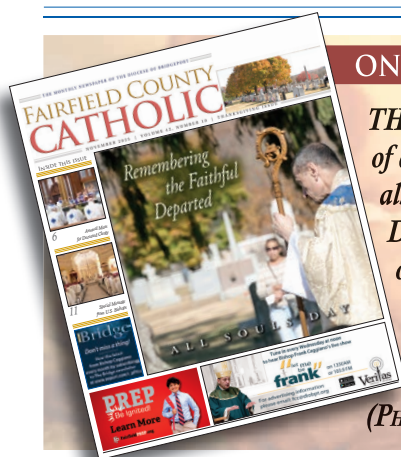


RICCARDO VARAGNOLO

In his spare time, Mendez enjoys playing tennis and pickleball, spending time with family and friends and learning new things about other cultures.

“From my childhood, I have recognized the grace of having a mother whose faith quietly shaped my own. Through her gentle testimony, I came to know God not as a distant figure, but as a loving Father who calls me into a deeper relationship with him,” Mendez said. “As I continue this journey, I pray that

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



ON THE COVER

THE COMMEMORATION of all the Faithful Departed—also known as All Souls Day—is celebrated each year on November 2. This month, Catholics remember and pray for the dead, especially the holy souls in purgatory.
(PHOTO BY AMY MORTENSEN)

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Appeal News

Helping Catholic Charities meet a rising need

By JOE PISANI

SHELTON—The 2025 Bishop's Appeal, One in Christ, is especially important now in Fairfield County, where despite our blessings, "there is an undeniable need for the Church to put our faith into action and care for the hungry, the homeless, the jobless and those who have no hope," said Pamela S. Rittman, director of development and the Bishop's Appeal.

Catholic Charities, which is partially funded through the Appeal, is the largest provider of food resources in Fairfield County through its soup kitchens and food pantries, as well as the Senior Nutrition programs.

"We have seen a significant increase in demand in recent weeks at all of our locations," said Michael Donoghue, executive director of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County.

Food insecurity had been increasing even before the government shutdown affected the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides monthly food benefits to low-income households so they can buy groceries,

he said.

"The rising cost of rent, food, and basic needs causes many lower-income families to struggle to make ends meet," he said. "For example, at our new Thomas Merton Family Center in Bridgeport, we now provide food in our food pantry for more than 2,000 individuals each month, up from a maximum of 600 individuals per month in the old facility, which represents an increase of more than 300 percent in two years." That rising need predated the SNAP crisis, he said, which only increased the urgency.

Pointing to the additional demand on the services of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, Donoghue said that 75 percent of SNAP recipients are children or elderly and that one in five children in Bridgeport are food insecure.

"As food insecurity continues to rise across Fairfield County, the Bishop's Appeal partners with Catholic Charities, who are on the front lines, providing meals and groceries to families, seniors, and individuals in need," Rittman said. "Your gift to the Appeal ensures that essential support and

compassion reach those experiencing hardship."

In addition to the support provided by the Bishop's Appeal, Catholic Charities actively raises funds to address the increasing demand for its services and to sustain its operational budget.

Among the programs that Catholic Charities provides throughout the diocese are the Thomas Merton Family Center in Bridgeport, Morning Glory Breakfast Program in Danbury and New Covenant Center in Stamford—all of which offer meals and nutrition services.

"Catholic Charities puts love into action by reaching those who are homeless, who are hungry, who are looking for employment, who are looking for shelter and who are looking for hope," Bishop Frank J. Caggiano said.

In announcing the 2025 Bishop's Appeal, One in Christ, Bishop Caggiano called upon the faithful to take part in "the great adventure that is the spiritual and pastoral renewal of our diocese."

He urged Catholics throughout Fairfield County to "unite as One in Christ to bring to life all the diocesan ministries, programs and agencies that deliver the pastoral care and human services that no single parish can provide on its own."

The One in Christ appeal, which has an \$8 million goal, will provide for works of charity, formation in faith, education and catechesis.

"This Thanksgiving season, as we reflect with gratitude on our many blessings, may we also



be moved to share them with others," Rittman said. "There is still time to make your gift. Your generosity embodies the spirit of faith, hope, and love—truly heartfelt and deeply appreciated."

(For more information on the

Appeal, or to make a gift, please visit www.2025BishopsAppeal.org or call 203.416.1479)

(For more information on Catholic Charities' food programs, visit www.ccfairfield.org/2025/10/27/snap-benefits.)

PLANNING TO BE IN
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Florida
THIS WINTER?

You are invited to join Bishop Caggiano
for Mass and Brunch in Naples
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2026
11:00 AM
See you in the Sunshine State!

Please contact Connie Von Zwehl for further details
and your personal invitation by email at
connievonzwehl@gmail.com or call (203) 216-1608.

TWO TO BE ORDAINED FROM PAGE 3

my heart may be molded after the Heart of Jesus and the tenderness of Mary, so that I may serve God's people with joy, love, and pastoral charity wherever the Holy Spirit sends me."

Mendez will serve his first Mass as a transitional deacon on Sunday, December 7 at 11:30 am at St. Aloysius Parish in New Canaan. Monsignor Robert Kinnally will be the celebrant, and

Mendez will be the homilist.

Riccardo Varagnolo is a member of the Koinonia St. John the Baptist, a community of consecrated brothers, sisters, priests and lay faithful. Born in Contarina, Italy, he is one of four children of Zelindo Varagnolo and Katy Bertaggia.

Varagnolo has educational backgrounds in information technology engineering, philosophy and theology. He entered the Koinonia St. John the

Baptist in May 2015.

"In the community, I grew in my relationship with the Lord and developed in pastoral work, gaining experience not only in Italy, but also in Mexico," Varagnolo said. "At a certain point, my superiors suggested the opportunity to begin my studies, and my pastoral experience in Bridgeport further strengthened my desire to embark on the path toward the priestly ministry."



“For I was hungry and
you gave me food.”

— MATTHEW 25:35



Hunger is real —
and we can respond.

FOOD INSECURITY CONTINUES TO RISE ACROSS FAIRFIELD COUNTY.

Catholic Charities is on the front lines, providing meals and groceries to families, seniors, and individuals in need.

Your support of the **2025 Bishop's Appeal** partnering with Catholic Charities helps ensure this vital work continues. Together, we can feed the hungry and bring Christ's love to our neighbors.



Make your Thanksgiving gift today
to the 2025 Bishop's Appeal.

YOUR GENEROSITY HELPS CATHOLIC CHARITIES FEED
THE HUNGRY AND STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITIES.

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the BISHOP'S LECTURE SERIES 2026



The mission of the Bishop's Lecture Series is to provide opportunities for compelling adult faith formation regarding catechetical, theological or pastoral issues of contemporary importance.

Each year four such lectures will be given in various regions of the diocese.

Light refreshments will be available prior to the start of the program.

After an initial period of prayer, the lecturer will present the talk that will be 45 minutes in length. After a short break, there will be a 30 minute period of conversation and dialogue with participants.



Dr. John Bergsma to deliver the Bishop's Lecture

Date | Thursday, January 22, 2026

Time | 7 pm

Location | McClinch Family Center
190 Shelton Road, Trumbull

Lecturer | Dr. John Bergsma

Topic | Jesus and the Mystery of the Dead Sea Scrolls:
A Catholic Perspective on Christian Origins

*Dr. John Bergsma is Professor of Theology at the Franciscan University of Steubenville. A former Protestant pastor, Dr. Bergsma entered the Catholic Church in 2001 while getting his Ph.D. in Bible from the University of Notre Dame. A close collaborator of Dr. Scott Hahn, Bergsma speaks regularly on Catholic radio and at conferences and parishes nationally and internationally. He has authored over a dozen books on Scripture and the Catholic faith, including *Bible Basics for Catholics* (Ave Maria Press), *Stunned by Scripture: How the Bible Made Me Catholic* (Our Sunday Visitor), and *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: Old Testament* (with Brant Pitre; Ignatius Press).*

Dr. Bergsma's talks and studies are available on CD and mp3 from catholicproductions.com. He and his wife Dawn reside with their eight children in Steubenville, Ohio.

To RSVP to a Bishop's Lecture event, please visit:
www.bridgeportdiocese.org/bls
or email: bishopslecture@diobpt.org

Parish News

Diocese remembers 'ministers of the light'

By ROSE BRENNAN

BRIDGEPORT—As the month of November progresses, the days grow shorter and shorter, and each day has a bit more darkness than the one before. And at the Annual Mass for Deceased Clergy on November 15, which commemorates priests and deacons in the Diocese of Bridgeport who have died in the past year, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano reflected on the role the waning light has both in the months to come and in the lives of the clergy—those gathered there that morning and those who have entered into the mystery of death.

"It seems to me that nature each year does a great service to us for by creating these conditions, as darkness continues to grow in our midst, to prepare us for the celebration of the coming of the Light," he said. "A light, of course, which is not of natural origin—a light that is supernatural and divine in nature, a light that was welcomed by the angels, a light that you and I are baptized into a light, who is the Light of the World."

Through our baptism, the bishop said, we are called to proclaim the message of this light: Jesus Christ. But those of us who become members of the clergy are called to take that message even further and "gave their lives in service of the light."

"Those who are ordained, are not just servants to it, but they are ministers of the light," Bishop Caggiano said. And in a world that is becoming ever more accustomed and familiar with the darkness—man-made falsities, gossip, ignorance and all that we create to obscure the truth and not live the truth—those who are ordained give their lives in ministry to the light."

To live in the light is not an easy task, the bishop said. Those who live in the light must also be held accountable to the words that they preach. And they, too, will sometimes fall victim to the darkness when they sin, because they are also far from perfect. But as we are reminded each day, the darkness will always wane and light will triumph—as it did in the ministry of the deceased clergy

being remembered that morning.

"You can imagine those for whom we pray the great joy they experienced in their lives when they saw chains of sin broken, when they saw the joy on a little infant's face, when ... that child was born again to eternal life, when they saw the joy, the happiness, the delight of a husband and wife leaving the sacred church and beginning a life together cemented in the power of the Holy Spirit," Bishop Caggiano said. "It is a sacrifice, but there are joys beyond all telling."

At the end of the month, the Church will once again celebrate the liturgical season of Advent: a season of joyful anticipation and waiting for the Light of the World to become incarnate at Christmas. And we also wait in that same joyful spirit for his second coming at the end of time to welcome us into eternal life.

"As we gather here this morning, my friends, let us pray that all the baptized throughout the world may never lose hope of the victory of light over darkness," he said. "And in a special way, we pray for those who have gone before us, that the light that they served welcomed them into heav-

en, shed all their fears, anxiety, sufferings and pains, healed their hearts and gave them the victory that was the promise given to them on the day of their baptism. They were faithful in this life. They knew the light and lived it as best as they could. And now we commend them to the mercy of God."

The Diocese of Bridgeport remembers

Father William F. Carey—
November 5, 2024

Deacon Emmet Murray—
December 21, 2024

Deacon Paul Herman—
December 26, 2024

Deacon Raymond Chervenak—
February 1, 2025

Father Patrick Mooney—
March 18, 2025

Father Robert John Post—
November 30, 2024

Monsignor Richard J. Shea—
January 22, 2025

Deacon Thomas McManus—
April 22, 2025

Father David Tracy—
April 29, 2025

Deacon Russell T. Rigg—
May 16, 2025

Monsignor William J. Scheyd—
May 27, 2025

Scripture conference

St. Jerome Center to host Scott Hahn, John Bergsma

TRUMBULL—On January 23 and 24, the St. Jerome Center will host Scott Hahn, John Bergsma and Jeffrey Morrow, Sacred Scripture scholars from the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology for a one-and-a-half-day conference at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull.

The conference is entitled "Renewed and Transformed: How Christ Reads and Fulfills the Scriptures." All are invited to hear from some of our Church's most celebrated Scripture scholars.

The St. Jerome Center Bible Studies use resources from the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, where Hahn, Bergsma and Morrow are based. Thus far, 13 Diocese of Bridgeport parishes are hosting these weekly Bible studies, and hundreds of parishioners are participating.

(The "Renewed and Transformed" conference will cost \$40 per person. To register for the event, visit www.stpaulcenter.com/events/trumbull2026.)

Parish News

St. James honors Our Lady with Rosary procession

By JOE PISANI

STRATFORD—Lourdes Dominguez was praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament at St. James Parish when she felt Jesus whispering to her, heart to heart, asking the parish to honor his mother by praying the Rosary for unity in the Church, in the country and in the world.

"I was with the Blessed Sacrament, and I heard in my heart that we have to come together and pray for unity," Lourdes said. And Jesus' prayer for unity at the Last Supper immediately came into mind. "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father,

are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me."

She approached pastor Father Peter Adamski with the idea, and he embraced it wholeheartedly.

One woman, who said yes to Jesus in honor of his mother Mary, began an initiative that brought several hundred people to St. James Parish for a Rosary procession on a Saturday afternoon in October, the month dedicated to the Holy Rosary.

They gathered to pray the Joyful Mysteries in front of the church on Main Street and then processed through the neighborhood with a statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Redemptoris Mater seminarians played guitars and sang Marian hymns, while a dozen

young people carried a 20-foot Rosary with large wooden beads that were crafted by Lourdes' husband, Orlando.

In the days leading up to the procession, the parish community also prayed a novena to Our Lady of Fatima.

Father Adamski addressed the group gathered at the steps of the church, where there was a tall cross with the wooden Rosary draped over it and a statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, standing on the platform adorned with a bed of roses, lilies and carnations.

"We thank you all for joining us in prayer for world peace, by praying the Holy Rosary," he said. "We all believe in the power of the Rosary to bring us hope and peace and unity. Peace and



unity are so lacking in our world today, even in our Church. The Blessed Mother has appeared multiple times on this Earth all over the world. She has appeared to urge us to pray this most powerful prayer, so we gather here today to do her will."

Father Adamski encouraged everyone to pray to the Queen of

Peace to restore harmony in their families and in "a society ravaged by the evils of sin."

"We do this through her powerful intercession with the Prince of Peace," he said, "who obtained for us perseverance in virtue, patience in trials, courage in persecution, zeal for his glory,

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

SS. Cyril & Methodius celebrates Christ the King

By EMILY CLARK

Editor's note: SS. Cyril and Methodius Parish is a part of the Institute of Christ the King, and celebrates feast days according to the pre-1962 General Roman Calendar. The current General Roman Calendar now celebrates the Solemnity of Christ the King on the final Sunday of the liturgical year.

BRIDGEPORT—"Christus vincit! Christus regnat! Christus imperat! Christ conquers. Christ reigns. Christ commands. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

Canon Francis Xavier Altieri IV, rector of SS. Cyril and Methodius Oratory, began his homily in the Latin tradition as the church commemorated the 100th anniversary of the institution of the Feast of Christ the King. Characteristic of this church dedicated exclusively to the traditional Mass and sacraments, the solemn High Mass on Sunday morning, October 26 was just one of several celebrations planned by the parish.

To enhance what Canon Altieri called one of the "great events of our salvation," a brass quintet and polyphonic choir performed throughout the Mass with the trumpets sounding in honor of the King. Keeping with



tradition, the liturgy was entirely in Latin except for the homily. Canon Altieri faced the altar, away from the congregation, for prayers, readings and the consecration, and multiple altar servers and deacons assisted him.

In describing the feast day during his homily, Canon Altieri, wearing the customary biretta, explained how it was established in 1925 by Pope Pius XI.

"One hundred years may seem like a long time, but in the life of the church that is 2,000 years old, it is still something very recent. It invests our celebration today with a particular grandeur not to mention joy and gratitude," he said.

When the pope published an encyclical in December 1925,

Canon Altieri continued, "it was in the midst of a troubled war period when mankind was lost in its own creation. The twin demons of fascism and communism were grabbing at the ruins left over from the Great War."

One aspect of that encyclical, he said, focused on establishing a new feast day for the troubled modern world.

"The formal object of this new feast day is precisely the kingship of the Church. It's what we're all about," he said, noting that the feast of Christ the King was fixed as the last Sunday of October, specifically the Sunday before the Solemnity of All Saints. "Christ continues to reign through the holiness of his saints."

Noting that the Feast of Christ

the King is commonly celebrated at the end of November, the last Sunday before Advent, Canon Altieri said that was due to the shifting of feast days that occurred in the late 1960s. Despite this, he said, "His kingly authority already exists here and now. In fact, we will be judged then based on how we respond to his kingship now in this present life."

He explained how a neutral society, one without religion or ideology, is a myth and labeled secularism itself as highly exclusive. To relegate Jesus Christ and his church as an "optional extra," he said, is "an outrage, an injustice."

With raised voice, Canon Altieri proclaimed, "We Catholics have a right to worship God and to freely practice the Catholic faith at home, inside, outside because God has the right to be worshipped. We have the right to fulfill our duty. On this Feast of Christ the King, let us raise our voices and say yes, this man, this God, he must reign!"

