

THE MONTHLY NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

JANUARY 2026 | VOLUME 43, NUMBER 1 | CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK ISSUE



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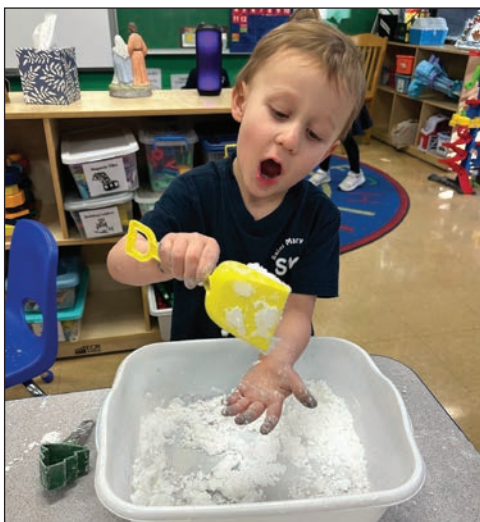
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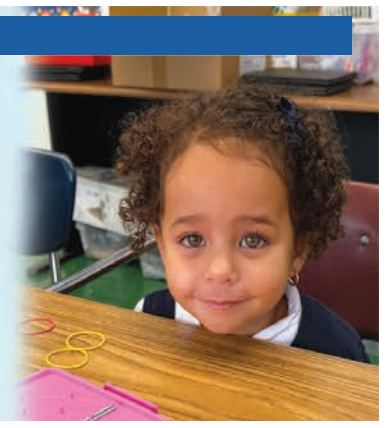


ON THE COVER

STUDENTS AT CATHOLIC ACADEMY OF BRIDGEPORT
—St. Andrew celebrate Three Kings Day. Visit our special section (pages 13-16) for more information on our Catholic schools!
(PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHOLIC ACADEMY OF BRIDGEPORT)

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Diocesan News

Hope is the fuel of Christian life

By ROSE BRENNAN

BRIDGEPORT—All good things must come to an end, and that includes the Jubilee Year of Hope, which formally closed in the Diocese of Bridgeport with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano on the morning of January 4, 2026.

The Jubilee Year of Hope formally began on Christmas Eve of 2024, when Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St. Peter Basilica. The Diocese of Bridgeport began its local celebrations on the first three Sundays of 2025, with Masses at its three designated Jubilee parishes: St. Augustine Cathedral in Bridgeport, the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist in Stamford and St. Peter Parish in Danbury.

The diocese's Jubilee Closing Mass took place on the Solemnity of the Epiphany, which commemorates the three wisemen's visit to the child Jesus. Bishop Caggiano noted it was a day with



no shortage of themes and mysteries upon which to reflect, but that day he had selected just one: perseverance.

The bishop said that like the wisemen, each of us is given our own journey to undertake in this life. And God asks us to continue that journey of life with him leading the way. At times, it can be easy—but at other times, it isn't. Sometimes the journey of life requires extraordinary effort to keep going, and sometimes it

takes us straight into darkness.

"Every single journey step could give us an occasion to forsake hope: hope that God keeps his promises, and that God loves you wildly, and that no matter how high, how steep, how long, how dark the journey of your life is, God will always be there for you," he said. "That is hope. And that, my friends, is the fuel of the life of every disciple of Jesus Christ."

But, the bishop said, this hope is not meant to be kept to

oneself. Like the wisemen, he said, Christians are called to be "ambassadors of hope" to the entire world.

"As the Magi brought the Gentile nations to the Christ child—representing all those who are not part of the covenant—and in so doing, in their adoration, reminded creation that every child of God is called to salvation, mercy and hope in Jesus Christ," Bishop Caggiano said.

Persevering in hope also requires one key ingredient: patience. The bishop noted that the wisemen's journey to Bethlehem began many years before they actually made the trek. According to legend, they were astronomers, keeping watch for a sign in the sky—a star—that would herald the arrival of the Messiah.

The journey of the life of a Christian can be an arduous one at times. And the bishop recalled one of the first declarations God made about human nature when

creating Eve for Adam: man was not meant to be—or to journey—alone.

"Can we be courageous enough to make the pledge that we will not only keep walking wherever God leads us, but that we will not allow anyone to walk alone?" the bishop asked. "We are all journeying together: through the ups and downs of life, through the triumphs and failures, through the sinfulness and great moments of grace. We are walking together, with the Lord at our lead, to heaven."

The formal Jubilee of Hope may have come to an end, but the bishop said the promise of hope remains for the rest of Catholic life.

"Even though we are ending the Jubilee Year, we're not ending the journey of our lives," Bishop Caggiano said. "And therefore, we are not ending the quest to ask the gift of hope to continue to burn in your hearts and mine." ■

Station Church Pilgrimage launches February 18

By ROSE BRENNAN

SHELTON—Inspired by the "station days" of Rome and building off the success of a similar program in the Diocese of Brooklyn, N.Y., the Diocese of Bridgeport will launch its first Lenten Station Church Pilgrimage this Lenten season.

From Ash Wednesday on February 18 to the morning of Holy Thursday on April 2, the faithful will be invited to participate in daily Mass at various parishes across the Diocese of Bridgeport. On weekdays, two daily Masses will be offered—one in the morning and one in the evening—as well as one Mass in the morning on Saturday. Some participating parishes will also include other devotional practices such as praying the Rosary, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Stations of the Cross.

Rome's station day pilgrimages evolved from the tradition of celebrating Mass at the tombs of early Christian martyrs, and

records of these pilgrimages begin as early as the fourth century. Early on, it was customary for the Pope himself to celebrate these daily Masses at the designated churches.

The station days fell out of practice entirely during the Avignon papacy in the 14th century but witnessed a modern revival with the papacies of Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII, who attached indulgences to visiting these station churches. Today, the Pontifical North American College coordinates an English-language public station Mass at all of the station churches of Lent and has done so every year since 1975.