Following Mass, the indoor Eucharistic Procession began as the church was filled with the sweet smell of incense and strains of "Kyrie." Canon Altieri, holding high the monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament exposed, led the deacons and servers through-

out the church, up and down the aisles, stopping in front of the side altar of Christ the King. Together, the faithful recited aloud the Act of Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Litany of the Sacred Heart before the celebration concluded.

Once outside the church in the bright sunshine of this late October day, members of the congregation spoke in awe of the sacred music and scripture of the day.

"It brought me to tears!" said Lenore Opalak of Fairfield. "The Mass felt like an intercession between us and Heaven. Such holiness! It was more than just beauty. It was the music and the depth of the prayers."

That evening, the church welcomed back parishioners, guests and visiting clergy for a solemn choral Vespers and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

"The high point of the service of Vespers is always the singing of the Magnificat, Our Lady's canticle of thanksgiving," Canon Altieri said after the service. "When Vespers is celebrated solemnly, the altar is incensed at this moment, like at Mass. That night, the clergy processed to the altar of the Sacred Heart in order to incense the statue of Christ the King." ■

Parish News

A connection to the newest Doctor of the Church

By ROSE BRENNAN

TRUMBULL—This year on the Solemnity of All Saints, one member of its communion became the Church's newest Doctor of the Church: St. John Henry Newman. And not only is he one of the most celebrated English-speaking theologians of all time, he also has a profound connection to St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull and its pastor, Father Joseph Marcello.

Originally an Anglican cleric, Newman converted to Catholicism in 1845. He then became a member of the Oratorians and was created a cardinal in 1879, all the while continuing as an academic and theologian. He was canonized in 2019 by Pope Francis and was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIV on November 1, 2025 during the Jubilee for the World of Education.

St. John Henry Newman is just the 38th Catholic saint to receive the additional distinction of "Doctor of the Church," which is a title of honor given to saints

who have made significant contributions to the Catholic faith through research, study or writing. Incidentally, St. Catherine of Siena Parish's namesake is one of just four female Doctors of the Church, along with St. Teresa of Avila, St. Therese of Lisieux and St. Hildegard of Bingen.

"There was some thought that Newman would be named a Doctor of the Church the day he was canonized in 2019," Father Marcello said. "And even before he was beatified, there was some thought that if Newman's ever canonized, he'll be a Doctor of the Church. His thought is just so outstanding and so luminous."

An academic approach to Catholic theology might be a daunting thought for many within the Church, but Father Marcello classified Newman's writings as "erudite but accessible."

"Almost on any page, you just read a given paragraph at random and you say, 'Wow, I've never thought about it that way before,' or 'Wow. That's really beautiful. That's really insightful. That helps me to understand this

aspect of the faith better,'" he said. "And even though it's written at a very profound level, it's accessible for anybody."

Once Father Marcello was introduced to the works of St. John Henry Newman, he said he "couldn't get enough." After he became pastor at St. Catherine's, he was able to introduce the saint to the faithful who worshipped there, notably celebrating Masses in his honor the weekend he was canonized.

"I've wanted to help the whole parish see what a treasure the Church has in Newman," he said.

St. John Henry Newman is also featured in a stained glass window over St. Catherine's baptismal font, standing among other more recent additions to the communion of saints, including Bl. Michael McGivney, St. Teresa of Calcutta and St. Josephine of Bakhita.

Finally, St. Catherine's is home to two first-class relics of St. John Henry Newman. Such relics are incredibly rare in the Church, as when the saint's grave was opened in preparation for his



beatification in 2008, his remains were not in a condition to have relics made.

"The Oratorians didn't think there would be first-class relics of Newman," Father Marcello said. "But they later discovered that this man who was Newman's barber thought he would be a saint and saved the clippings of his hair. And they were given to the Birmingham Oratory, where Newman lived ... We have two: one's in my chapel, and one's in our altar."

While he has a personal devotion to St. John Henry Newman, Father Marcello said that anyone in the pews can learn something from the saint's life and teachings, especially given the sheer volume of his written work. In fact, Father Marcello said, a website called Newman Reader allows people to filter the saint's

writings by topic, narrowing down his writings to what is most relevant to the reader.

Moreover, Newman being named a Doctor of the Church also elevates him to a level of prominence on the General Roman Calendar. And not only does Father Marcello think such a title is well-deserved, but he also thinks it will introduce more of the faithful to a truly extraordinary saint.

"I'm grateful in the sense that it will make Newman more widely known in the Church—and hopefully more widely read," Father Marcello said. "Whenever someone's reading the words of St. John Henry Newman and having a fresh insight into the faith, Newman's priestly ministry is continuing to bear fruit in the world." ■

Shrine to Our Lady of Divine Providence dedicated

BRIDGEPORT—The shrines and saints to whom they are dedicated at St. Margaret Shrine in Bridgeport runs the gamut from Marian apparitions, moments in the life of Jesus, beloved saints and more. And on November 15, another was added to their ranks: Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence, the patroness of Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rican presence in the city of Bridgeport has long been a significant one. In fact, according to the 2020 U.S. Census, Bridgeport has the 13th largest stateside Puerto Rican population nationwide—and they're also the largest Spanish-speaking community in the city. Their presence in Bridgeport even predates the Diocese of Bridgeport, which was established in 1953.

Puerto Rican history is part and parcel with Bridgeport history. And according to Father Rolando Torres, pastor of St.



Mary Parish in Bridgeport, that should be reflected at St. Margaret Shrine with a place of prayer centered around a statue of Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence.

"Most of the people who helped build the American Church in Bridgeport were Puerto Rican," Father Torres said. "So I said, 'Why don't we have the patron of Puerto Rico at St.

Margaret Shrine?"

Father Torres hatched a plan to correct this in November of last year, raising much of the money for the project by selling bricks the faithful could engrave with their names to decorate the shrine. Construction began on the shrine two months ago.

The shrine's completion was celebrated with a Spanish-language pontifical Mass at St. Augustine

Cathedral on November 15, with guest celebrant Auxiliary Bishop Tomas Gonzalez from the Archdiocese of San Juan in Puerto Rico. Following Mass, there was a procession from the Cathedral to St. Margaret Shrine, where the statue of Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence was blessed and venerated.

Editor's note: Below is an article about the celebratory Mass, written by Fairfield County Catholic's Nuestra Voz columnist, Maricarmen Godoy. To honor the community for whom the shrine was created and dedicated, the article is written in Spanish.

Virgen de la Divina Providencia estrena casa POR MARICARMEN GODOY

BRIDGEPORT—El sábado 15 de noviembre a las cuatro de la tarde la catedral de Saint Augustine recibió a cientos de feligreses para celebrar la Misa

Pontificia de Nuestra Señora de la Divina Providencia, patrona de Puerto Rico, con el fin de bendecir e inaugurar la casita de la virgen en la advocación de la Divina Providencia; que a partir de esta fecha, descansará en la recoleta de esculturas del santuario de St. Margaret Shrine ubicado en 523 Park Avenue de esta ciudad.

La Misa Pontificia, fue celebrada por el Obispo auxiliar de San Juan- Puerto Rico, Monseñor Tomás González; presidida por Monseñor Frank Caggiano, Obispo de la Diócesis de Bridgeport; y, concelebrada por algunos sacerdotes de Bridgeport, además del Padre Rolando Torres, puertorriqueño, párroco de la iglesia de St. Mary, quien desde noviembre del 2024, después de celebrar la fiesta patronal de Nuestra Señora de la Divina Providencia en su parroquia, se dispuso a gestionar paso

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

Parish News

Trunk or Treat honors the saints

'Not a holiday about ghosts and goblins'

By EMILY CLARK

TRUMBULL—The Holy Family stood quietly, talking together, while St. Zita offered small loaves of bread to those who were hungry. St. Peter and St. Christopher walked among the crowd, staffs in hand. Angels with iridescent wings darted about.

No, this is not a scene taken from an untold tale in scripture but rather one that unfolded in the parking lot of St. Theresa Parish, just as dusk was settling on Saturday, October 25, with young parishioners and their parents dressing as their favorite saints. The first annual "Trunk or Treat," organized by the Knights of Columbus council 8013 and its deputy grand knight Thomas Angiolillo, aimed to teach everyone the real meaning behind Halloween and All Saints Day.

"Our parish is popping with a lot of kids and families, so we thought a Trunk or Treat would be a great community building activity," said Angiolillo, describing the event where children go from car to car in a parking lot to receive candy from decorated trunks, in place of going door-to-door. "It's a fun way to get people together to celebrate, and my brother-in-law, who is a deacon, reminded me that this is not a holiday about ghosts and goblins."

This time of the year, Angiolillo said, is one to remember the saints in heaven and pray for the souls in purgatory.

"We wanted to be sure to get the saints involved," he added, doing his part by dressing as St. Peter while his wife Carla donned a costume of Our Lady of Fatima.

Stefania Leone and her children Arianna and Luca not only dressed up but also covered their trunk with inflatable crayons and paint brushes, labeled with verses from the Bible. They journeyed across town from St. Catherine of Siena Parish to take part in the Trunk or Treat.

"Our family just loves the saints!" Leone said, as she handed out colored pencils and granola bars to children. "Every summer, we start working on the costumes for the fall." This year's costumes, all handmade, helped her children honor Our Lady of Mount Carmel

and St. Simon Stock, both wearing the large brown scapulars.

Nearby, young Anna and Gabriella Ciardiello could not stop smiling in their dresses to match St. Bernadette and Our Lady of Lourdes. As parishioners at SS. Cyril and Methodius Parish in Bridgeport, they enjoy sitting in front of Our Lady and looking at the roses, their mother explained.

Eight-year-old Josephine D'Agostino, also known that evening as St. Zita, carried a basket of fresh rolls as she made her way through the crowd with her cousins, Spiderman and Princess Aurora from Sleeping Beauty.

"I really like her (St. Zita) and how there were angels in the kitchen baking bread when she was working," said Josephine.

It was hard not to miss the Bausch family from St. Theresa Parish as Andrew and Meghan and their four children emerged from their decorated car as some of the most beloved saints. While the parents went all out as St. Catherine Labouré with a



tall, starched habit and St. Isaac Jogues with a plastic ax on his head, the boys dressed as St. Francis and St. Pope John Paul II. Baby Cecelia snuggled in a sheep costume and seven-year-old

Agnes chose St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, complete with a black cloak and gray bonnet.

"I always just liked her. And look!" she said, pointing to her baby carriage filled with dolls in

tiny robes and halos. "Even they are dressed up!"

"We always like the costumes and getting dressed up, and now we have something fun to do," Meghan Bausch said.

With trunks including those displaying cut-outs of saints and one with a Noah's Ark theme, the cars were as festive as the families. And it was all in the name of fellowship, remembering the day when Catholics honor the holy men and women who came before them.

"Today, we celebrate the saints, and what better to be than a saint?" said Father Brian Gannon, pastor of St. Theresa Parish, looking around at all those gathered before him as he offered a blessing prior to the event. "We seek the glory of the saints and encourage our children to be holy and to bring others closer to you, almighty God."

Before the night was over, prizes were awarded for the best family costume, best individual costume and best trunk.

Window restoration at St. Joseph's

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

DANBURY—The more than 100-year-old ornate stained glass rose window that adorns the front of St. Joseph Parish on Main Street has been restored to its original brilliance.

The prominent stained-glass window, an architectural masterpiece depicting St. Cecelia—the patron saint of music—with 12 angels looking upon her, was one of the first windows to be restored at the church.

This is the first time in the church's history that the stained glass windows are being restored.

"The parish has a 120-year-history and these windows have seen it all," said Father Eric Silva, parochial administrator. "We are not building something new but preserving that which the original founders of the church sac-

rificed so greatly to provide."

Father Silva added that the immigrants who called Danbury their home decades ago understood the importance of creating a proper place of worship.

"The beauty of these windows must be preserved as a means to honor those who built the church but also for all of those existing and future members who all come to church in order to encounter the author of all that is beautiful," he said.

The first phase of the restoration project has been completed through the generosity of previous benefactors that had dedicated money for church improvement, said parish manager Anne Leclercq, who has overseen the project for the parish. There are 75 stained-glass windows in the church to be restored; 30 were completed in the first phase. Reinstallation of the stained-glass windows from phase one was completed in July.



The restored windows include the rose window above the organ, the small window of St. Joseph next to his altar, all the windows above the high altar

and all the windows in the church hall. Completed restoration also includes the large window of the Annunciation next to Mary's altar. Parishioners can get a closer look at the restoration efforts by comparing it to the window on the opposite side of the side entrance, which has not yet been restored.

The church is heading into the second phase of stained-glass window restoration for the remaining windows.

"We are building on the historic beauty of the church and the partnership of our parishioners," Leclercq

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Catholic Charities

When times are challenging, we open doors

By AMY ZAJAC

BRIDGEPORT—Every year, Catholic Charities of Fairfield County opens its doors to thousands of individuals and families seeking help, hope and healing. Whether it's groceries for a hungry family, counseling for a single mom struggling with depression, or a path forward for a person rebuilding after illness or hardship, these acts of compassion are assisted through the generosity of annual donors.

Annual giving is simple, but its impact is profound. These funds allow Catholic Charities to respond to immediate needs and planning for the future. It is powerful, and the support helps keep the agency's mission alive.

Michael Donoghue, executive director of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, explains it well. "One-time emergency appeals provide relief in times of crisis, but annual giving provides ongoing support that sustains

essential programs every day throughout the year." With food pantries, soup kitchens, counseling, housing assistance and family services, Catholic Charities relies on annual gifts to keep these lifelines open.

Donoghue adds, "Annual contributions ensure that when someone knocks on our door, we can greet them with compassion and practical help. When crises arise—such as the end of SNAP benefits, rising food costs, or government shutdowns—we act quickly to fill the gaps."

An annual giving fund allows Catholic Charities to purchase food in bulk, expand housing resources and extend emergency aid without delay.

While Catholic Charities offers three annual year-end appeals, they support one mission – hope. These three options give donors the opportunity to choose where their generosity will have the greatest personal impact.



- Catholic Charities of Fairfield County – Provides supportive services that enable families to rise out of poverty, overcome barriers, and achieve self-sufficiency and independence.
- New Covenant Center in Stamford—Provides meals,

a food pantry, and essential services to individuals and families facing hunger and homelessness to our neighbors in Stamford.

- Thomas Merton Family Center in Bridgeport (Friendsgiving Campaign) – Provides warm meals, shower program, case management services and other essential services to the most vulnerable in Bridgeport.

With 87 cents of every dollar raised directly supporting vital programs, each appeal represents the Catholic Charities mission, reflecting the full spectrum of care—feeding bodies, healing minds and lifting spirits.

Nonprofits such as Catholic Charities rely on financial predictability. Annual donations provide a reliable source of funding that allows for better planning, resource allocation, and program development.

This consistency makes long-term initiatives—such as job training, affordable housing or mental health services—possible. Annual gifts ensure stability amid uncertainty, helping Catholic Charities to plan boldly and serve faithfully.

"Annual giving isn't just about generosity. It's a tangible way to welcome and offer compassion to our most vulnerable neighbors," Donoghue said. "For many, annual giving is a spiritual practice—an offering of gratitude for the blessings they've received and a commitment to provide a hand up to others in need."

The importance of charitable giving was reflected at the Catholic Charities USA Annual Gathering in October. A letter from Pope Leo was delivered, stating, "I express my heartfelt gratitude for all that you and those in your networks do each day to put into practice the Lord's admonition to see and serve him in the poor, hungry, homeless, and people in any kind of need."

By supporting one or more of Catholic Charities' three year-end appeals, donors can partner in this vital mission, ensuring that compassion, dignity and hope continue to reach every corner of our community.

(For more information about Catholic Charities and these year-end appeals, visit www.ccfairfield.org.)

ST. JAMES HONORS OUR LADY FROM PAGE 7

enthusiasm in loving and serving our God, and confidence in the public defense of his Holy Name and of his divine and natural laws."

organized in 1460 by St. Alan de la Roche with 15 Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries. St. John Paul II added the Luminous Mysteries in October 2002.



Before they began, Father Adamski explained the evolution of the Rosary from the earliest Christian times, when the faithful would pray 150 Our Fathers as a substitute for reading the 150 psalms, until 1208 when the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Dominic and gave him the Rosary, which was later

Lourdes, dressed in a white dress and a blue sweater—the colors of the Blessed Mother—led the fourth decade, the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple, and prayed in Spanish.

When they finished, Father Adamski said, "We have just prayed the most powerful prayer,

which the Blessed Mother has given us. I urge you to pray it every day." By praying the Rosary, the faithful can bring Jesus back into society, promote peace and end abortion, he said.

After he thanked Lourdes and Orlando Dominguez for their inspiration and organizing the procession, the crowd erupted in applause.

Moments later, a convoy of military trucks drove by, and Father Adamski said, "Here comes the cavalry in honor of Mary." As if on cue, the National Guard members waved and blew their horns.

The group then left the church and processed up Broad Street, across Elm and down Academy Hill Road to Main Street, walking behind the statue of the Blessed Mother, wearing a crown and displaying her Immaculate Heart.

Among the faithful was longtime parishioner Joe Sullivan, who came to answer the call of Our Lady.

"Lourdes answered Mary when Mary whispered to her to do a novena to Our Lady of Fatima and set up a Rosary procession," he said. "Mary has

come many times and always says to pray the Rosary for peace and to end intolerance in the world. St. James' community of faith is well known for coming together in support of spiritual causes."

Sullivan, who has a strong devotion to the Blessed Mother, said, "Many times in my life, I would come before Mary and pray to her ... and she answered my prayers."

He credited Our Lady with teaching him how to pray the Rosary from his heart.

"I used to pray it with my brain, but now I try to pray with my heart because prayers not said in earnest don't reach Heaven," he said. "Today, we come to Mary not for our wants but for our needs, so this is a wonderful thing because it reinforces the power of prayer for us all."

High school student Brianna Zafe and her brother were among the volunteers who took part in the procession.

"I'm here because I wanted to help," she said. "Every day we pray the Rosary as a family before or after church, so it is very important to us."

Special Pastoral Message

On Immigration, from the United States Conference for Catholic Bishops



As pastors, we the bishops of the United States are bound to our people by ties of communion and compassion in Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are disturbed when we see among our people a climate of fear and anxiety around questions of profiling and immigration enforcement. We are saddened by the state of contemporary debate and the vilification of immigrants. We are concerned about the conditions in detention

centers and the lack of access to pastoral care. We lament that some immigrants in the United States have arbitrarily lost their legal status. We are troubled by threats against the sanctity of houses of worship and the special nature of hospitals and schools. We are grieved when we meet parents who fear being detained when taking their children to school and when we try to console family members who have

already been separated from their loved ones.

Despite obstacles and prejudices, generations of immigrants have made enormous contributions to the well-being of our nation. We as Catholic bishops love our country and pray for its peace and prosperity. For this very reason, we feel compelled now in this environment to raise our voices in defense of God-given human dignity.

Catholic teaching exhorts nations to recognize the fundamental dignity of all persons, including immigrants. We bishops advocate for a meaningful reform of our nation's immigration laws and procedures. Human dignity and national security are not in conflict. Both are possible if people of good will work together.

We recognize that nations have a responsibility to regulate their borders and establish a just and orderly immigration system for the sake of the common good. Without such processes, immigrants face the risk of trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Safe and legal pathways serve as

an antidote to such risks.

The Church's teaching rests on the foundational concern for the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). As pastors, we look to Sacred Scripture and the example of the Lord himself, where we find the wisdom of God's compassion. The priority of the Lord, as the Prophets remind us, is for those who are most vulnerable: the widow, the orphan, the poor and the stranger (Zechariah 7:10). In the Lord Jesus, we see the One who became poor for our sake (2 Corinthians 8:9), we see the Good Samaritan who lifts us from the dust (Luke 10:30-37), and we see the One who is found in the least of these (Matthew 25). The Church's concern for neighbor and our concern here for immigrants is a response to the Lord's command to love as he has loved us (John 13:34).

To our immigrant brothers and sisters, we stand with you in your suffering, since, when one member suffers, all suffer (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26). You are not alone!

We note with gratitude that so many of our clergy, consecrated religious and lay faithful already accompany and assist immigrants in meeting their basic human needs. We urge all people of good will to continue and expand such efforts.

We oppose the indiscriminate mass deportation of people. We pray for an end to dehumanizing rhetoric and violence, whether directed at immigrants or at law enforcement. We pray that the Lord may guide the leaders of our nation, and we are grateful for past and present opportunities to dialogue with public and elected officials. In this dialogue, we will continue to advocate for meaningful immigration reform.

As disciples of the Lord, we remain men and women of hope, and hope does not disappoint! (cf. Romans 5:5)

May the mantle of Our Lady of Guadalupe enfold us all in her maternal and loving care and draw us ever closer to the heart of Christ.

(Para leer este mensaje en español, visite www.tinyurl.com/USCCBesp.)

WINDOW RESTORATION FROM PAGE 9

said. "It's a unique opportunity to be part of maintaining something so beautiful and spiritually inspiring."

A capital campaign is underway to fund the project with a goal of raising \$1.4 million. The generosity of donors has raised just over half the amount needed for the project, Leclercq said. The parish is actively accepting donations and money can be pledged to the project and paid over the next three years. It's anticipated that the restoration of the next set of windows will begin as early as December, with the reinstallation of the stained glass windows in 2026.

When the windows are removed, realistic-looking scrims are put in its place so as not to disrupt the overall look of the church and to maintain a consistency of appearance during restoration.

"It's an important detail because no one wants to see their church in disarray," said Leclercq.

In addition to restoring the windows the restoration includes putting a protective barrier on the outside of the windows to provide additional protection from the elements.

With the windows restored, the beauty of the church is enhanced, and details in the restored stained-glass windows, especially those above the altar, can more readily be seen.

"You can see a landscape above the evangelist, like a mountain or a lake," Leclercq said, referring to the stained-glass windows above the altar. "I never saw that before. It's beautiful."

"Beauty in Catholic churches is absolutely a necessity and not an additional bonus for those who can afford to have nice and beautiful things," Father Silva said. "Not only does God deserve to have the items that occupy his place of worship that reflect who He is, but this beauty draws those who do not know him to himself."

The beauty of the church and the stained glass windows help inspire worship for all those that gaze upon it.

"It's such an inspiration to look at the rose window while playing the organ," said parish organist and music director Robert Fertitta, who sits just feet away from the window in the loft, which depicts St. Cecelia wearing a white gown, red cape and a cross hanging from neck while playing the organ with one hand on the keyboard and three organ pipes in the background.

Fertitta has photographed many stained-glass windows in his travels and recently gave a presentation at St. Joseph reflecting on the beauty and significance of many of the windows in churches around the world and specifically in the Diocese of Bridgeport. His work can be seen on many church websites.

"We have a beautifully unique church, and we're able to work as a parish family to keep it that way," Leclercq said.

Father Silva agreed.

"This is a church with a rich history, with incredible beauty, and is one that future generations of parishioners would undoubtedly be grateful that both its history as well as its beauty has been preserved and protected," he said.



THE PARISH OF ST. CECILIA - ST. GABRIEL 2025 CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE

Christmas Eve Vigil Masses - Wednesday, December 24, 2025

St. Gabriel Church: 4:00 p.m.

St. Cecilia Church: 4:00 p.m. and 12:00 Midnight

Christmas Day Masses - Thursday, December 25, 2025

St. Cecilia Church: 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 11:15 a.m.

The Solemnity of Mary Vigil Mass Wednesday, December 31, 2025

St. Gabriel Church: 4:00 p.m.

The Solemnity of Mary Masses Thursday, January 1, 2026

St. Cecilia Church: 7:30 a.m. and 11:15 a.m.

St. Cecilia Church ~ 1184 Newfield Avenue ~ Stamford
St. Gabriel Church ~ 948 Newfield Avenue ~ Stamford

EDITORIAL

Remembering
our beloved departed

As the weather turns colder and the days grow shorter, we are once again in the month of November, when we are called to remember and pray for our deceased loved ones. And as I listened to Bishop Caggiano during the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed on November 2, I couldn't help but think back on my beloved friends and family members who have gone before me into the mystery of death.

First to my mind was my grandfather—my only one, as the other had died well before I was born. I remember him being my consistent companion in the early years of my life. We'd watch TV (well, I would, he'd nap), eat ice cream and go to the library to pick out new books for me and for him. I remember his kindness, his quiet dignity, and how no one was happier than him to spend a day at the beach. He's never far from my mind whenever I walk Fairfield County's beaches or when I'm watching a baseball game.

His wife, my grandmother, was also by my side quite often in my early days. She taught me to be gentle with their two cats, engendering in me a lifelong love and reverence for animals. And without her, I literally would not know my left from my right. I could never remember which shoe to put on which foot, and she had the bright idea to write "L" and "R" on the soles of each shoe so I could tell them apart. I can't help but get up and dance in her memory whenever I hear a Frank Sinatra song: he was always her favorite.

Finally, my other grandmother remains with me anytime I step into a church. I'd often accompany her to Mass when no one else would, and our shared faith became a touchstone for us as I got older. I think of her whenever I cook tomato sauce, remembering her delicious home cooking. And I also remember her whenever I cook chicken soup, which was one of the only things she would eat toward the end of her life.

Of course I miss them all, but they are never far from me. I take comfort when I remember how deeply I was loved by them: as a child, as a teenager and into my early adulthood. My relationship with them hasn't ended, but merely changed. And while I am in no rush to get there, I look forward to the day when I will see them again.

This November, know of my prayers for all of the departed—including the ones you hold near and dear to your hearts. May they rest peacefully and see the Lord face-to-face.

Bishops elect new officers

BALTIMORE—The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) met in Baltimore the week November 10 for their plenary assembly. Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, Okla. was elected as Conference president, and Bishop Daniel E. Flores of the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas was elected as Conference vice president. They succeed Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, the Archbishop for the Military Services, USA, and Archbishop William E. Lori of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, who are concluding their terms as Conference president and vice president, respectively.

The president and vice president were elected from a slate of 10 nominees. Archbishop Coakley was elected president with 128-109 votes over Bishop Flores in a runoff on the third ballot. In the vote for vice president, Bishop Flores was elected vice president on the first ballot from the remaining nine candidates.

Archbishop Coakley studied for the priesthood at Mount St. Mary Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md., and was ordained a priest on May 21, 1983 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Wichita, Kan. After serving as a priest in the Diocese of Wichita for 21 years, he was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Salina, Kan. on October 21, 2004.

On December 16, 2010, Bishop Coakley was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI as the fourth Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. Archbishop Coakley selected "Duc in Altum" (Put Out into the Deep) as his episcopal motto. Jesus calls the Church today, as always, to put out into the deep, as a witness to hope, to hear and to respond joyfully to his word with faith and confidence. It is a call to embrace the challenges and opportunities of the New Evangelization.

Bishop Flores entered Holy Trinity Seminary, an institution associated with the University of Dallas, in 1981. He received a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy in 1983 and a Masters of Divinity in 1987 and was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Corpus Christi, Texas, the following year. He completed his Doctorate in Sacred Theology in 2000 at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas.

In October 2006, Pope Benedict XVI named him Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of Detroit, Mich. Recognizing the growing population of Catholics of Hispanic heritage in the Archdiocese of Detroit, Cardinal Maida named Bishop Flores to oversee Hispanic ministry in the archdiocese. On December 9, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI appointed Bishop Flores as the Sixth Bishop of Brownsville. He was installed on February 2, 2010 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle. ■

EDITOR'S CHOICE

New ministry to accompany the suffering

By STEVEN FILIZZOLA

SHELTON—Many who sit among us in the pews each Sunday suffer from physical or emotional pain. Yet, most of their anguish remains unknown to those around them. Medical and family care is often available, but on-going spiritual care remains elusive.

Five years ago, St. Aloysius Parish in New Canaan began a program to accompany the suffering, based on the book *Peace in the Storm: Meditations on Chronic Pain and Illness* by Maureen Pratt. They became the first parish in the country to begin a ministry based on the book, and Pratt quickly developed an extensive program to assist any parish to create and grow this ministry. Now, the Peace in the Storm Project is used in dozens of parishes around the nation.

The Diocese of Bridgeport has two parishes offering this ministry, as St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Fairfield followed the lead of St. Aloysius earlier this year. Eight additional parishes are now developing a Peace in the Storm ministry, and by next summer, the Diocese of Bridgeport plans to have over 20 parishes with programs to accompany the suffering.

The Peace in the Storm Project helps those who suffer deal with the tormenting questions: "Why me?" "Where is God?" "Did I do something wrong?" Using the book and the accompanying conversation guide, group members

will explore topics such as: Loneliness, Acquiring Courage, Finding Laughter, Keeping God Central Filled with Grace, Living a Divine Life and Being Truly Restful.

Father David Roman, who has led the effort to establish both the St. Aloysius and St. Thomas Aquinas ministries, said, "Peace

guides participants to explore scripture, Catholic teachings, prayer and the wisdom of shared experiences. Together, they create a welcoming community, experience spiritual growth, engage in shared reflection, receive practical support and focus on a deeper relationship with God and the Church.

Pratt has seen her program rapidly expand. "Since the book's publication in 2005, I had hoped that Catholic parishes would use it to support people who were also trying to stay close to God while living through life's 'storms.' The support from the Diocese of Bridgeport, especially Bishop Caggiano, have helped the hope become reality - an immense joy and ongoing blessing that I pray will bring comfort and peace to all who participate in the groups throughout the diocese," she said.

Pratt is scheduled to visit the diocese this coming April as part of the "Bishop's Lecture Series," in which she will share with her expert thoughts on accompanying the suffering. She guides both those who suffer and their caregivers, which often include family members and friends.

The Peace in the Storm Project is theologically sound, practical, spiritual support for those who suffer. This ministry will make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who suffer, in ways that secular organizations cannot. The diocesan Peace in the Storm team will mentor and assist any parish willing to establish this program. ■

"The Peace in the Storm Project is theologically sound, practical, spiritual support for those who suffer."

in the Storm groups provide a unique opportunity to remind people that they're not suffering alone. Our goal in establishing this ministry is to remind people that as a member of the one body of Christ, they are loved, supported and walked with. Peace in the Storm has brought much healing, peace and consolation to those who are sick."

Pat Calanca, who co-developed the first diocese ministry five years ago with Father Roman, said, "This ministry offers parishes and parishioners a completely unique opportunity to gather folks with challenges, in a spiritual way, to share how our faith has helped us in our struggle and to walk with each other as we continue to face our individual challenge."

This parish-based ministry

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Editorials



Keeper of the memories

COLLECTING MOMENTS

BY EMILY CLARK

Emily Clark is a writer and teacher, and a member of St Theresa Parish in Trumbull.

Each year as Thanksgiving approaches, the pressure mounts. It's not about where everyone will go (our house, of course) or if the turkey will be dry (it will, of course) or when the aunts will arrive (late, of course). It's the yearly albeit welcome pressure handed down to me from my grandmother over 30 years ago to preserve the memories we made in the last 12 months.

They're not the memories of photos in an album or of words in a journal. They're the memories printed, with humor and sentimentality, on tiny, folded place cards—previously in her perfect penmanship and now in my careful cursive.

An Austrian immigrant with a life defined by hard work, my grandmother was not all that demonstrative in her affection. She showed her love best in her authentic recipes and stories of

the homeland. Her dream of becoming a teacher and a writer could never be realized with a limited eighth-grade education, but she found a way to do both through her only granddaughter—instructing me in the art of making a savory goulash and modeling how to write from the heart, which she did each year at Thanksgiving.

In her house smelling of brined turkey and mince pie, we would find one of those tiny, folded place cards, sitting alone on her bone china plates. No one could peek until after the blessing, which my grandfather said with special reverence, but then, we rushed to open them. What did Gram write about us this year? we wondered, quickly reading her four-line poems. My dad's detailed his new bright blue pick-up. My brother, a soccer goalie, shared his on the team's winning record. My aunt's

November birthday, which often fell on the holiday, was the focus of hers. We'd laugh and smile at each one, until my grandmother read hers.

Unlike ours about light-hearted events, hers was always a prayer, an original one, written as her way to give thanks to God on this day of Thanksgiving.

Even as a child, I saw in those verses the deep faith my grandmother held and the familial connections she cherished, passed onto us through her words and actions. And now, I, like my grandmother before me, have the privilege of capturing the heart of my family, fueling the faith that sustains us when life becomes more complicated than pick-up trucks and soccer games.

In reliving these memories each year as I prepare to write again, I see how this tradition brings a special awareness to the

ever-unfolding graces that have come our way. As we tell our stories, through turkey-themed place cards or in the oral tradition of our ancestors, we realize that our family, like so many others, is just one of the great gifts bestowed on us by the Almighty.

A friend once said that these poems are like those photographs in an album, cherished mementos offering a glimpse into our lives of yesteryear. Photographs would be less pressure, I think, as I contemplate what to write. Turning over an old worn place card of my grandmother's, dated 1982, I seek her words as inspiration: "Now that the verses are said and done, we thank the Lord, the Father and Son; let's count our blessings and serious be, and lift a prayer for you and for me." Maybe I'll use her words in place of mine this year.

Thanks, Gram. ■



Secrets to a long marriage

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

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

I recently was asked to "say a few words" at my niece's wedding, which is good because when I'm asked to speak, I prefer to say as few words as possible.