In total, the Diocese of Bridgeport pilgrimage will encompass 38 days and 30 of the diocese's churches, visiting Bethel, Bridgeport, Danbury, Easton, Fairfield, Greenwich, Monroe, New Fairfield, Newtown, Norwalk, Redding, Shelton, Stamford, Stratford and Trumbull.

The pilgrimage will begin on



February 18 with an evening Mass at St. Augustine Cathedral in Bridgeport and will conclude at the same location with the diocesan Chrism Mass on April 2.

The faithful are encouraged to attend as many of the 63 Masses as they can.

Father Joseph Gill, pastor of St. Jude Parish in Monroe, will

host Masses on February 19 and March 19. He is thrilled to participate in this inaugural pilgrimage—twice.

"When I studied in Rome, one of my favorite memories was making the 'station churches' and visiting all of the beautiful churches with rich history in the Eternal City," he said. "Although

we're not quite Rome, our diocese also has a rich history with diverse and beautiful churches. We are excited to host pilgrims from across the diocese at St. Jude's."

St. Leo Parish in Stamford will also serve as a station church for two days of the pilgrimage: February 24 and March 31.

"Just as the Israelites fled slavery in Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and wandered the desert for 40 years, our trust in God sets us on our journey," said Father Javier Nieva, DCJM, pastor of St. Leo's. "We want to leave sin behind and seek the Lord. This diocesan Lenten pilgrimage has profound symbolic and spiritual significance and will yield great fruits."

Interested parties can either receive a Lenten pilgrimage brochure through their parish office or download it from the diocesan website beginning February 2.

(A complete schedule of the pilgrimage can be found on page 12. For more information, contact Steve Filizzola at steven.filizzola@diobpt.org.) ■

Appeal News

Bishop launches 2026 'One in Christ' appeal

By JOE PISANI

SHELTON—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano recently announced the start of the 2026 One in Christ Bishop's Appeal, expressing his gratitude and joy because the work of renewal is succeeding in the diocese, with Mass attendance up 22 percent in the last three years and more seminarians than there have been in 30 years.

"The Holy Spirit is working powerfully in our midst, and we are beginning to see the fruits of our efforts, and those fruits are growing," he said. "Over the last few years, you have heard me say that we are in the work of renewal—of bringing new life, both individually to our own discipleship and collectively to our common life as a Church."

The bishop urged the faithful to continue on this path "so we can do even more."

"For that, I need your help in supporting the ministries that are the foundation of our Church," he said, "and through funding the new initiatives that are giving further and even greater life to our Church."

Bishop Caggiano said he was grateful for the contin-

ued generosity and urged the faithful to consider a sacrificial gift to the 2026 One in Christ Bishop's Appeal, which has a goal of \$8 million and will provide for works of charity, formation in faith, education and catechesis.

"I urge you to open your hearts and ask what it is that we can do as our next step in support of what the Lord is doing," he said. "I am always grateful for your generosity."

In making the announcement, he said the Appeal continues to support "The One," which is the diocesan vision of spiritual and pastoral renewal.

"Your generosity supports ministries and services that no single parish can provide on its own, accompanying others in faith and reflecting truth, beauty and goodness by serving those in need, forming disciples and strengthening the Church in Fairfield County," he said.

Pamela S. Rittman, director of development and the Bishop's Appeal, said the many ministries supported by the Appeal are focused on three main categories: Accompanying Our Neighbor (education-focused), Fostering

Works of Goodness (charity-focused) and Celebrating the Truth in Jesus Christ (faith-focused).

"The One in Christ Bishop's

Jesus and growing in their faith through the Institute for Catholic Formation Satellite Center.

• Those who are isolated,

Appeal, along with vice chairs Kenn and Maureen Devane of St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Ridgefield. Father Luke Suarez,



MARK AND MORGAN MOONEY AND MAUREEN AND KENN DEVANE

Appeal is an invitation to live our faith in action," Rittman said.

"We are deeply grateful for the faithful support of our parishioners over the years and for the continued generosity that allows us, united as one Church, to care for the vulnerable, form future leaders and make Christ's love visible throughout our diocese."

Rittman said that some of the activities the Appeal supports include:

- Priests, deacons and laity being formed to preach, lead and evangelize more effectively through the St. Jerome Center for Preaching and Biblical Studies.

- Children in Bridgeport and Danbury who are encountering

grieving or ill are receiving care through the Pastoral Companions Program.

- Individuals and families in crisis, the poor, the sick, and those searching for Christ, who are being served through Catholic Charities and other outreach ministries.

- Families receiving Bishop's Scholarship Fund tuition assistance, through a partnership with Foundations in Education, which will help them provide their children with a Catholic education.

Rittman said that Morgan and Mark Mooney of St. Pius X Parish in Fairfield, who were last year's Chair Couple, will continue in that role for this year's

pastor of Holy Spirit Parish in Stamford, will succeed Father Gregg D. Mecca, pastor of St. Peter Parish in Danbury, as pastor co-chair.

"As we look ahead to the 2026 One in Christ Bishop's Appeal, we offer our prayers in gratitude for the generosity that has sustained our Church and in hope for the blessings yet to come," Rittman said. "May the Holy Spirit guide our hearts, unite our parish communities, and inspire us to respond faithfully to Christ's call to serve one another."

(For more information, visit www.2026BishopsAppeal.org or call 203.416.1470. Thank you for your support.)

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ONE in Christ
2026 Bishop's Appeal
DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

“The Bishop's Appeal allows us to live out 'The One,' our diocesan vision of spiritual and pastoral renewal. Your generosity supports ministries and services that no single parish can provide on its own, accompanying others in faith and reflecting truth, beauty, and goodness by serving those in need, forming disciples, and strengthening the Church in Fairfield County.

I invite you to prayerfully consider giving generously to the 2026 Bishop's Appeal. Your contribution is a tangible sign of our unity, One in Christ, and enlivens the mission of the Church in our Diocese of Bridgeport.”

+ Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport

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The One

Deacon Carillo appointed inaugural Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry

SHELTON—The Diocese of Bridgeport has announced the creation of a new diocesan leadership role aimed at strengthening pastoral outreach to its growing Hispanic and Latino Catholic communities. Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has appointed Deacon Edward Carillo as the Diocese's first-ever Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry, marking an important new chapter in the Diocese's ongoing commitment to evangelization, accompaniment and unity.

In making this appointment, Bishop Caggiano emphasized that the diocese has been richly blessed by the "vibrant faith, deep devotion, and generous service" of its Hispanic faithful, whose love for the Eucharist, commitment to family life and dedication to parish communities continue to enrich the entire diocesan Church.

The position was in part formed due to the significant growth of the Spanish-speaking Catholic population in Fairfield County. Most of the diocese's largest parishes are majority or exclusively Spanish-speaking, centered on urban areas like Bridgeport, Danbury and Norwalk.

In the past, the Diocese of Bridgeport has had an Episcopal Vicar for Hispanic Catholics. However, this new role is designed to respond more intentionally to the pastoral needs of these communities while fostering collaboration, listening and leadership development across the diocese.

"I will be working hand in hand with pastors," Deacon Carrillo said of his new role. "I am not here to give them more work, but I am here to support them and support our community."

As Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry, Deacon Carillo will assist clergy serving Hispanic communities, oversee key diocesan initiatives centered on evangelization and formation, and help develop lay leadership among Hispanic and Latino Catholics. His work will emphasize consultation, pastoral support and the strengthening of par-

ish-based communities of faith.

In the coming months, Deacon Carillo's first priority will be to visit parishes with a significant Hispanic presence, meeting personally with pastors and



parochial administrators to listen to their needs and concerns. He will also engage Hispanic coordinators of ecclesial movements, prayer groups, and faith communities throughout the Diocese, ensuring their voices help shape future initiatives.

As of right now, Deacon Carrillo has three major initiatives on his plate. First is a reintroduction of "The One"—Bishop Caggiano's mission for ecclesial renewal in the Diocese of Bridgeport—to the diocese's Spanish-speaking community.

Second, he plans to launch a program titled "Created for God/Creada para Dios," a bilingual faith formation program for young women approaching their quinceañera—a 15th birthday celebration and rite of passage. According to Deacon Carrillo, these celebrations will often include a Mass and blessing for the young woman, but in recent years, they have become more secularized.

Deacon Carrillo is hopeful this new program, developed by the Catholic women's apostolate Endow, will refocus part of the celebration on the young wom-

an's faith.

"The quinceañera has always been the moment when a girl starts walking the path toward becoming a woman," he said. "She's also walking—at the same time—into holiness. We are forming them, and we are forming their parents as well, so when they have their celebration, their Mass and their blessing is not just one checklist item out of the way."

Finally, Deacon Carrillo hopes to launch a Hispanic Family Day. With the name "One Family in Christ," this event will bring Spanish-speaking families from all around the diocese together in prayer, worship and an encounter with the divine.

According to Deacon Carrillo, this day will also be an opportunity for Hispanic Catholics to celebrate not only their shared language and faith, but their differences among other cultures



DEACON EDWARD CARILLO

and countries of origin.

"We're going to have a celebration with all the Hispanic parishes ... and their parishioners," he said. "The engines of this program will be the prayer groups and the ecclesial movements. They're going to work very closely together with all of us on creating this day."

Bishop Caggiano has entrusted this new ministry to the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, praying that it may be a moment of grace, deeper communion and renewed missionary outreach for the Diocese of Bridgeport. ■

Accompaniment Ministry launches mental health fellowship

SHELTON—The Diocese of Bridgeport's Ministry of Accompaniment, led by Deacon Tim Bolton, has launched the Fiat Mental Health and Church Life Fellowship, a new year-long formation and leadership development opportunity designed to strengthen the Church's response to mental health challenges through faith-filled accompaniment.

In partnership with the Fiat Program on Faith and Mental Health and the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame, the fellowship invites clergy, parish staff, educators and parish volunteers to deepen both their personal formation and their pastoral skills.

Beginning in March, program fellows will participate in a 10-week online course led by Notre Dame faculty and practitioners, addressing essential



DEACON TIM BOLTON

questions at the intersection of faith and mental health. Topics include understanding mental health, accompanying those impacted by trauma or addiction, responding to suffering, and sup-

porting individuals experiencing thoughts of suicide or self-harm.

"Mental illness has been present in my family, and the course helped me to see our family's challenges with fresh eyes," said a bereavement minister who took the 10-week course. "This has opened new pathways for conversation in our family, and we've been able to seek out more support in our parish and through mental health resources in our community."

A youth minister who participated in the 10-week course said they learned about the important role the Church and its leaders can play in suicide prevention.

"I used to be anxious talking with the teens I minister to about suicide," they said. "Now, I realize that asking whether a teen who is struggling has been thinking about suicide is the best means of prevention. I know how to ask the question and how

to help them get the additional resources they need."

A parish lay minister noted they would avoid talking about mental health because they weren't a certified professional. But that changed after they took the course.

"Through the course, I've learned about the challenges facing those with mental illness and their families," the minister said. "I'm now comfortable inviting adults in our faith formation to reflect on and share experiences with mental illness, to the extent they are comfortable. We're able to create a space for praying and talking about life with Christ in the midst of this."

(Clergy, parish staff, educators and parish volunteers are welcome to apply to this new fellowship program. For more information, contact Deacon Tim Bolton, director of accompaniment, at dnbolton@diobpt.org.) ■

Parish News

Bishop blesses Cathedral shrine to Blessed Mother

By JOE PISANI

BRIDGEPORT — St. Augustine Cathedral was filled with the faithful who came to honor the “Great Mother of God who always did what God asked,” as Bishop Frank J. Caggiano blessed the new Marian Shrine.

The solemn blessing on the Fourth Sunday of Advent moved the statue of Blessed Virgin to a place of honor left of the altar in a project that was eight years in the making, giving her a “worthy home provided by so many children who may continue to know her protection,” the bishop said.