Talking about marriage can be a dicey undertaking, unless you're like the great comedian, Henny Youngman, whose trademark one-liner was "The secret of a happy marriage ... remains a secret." He was also known for his famous joke: "Take my wife ... please."

But marriage isn't a joke, although in our era it's not taken seriously enough.

When I met the young couple, I told them, "I can tell a few humorous stories, if you let me know a little about yourselves."

Then, in a serious tone, I added. "Let's be clear about one thing...." (Cue: Tense silence and anxious glances.) "I'm going to mention God."

They relaxed. "God is good," I told them and they nodded agreement.

Sad to say, I've been to marriages where God wasn't mentioned at all, although there were Aztec incantations, Hindu prayers, e.e. Cummings' poems, and all sorts of mumbo jumbo.

You see, many young people inhabit a world far removed from faith formation classes and young adult ministries, which means they don't talk about God and don't really know much about him—especially as far as marriage is concerned.

They may have learned about Jesus in their early years, but then secular society swallowed them whole like that whale in the Book of Jonah.

But you can't keep a good God down. Jesus is always looking for ways to creep in the door, even if it's only open a crack. He can be persistent, really persistent, until he gets what he wants, and thank goodness—or thank God—he often does.

So the kids were OK with God. Once I realized they weren't panicking, I pushed the envelope a little further and said, "You know, marriage is a sacrament." They nodded, even though a priest wouldn't be marrying them. "And you know, you're making a vow to be faithful for life?" They nodded again. "And you know (now I was really going for the gold) if you want your marriage to last, you have to pray for each other." Silence. OK, maybe I pushed a little too far, but I planned to return to that topic in my 10-minute monologue.

I also wanted to include a small portion of the "Exhortation Before Marriage,"

which was read at Catholic weddings before Vatican II.

It says in part: "This union is most serious, because it will bind you together for life in a relationship so close and so intimate, that it will profoundly influence your whole future. That future, with its hopes and disappointments, its successes and its failures, its pleasures and its pains, its joys and its sorrows, is hidden from your eyes. You know these elements are mingled in every life and are to be expected in your own. So not knowing what is before you, you take each other for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death ... And whatever sacrifices you may hereafter be required to make to preserve this mutual life, always make them generously. Sacrifice is usually difficult and irksome. Only love can make it easy, and perfect love can make it a joy. We are willing to give in proportion to our love. And when love is perfect, the sacrifice is complete."

That just about says it all when it comes to advice for a lasting marriage.

Pope Francis often said the

three most important words in married life are "please," "thank you" and "I'm sorry." My friend Judy believes a sense of humor is necessary, especially as you get older and life gets harder. She and her husband Ben recently celebrated their 58th anniversary, so she must know what she's talking about.

For his part, Henny Youngman had this to say: "Some people ask the secret of our long marriage. We take time to go to a restaurant two times a week. A little candlelight, dinner, soft music and dancing. She goes Tuesdays, I go Fridays."

Despite his jokes, he took marriage seriously, and his wife Sadie, who was often the butt of his comedy, attended his performances. In her final years, she suffered a debilitating illness but was afraid of hospitals, so Youngman had her bedroom turned into an intensive care unit.

When she died in 1987, they were married almost 60 years. The comedian was so devastated he told a reporter, "This is the first time I ever said, 'Don't take my wife' ... and they took her anyway." ■

Catholic Schools

CAB gala raised \$1 million

DARIEN—The Catholic Academy of Bridgeport (CAB) held its annual gala themed “Charting Our Course Together” at Woodway Country Club on October 23. The school honored longtime supporter Dr. Frank P. Cammisa, Jr. and six CAB alumni who have gone on to success in medical-related fields.

Through a live auction and paddle raise, the Academy raised \$1 million. These funds will impact the 880 PreK-8th grade students who attend CAB, 86 percent of whom come from families living at or below the poverty level and 96 percent of whom qualify for need-based financial assistance.

After a festive cocktail hour, Board Chair John Kreitler welcomed guests in the ballroom, sharing that while CAB’s 20th anniversary, celebrated last year, was indeed a historic landmark and one of which he continues to be very proud, the Academy is already hard at work planning for the next 20 years and beyond.

“Fundraisers like this are crucial to our efforts, but we know that we must work diligently to expand operational and endowed giving opportunities, and to steward new donors to ensure

momentum for the decades to come,” Kreitler said.

Next, Executive Director Angela Pohlen gave an inspiring speech laced with humor and storytelling, explaining, “We are a school that on paper shouldn’t exist ... We fundraise for what public schools get as a matter of course, and yet here we are, unapologetic, with the audacity to ask for more ... because I will be audacious on behalf of our students. While we need to ask for help every year just to do what we already do, to do more we have to think big, dream big and figure out how to make it work ... So, we come to you and we hope that you will be our partners ... and like Simon, help us to carry the cross of this work because the reward is so, so great ... We don’t need help standing at the top of the mountain, we need help with the climb.”

Pohlen’s speech segwayed into an emotional performance of Miley Cyrus’s “The Climb” sung by CAB alumna Kiara Johnson ‘25, now a freshman at Notre Dame Prep in Fairfield.

Sister Joan Magnetti, RSCJ, major gifts coordinator, then presented the Good Shepherd Award to Cammisa, a friend for over 30 years.

“Frank, you have attended many galas and golf outings for our school, often coming straight out of a busy day of surgery,” Sister Joan said. “You sponsored a (CAB) Rising Stars student who was a refugee fleeing from persecution in the Congo, even paying his tuition through eighth grade. But more than all that, you have lived the Gospel message as written in St. John: ‘I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me and I lay down my life for the sheep.’”

Cammisa thanked Sister Joan, then spoke from the heart to encourage those in attendance to support CAB too.

Following an elegant dinner, CAB alumnus Jeremiah Andre ‘15, one of over a dozen-plus family members who have attended the Academy, spoke. Andre, who went on to attend Kolbe Cathedral Prep, Fairfield University and the University of Bridgeport, and now is in his final year of a two-year Masters in Science at the University of Hartford, said he is specializing in Prosthetics and Orthotics because “it’s a field where I get to combine science, creativity and compassion to help people



live fuller lives. I realize the foundation for all of this—the confidence, the drive, the sense of community, even the love of science—was planted back at CAB.”

Andre and five other CAB alumni were then recognized and applauded.

A live auction and robust pad-

dle raise was followed by nearly two dozen alumni being invited up to the stage to sing “We Are Family.” It was a fun-filled, laughter-packed way to end the night and the crowd stayed to mingle long after the music ended.

(To learn more about CAB, visit www.catholicacademybridgeport.org.) ■

Other distinguished alumni recognized at ‘Charting Our Course Together’ Gala

Zaid Aparicio is a 2011 alumnus of CAB’s St. Augustine campus. He went on to Kolbe Cathedral Prep then received a Magis Scholarship to attend Fairfield University’s competitive nursing program, as one of only six males. Today, he is the nurse manager for the VA’s Cardiac Telemetry Unit, where he oversees 30 nurses and six nursing assistants. He says he is passionate about working with veterans “because their needs and healthcare are unique and require specialized training, particularly since their issues are often a result of their combat experience.”

Keara Klein is a 2016 alumna of CAB’s St. Ann campus who refers to CAB as “a college prep school.” After graduating from Sacred Heart Academy in Hamden, Conn., she went on to participate in a high-performance shadowing program at St. Joseph’s University where she earned a B.S. in biology. Today, she is in her second year of graduate school at Sacred Heart University, where she is pursuing her doctorate in physical therapy with a focus on geriatrics.

Emma Leito is a 2016 alumna of CAB’s St. Ann campus. She went on to attend Luralton Hall in Milford, Conn., received a B.S. in Nursing from Endicott College, shadowed a midwife, and has worked for the past several years on the Labor and Delivery and Maternal Special Care floor at Yale New Haven Hospital. She will be switching to the Pediatric ICU soon as she seeks to get critical care experience in her consideration of becoming a nurse practitioner one day.

Dr. LaToya McLean is a 2007 alumna of CAB’s St. Ann campus who received a full merit scholarship to the University of Connecticut, where she earned a B.S. in physiology and neurobiology. She later graduated with an M.S. in basic medical sciences and then a Doctor of Medicine from New York Medical College. She completed an internship in internal medicine at Montefiore and today is chief resident in the fourth year of her radiation oncology residency.

Victoria Trentini is a 2011 alumna of CAB’s St. Andrew campus who was a top student, top athlete, and president of the student council. She went on to similar success at Kolbe Cathedral Prep, Fairfield University and Capella University, where she received her Masters in Nursing. She spent several years working as a nurse at Bridgeport Hospital and treated the first-ever COVID patient at that hospital in 2020. Today, she is a nurse manager for a post-anesthesia unit. ■

Seven Kolbe students named Inner-City scholars

BRIDGEPORT—Foundations in Education is pleased to announce the 2025-2026 Inner-City Foundation Scholars at Kolbe Cathedral Preparatory School.

Established in 2015, Foundations in Education’s mission is to strengthen and transform the mission of Catholic education in the Diocese of Bridgeport by providing tuition assistance to families in need, supporting innovation in academic programs and fostering opportunities for the professional development of school leaders.

The Inner-City Foundation board directed funds to Foundations in Education to establish the fund during

the 2021-2022 academic year. Investment income earned from the principal balance of the endowed fund established by the Inner-City Board is distributed annually to benefit Kolbe students in the form of scholarships for a minimum of four students each year.

“We are exceedingly grateful to the board of the Inner-City Foundation for having the foresight as they were winding down their operations, to preserve the organization’s legacy, while creating this Scholarship in perpetuity, aiding students for generations to come. This year, the fund provided seven scholarships, the most since the fund was established,” said Holly Doherty-Lemoine, executive director of Foundations

in Education.

The Inner-City Scholars are awarded in consultation with the Kolbe principal and considered as part of Kolbe Preparatory School’s annual enrollment application. The awards are based on financial need and intended for students of good character and strong academics, as identified by the Kolbe principal as having demonstrated leadership or shown leadership potential.

Seven students received the scholarship for the 2025-2026 academic year: six seniors and one sophomore.

Ryan Alvarez, a sophomore, chose to attend Kolbe Cathedral, favoring the strong academic college prep. He

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

Catholic Schools

Immaculate opens Business Innovation Center

By AMY POLACKO

DANBURY—Immaculate High School officially opened its new Business Innovation Center on Thursday, October 23, marking another milestone in the school's commitment to preparing students for college, careers and leadership in a rapidly changing world.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony brought together faculty, alumni and community partners, including Danbury Mayor Roberto Alves, to celebrate the launch of this cutting-edge space designed for hands-on business education, entrepreneurship and innovation. The center includes collaborative workstations, presentation tech-

nology, stock market trading simulation through Interactive Brokers software and flexible areas for project development—all modeled after real-world environments.

Immaculate alumni Chris Palmer '68, a former NFL coach, and Rob O'Neill '91, chief financial officer of pharmaceutical company Viatrix, played a crucial role in funding and championing the Business Innovation Center.

"The business world is increasingly grappling with complex ethical dilemmas, particularly around the use of Artificial Intelligence," O'Neill said. "Addressing these challenges requires more than technical expertise—it demands a foun-



dation rooted in ethics, empathy and service. Immaculate's Business Innovation Center is uniquely positioned to prepare students for this reality. By fostering a learning environment grounded in responsibility, compassion and reverence, the center empowers students to become thoughtful leaders who can navigate the moral complexities of modern business."

"I think this is yet another thing that sets Immaculate apart from other schools," said Palmer. "If you come for a visit and have any inkling for doing something in business, this center is going to jump out at you. I think it's going to take off—and it's fun!"

Interest in business and entrepreneurship among high school students is growing nationwide, and Immaculate is on the cutting edge of that trend, providing students with the resources, mentorship and technology to explore finance, marketing, leadership and startup ventures.

"This is an exciting day for Immaculate!" said Head of School Wendy Neil. "Business education should feel like the real world. Now, thanks to the help of our alumni, community and partners, our students will practice the skills that colleges and employers value most."

The Business Innovation Center will serve as the home base for Immaculate's business program, offering students opportunities to develop practical skills and gain exposure to the fast-evolving world of business and technology. The school will also host a speaker series in the center during which outside business leaders can share their expertise with students.

The center is already having an impact on students.

they can watch it. It gives them a feeling that they are close to Wall Street and it's constantly moving, so it makes students feel connected to a larger world out there."

Following the ceremony, guests toured the new space and viewed project demonstrations showcasing creativity, problem-solving and collaboration in action. The new facility is part of Immaculate's ongoing investment in advanced academic and career spaces that prepare students for success. Recent additions include a state-of-the-art eSports Lab, Certified Nursing Assistant Clinical Room and renovated science and fitness facilities, reflecting the school's forward-looking strategic plan. ■

St. Catherine Center hosts annual Special Needs Mass



FAIRFIELD—On Sunday, November 2, St. Catherine Center for Special Needs held its annual Mass celebrating people with special needs at Holy Cross Parish. Monsignor Robert Weiss, a St. Catherine Center board member, celebrated the Mass.

The St. Catherine Center community actively participated in the celebration. Dave Stowe, parent and Center board member, and his daughter, Anna, a student at St. Catherine Academy, delivered the readings. Jessie, a young adult participant, led the Prayer of the Faithful alongside her mother, Michelle Rivelli, who also serves on the board. Tyler Harding, a young adult participant, and his family presented the offertory gifts.

The Mass coincided with All Souls' Day, a time to remember and pray for those who have passed.

In his homily, Monsignor Weiss reflected, "As we continue our remembrance on this day, we pray for those who are not with us. We pray in gratitude for those who are in heaven, and we especially pray for each other on this earth."

Following the liturgy, all were invited to a reception in the church hall, graciously organized by the Connecticut Order of Malta.

St. Catherine Center extends its heartfelt thanks to Monsignor Weiss, the Connecticut Order of Malta and all who helped make this annual celebration of faith and inclusion possible.

(Each year, St. Catherine Center offers young people with special needs the opportunity to receive one or more Sacraments of Initiation outside the typical faith formation program. For more information, contact the Center at 203.540.5381.) ■

Theology bowl binders blessed



SHELTON—On November 14, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano blessed the binders that will be used in an upcoming Theology Bowl competition for Catholic high school students. Hosted by the diocese's apologetics office, the competition is slated for Spring 2026.

The bishop prayed that the binders "may become instruments of your grace and wisdom, that they may be the vehicle and means by which our young people will learn more deeply the richness and beauty of our Catholic faith, to become more articulate in its explanation, and most especially to live what they believe." ■

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Catholic Schools

A mile to the summit

By CARLOS PARDO MARTIN

It was one of those perfect Connecticut fall mornings, the kind of crisp, golden day that makes you forget winter exists. My photographer brother-in-law was in town, and since he's a good sport, he agreed to join the Mountaineers Club from Stella Maris School on their monthly hike to capture some footage for my kid's school.

And, so that my wife's good-willed brother might not feel alone in his laudable effort, I decided (either by some altogether unique inspiration or by complete lack of judgement) to join the hike too, bringing along our four youngest children.

That meant my seven-year-old, thrilled to hike "with the big boys" (Mountaineers starts in fourth grade, a true rite of passage); my five-year-old daughter, who would follow me into a pit of lava without hesitation; my four-year-old, wearing a bright yellow jacket and convinced he could climb Everest as long as his siblings were ahead; and my one-and-a-half-year-old, who, for reasons I still don't fully understand, developed an intense aversion of

leaves and screamed every time her shoes touched them.

Ten minutes in, I told my brother-in-law to go ahead with his camera and capture the glory of the day while I kept pace with the kids.

"We'll catch up," I said confidently. (Spoiler: we would not.)

Forty minutes later, I had carried the leaf-averse baby for most of the trail, sung every children's song I could remember and listened to my seven-year-old chant "I want to go home" on repeat. My arms ached, my ears rang and my spirit—well, it was fading fast.

Defeated, I called our school chaplain to let him know I wasn't going to make it. He told me, "You're just a mile from the summit. Keep it up! If you persevere, you'll still make it in time for Mass."

A mile. Was I supposed to rejoice, double down, take a rest, call a helicopter, give up? I didn't quite know for certain.

But something about that word—persevere—stuck with me. If it were one of my kids, I'd tell him to keep going. So, I hoisted the baby one more time and kept walking.

When we finally reached the top, the sight stopped me in my tracks. The Mountaineers, the

Stella Maris boys and the Mater Salvatoris girls were all kneeling in silence, heads bowed in prayer, surrounded by the blazing colors of fall—gold, orange, and scarlet leaves glowing under the late morning sun. Each student wore a colorful bandana, marking his or her rank and commitment within the Mountaineers hierarchy. For a quarter of an hour, there was hardly a word or movement perceived. Then, as the moment of prayer ended, and as they lifted their heads together, the chaplain urged them on, "For the greater glory of God!" Then all joined in heart and voice in a cry of "More! More! And more!" that could surely be heard in Manhattan.