“You and I come to honor the Great Mother of God with the shrine that we have designed, which in God’s grace will be a fitting place to honor the Immaculate Heart of Mary, she who in all of salvation history did not once hesitate in doing God’s will,” he said.

After the blessing, Bishop Caggiano incensed the shrine as the choir sang “Immaculate Mary, your praises we sing.”

The bishop thanked the sisters of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Go Vap for their work in adorning the shrine with flower arrangements, and he said that by February, there will be a new shrine erected to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the opposite side, where the faithful will be able to renew their consecration to the Sacred Heart.

During his homily, Bishop Caggiano recalled an elevator conversation he once overheard during which an older bishop counseled a younger one, who was having difficulty convincing priests and deacons to take new assignments. The bishop told his colleague, “He who hesitates is lost.”

“At times, life demands decisive action,” the bishop said. “You need to take time to figure out what to do, but when you know what you need to do, you need to do it. You need to do it with conviction and courage, with zeal and fortitude.”

Bishop Caggiano said that great leaders and even saints

also needed to be reminded of that adage, including Moses, Jeremiah, Elizabeth and St. Joseph, who in the Gospel account hesitates to take Mary as his bride.

“St. Joseph, himself, having



heard this remarkable revelation from Mary, hesitates and decides to go a different path,” the bishop said, “until the angel literally intervenes and tells him, ‘You are to take her as your bride.’”

In his own life, Bishop Caggiano said there have been occasions when he has prayed, and it became clear in his mind what the Lord was asking, but “I can come up with a thousand excuses why not to do it or to wait or delay to make sure that ‘Lord, you really mean what you say.’”

He attributed this hesitancy, which everyone experiences, to fear and anxiety of doing something others may not approve,

or perhaps to stubbornness, ego and pride when we say, “I think this is what I should do, not that, Lord, which with all due respect, you think I should do.”

Other times, fear of failure may cause hesitation. However, the bishop said, the Lord will not ask us to do anything on our own and will provide the grace of his Holy Spirit to accomplish what he asks, whether that task be large or small.

“The Great Mother of God was one who did not wait, who did not debate, who did not tell the Lord, ‘I think there is a better way and I know what the way is.’ She was one who always accepted what God asked even at the foot of the cross,” Bishop Caggiano said. “She never hesitated because her heart is immaculate. It was not divided like yours or mine is at times because of our own agenda.”

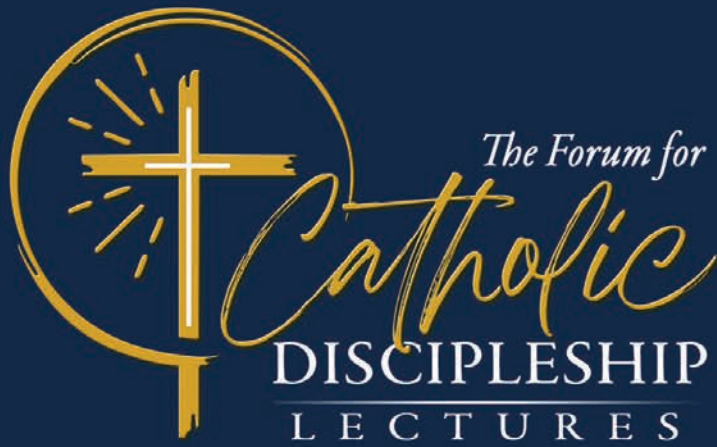
Her singular desire, he said, was “to make her life the path for her Son to do what he had to do.” Throughout life, her words were “Let it be done to me according to your word” not just at the Annunciation, but every day.

Bishop Caggiano urged the faithful to spend time in prayer and ask, “What have I been hesitating to do that the Lord has been asking me?”

“You and I know in our hearts that the Lord is prompting us for our own good and for the good of those we love,” he said. “Ask for the grace to do it. Stop delaying, stop making excuses, stop reverting back to our own agenda, which makes us get in the way of the holy Will of God.”

He also urged them to seek the intercession of the Blessed Mother at her new shrine:

“Today as we honor the Mother of God, ask for her maternal love, say a prayer that she will go to her Son. Ask for the grace that you and I may do what we need to do. Let us pray that we will not be among those who one day stand before the Lord, her Son, our God, and admit that we really did hesitate over and over again.”



The Bishop’s Lecture Series has been transformed into The Forum for Catholic Discipleship Lectures.

The Forum exists to promote the holistic formation of adult Catholics through encounters with truth, beauty, and goodness, while being accompanied in spiritual friendship the entire way. The lectures under The Forum continue the mission of what came before, bringing nationally renowned Catholic writers and speakers who illuminate the path of renewal while tackling pressing catechetical, theological, and pastoral issues.

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.

Next Lecture guest: Maureen Pratt

Date | Thursday, April 16, 2026

Time | 7 pm

Location | Community Room
Fairfield University Bookstore
1499 Post Road, Fairfield

Lecturer | Maureen Pratt



Maureen Pratt, MTS, MFA, GIA GG, Gem-A FGA (Merit), is a popular speaker, the award-winning, bestselling author of 10 books and the executive director and founder of The Peace in the Storm Project. Maureen Pratt has assisted the Diocese of Bridgeport to establish various parish based spiritual groups to accompany the suffering.

This ministry makes a meaningful difference in the lives of those who suffer through theologically sound, practical, spiritual support. Maureen will share her expert advise on how faith can heal pain and suffering, both for the afflicted and the caregiver.

To RSVP to this event, please visit:
www.bridgeportdiocese.org/bls
or email: bishopslecture@diobpt.org

Parish News

Haitian Community celebrates 222 years of Independence

By EMILY CLARK

BRIDGEPORT—On January 1, as the world marked New Year's Day and Catholics honored the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, Haitians observed yet another jubilant commemoration—the 222nd anniversary of their independence. Within the Diocese of Bridgeport, that included a Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Augustine Cathedral and joyful celebration of the tightknit Haitian community of Fairfield County.

Father Férry Galbert, vocations director for the diocese, and other Haitian priests joined Bishop Frank J. Caggiano in concelebrating the Mass which included readings and prayers in both English and Haitian Creole—one of the country's official languages—as well as dancers in native dress, traditional hymns and lively music.

"We gather together today to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and on this day specifically, we celebrate the independence of Haiti, and the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin," Bishop Caggiano said.

During the "Kyrie," eight young women, all wearing shirts with the words "Vive Haiti" and long blue skirts with red sashes—the traditional colors of their native country—danced before the altar as parishioners and guests tapped their feet to the rhythm of the upbeat chants. The singing continued later in the Mass with the "Credo" as well. Though typically recited in Masses celebrated in English and Latin, the Haitian

people sang in unison: "Do you believe? Do you believe? Oh yes, I believe: in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Father Dimitri Dèmesmin, a visiting Haitian priest from Camden, N.J., offered the homily, first in English, then in Haitian Creole.

"It's amazing to be together as a people of faith, a people of love, a people of hope, on this day of the new year, celebrating Mary the mother of God; celebrating a day of peace to share what we treasure the most—faith and love," he said. "Today, we call upon God to bless us, to bless our families, to bless our lands and our country Haiti and those dear to our heart."

Referencing the second reading, which had been proclaimed in Haitian Creole, Father Dèmesmin recalled how God chose Mary to be the mother of his son and how the Church proclaimed her the Mother of God.

"She is the Mother of God because she said 'yes' to the angel, 'yes' to be a part of God's plan," he added. "Today, we are blessed, knowing that Jesus came for you and for me. He came for all nations and tribes, all people and all languages. He is the universal savior, now and forever."

Following this brief homily, Father Dèmesmin then transitioned to his native language, specifically addressing the Haitian people gathered before him from this diocese and beyond.

At the offertory, in addition to the bread and wine traditionally presented to the celebrant, more

than a dozen women, again in blue and red dresses and head coverings, processed toward the sanctuary carrying baskets of fruit and vegetables as music continued to play. The bishop, assisted by Father Guy Dormevil, parochial vicar at St. Joseph-St. Ladislaus Parish in Norwalk and moderator of Notre Dame du Perpetuel Secours Quasi Parish in Stamford, accepted each one and placed them in front of the altar.

Mireille Desances of Bridgeport, wife of Deacon Rock Desances, said this independence day is a true cultural celebration.

"We have a Mass every year on January 1," she said, noting that it was previously held at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bridgeport until moving to St. Augustine two years ago. "It's



really a day all about Haitian culture and great for the whole community to come together."

Just before the closing prayer, the entire congregation joined in singing the Haitian National Anthem, waving miniature Haitian flags, which featured red and blue horizontal bands, the national coat of arms and a white scroll bearing the words, "L'Union Fait la Force," meaning "Unity Makes Strength."

Father Dormevil, in translating Father Dèmesmin's Haitian Creole homily, noted that the country's motto emerged through the visiting priest's inspiring

words: "We are a people of the past and the future, a people of hope, a people of the Lord. We can change if we unite ourselves."

In his closing prayer to all gathered before him, Bishop Caggiano said, "We see these great communities come together as one: one family, one Haitian family of faith. As we leave today to go on to the rest of this new year, we ask our Lord's grace and our Lady's intercession to bless you, to bless your families, the entire Haitian community. That's what we celebrate here today. Happy Independence Day and Happy New Year!"



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Foundations in Faith

Grant applications to open next month

NORWALK—Starting on February 15, parishes and ministries of the Diocese of Bridgeport will once again be able to apply for funding from Foundations in Faith via the St. John Paul II Fund for Faith Formation and the St. Therese Fund for Evangelization.

Since 2019, both funds have provided more than \$1 million to faith formation and evangelization programs throughout the diocese. In total, more than 60 parishes and more than 20 diocesan ministries have benefited from grants from these two funds.

In 2025, there were two inaugural grant awards to deaneries for their respective regional faith formation programs in Danbury and Stratford. In total, 33 pro-

grams across 28 parishes received grants from the St. John Paul II Fund.

These program support grants provide funding for a specific faith formation program for the duration of the pastoral year. Parishes wishing to be considered for funding must submit an application via Foundations in Faith's website, and the application requires some thoughtfulness by the applicants—which can be the pastor, parochial vicar, or a ministry leader like a Director of Religious Education. All email communications concerning the application—and if accepted, the grant—gets sent to the applicant and the pastor, by default. The first such email is a copy of the application itself. This

was designed so that pastors are fully aware of the funding being requested on behalf of his parish and for which purpose.

Another aspect of the application process is the budget. An itemized budget is required as the St. John Paul II Fund does not fund strictly service projects. The subject of the application must be a faith formation program. In this way, should the cost of a service project be part of a broader faith formation initiative, it may be considered.

In putting together your application, consider also your program start and end dates—which must be within July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027. If your application is accepted and your parish receives an award,



two reports will be required: a check-in next January and a Final Report in May 2027. Applicants must also identify three specific goals of the faith formation program, which are very helpful in guiding the applicant through the reporting requirement later on.

Last but not least, applicants must address the question of how their programs will encourage encounters with Christ and discipleship. This is an important part of the application because it demonstrates the parish and its leadership have aligned their efforts to the mission of the Church and the needs of their

community. The beauty here is that it allows for the applicant to demonstrate some innovation regarding a Bible study, sacramental prep or children's faith formation.

Diocesan ministries seeking funding would apply for the St. Therese Fund for Evangelization grant. The application form is the same as the St. John Paul II Fund for Faith Formation. The deadline to apply is May 1.

(For more information, contact Carol Incarnacao-Schirm at cschirm@foundationsinfaith.org. To apply, visit foundationsinfaith.org/grant-application-login.)



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Holy Trinity Chapel dedicated

By JOE PISANI

SHERMAN—For the Catholic community of Sherman, it was a gift that came just in time for Christmas. Less than a year after the groundbreaking, their new Chapel of the Holy Trinity was dedicated by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, who praised it as “a crown jewel of the diocese.”