In that echo stirred the fire of St. Francis Xavier, pillar in the order of the Jesuits—whose faith, like that of both orders guiding the Mountaineers, burned with the same relentless flame. His words seemed to flare into the wind: "Persevera per severa per se vera"—persevere through what is hard, for the truth is worth it. For Jesus, and for Our Lady, the heart of a Mountaineer of Stella Maris School will always be ready to climb higher, to give more, and to love without measure.



Moments later, as the Mass began at the summit, everything seemed to quiet. The light filtered through the trees, mimicking the shimmering glow of incense drifting toward the vaulted ceiling, and the forest became a cathedral: limbs of oak trees rose as columns to support the vault of a blue sky which no painter's brush could equal. Standing there, exhausted and holding my children, I realized that every step, every complaint, every ache had led precisely to this—a mountain-top Mass surrounded by beauty, joy and gratitude.

That's when it hit me: this is what Stella Maris School is all about—faith, perseverance and joy. The Mountaineers of the Immaculate Conception is more than a hiking club. It's a brotherhood of young men who desire to grow closer to Christ and one another. Through monthly hikes, prayer and apostolic service, they learn what it means to work hard, pray deeply and live with purpose. Each trip combines friendship, challenge and faith, culminating in moments of reflec-

tion and prayer that strengthen both body and soul.

As I caught my breath that day, watching all kids take in the view and surrounded by laughter of the mountaineers having lunch before continuing their hike, I couldn't help but think: for every kid wrestling with doubts and their own struggles that we perceive as small but for them it might as well be mountains, every parent stretched thin, every one of us weighed down by the climb, faith calls us to take just one more step.

And when we do, steadfast in faith and true to our purpose, we find at the summit the grace, joy and gratitude that come to those who never stop climbing.

About Stella Maris School

Located in Stamford, Stella Maris School forms boys of virtue, courage and faith through rigorous academics, deep spiritual formation and joyful community life. Its youth programs, such as the Mountaineers, help students grow in friendship with Christ and discover their mission in the world—one mountain, and one mile, at a time.



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DISCOVERING THE UNIQUE TALENTS AND FULL POTENTIAL OF EACH STUDENT

The power of an all-girls school

By MR. MICHAEL BABER

Editor's note: Mr. Baber is the president of Sacred Heart Greenwich, an independent all-girls Catholic school.

At Sacred Heart Greenwich, we see every day the profound impact of an all-girls education. Here, in a dynamic and supportive environment, girls are encouraged not only to challenge themselves but also to embrace boldness, curiosity and resilience. In a world that often places limitations on young women, we empower our students to define who they are, take risks and discover the limitless possibilities of who they are.

A Place Where Confidence Soars

Sacred Heart Greenwich is a place where students step forward with confidence, unafraid to use their voices. In coeducational settings, studies show that girls can sometimes hold back—whether in the classroom, on the field or in leadership roles. Our all-girl environment allows students to take center stage in every aspect of school life. They are the problem-solvers in STEM classes, the debaters leading discussions, the innovators in our labs, the stars on the stage, and the athletes setting records. They grow into bold thinkers who take intellectual risks and advocate for themselves and others.

She Defines Who She Is

Each girl at Sacred Heart Greenwich has the opportunity to explore her passions and develop her talents in an environment that

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Foundation News

St. Francis Xavier Fund looks back, steps forward

By CAROL INCARNACAO-SCHIRM

NORWALK—In September of 2025, Foundations in Faith published a much-anticipated report on the impact of the St. Francis Xavier Fund for Missionary Parishes. For the past five years, Kelly Weldon, director of Foundations in Faith, has been managing the ministry which provides grants to parishes and quasi-parishes in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

"It's been an honor to accompany pastors and entire communities as the SFX Fund, through its dedicated committee, works to address immediate needs and beyond in parishes where vibrant leadership and ministries thrive despite significant financial burdens tied to their facilities. Our goal is simple—to help lift those burdens so priests can return to what they do best: saving souls," Weldon said. "The SFX Fund is not a typical grantor, grant requests are received on a rolling basis and funds are made available

to the recipient within a couple of days. We are a ministry rooted in a relationship that provides immediate relief and a path ahead."

Father Abelardo Vasquez, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bridgeport, has sought the partnership of the SFX Fund many times over the years.

"My experience has been very positive. Everyone from St. Francis Xavier loves the Church. I am so grateful they really focus on helping people who are hungry for God," he said.

Since 2020, the SFX Fund has distributed more than \$2 million via 96 grants to 16 parishes and three quasi-parishes. Each year, SFX aims to distribute around \$500,000. At first, the grants were aimed at immediate relief. COVID-19 brought parish life to a halt, and the unique challenges facing individual parishes were brought to the fore. More than half of all grants awarded to date have addressed the basic needs of operating a parish: building repairs, general maintenance, security and



technological upgrades reflecting the 21st century.

The next level of SFX grants aims to stabilize parish operations through fiscal stability initiatives, expert consultants in various disciplines and investment in staffing and training. Lastly, SFX grants bring parishes over the finish line, so to speak, by helping them enhance the liturgy, activate their ministries

and deploy missionary outreach.

The report tells the story of the SFX Fund but also of the individual parishes that have benefited from this visionary endeavor. One such parish spotlight is St. Augustine Cathedral in Bridgeport. The impact of the SFX Fund at St. Augustine is one of responding to crises and building capacity. With nearly \$700,000 in total investments

in the Cathedral—including \$400,000 for a state-of-the-art geothermal heating and cooling system—the SFX Fund has transformed a financially strained parish, lacking in staff and ministries, into a multi-cultural hub for the Diocese of Bridgeport. It not only addressed major infrastructure needs, but it was also essential in implementing a fundraising campaign through Our Sunday Visitor that increased offertory and engaged the community.

The report boasts that today, St. Augustine Cathedral is home to 20 active ministries in multiple languages.

There are many such stories in the SFX report, each detailing the unique circumstances and successes of each parish and pastor partnership.

(To read the full report, visit www.foundationsinfaith.org/SFXReport. To support the St. Francis Xavier Fund for Missionary Parishes, contact Kelly Weldon at kelly.weldon@foundationsinfaith.org or at 203.416.1392.)

SEVEN KOLBE STUDENTS FROM PAGE 14

currently takes honors courses and has been described as being an exemplary student with a strong aptitude for mathematics. He leads by example through his dedication to his studies and his positive and collaborative nature. He loves baseball and even pitched a "no hitter" this past summer. He is a member of Kolbe's baseball team, playing the positions of pitcher, short stop and third base.

Densil Andrews entered Kolbe Cathedral as one of the top performers on the entrance exam. He has registered for multiple honors courses and completed his first Advanced Placement course as a freshman. He has participated in cross country and baseball and as a junior participated in the Career Pathways Advanced Manufacturing program, initially funded by an anonymous donor to Foundations in Education.

Mi'Yah Bostic is a leader on Kolbe's girls' basketball team, playing at the varsity level since her freshman year when the team made it to the State Championships. She has participated in Student Council and

the ECHO leadership program, which is dedicated to providing opportunities to build character, integrity and values and inspire today's youth to be tomorrow's leaders.

Cinsere Brooks has taken a series of honors courses, while participating in the Advanced Manufacturing program, currently in partnership with CT State Community College, earning several college credits. He is a member of the boys' cross country and basketball teams. He also works with his family lawn and gardening business and aspires to be a neurosurgeon.

Makalah Brown is enrolled in multiple honors courses within the college prep curriculum. She is a member of the Student Council, where she enjoys being a voice for the senior class and collaborating with other members. She also participated in the ECHO leadership program, where she interned with a school during the summer and currently volunteers with the Cardinal Shehan Center, a local children's community center in Bridgeport.

Kinsley Fanacio is enrolled

in honors and Advanced Placement courses. A member of the girls soccer team and indoor and outdoor track teams, she is also part of the Marian Work Study Program. Through the program, funded through Foundations in Education's Kolbe Transformation Initiative, she interns one day each week, gaining valuable professional experience. She is part of the Kolbe Art Club, has participated in the "100 Girls Leading" program, aimed at mentoring and empowering young girls to be active leaders, participates in a Hall Neighborhood College Prep program, Upward Bound and consistently volunteers for programs at her church.

Andix Torrealba advocates for himself and his classmates and displays a kind and mature nature. He is currently enrolled in multiple honors courses as well as Advanced Placement courses and is a member of Kolbe's boys' soccer team. A member of the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) Student Leadership Committee, he is

tasked with completing leadership activities that enhance the sports program for high schools across Connecticut. He plans to play professional soccer and has been extremely dedicated to being a voice and an example for his teammates.

Principal Camille Figluizzi shared, "Kolbe Cathedral Preparatory School will be forever indebted to the Inner City Foundation for their years of great generosity and commitment to our mission. The Inner City Foundation made it possible for hundreds of students to access a college prep curriculum in a faith filled environment. Our story lives on and the Inner City Foundation remains a large part of the story."

(To learn more about Foundations in Education, please visit www.foundationsineducation.org. To learn more about Kolbe Cathedral Preparatory School, please visit www.kolbecaths.org.)

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Sisters of the Holy Family

Sisters of Holy Family mark 150 years

By JOE PISANI

MONROE—One hundred and fifty years ago, a young Polish woman from a noble family left behind her life of wealth and privilege to start a religious community, inspired by another family—the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Frances Siedliska's congregation was founded on a commitment to do the work of God with families because "the family is the place where values are nurtured and persons are formed."

Today, the order that was established in 1875 by Bl. Mary of Jesus the Good Shepherd is an international apostolic congregation, celebrating its 150th anniversary at a time when families confront countless challenges. And its mission remains the same: to create communities of hope and love.

Sister Marita Ruppe, CSFN, superior of the convent in Monroe, said the congregation's 1,500 sisters continue to minister to families and communities in 14 countries, with their fastest growing missions in Spain and Ghana.

"To reach 150 years of service and have a congregation that is still thriving with young vocations is wonderful," she said.



"Our charism is family ministry, which is very important today. With 150 years in our past, we look to a hopeful future."

Sister Marita, who has been a member of the community 53 years, said Bl. Mary of Jesus' vision is particularly relevant now.

"The media, social media and other things that touch the lives of a family can cause problems and inner turmoil, and I think the fact that we're able to help them in some small way is very significant in today's society," she said. "We serve in any way we're needed—as teachers, nurses, social workers, marriage and mental health counselors, in youth ministry and

religious formation."

Sister Marita, who grew up in New York City, first encountered the congregation in elementary school, where the seed of her vocation was planted. After graduating from high school, she worked in the insurance industry and attended St. Francis College and later St. John's University.

At 21, she discussed her calling with Holy Family sisters in her parish and eventually entered formation. She always wanted to be a teacher and spent 25 years as a junior high school teacher and principal.

She later served as the head of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Province, which once covered all of New England, New York and New Jersey and was headquartered in Monroe at Marian Heights. In addition to the convent, there was a school, a house of formation and facilities for retired sisters. A new convent was built 10 years ago to replace the larger facility.

Today, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Convent has 12 sisters, some actively retired, others in nursing care and others in active ministry in the diocese at parishes, schools and senior care facilities. The Monroe convent is part of the Holy Family Province, headquartered in Des Plaines, Ill.

Throughout the year, the sisters held events to celebrate the congregation's anniversary, which concludes on the Day of Jubilee, November 30. Blessed Mary of Jesus the Good Shepherd's feast day is observed on November 21.

Sister Frances Smalkowski, CSFN celebrated 65 years as a Sister of the Holy Family of Nazareth on September 8.

"God has truly led me here," she says. "There have been, you might say, some temptations along the way to move in different directions, but God continued to lead me to become the best person I can be—which I'm not right now, because I still have a long way to go."

A native of Jamaica, N.Y., she entered the congregation as a postulant at 15.

"I did not grow up in a religious family. My parents did not go to church," she said. "But they sent me to a school run by the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Ever since I was a child, I wanted to be a sister. As strange as it may sound, I also wanted to be a mother and a wife, but I was dressing my dolls as nuns—as my mother could attest, although she never wanted this life for me. My father would just let me do what I felt I should do."

Despite her desire to be a missionary, Sister Frances taught briefly, and then the congregation sent her to nursing school. For 43 years, she has been Director of Pastoral Care at St. John Paul II Center in Danbury.

Sister Joan Stankowski, 89, has been a member of the community for 69 years. She grew up in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and her voca-

tion was inspired by the sisters, who prepared her for the sacraments.

For 25 years, she worked at Little Flower Children and Family Services in Wading River, N.Y.

"I went for nurse's training to take care of senior sisters, and lo and behold, where did I wind up? Taking care of children," she said.

In 1969, she came to Monroe to work in the development office and has been there ever since.

"The community has given me lots of love and lots of care. I've had different kinds of education and different kinds of jobs," she said. "I became an LPN, I taught first grade, and I finally came here and worked with one of our centers. Now, I'm retired and enjoying life—the life the sisters have given me the opportunity to have."

Looking back, Sister Joan says, "It's a privilege that God chose me to become one of his brides."

Sister Mary Frances celebrated 69 years in the congregation on September 8. She was inspired by the sisters in her Baltimore elementary school. Her vocation took her around the world—from Brooklyn to Baltimore, to the Philippines and Ghana ... and Monroe.

She began teaching and later started a house of prayer on Long Island before going to the Philippines with two other sisters to start a mission.

"That was a beautiful experience because family is very important to them," she said. "I still remember the girls coming and saying, 'My family isn't holy, so I thought if I become a sister, I'd pray for them and help them to be holy.'"

In 1995, Sister Mary Frances started the Nazareth Spiritual Center in Monroe, which helped families with faith formation and spiritual development.

When asked about her seven decades in Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, she says: "This life has been worth it over and over and over again, more than I can ever thank God. Where I went and what I did, I don't think I ever would have planned for myself. The magic of this congregation is to follow God's will because he gave us many different opportunities wherever we were, and eventually you saw how it came to focus on the family ... all because of the Holy Family of Nazareth."

ALL-GIRLS SCHOOL FROM PAGE 16

prioritizes her growth. Whether she's interested in coding, public speaking, artistic expression or global service, she is supported in discovering and pursuing her unique strengths. Our dedicated educators encourage girls to be inquisitive, creative and fearless—reminding them that they are not defined by societal expectations but by their own aspirations.

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Our students engage in meaningful co-curricular experiences that extend beyond the

classroom. They participate in service projects that bring them together with students—both male and female—from other schools, collaborate on joint field trips and academic competitions, and take the stage in plays and musicals alongside their peers from neighboring institutions. Sacred Heart Greenwich students also enjoy a vibrant social life, attending proms, dances and special events that foster friendships and connections.

These experiences ensure that while our students benefit from the unique advantages of an all-girls education, they are also actively engaged in a broader, coeducational world, developing the confidence and skills to thrive in any setting.

She Discovers Her Purpose

A Sacred Heart education is not just about preparing young women for college—it's about preparing them for life. By the time they graduate, our students have the confidence to walk into any room—whether it's a board-

room, laboratory, newsroom or diplomatic meeting—knowing that their voices matter. They understand the value of hard work, the importance of collaboration and the power of standing up for what they believe in. They break barriers in their chosen fields and lead with integrity and purpose.

Join Us in This Mission

At Sacred Heart Greenwich, we are committed to fostering an environment where young women can flourish academically, socially, and spiritually. As we continue this mission, we invite families to discover the power of an all-girls education and the lifelong impact it has on our students.

We shape bold leaders who are ready to make their mark on the world. Because when a young woman is given the space to define who she is, she discovers who she's meant to be—and the possibilities are limitless.

Christmas News

McGivney Center highlights seasonal traditions

NEW HAVEN, Conn.— Around the world, people annually celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, incorporating cultural traditions into the Christmas season. Advent calendars, Christmas trees and the display of the crèche, the three-dimensional representation of the biblical nativity scene, are examples of these customs. The traditions include other Christian figures and events surrounding

Christmas, such as St. Nicholas Day and Three Kings Day. The Blessed Michael McGivney Pilgrimage Center is showcasing Christmas traditions and art. This year's exhibit, The Spirit of Christmas, features crèches and other artwork from across the globe, celebrating Christmas customs and seasonal celebrations. The show opened November 8 and continues through


February 1, 2026. The McGivney Center, formerly the Knights of Columbus Museum, is carrying on a tradition of its own. Since opening its doors at 1 State St. in New Haven in March 2001, the Center has presented Christmas art exhibits and its Christmas Tree Festival, this year featuring 20 trees with ornaments and trimmings handmade by Connecticut elementary school students. The



Christmas Tree Festival opens December 6.