“How great a day this is that we come together to celebrate the beauty of this place and all the hard work that was required to build this chapel, literally stone by stone, wood upon wood,” Bishop Caggiano said during the Mass of Dedication on the Fourth Sunday of Advent.

He thanked Father Robert L. Wolfe, pastor of St. Edward the Confessor Parish, for “taking on such an awesome task as a young priest,” project manager Doug Kastilahn for his tireless work over the past three years and the parish community for its commitment to building a new house of worship.

Traveling north on Route 37 through the hills of northwestern Connecticut, the white chapel suddenly appears, resplendent in the sunlight, surrounded by woodlands, with a towering stained glass window of the Blessed Trinity visible to everyone who drives by.

Holy Trinity was founded in 1981 as a mission chapel of St. Edward the Confessor in New Fairfield and merged with the parish in 2022. The original chapel, which had a mold problem and could not be renovated, was demolished in 2023, and last spring, work began on a new building, made possible by the church's endowment.

In his homily, Bishop Caggiano told the faithful, who filled the pews and stood in the aisles, about a retreat he made with 36 seminarians in Assisi, which included a visit to the Church of San

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

Foundations in Education

Bishop's Scholarship applications open February 1

SHELTON—Foundations in Education Inc. (FIE), Connecticut's largest K-8 scholarship granting organization (SGO), is pleased to announce that applications for the Bishop's Scholarship Fund (BSF) open February 1, 2026.

The mission of the Bishop's Scholarship Fund is to help families afford a Catholic education at diocesan-sponsored elementary schools throughout Fairfield County. Families with students in kindergarten through eighth grade for the 2026-2027 school year are eligible to apply.

In the past year, Foundations in Education awarded tuition assistance through the Bishop's Scholarship Fund to 1,149 students, totaling over \$2.98 million. BSF prioritizes families who demonstrate financial need, ensuring Catholic education is accessible to students across the region.

Among Bishop's Scholarship Fund recipients for the 2025-2026 school year, 62 percent were raised by single parents, and 62 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The average household gross income among these recipients was \$49,875.

To apply, families must complete the FACTS Grant & Aid applica-

tion online at www.FACTSmtg.com/aid, upload required tax documents, answer all relevant questions and submit a non-refundable \$35 application and administrative fee payable to FACTS.

The application deadline is March 15 for families currently enrolled at any of the diocesan-sponsored elementary schools, while families new to these schools have an application deadline of April 15.

Scholarships are awarded based on demonstrated financial need. Applications are reviewed by a Scholarship Committee, and award notifications are issued through the FACTS system in May. Scholarship funds are distributed directly to the schools on behalf of recipient families.

"Since our founding, Foundations in Education has made over 14,500 awards totaling \$29 million in tuition assistance to families across the diocese," said Holly Doherty-Lemoine, executive director of FIE. "We are deeply grateful to the generous donors and friends supporting us for over a decade who make this work possible and ensure that financial need is never a barrier to a faith-filled, high-quality educa-



tion. We all agree on the value of accessing a quality education rooted in faith. We all agree our children are worth it, and the transformational impact of a Catholic

education lasts a lifetime."

"The Bishop's Scholarship Fund has given our children the opportunity of a lifetime," shared a parent of a BSF recipient. "As

a family who values both education and faith, choosing Catholic school has been a decision we have always taken great pride in choosing. We recognize our great privilege in receiving this tremendous support."

The Bishop's Scholarship Fund is made possible through the generosity of donors across Fairfield County and beyond, and is the flagship program at Foundations in Education. Founded in 2015 by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, FIE is a nonprofit organization, and Connecticut's largest K-8 SGO, committed to strengthening and transforming Catholic education within the Diocese of Bridgeport. In addition to providing tuition assistance, FIE supports academic innovation and professional development opportunities for school leaders.

(To learn more about supporting Catholic education or applying for tuition assistance, visit www.foundationsineducation.org.)

Seventh grader triumphs at debate

STAMFORD—The Catholic Academy of Stamford proudly congratulates seventh-grade student Yohan Joseph on his recent success in competitive debate.

Joseph recently resumed his debate journey through the Westfield Academy of Debate, Model UN and Leadership. On Saturday, December 13, he joined two fellow Westfield students at the Connecticut Middle School Debate League Tournament, hosted by Seymour High School.

Competing in the novice division, the team debated both sides of the motion, "This House would establish a permanent host city for the Winter Olympics and a permanent host city for the Summer Olympics," across three rounds of competition.

The team delivered an outstanding performance, winning all three rounds against teams from Eastern Middle School in Greenwich, Middlebrook Middle School in Wilton and Amity Middle School.

"We appreciate the great academic foundation Yohan continues to receive at CAS, which enables him as he continues on with his debating endeavors," said Joseph's parents.



YOHAN JOSEPH

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April 29, 6:30pm

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EDITORIAL

‘And keep it
all the year’

In addition to placing the baby Jesus into my home nativity scene, attending midnight Mass and making struffoli, one of my favorite Christmas Eve traditions is watching *The Muppet Christmas Carol*.

Now before you laugh at me, let me share some crucial information with you: *The Muppet Christmas Carol* is consistently lauded as one of the most faithful film adaptations of Charles Dickens’ 1843 novella. And that means the world to me as someone with an English degree—not to mention a soft spot for The Muppets themselves.

Inseparable from any adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*—Muppet-driven or otherwise—is a Christian message: one which condemns greed, and even ties it to a promise one will die alone and despised. Moreover, it emphasizes the ideals of hope, charity and conversion.

One of the most-often quoted lines from *A Christmas Carol* comes from the moment of Ebenezer Scrooge’s conversion from his miserly, unkind and cold ways: “I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.”

By the time you’re reading this editorial, you’ve probably packed up the Christmas decorations, thrown the Christmas tree onto the curb for trash collection and placed everything else in the attic or basement, to be seen and used again next December. But how do we avoid doing the same with the spirit of Christmas?