The McGivney Center also has an ongoing exhibit, Away in a Manger, tracing the history of nativity scenes and artistic depictions of the biblical accounts of Christ's birth in Bethlehem. A seasonal visit to the McGivney Center has, itself, become a

Christmas tradition for many Connecticut families. *(The Blessed Michael McGivney Pilgrimage Center, operated by the Knights of Columbus, is open to the public Wednesdays through Sundays, from 10 am to 4 pm. Admission and onsite parking are free. More information is available at 203.865.0400 or www.michaelmcgivneycenter.org.)*




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Parish News

A journey of faith, hope and healing

By ROSE BRENNAN

STAMFORD—"I never intended to write what you are reading, but I believe God wants me to share this story."

These are the words that open the prologue to *Thank God for God: A Memoir of Faith, Hope and Healing*, a memoir by Carol Kennedy. An ordinary person who turned to her Catholic faith to survive extraordinary circumstances, she is hopeful others—whether they have faith or not—will learn something from her story.

The memoir is organized into three sections: Live Your Faith, Love Your Faith and God's

Presence. Carol originally intended to only publish the first section of the book, which she says came to her in a moment of prayer in 2019—with words, sentences and chapters flowing into her brain that simply wouldn't stop until she put it down on paper. Those chapters became a memoir originally titled *Our Journey to Peace*. But God wasn't through yet, and other life circumstances compelled her to add the other two sections to what would later become *Thank God for God*.

"Each of the chapters in the book is based on a tenet of our faith," Carol Kennedy said. "The whole book is about how

we manage to survive and thrive through several pretty big life challenges and extraordinary circumstances, and how we called upon our faith to do that—and to be sitting here as people who are at peace and joy in our lives and happy because of our faith."

Carol and her husband John are members of St. Leo Parish in Stamford, where they raised their family. Even getting to that point as a family proved difficult, with the Kennedys turning to St. Gerard for his intercession in having children. God and St. Gerard delivered, and they had three sons within 17 months—two were twins—named Jack, Ryan and Gerard, in thanksgiving for the saint's intercession.

But life wasn't smooth sailing from then on. Gerard faced a nonverbal learning disability that sometimes manifested as physical lash-outs. Then, in December of 2023, Gerard died unexpectedly of a cardiac event at the age of 23. And to this day, the Kennedys still don't know how it happened.

"His passing, we still don't really understand," Carol said. "The cardiologist was mystified. The neurologist ... said that the neuro ICU was baffled."

The Kennedys then had to navigate the profound grief of the unexpected loss of a child. And with that, the second and third parts of *Thank God for God* started to fall into place. The "Love Your Faith"

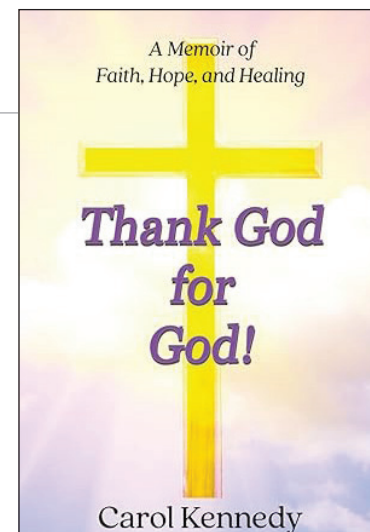
section describes several "extraordinary events" the Kennedys experienced in the months following Gerard's death, while the "God's Presence" section reflects on how God was there every step of the way in the first year following Gerard's death.

"Many people turn to their faith when something bad happens in their lives," Carol writes in the prologue. "Having that foundation enables people to reach down and draw their strength from God. I have learned over the years that making God the center of my life is not only the way to weather bad times, but that it brings a joy and peace I wish everyone could experience."

While Carol didn't intend for *Thank God for God* to be a "grief book," she noted that it seemed to particularly resonate with others experiencing loss. Moreover, sharing the story of how the Kennedys weathered the storm of losing a child helps share the faith that made it possible.

"It's not a grief book, it's not a faith book, so what is it?" John said. "We want to use it as a tool to help people that may be rethinking their faith or deepening it. It's a book of evangelism: to bring people closer to the faith."

Thank God for God does have a message about processing grief—although it might not be a "grief book." But to Carol, it has another universal message: hope.



"There was hope that we were going to be able to have children," she said. "There was hope that we were gonna be able to get our son through this difficulty in parenting him. We hope and pray all the time that he sees the light of God's face."

After suffering the loss of a loved one—especially a child—grief doesn't necessarily "go away." But the key to navigating it, Carol said, is turning back to that feeling of hope, rooted in her family's Catholic faith.

"We go back to this every time we go back to a dark place: the two things we know," she said. "We know (Gerard) is good. We don't know exactly where he is now, but he's good. And we believe we will be with him again someday."

(Carol Kennedy's memoir, *Thank God for God*, is available for purchase as a paperback or Kindle download on Amazon.)

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Service at Little Angels Shrine

NEWTOWN—More than 100 parents, relatives, friends and neighbors gathered at the Little Angels Shrine on November 15 at Resurrection Cemetery in Newtown, for the interment of four babies. Deacon Don Ross led the service.

In an effort to support parents who have suffered the heartbreaking loss of a baby, the Diocese of Bridgeport Cemetery Ministry hosts a service one Saturday per month to bury and/or pray for babies who have been lost due to miscarriage, stillbirth, at birth or shortly thereafter.

The Cemetery Ministry will make arrangements to receive remains at home or a hospital, transport, store and deliver them to the shrine for burial. An urn and plastic vault will be provided for the remains and a plaque will be placed on a memorial wall for each infant. There is no fee for this but donations are accepted via our website at www.thegrief.org

(For more information, contact Carolyn Killian at 203.404.0023 or at carolyn.killian@ctcemeteries.org.)



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Team Woofgang

Lauralton graduate makes mercy a movement

FAIRFIELD—For Amy (Gentile) Stern, the lessons learned at the Academy of Our Lady of Mercy, Lauralton Hall, were never confined to the class-

With these values as her foundation, Stern was called to lead a nonprofit that is now changing lives across Fairfield and New Haven counties.



room; the Sisters of Mercy, who taught there, instilled in every student a deep understanding of the values that define a meaningful life: compassion, service, empowerment and community.

At Lauralton, Stern viewed service as an honorable calling instead of an obligation. She continues to incorporate Mercy values—respecting the dignity of every person, lifting others and leading with compassion—into her daily life.

In 1994, Stern welcomed her third child, Patrick, into the world. Born with Down syndrome, Patrick quickly became both her inspiration and her teacher.

Determined to help her son thrive, Stern navigated programs, therapies and school systems with the same perseverance and faith that had guided her since her Lauralton days.

As Patrick approached adulthood, Stern saw what so many

families of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience: when school ends at 22, opportunities for connection, growth and purpose often vanish.

“I realized that Patrick had worked so hard to gain his skills, and I wasn’t going to let those go to waste,” Stern said. “He, and so many others, deserved a place where they could continue learning, working and belonging.”

In 2017, Stern joined forces with two other Fairfield mothers, Kelly Maffei and Kris Burbank, to create Team Woofgang & Co., a nonprofit that lives out the Mercy values of compassion, service, empowerment and community.

At Team Woofgang’s vocational bakery in Black Rock and retail store in Fairfield, adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, known as Team Members, bake, package and sell handmade dog treats and toys. They learn job skills, build confidence and take pride in their work while forming genuine friendships.

“It’s more than baking,” Stern said. “It’s belonging, and it’s empowerment in its purest form.”

What began as one mother’s vision has become a thriving community where every person is valued, included and celebrated, a modern reflection of the Mercy tradition in action.

From its earliest days, Team Woofgang & Co. has thrived thanks to the generosity of Amy’s family and friends, including many Lauralton Hall alumnae. Among the first to lend their hands and hearts were Ann (Ford) Roach, Jane (Ford) Shaw and Beth (Fitzpatrick) Lucas, whose dedication continues to strengthen the organization today. Mary Ellen Brennan-Connelly, a proud Lauralton parent of Devin Connelly, also serves on the Board of Directors, helping guide Team Woofgang’s continued growth and outreach.

It is no surprise that Lauralton Hall’s brother school, Fairfield College Preparatory School, has become one of Team Woofgang’s biggest partners. For the fifth consecutive year, Fairfield Prep students have hosted a weekly Bunco Club that brings their students and Team Members together, building friendship, compassion and community

through laughter, games and genuine connection.

In April 2024, Christine (Matthews) Paine, also a Lauralton alumna, became Executive Director of Team Woofgang & Co. With decades of nonprofit leadership experience and inspired by her own mentor, Lauralton’s beloved development director, Sister Pat Rooney, Paine continues to expand the organization’s reach while staying true to its heart.

Today, Patrick works proudly

alongside his friends at Team Woofgang, living proof of what his mother set out to create. What began as one family’s effort to address a need has grown into a vibrant nonprofit rooted in compassion, service, empowerment and community—the very values Stern learned decades ago at Lauralton Hall.

“Service was something the Sisters of Mercy taught us to live,” Stern said. “Team Woofgang is how I live it.” ■

The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano



By the Grace of God and the Authority of the Apostolic See

Bishop of Bridgeport

DECREE FOR THE EXTINCTIVE UNION OF HOLY FAMILY AND SAINT EMERY PARISH OF FAIRFIELD, CT

In virtue of the office entrusted to me, I, the Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, concerned with the spiritual welfare of the souls entrusted to me, zealous of removing everything that may be detrimental to their well-being and desiring to promote everything becoming of their progress, having heard the people of Holy Family and Saint Emery Parish, Fairfield, CT,

- having considered the law and the facts, and;
- having heard all those whose rights may be harmed (c. 50) on January 31, 2025, March 11, 2025, May 17, 2025 and July 11, 2025, and;
- having ascertained from documents and deeds and consulted those concerned that there are no major donors or heirs to be heard, and;
- having consulted the Council of Priests (c. 515 §2) on September 25, 2025, and;
- having determined that the good of the souls requires it,

ESTABLISH THAT

The above parish be so amalgamated, through an extinctive union, into the following three parishes:

Parish of Saint Ann, Bridgeport
Parish of Saint Peter, Bridgeport
Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, Fairfield

After the above process of discernment, this determination has been made for the following reasons:

- For the general spiritual welfare of all the parishioners
- To better serve the needs of faith formation for the children of the parish territory
- To make better use of the resources available to minister to the families

Wherefore, I, the undersigned Bishop of Bridgeport, in virtue of c. 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law, do hereby decree that the Parish of Holy Family and Saint Emery, Fairfield, CT, which up until now has been an independent parish, be so amalgamated into the above-mentioned three parishes. The parish boundaries of the three parishes will be so modified so as to incorporate the territory of the extinct parish.

I also hereby decree that all the rights, obligations and privileges of the members of Christian faithful domiciled in the territory of the above amalgamated parishes, accorded them by law or legitimately acquired, are to be transferred to and made part of the above-mentioned parishes.

The intentions of the founders and donors of the patrimony of the two amalgamated parishes, must be respected, in accordance with the law (c. 121 & 122). All sacramental registers and parish files of the amalgamated parish are to be properly transferred to, preserved and safeguarded by the Chancery of the Diocese of Bridgeport, in accord with the norm of law.

This decree becomes effective on November 1, 2025.

This decree is to be communicated to the respective pastors who are the proper administrators of the juridical persons that are being amalgamated. It is also to be communicated to all interested persons, according to the norm of law (c. 532). It may be challenged within the peremptory time limit of ten (10) days from the legitimate notification of the decree and in accordance with the norm of law (c. 1734 §2).

Given this 1st of November 2025, the Solemnity of All Saints, at the Office of the Bishop, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Francis Caggiano
Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

Patrick Toole
Deacon Patrick Toole
Chancellor

A Cathedral Concert of Christmas -Lessons and Carols-



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2025

4:00 PM

CATHEDRAL OF SAINT AUGUSTINE
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All are invited to join Bishop Caggiano for this beloved annual tradition at the Cathedral! The musical program will feature festive Christmas Carols sung by the Cathedral Choir, Diocesan Choir, and guest instrumentalists. The program is free, and everyone is welcome!

For further information, contact the Diocesan Music Office:
(203) 368-6777 X 22 or william.atwood@diobpt.org

Finance News

Diocesan operating budget

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano and the Finance Council of the Diocese of Bridgeport have approved the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026 operating budget with a total of \$27,522,850 in revenues and \$27,501,708 in expenditures, representing a \$21,142 projected surplus.

This year's approved budget projects revenues increased by \$2,729,482 and total expenses increased \$2,734,857 from June 30, 2025.

Good Stewardship

"Our focus has been to always be good stewards of the funds entrusted to our care, ensuring donor's intentions are followed, that the overall budget is aligned with the goals of Bishop Caggiano, and to prudently fund the various ministries of the diocese so they can effectively operate as intended," said Mac Bryant CPA, CDFM, chief financial officer (CFO). "Earlier this year, we shared our audited financials through the *Fairfield County Catholic* as well as published them on our website. We continue our dedication to transparency by sharing our budget for this fiscal year. This cycle recurs annually in the spirit of transparency called for by Bishop Caggiano."

Bryant said the prior-year budget adopted for fiscal year ending June 30, 2025 similarly reported a projected surplus, totaling \$26,515.

"The financial statement audit conducted by an independent CPA firm for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025, is still underway, but pre-audit results show that the diocese was able to fully fund its operations and achieve a surplus of approximately \$835,000 primarily due to generous gifts, bequests, and investment income. In addition to funding the various diocesan ministries, our focus is to assist parishes, schools, and related organizations with administration and finances," said Bryant.

Bryant said the development of this fiscal year budget ending June 30, 2026 was as challenging due to expanded ministry and other costs, as well as uncertainty related to the economy, as well as predicting contributions and other revenue sources. He continued, "in addition, we have

to provide administrative and financial assistance to parishes, schools, and other organizations for which the future needs are often unknown at the time of budget preparation."

The diocese continues to focus on a new model developed in 2024 to examine Curia operations by categories:

1. Central ministries and services that are unique to the ministry of the bishop and only the diocese can provide.

2. Administrative services that must support the central ministries (whether provided by the diocese directly or outsourced).

3. Services provided to parishes, schools and other institutions, while respecting the principal of subsidiarity.

4. Diocesan-sponsored charities that help realize the threefold function of the Bishop's Office: teaching, sanctification and governance (including charity).

The \$27,501,708 expense budget for June 30, 2026 is allocated as follows: Grants and Contributions: \$4,350,367 (15.82 percent of total); Pastoral Ministries and Support: \$4,362,525 or 15.86 percent; Other Ministries: \$3,404,563 or 12.38 percent; Financial Services: \$3,108,064 or 11.3 percent; Administrative and Operations: \$2,991,182 or 10.88 percent; Offices of Communications and Development: \$2,654,064 or 9.65 percent; Seminary and Vocations: \$2,553,342 or 9.28 percent; Education Office: \$2,016,014 or 7.33 percent; Catholic Leadership Institute: \$1,771,627 or 6.44 percent and Pastoral and Human Services: \$289,960 or 1.06 percent. Salaries and benefits (Lay and clergy) across all these ministries represent approximately 44.1 percent of the overall diocesan budget.

Bishop's Appeal

The Annual Bishop's Appeal (ABA) and Cathedralricum continue to be the major sources of revenue for the annual operating budget, totaling approximately 55 percent. The ABA supports diocesan mission-related programs and returned over a million dollars in 2025 back to parishes which exceeded their goals. Cathedralricum is the traditional assessment on parishes to support the administration and operating

costs of the diocese, he said.

Joseph Gallagher, chief development officer, and his team continue to focus their work on achieving annually the ABA budgeted goal, totaling \$8.0 million for the June 30, 2026 budget.

Cathedralricum revenue is projected at \$7.15 million for fiscal year ending June 30, 2026. This is compared to the budgeted amount of \$6.45 million last fiscal year.

Cemeteries' operational success under the leadership of Dean Gestal is projected to provide diocesan-budgeted support totaling \$1.5 million, the same as the prior year allocation.

Additionally, interest income from banks and dividend income from investments is projected to be \$1.35 million for June 30, 2026, versus a budgeted amount of \$1.2 million for June 30, 2025.

A positive increase in expenses is related to seminarians and related tuition costs. For June 30, 2026, \$1,705,863 has been budgeted, a 17.1 percent increase over the prior year. This remarkable trend is related to the work of Father Christopher Ford, director of seminarians, and Father Ferry Galbert, director of vocations. Their focus is on developing a culture for promoting vocations within the diocese and the accompaniment of men as they discern their path to priesthood. Currently the diocese has 38 men in formation.

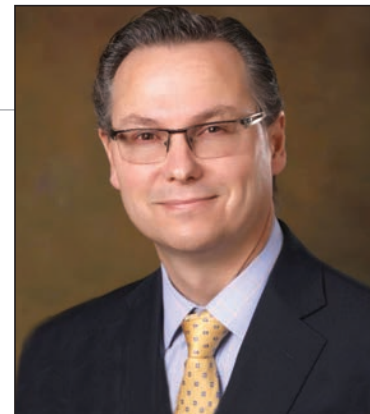
Grants

Contributions and grants allocated from the Annual Bishop's Appeal to diocesan mission-related entities represent approximately 26.0 percent of appeal contributions and 7.6 percent of total budgetary expenses. These contributions and grants support the missions of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, St. Catherine Center for Special Needs, the Catholic Academy of Bridgeport, the Cardinal Shehan Center and the Bishop's Scholarship Fund within Foundations in Education. Additionally, the appeal funds support vocations, seminarians and retired priests. Bryant added, "The generous support for the ABA is impressive, and we are grateful for the donors whose contributions provide a vital lifeline of support to these ministries."

Grants from restricted contributions to support school initiatives and physical improvements total approximately seven percent of total expenses.

Pastoral and mission related programs are always an imperative part of the diocesan budget, as Bishop Caggiano's seeks to revitalize our faithful. As the bishop continues to implement "The One" the funding reaches heightened importance on the success of his mission. Contributions to support "The One," are being raised in addition to operational budgetary support.

"Although the diocesan goal has been not to use one-time revenue sources within our budget to support operations, this year's budget includes approximately \$1.4 million of one-time revenue sources to achieve a balanced budget," he said. These one-time revenue sources include proceeds from the sale of real estate assets and a large, restricted bequest to support the operations of the Queen of Clergy priests' retire-



MAC BRYANT

ment home. This is compared to a \$1.6 million one-time revenue sources included in the prior year budget.

Alternative revenue sources and models are being explored to reduce the reliance of the onetime revenue sources for future budget cycles.

Budget Planning

During the budget planning process, department leaders submitted their preliminary budgets to the finance department and after initial review, proposed expenses were adjusted to reduce requested expenses to minimums necessary to functionally operate based on estimated revenue and a balanced budget, but balanced with ministerial needs.

"Mass attendance has

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

Accountability Sunday set for December 7

SHELTON—In addition to the Second Sunday of Advent, December 7 will also mark the fifth annual Accountability Sunday in the Diocese of Bridgeport. On that day, diocesan parishes, schools and other entities will simultaneously issue their financial reports to the faithful using a standardized accounting reporting model.

Mac Bryant, chief financial officer of the diocese, said every diocesan entity is required to report annually the results of their financial activities for the fiscal year ending June 30. The individual reports will be made accessible either through parish bulletins or websites.

Accountability Sunday was mandated by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano in 2021 to ensure financial transparency and provide a standardized template for reports issued by parishes and schools.

The bishop's leadership has since led to a reporting model that is consistent, uniform and accessible to parishioners throughout the diocese. Accountability Sunday has also had a very positive response since its inception.

Accountability Sunday financial statements are designed so that the average person in the pew who may not have experience reading financial reports can understand the financial details.

(For past Accountability Sunday reports from the Diocese of Bridgeport and Catholic Cemeteries of Fairfield County, visit www.bridgeportdiocese.org/finance-services/financial-reports.)

Finance News

New tax credit a win-win for Catholic education

By MICHELE MITOLA

Editor's note: Michele Mitola serves on the board of Foundations in Education and is a parishioner at St. Pius X Parish in Fairfield. She is Vice President of Strategic Planning and Development at the Children's Scholarship Fund. These views are her own and are not intended to provide legal, financial or tax advice.

Families hoping to send—or continue to send—their children to Catholic schools stand to gain enormously from a new law that could soon generate a substantial increase in private charitable donations to fund K-12 scholarships.

Beginning in 2027, eligible individual taxpayers can claim a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit of up to \$1,700 (\$3,400 for joint filers) for donations to approved K-12 scholarship granting organizations (SGOs) like Foundations in Education (FIE). That means, whether you pay federal taxes through paycheck withholdings, quarterly estimates or when you file your annual return, up to \$1,700 of what you otherwise owe to the IRS could fund the gift of a Catholic education for a student, without costing you one penny more!

Here are three facts to know:

First, a tax credit is different from a tax deduction. The new federal scholarship tax credit allows individual taxpayers to reduce, dollar-for-dollar, their federal tax bill by up to \$1,700—whether the taxpayer itemizes or not—by donating to an approved



SGO. In other words, if you owe the IRS \$2,000, you could reduce the amount you owe to \$300 by donating \$1,700 to an SGO.

This is different from a charitable deduction, the value of which depends on your marginal tax rate and whether you itemize or apply the standard deduction. For example, if you are in the 22 percent tax bracket and itemize a \$1,700 donation currently means you pay \$374 less in federal income taxes.

Although there is a \$1,700 cap on what an individual taxpayer can donate each year to obtain the federal scholarship tax credit, there is no minimum donation required to claim the tax credit. If you contribute less, your credit will simply be less. Note that this credit is not refundable, however, meaning you can only take it against federal taxes you owe.

Taxpayers also can continue to give an additional gift to an SGO and take the charitable deduction. Moreover, the scholarships SGOs award students are

not limited to \$1,700; in fact, gifts from a number of taxpayers can be bundled together to offset tuition and other eligible expenses for students attending both public and private schools.

Second, the tax credit only applies for individual cash donations made after December 31, 2026. The credit will not apply to corporate, foundation, or donor advised fund gifts or gifts of stock or property. Any individual who pays federal income taxes could receive a tax credit on their 2027 Federal 1040 tax return, typically filed in 2028, for a 2027 cash (including check or credit card) donation to an eligible scholarship granting organization.

During the year in which

donors make the tax-credited donation, they can adjust their federal income tax withholding or estimated payments to reflect their charitable giving.

Note that the federal scholarship tax credit is permanent—meaning it will not expire—and there is no cap on the number of taxpayers who can participate, so the tax credit will not “run out.”

Finally, tax credit scholarship donations can only be used in Connecticut if the governor opts in. The major caveat under this law is that, in order for Connecticut students to benefit, Governor Ned Lamont would have to opt-in and provide the U.S. Department of the Treasury, by January 1, 2027, a list of qualified SGOs in the state eligible to receive federal scholarship tax credit donations. If the governor does not opt in, Connecticut taxpayers can still donate to SGOs in other states (not their residence), and take the federal tax credit, but neither FIE nor Connecticut children would benefit.

Governor Lamont has indicated he is considering opting in. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is encouraging all governors to opt in, as is former

Providence, R.I., Mayor Jorge Elorza, the CEO of Democrats for Education Reform.

Elorza recently noted, “This is a rare win-win: families gain new resources, schools gain new partners, and governors can deliver solutions without tapping state budgets. Opting in is a no-brainer; it’s sound policy, and smart politics.”

Over the last 10 years, Foundations in Education has awarded scholarships totaling more than \$29 million to income eligible children to attend a Catholic school in the Diocese of Bridgeport. This year alone, FIE awarded more than 1,100 scholarships valued at nearly \$3 million. But each year, the documented need of students hoping to attend a school within the diocese exceeds the scholarship funds available. The new federal scholarship tax credit could be a game changer for so many students across the diocese.

Governor Lamont should take advantage of this historic opportunity and opt in so that federal tax credit scholarship donations—particularly those made by Connecticut taxpayers—can remain in our state and benefit our children. It truly is a no-brainer. ■

DIOCESAN OPERATING BUDGET FROM PAGE 22

increased 22 percent since 2022, which demonstrates the spiritual renewal in the diocese. We developed the budget to continue this trend, carefully balancing ministerial needs and aspirations with the limited financial resources available to accomplish those objectives,” Bryant said.

The diocese continues to focus on its challenges which include the long-term underfunded liability obligations related to the frozen diocesan lay employee pension plan (frozen since 2008) expanding ministerial needs.

The diocese continues to partner with parishes on an enhanced giving program throughout fiscal year 2026 to assist parishes increase offertory, planned giving, and other support as they continue to plan for continued

financial needs, such as deferred capital maintenance of buildings, ministerial, and administrative expenses.

Managing Healthcare Costs

Healthcare benefits costs continue to increase significantly higher than inflation rates annually, which continues to present challenges.

The diocese continues to work to manage and control healthcare related expenses and benefits while providing affordable comprehensive coverage for employees and their families.

On January 1, 2023, the diocese engaged Reta Trust to provide these benefits, after years of providing benefits on a “self-insured” basis.

Reta Trust (a not-for-profit trust) has operated for more than 45 years providing health coverage that aligns with the teachings of the Catholic Church, to employees

and religious staff of Catholic institutions. Many U.S. dioceses have joined, and members total more than 425,000. This provides purchasing power for benefits that were lacking with our self-insured plan. As a not-for-profit trust annually, dividends are returned to each diocese that should control future increases in medical premiums. Additionally, due to the billing of medical benefits by a third-party provider, premiums are paid in full by all diocesan entities. This eliminated an approximately \$1 million annual bad debt reserve for unpaid premiums, when billed by the diocesan self-insured plan.

(Consistent with prior years, full audit results are published annually on the website for the Diocese of Bridgeport at www.bridgeportdiocese.com/financial-reports.) ■

SHRINE TO OUR LADY FROM PAGE 8

a paso, lo que a partir de este sábado es la casita o urna de cristal de la imagen de la Virgen de la Providencia, patrona de su país.

Tras una reunión con el Obispo Caggiano y después del sí de la Diócesis para construir la casita, el Padre Rolando se dedicó a levantar fondos de los fieles de las parroquias circundantes; buscar una firma de arquitectos e ingenieros para que le ayuden en el diseño del pequeño santuario (shrine) y una constructora para que plasme los planos del diseño.

Y mientras el arquitecto puertorriqueño Leo Rodríguez, pasó casi tres meses diseñando en forma gratuita la casita de la Virgen puertorriqueña, con el apoyo del ingeniero Bryan Aguirre, armaron la ingeniería necesaria para construir el pedido del Padre Torres.

“Mi mamá acudía a la parroquia del Padre Torres y cuándo él me pidió que lo ayudara en este proyecto, simplemente le dije que sí y empezamos a diseñar. La idea fue crear algo para proteger la estatua de la virgen de la Divina Providencia y pens-

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

Obituaries

Sister Agnese Palczynski, CSFN, 88

Sister Agnese Palczynski, CSFN passed peacefully the evening of November 12, 2025. She was 88 years old.

Sister Agnese was born in Utica, N.Y., on September 16, 1937, to Agnes and Chester Palczynski. Her younger sister, Helene, joined the family 14 years later. Upon graduation from high school, she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth on September 8, 1955.

Sister Agnese received her BA in Psychology and Education from Holy Family University in Philadelphia and her Masters Degree in Religious Studies from St. Charles Seminary in Philadelphia.

Sister Agnese served the children and families of Little Flower Children Services in Wading



SISTER AGNESE PALCZYNSKI

River, N.Y., for 32 of her 64 years in ministry. In addition to her years at Little Flower Children Services, she also spent several

years as an elementary school teacher ministering in schools in Brooklyn, N.Y. and Springfield, Mass. Sister Agnese worked as co-director of the daycare at St. Christopher's Home in Sea Cliff, N.Y., and served six years as Provincial of the Monroe Province of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Sister Agnese experienced health issues in 2022, which necessitated her move to Immaculate Heart of Mary Convent in Monroe, Conn. Upon retirement, she enjoyed the beauty of nature, quiet moments in the chapel in prayer and staying connected with family, friends and former co-workers. Sister Agnese suffered many health issues during the final two years of her life. After numerous trips to the hospital, her body grew weaker, and Sister Agnese was placed on hospice.

Sister Agnese is survived by the Sisters of her Religious Community, her sister Helene Smith, brother-in-law, James Smith and her nephews Brian and Andrew Barlow, several cousins, and their families.

Funeral services for Sister Agnese took place in Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel, Monroe, Conn. on November 18, 2025. Condolences may be left at www.SpadaCinoFuneralHome.com.

Father Joachim Jan Blonski, 77

GALLUP, N.M.—Father Joachim Blonski passed away on October 25, 2025. He was 77 years old.

Father Blonski was born in Danbury, Conn., on March 30, 1948 to Walter and Margaret Blonski. He is survived by his brother, Ronald Blonski and his wife, Cathy and nephew, Steven Blonski and niece, Rebecca McNeil and their respective children.

Father Blonski was a priest of the Diocese of Gallup, N.M., a Roman Catholic diocese that serves seven major Native American reservations in both New Mexico and Arizona. Most recently, he was the pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish in St. Johns, Ariz. and San Raphael Mission in Concho, Ariz. He served in the Diocese of Gallup for over 51 years.


Father Blonski first taught at Sacred Heart Cathedral High in Gallup and served as a dorm advisor for Native American boys at Cristo Rey Academy. In 1977, he entered a new religious order, the Brothers of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It was at this time he took the religious name Joachim. He served as a brother for 11 years and had various ministerial and teaching assignments including teaching at St. Michael's Indian School on the Navajo Reservation and being project manager for the Southwest Indian Foundation.

In 1988, Brother Joachim decided he would enter the seminary to become a priest of the Diocese of Gallup. He attended St. John XXIII Seminary in Weston, Mass. He was ordained a priest on December 12, 1992. Father Blonski served as parochial vicar and pastor of various parishes and missions both in New Mexico and Arizona.

Visitation with Vigil Mass and Rosary was on October 31 at St. Rita Catholic Church in Show Low, Ariz. The funeral Mass was on Saturday, November 1 at St. John the Baptist Church in St. Johns, Ariz., and was preceded by visitation and Rosary.



FATHER JOACHIM BLONSKI



FAIRFIELD COUNTY
Catholic Cemeteries
A MINISTRY OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

St. Mary-Putnam to host a Tree of Remembrance during the season of Advent and Christmas.

St. Mary-Putnam Cemetery invites you to our "Tree of Remembrance" event in memory of a loved one who has passed.

The tree will be located at 399 North Street in Greenwich, Connecticut opposite the mausoleum. Individuals and families may bring their own ornament to the cemetery office at 35 Parsonage Road to be placed on the tree or choose a complimentary ornament to be placed in honor of their loved one.

The tree will be available to the public beginning Monday, December 1, 2025 and will remain up through the holidays. The public is invited to join us for the lighting of the remembrance tree which will include a special blessing, music, and complimentary refreshments on Thursday, December 4, 2025 from 5:30-6:30pm.

This is a family friendly event and the opportunity is open to all families in the community who have experienced a loss and wish to honor a loved one during the holiday season regardless if your loved one is buried with us or not.

Please note: Ornaments will not be returned, so we respectfully request you do not bring ornaments that are of great sentimental or financial value.

203.742.1510 | info@ctcemeteries.org

DECEASED CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT NOVEMBER 23—DECEMBER 20		
NOVEMBER		
23	Rev. Robert G. Pohley	2006
	Rev. Carducci S. D'Amico	2018
26	Deacon Joseph Rowan	2013
27	Deacon John Barton	2012
	Rev. Myron V. Miller	1961
	Rev. Nicholas Grieco	2021
28	Deacon Wayne E. Malloy	2011
30	Rev. Robert John Post	2024
DECEMBER		
1	Rev. Michael E. Kearney	1956
	Msgr. Alfred J. Sienkiewicz	1996
	Deacon Robert W. Becker	2000
	Deacon Salvatore Clarizio	2017
	Rev. Joseph F. Palacino	2020
3	Rev. Mark A. Connolly	2019
	Msgr. John E. Gilmartin	2011
	Rev. Thomas Gwozdz, OFM Conv.	2007
	Rev. Joseph A. Pisarcik	1956
4	Msgr. Joseph M. Fitzgerald	2005
5	Rev. Vincent J. O'Connor	1985
7	Deacon George I. Saulnier	1997
8	Rev. Rufin Kuveikas, OFM Conv.	2008
10	Msgr. Bartholomew J. Skelly	1967
	Rev. Paul M. Spodnik	1976
	Rev. Ambrose Walas, OFM Conv.	1967
12	Rev. Stephen J. Gleeson	2020
14	Rev. Alfred E. Russo	2009
15	Msgr. Lawrence J. McMahon	2009
17	Rev. Kieran T. Ahearn	1997
19	Rev. Philip Morrissey	2008
20	Msgr. Thomas J. Driscoll	2018

Sports

St. Joe's on a path to 17th football state title?

By DON HARRISON

TRUMBULL—St. Joseph High School and state championships have become synonymous in more than one athletic endeavor. Indeed, the Cadets' football, boys basketball, girls soccer, boys lacrosse and baseball teams have become consistent contenders for state honors.

Coach Joe Della Vecchia's current football squad is attempting to duplicate his 2024 team, which defeated previously undefeated Brookfield, 21-20, to capture the CIAC Class-M state championship—the 16th title on the gridiron for the diocesan high school.

Della Vecchia, head coach for the most recent eight titles, served as an assistant coach under Christy Hayes for three, and as 1980 senior captain—dividing his time between running back and strong safety—he was instrumental in St. Joe's capturing its initial state championship under coach Ed McCarthy.