The Christian ideals of conversion, hope and charity cannot be boxed up in the same way. And they shouldn’t be! In just one month, we’ll be called into a season of conversion and almsgiving during Lent. And likewise, the same ideals shouldn’t be boxed up with our Easter decorations either.

The Catholic life is one punctuated by love: of God and of neighbor. And that love is reinforced in our commitment to hope, charity and conversion. And by remembering these ideals, we are able to honor Christmas in our hearts, and “keep it all the year,” as Scrooge did.

Make me a channel
of your peace

As is likely the case with many of you, I have been disturbed by the increasing violence and unrest occurring in our country. And I think there is no better time for the Holy Father to have announced a special Year of St. Francis in 2026.

Further details of our own diocesan celebrations are forthcoming. But for now, amidst the violence and unrest in our country, I have at least found some comfort and agency in this great saint’s prayer, which asks God for the grace to sow love, pardon and joy where there is hatred, injury and sadness.

May we pray for a true and lasting peace, following the words and example of St. Francis, and may we not seek to be loved as to love:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

EDITOR’S CHOICE

O come, let us adore him

One of the key components of Bishop Caggiano’s vision of “The One” is the opportunity to encounter Our Lord. And there are few more moving, life-changing ways to do so than in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament: where Jesus himself is there—Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity—in the Eucharist.

Currently, nine parishes in the Diocese of Bridgeport offer Perpetual Adoration, where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed for

Adoration 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Those parishes include:

St. Charles Borromeo Parish,
Bridgeport

St. Edward the Confessor
Parish, *New Fairfield*

St. Rose of Lima Parish,
Newtown

St. Matthew Parish, *Norwalk*

St. Mary Parish, *Ridgefield*

St. James Parish, *Stratford*

St. Mark Parish, *Stratford*

St. Theresa Parish, *Trumbull*

St. Francis of Assisi, *Weston*

Bishop Caggiano hopes this opportunity will soon be offered in at least one parish in each of the diocese’s nine deaneries. However, the majority of parishes in the diocese do offer weekly opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration.

For more information on Perpetual Adoration and parish-specific Adoration schedules, please visit www.bridgeportdiocese.org/adoration-of-the-blessed-sacrament.



CLERGY APPOINTMENTS

*The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano,
Bishop of Bridgeport,*

has made the following clergy appointments in the Diocese of Bridgeport:

PASTOR

REVEREND MICHAEL CLARK, appointed to serve as Pastor at Saint Paul Parish, Greenwich. Effective date is February 1, 2026, for a term of six years.

REVEREND MICHAEL DUNN, appointed to serve as Pastor at Saint Catherine of Siena and St. Agnes Parish, Riverside. Effective date is February 15, 2026, for a term of six years.

REVEREND ERIC SILVA, appointed to serve as Pastor at Saint Joseph Parish, Danbury. Effective date is February 1, 2026, for a term of six years.

PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATOR

REVEREND MATTHEW LOMAN, appointed to serve as

Administrator of Saint Gregory the Great Parish, Danbury. Effective date is February 15, 2026, for a term of one year.

REVEREND PAUL SANKAR, appointed to serve as Administrator of Our Lady of Grace Parish, Stratford. Effective date is February 1, 2026, for a term of one year.

HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN

REVEREND MICHAEL NWOKOCHA, appointed to serve as full-time Priest Chaplain at St. Vincent Medical Center, Bridgeport. Effective date was December 17, 2025.

REVEREND JOHNSON SINGARAJAN, appointed to serve as full-time Priest Chaplain at

Norwalk Hospital. Effective date is February 1, 2026.

RETIREMENT

REVEREND JOSEPH CERVERO, to retirement. Effective date was December 31, 2025.

REVEREND MONSIGNOR MARTIN RYAN, to retirement. Effective date is January 31, 2026.

DEANERIES

REVEREND ROBERT WOLFE, appointed to serve as the Dean of Our Lady, Queen of Confessors Deanery. Effective date is February 15, 2026.

*Deacon Gerald M. Lambert
Episcopal Delegate for Clergy
and Religious — January, 2026*

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Editorials



Wake up call

COLLECTING MOMENTS

BY EMILY CLARK

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

Most mornings, I am in a rush. Coffee mug in one hand and work bag in the other, I say good-bye to my husband and—if I can find him—our cat. No time to dawdle with a busy day ahead. Traffic to battle, an early meeting to attend, and it's already 6:15?

Recent mornings, however, have been different, slower. It's not a new year's resolution to give myself more time or a decision to leave for work earlier.

It's the essence of January. It has enveloped me.

Walking out the door, I am surrounded by not only the darkness and the shock of frigid air but also by the stillness. A thin layer of snow on the grass from last night's brief squall muffles even the slightest noise that might exist this early, almost as if, like me, the world is reluctant to wake up. No movement, no sound. It is a silence I don't want to break, so I don't.

Despite the rushed feeling I

had indoors, out here, I am compelled to pause, to look, to absorb an experience that seems almost sacred. I breathe deeply, allowing the chill to sting my nose just a bit. And then again. There is no better wake up call.

As I adjust to the stillness and the cold, my mind shifts to the utter darkness that still remains just before the sun rises. Though standing in my own driveway, the front door merely yards away, my own backyard appears unworldly. No streetlights, no headlights. I glance up. Above, the moon illuminates. It is no longer a full moon and not yet a crescent, this beacon in the ink black sky before dawn. I remain in the driveway a few moments more, mesmerized by the slightly hazy glimmer just beyond the tall hemlock branches, until reality calls.

Right, left, right, right out of my neighborhood, and the world begins to awaken. A few cars pull out and a few walkers emerge.

Though the darkness persists, I keep the moon in my view, high overhead, and am enlightened once again as I pass a home on Main Street, one which keeps a single candle burning, day and night. It's likely a flameless one, but still I wonder: are they expecting someone, missing

**“Walking out the door,
I am surrounded by
not only the darkness
and the shock of frigid
air but also by the
stillness.”**

someone, ready to greet someone who may be alone? The reason is less important to me than the light itself—a greeting, a warmth,

a sign that I am closer to my destination, even when the darkness of a winter morning hangs on. Like the moon, it guides and illuminates, for anyone who sees or needs it.