So, what are the prospects for a 17th championship this fall?

"Well, it's still a tough road to qualify," Della Vecchia said. "We had a pretty good team coming back, but we'd lost some outstanding players to graduation. And we play the toughest schedule, probably, in the state. Seven or eight of our opponents may end up making the playoffs."

The Cadets enter the final two weeks of the 2025 regular season with a 6-2 record and ranking

sixth in the GameTime state top 10 poll.

Victory number six came in the form of a 35-14 decision over Fairfield Ludlowe on November 8, and it marked Della Vecchia's 200th win in 27 seasons as head coach.

"I've been doing this for a long time... it brings back a lot of memories," said Della Vecchia. "What's truly important is that many of the kids I've coached are still in touch with me."

Junior quarterback Harry H.T. Jones delivered his finest performance of the season against Ludlowe, completing seven of 10 passes for 172 yards and three touchdowns—highlighted by a 65-yard strike to Jake Rios on the game's first play from scrimmage.

Rios, who as a sophomore was selected to the Connecticut Coaches' 2024 All-State team, has distinguished himself this season in multiple capacities... as a wide receiver (47.3 reception yards per game, five TDs), free safety (three interceptions), place-kicker (22-24 EP, 8-9 FG) and punt returner.

Senior Tristan Spain, whose contributions last fall were limited by injuries, has emerged as the leading running back, averaging 77.4 yards per game (with four TDs).

Finn Kilmartin, a junior running back, made his presence felt on November 1 when he scored four touchdowns against Staples of Westport—traditionally among St. Joe's strongest opponents.

With support from a sophomore back named Manning Stanko (100 yards on 17 attempts), the Cadets stunned the Wreckers, 27-6, on their home field.

Kilmartin, whose eight touchdowns lead the team, is a two-sport athlete. Last spring, he was a member of St. Joe's boys lacrosse team, which won the Class L state title with a 10-5 triumph over top-seeded Fairfield Ludlowe.

The youngest son of Douglas and Amanda Kilmartin, he took another notable step last spring when he converted to Catholicism. His reasoning behind this significant change?

"Ever since I was young, I felt there was something missing in my life. After I came to St. Joe's, I began to see God," he said.

With extensive guidance from the St. Joe's chaplain, Father Ferry Galbert, young Kilmartin made the transformation at the Easter Vigil at St. Lawrence Parish in Shelton. His godfather? Defensive end Will Zaccagnino, a football teammate and classmate who happens to be among his closest friends.

"Will has helped me a lot," Kilmartin said. "Through the years I discovered that we had good chemistry."



FUNERAL GUIDE

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Nuestra Voz

Feligreses oran más de cuarenta horas

POR MARICARMEN GODOY

BRIDGEPORT—El jueves a las tres de la tarde inició la exposición y adoración al Santísimo Sacramento en el Altar Mayor de la iglesia de Saint Peter, un evento preparado por el padre Alexis Moronta, con el apoyo de los grupos parroquiales y bajo la custodia de los Caballeros de Colón; jornada que se extendió hasta el domingo en la noche y sigue vigente los jueves a las 6:30 pm.

Bernardo Castañeda, miembro de la organización Caballeros de Colón, fue uno de los que ayudó en la vigilia del Santísimo y

contó que desde que se expuso el Santísimo los fieles llegaron todos los días quedándose hasta altas horas de la noche y la madrugada. Y otros la jornada completa de las cuarenta con un intervalo de dos horas para dormir y asearse. Por eso, para apoyar totalmente la jornada los Caballeros de Colón se turnaron en horarios de 8 pm a 1 am, luego de 1 am a 7 am y durante todo el día.

Macaria Cedeño, en el lapso de la exposición del Santísimo rezaba el Rosario muy devotamente. Ella solo durmió dos horas al día para poder estar todo el tiempo restante en la velada de exposición. Macaria cuenta

que estar en el Santísimo le produce tranquilidad y que todas sus enfermedades como la diabetes, reumas y estrés se desvanecen a la hora de orar y rezar el Rosario, una jornada que hoy es parte de la agenda de la parroquia que se lleva a cabo los viernes a las siete de la noche y se conoce con el nombre de Cenáculo de Oración.

“A mí me encanta la exposición del Santísimo, se convierte en un momento de gozo espiritual y rezar el Rosario por la vocación y perseverancia de los sacerdotes es una gracia especial que Dios me concede”, dijo Macaria.

Hortensia Flores, de Toluca-México, que vive en Bridgeport



SHRINE TO OUR LADY FROM PAGE 23

amos que una urna en forma de casita hecha de cristal con una base de piedra podría ser lo adecuado”, dijo el arquitecto Rodríguez, a quien le tomó más de diez meses entre diseñar, preparar la ingeniería, contar con los permisos municipales y construir la obra.

Por su lado, el padre Torres hizo una gira en las parroquias buscando el setenta y cinco por ciento del valor total de la obra para pagar a la empresa constructora; custodiaba la imagen de la Señora de la Divina Providencia que reposaba en su parroquia y que había venido de una fábrica de México, a su vez, vendía ladrillos para ajustar el dinero.

Simultáneamente, Raúl Ruiz, un saxofonista puertorriqueño, maestro de capilla de la iglesia de Saint Charles, por pedido del padre Torres, buscaba músicos y repertorio sacro de la Isla para montar los cánticos de la Misa de Acción de Gracias del 15 de noviembre del 2025; a su vez, audicionó a cantores que formaron el Coro Puertorriqueño de Bridgeport, apoyado por músicos que tocaron los bongoes, congas, guitarra, bajo y el tradicional cuatro puertorriqueño, una guitarra de diez cuerdas que tiene un sonido especial que sirve para ejecutar música tradicional puertorriqueña.

“Vamos a celebrar...como el verde de los campos, como el canto del Coquí...”, “qué bonita eres tú María...” Y el

Himno a la Providencia: “Virgen Santa de la Providencia, madre de Clemencia, honor del Caribe protectora, borinquen te aclama, patrona te llaman...”; fueron parte de las letras de las canciones interpretadas por el Coro puertorriqueño; que hizo su debut la tarde del sábado y que al siguiente día cantó el mismo repertorio en la misa dominical del mediodía en la iglesia de St. Charles ha pedido del Padre Abelardo Vásquez, su párroco general.

Durante la celebración el Obispo Auxiliar de Puerto Rico, Monseñor Tomás González, predicó cómo la Virgen actúa ante una necesidad por su innata sensibilidad, un don dado también a las mujeres; refiriéndose al Evangelio del día sobre las bodas de Caná cuando María le dijo a Jesús que no había vino y mostrando así una ruta de cómo los hijos de Dios debemos confiar, esperar y siempre (como ella) estar dispuestos a dar un sí, sin miedo.

Para luego, narrar cómo el 19 de noviembre de 1969 el Papa Paulo Sexto declaró a la Virgen de la Providencia, Patrona principal de la nación puertorriqueña. Y este 2025, en el Año de la Esperanza, celebrar también 50 años de su coronación canónica; además la Conferencia de Obispos de Puerto Rico, declaró, que a partir del 19 de noviembre del 2025 hasta el 5 de diciembre del 2026, el Año Jubilar Mariano. “Y, es porque María quiere

seguir encontrándose cerca de nosotros”, dijo el Obispo González.

Mientras que, Monseñor Frank Cagianno, reconoció las contribuciones de la comunidad puertorriqueña desde hace más de 90 años, mucho antes de que Bridgeport sea considerada una Diócesis y el Padre Torres agradeció una a una a las personas que ayudaron a cumplir el sueño de tener una imagen de la Virgen de la Providencia en el pabellón de esculturas del Santuario de Saint Margaret. “... Es que ni una estampa de la Virgen había ahí (en Saint Margaret) y creo que ella (la virgen) merece estar ahí”, indicó el Padre Torres.

Después de la Misa, la imagen de la Patrona de Puerto Rico, fue cargada por cuatro devotos puertorriqueños que portaron el traje y sombrero de paja borinqueño, y en peregrinación llegaron al Santuario de St. Margaret Shrine.

Con cantos marianos y velas encendidas por los fieles -a manera de vigilia- el Obispo González, bendijo el cimiento y pilares de la casita más la imagen de la Virgen; porque de acuerdo con el Arquitecto Rodríguez, en unas semanas más se colocarán unas paredes de cristal, diligencia que no se pudo realizar debido a que el flete del material no avanzó a llegar de Europa y por ende falta ensamblar las piezas y colocarlas para cercar la urna. ■

desde hace tres años, acompañada de su esposo Manuel Saúl nativo de Cuenca-Ecuador, desde el 2022 asisten a la misa dominical del mediodía y son miembros activos de la Parroquia de Saint Peter, y acompañaron a la jornada de adoración al Santísimo por cuarenta horas, tiempo que se prolongó y que permitió a muchos fieles, al igual que a la familia Saúl-Flores, asistir con fe, devoción y de rodillas a los pies del Santísimo Sacramento.

Por la cercanía a la iglesia la familia se enteró que había la exposición del Santísimo por cuarenta horas porque el Padre Alexis, párroco de la iglesia, anunció durante las misas de doce y la del viernes a las siete, a la que ellos acuden, sobre la exposición del Santísimo.

Acorde con Hortensia, madre de los siete niños Saúl-Flores, cuando se mudaron a Bridgeport llegaron a la iglesia de Saint Agustine pero a los dos meses siguientes compraron una vivienda cerca de la parroquia Saint Peter y decidieron por parte activa de esta iglesia donde sus hijos han hecho su Primera Comunión y ella acude a la Clase Bíblica de los martes a las 7:00PM para “aprender de la Palabra, cómo ser buena persona e hija de Dios y saber convivir para relacionarse y educar en la fe y en los valores a sus pequeños hijos.

“Blanca de 11 años y Camila de 9 años hicieron la Primera Comunión aquí y estos dos últimos acompañaron al Santísimo después de recibir su Hostia

Sagrada”, dijo Hortensia.

Reflexión que es apoyada por su esposo Manuel, quien a pesar de no ser muy activo en la iglesia porque trabaja de sol a sol, apoya a que su esposa venga constantemente a la iglesia porque cree que al tener una familia extensa necesita de la bendición de Dios para salir adelante en su proyecto de vida familiar. “Hay que unirse a Dios porque sin él no se puede caminar”, dijo Manuel.

En el Boletín semanal de la iglesia el P. Alexis, párroco de la iglesia, escribió un mensaje a sus fieles diciéndoles: “ El fin de semana de octubre... Por favor a de anotarse para acompañar a Jesús en la Eucaristía... del jueves 23 desde la 3 pm-12 am; Viernes 24 desde la 1 am-12 am; sábado 25 desde la 1 am-12 am y domingo 26 desde la 12 am-7 pm. El Comité de Bienvenida, en ese fin de semana estarán después de la misa anotando las personas para las distintas horas de adoración. Por favor anotar su nombre y teléfono.

Cuando Usted Venga a cubrir un momento de adoración, puede escribir sus intenciones, en el cuaderno de 40 horas de adoración al Santísimo. Vamos a ofrecer todas estas intenciones durante las misas del fin de semana. Como ya he dicho en mis homilias, queremos iniciar este Año Eucarístico con la devoción de las 40 horas Adoración al Santísimo y tendremos varios eventos durante este año para profundizar nuestra fe en la presencial real de Jesús en la eucaristía”. ■

Vocations

Priesthood:

A fight for the true, beautiful and good

By **FATHER ERIC SILVA**

In the history of the Church, few parish priests have been canonized as saints. Most of whom were parish priests went on to become bishops, found religious orders, were martyred at varying times of tumult and war or who were sent for varying degrees of missionary or chaplaincy work for the military services.

In the Church's 2,000-year history, only two parish priests who lived their priesthood in the relative obscurity of their parish boundaries, have been canonized

saints: St. John Marie Vianney and St. Ivo of Kermartin.

St. John Vianney once wrote, "When people want to destroy religion, they begin by attacking the priest; for when there is no priest, there is no sacrifice, and when there is no sacrifice, there is no religion." While it may be impossible to quantify the attacks of the devil on the diocesan priesthood versus the priesthood of religious orders, but the reality that so few diocesan priests have been canonized creates a poignant reflection on what lies in wait for all young

men truly discerning a call to the diocesan priesthood: war. War with one's own vices and sinfulness, not only for his own sanctification, but also in order that all those to whom the priest is called to serve, are not deprived of the holy priest that the Church deserves.

In St. Paul's epistle to the people of Rome, the sixth chapter reads, "What return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the

return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What is required of each and every son and daughter of God is also required of the priest, but while the "wages of sin is death", for the priest, the wages of sin means not only his own death, but the death an untold number, known to God alone on the other side of eternity.

There are those who would claim that we have a shortage of priests and that the Church is in



FATHER ERIC SILVA

need of priests more than ever. While it is certainly true that gone are the days of rectories with six priests, all serving the same parish, what was true in those times of perceived priestly abundance, is truer now. We do not need more priests, we need more holy, self-sacrificial priests, who wage war against sin by prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

The devil once told St. John Vianney, "If there were three priests like you, my kingdom would be destroyed." Why not the Diocese of Bridgeport? Why not from amongst our own diocesan sons? We must highlight the joys of the priesthood, but it must never be devoid of the great battle that it also demands, and the stakes that are at hand.

Embedded in the heart of every man, to some degree, is a desire to fight and do battle, but we are "not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

In 2025, the Church marks the centenary of St. John Vianney's canonization, and since his canonization, Bl. Michael McGivney is the closest the Church seems to have gotten to canonizing another "ordinary parish priest." Pray for your diocesan priests; pray also, that the Lord may raise up an entire generation of holy priests who have found the joy and fulfillment in doing battle with their own sinfulness and all that seeks to divert the flock's attention away from all that is good, true and beautiful.

A young man need not wait until he is ordained a priest or even to have entered the seminary to begin preparing for his call to become what our world, our Church and our Diocese of Bridgeport need: good, holy and joyful priests.

Diocese's Filipino community extends helping hand back home

By **FATHER CYRUS BARTOLOME**

Editor's note: Father Cyrus Bartolome is the diocese's Episcopal Vicar for Filipino Catholics. He is also pastor of Assumption Parish in Westport, a member of "The One's" pilot parish program.

WESTPORT—In a moving display of faith, compassion and unity, the Filipino community of the Diocese of Bridgeport came together to bring relief and hope to families in the Philippines who were recently struck by both a devastating typhoon and a powerful earthquake. What began as a simple call for help quickly grew into a heartfelt mission of mercy—showing that love and solidarity can reach across oceans.

When reports of destruction and hardship began to circulate—homes destroyed, families displaced and entire communities left struggling to survive—Filipino parishioners throughout the diocese mobilized. Different Filipino groups, families and individuals joined forces to collect personal donations and send much-needed support to those affected by the disasters.

The community organized a coordinated relief effort to purchase rice, canned goods, bottled

towns of Compostela, Liloan, Cabadjanan and Cebu, to name a few. These are some of the



water and solar-powered lights for families left without electricity. Through generous donations and the spirit of "Bayanihan," a cherished Filipino value of communal unity and cooperation, the community's compassion became a lifeline to those suffering across the Visayas region.

Special attention was given to the municipality of Naval in the Province of Biliran and in the

hardest-hit areas that suffered not only from the typhoon but also from severe flooding. Relief goods and essential supplies were distributed to residents who lost homes and livelihoods, bringing both material aid and emotional comfort to families striving to rebuild their lives.

Working in collaboration with local trusted partners in Cebu and Biliran, the donations were care-

fully coordinated and delivered to the affected communities. For many survivors, the arrival of these relief goods was not just about physical sustenance—it was a sign that they were not forgotten, that their brothers and sisters abroad were praying for them and standing with them in faith.

"We may be far from home, but our hearts remain close to our people," said one of the organizers. "This is what it means to live our faith—to be the hands and heart of Christ for those in need."

The Filipino community of the Diocese of Bridgeport expressed deep gratitude to all who contributed their time, resources and prayers. The outreach serves as a powerful reminder that faith in action can bridge continents and bring light—both spiritual and literal—to those enduring dark and difficult times.

As the people of the Provinces of Cebu and Biliran continue to recover and rebuild from the twin disasters, the Filipino community remains steadfast in prayer and support, trusting that God's love will continue to heal, strengthen and renew all who have suffered.

Please join
Xavier Society for the Blind
for our
**125th
Anniversary
Mass**



**Sunday, December 14th
at 10:15 a.m.
St. Patrick's Cathedral
5th Avenue
in Manhattan**

**Father Jamie Dennis, a blind
priest from Kentucky and a braille
client of XSB, will be celebrating
the Mass with Cardinal Dolan.
Braille and large print Mass
Propers will be available at Mass.**

**For more info contact
Aisling Redican at
aisling@xsbonline.org
or call 212-502-7607**



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