This morning was the day after the Epiphany, when the wisemen followed their own guiding light to pay homage to the newborn babe, the king of kings, the Light of the World who dispels the darkness of sin and despair. The moon that mesmerized me and the candle that greeted me could only dispel the darkness of winter, but even that too was created by God.

“Arise!” Isaiah tells us. “Shine, for your light has come.”

And that light, the one of the Almighty, will last long after the essence of January has melted into the brilliance of spring with a reminder to observe, to appreciate, to awake with a moment of gratitude to him, who shines brightly even in the darkest days. ■



A parent's pain

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

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

Josephine is 93 and a few months ago, her husband of 65 years died. It hasn't been easy for her, especially around the holidays. At the wake, everyone was surprised to discover she had a daughter. She never mentioned her until then, and it was only a brief mention, almost innocently in a soft, sorrowful voice.

“I was just talking to my daughter and she said to me, ‘How can you believe in all this religion stuff?’” she told her friend.

There was a painful moment of silence, and then she added, “My daughter went to Catholic grammar school, and we were in church every Sunday and

we always prayed ... and now, somehow, she doesn't understand or seem to care.”

Sound familiar? It's one of the greatest pains that parents endure, especially parents who tried so hard to raise their kids in the faith and then, for any of 1,000 different reasons, they fell off the edge of the world. Or more accurately, they turned to the world and embraced it, instead of Christ.

For many parents, the pain is persistent. But for the children, the pain is probably even worse ... although they deny that it even exists to themselves and others.

“How can you believe in all this religion stuff?” “Do you

actually believe that's the Body of Christ?” “Why do you bother to go to church?” The litany goes on and on.

Very often, they've replaced faith with the values of the world, with political ideologies, with New Age thinking, with nothing actually.

Many parents look for reasons to be hopeful. They wonder how their children could squander the inheritance of a rich faith, which offers the path to salvation and comfort during crises, and instead worship the false gods that our society exalts—from pleasure to possessions to popularity and success, which in the end are nothing more than a handful of dust.

Some children do it out of anger, some out of disillusionment, some out of ignorance, some out of laziness, some out of rebellion, but mostly out of stupidity. There are a thousand excuses but not one good reason.

When she was a little girl, Debbie wanted more than anything to be an altar server. She was proud that she could take part and help the priest as he celebrated Mass, and her family was proud to see her at the altar.

The girl knew her catechism, she got all her sacraments, she went to a Catholic college, she taught in a Catholic high school, but when it came time to get married, she wanted a ceremony on the beach without a priest. A friend who got a certificate off the internet was going to officiate. She married a man who thought he was a deep thinker and a professed non-believer ... and she followed him down the rabbit hole away from her faith. Political causes became more important than God and the Gospel.

Every faithful parent has a story. Every faithful parent hopes against hope that things will change someday. Every faithful parent prays, and every faithful parent is sure that Jesus and the Blessed Mother hear their heartfelt pleas and will answer them ... even if it takes 17 years as it did with St. Monica and her son Augustine, who eventually became a bishop, a saint and a Doctor of the Church.

So many parents live their lives somewhere between expectation and despair, buoyed by the assurance that all prayers

are heard and all prayers are answered in God's time.

At a recent Catholic Men's Conference in Connecticut, Dr. Ray Guarendi, adoptive father of 10 children and host of two EWTN programs, talked about the challenges he faced as a parent and the challenges we all face in a troubled society.

He urged Catholic fathers (and mothers) to “stay strong in resisting the culture” and to be patient and persistent in disciplining.

“I can give you dozens of ideas,” he said, “but I can't give you the will to do them.”

He added that very often he encounters parents who are troubled because “children raised in a faith-filled home by loving parents are leaving the faith.” And this is what he told 600 men in the audience: “Even Christ, who was perfect, couldn't get everyone to follow him, so never tether your peace to decisions your adult children make. Pray for them, love them, but recognize some may only come back after you're gone.”

That's a painful realization, but a hopeful one, even for Josephine at 93. ■

Lenten Pilgrimage Schedule



2026 Diocesan Lenten Pilgrimage

F E B R U A R Y 1 8 — A P R I L 2

68 MASSES

in 30 CHURCHES

over 38 DAYS

Please join us for as many Masses as you can and experience the Truth and Beauty of the Lenten Season!

Name: _____

Email: _____

Monday, February 23 Saint Mark <i>Stratford</i> ● Mass 8 am ● Mass 7 pm	Tuesday February 24 Saint Leo <i>Stamford</i> ● Mass 8:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Rosary at 9 am</i>	Wednesday, February 18 Saint Augustine Cathedral <i>Bridgeport</i> ● Mass 7 pm	Thursday, February 19 Saint Jude <i>Monroe</i> ● Mass 9 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Adoration/Confession at 6 pm</i>	Friday, February 20 Saint Jerome <i>Norwalk</i> ● Mass 9 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Stations of the Cross at 6 pm</i>	Saturday, February 21 Saint James <i>Stratford</i> ● Mass 8 am
Monday, February 23 Saint Mark <i>Stratford</i> ● Mass 8 am ● Mass 7 pm	Tuesday February 24 Saint Leo <i>Stamford</i> ● Mass 8:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Rosary at 9 am</i>	Wednesday, February 25 Saint Catherine of Siena <i>Trumbull</i> ● Mass 7:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Rosary at 8 am</i>	Thursday, February 26 Saint Peter Sacred Heart <i>Danbury</i> ● Mass 7:30 am (<i>Saint Peter</i>) ● Mass 7 pm (<i>Sacred Heart</i>)	Friday, February 27 Saint Peter <i>Bridgeport</i> ● Mass 12 pm ● Mass 7 pm	Saturday, February 28 Saint Lawrence <i>Shelton</i> ● Mass 9 am
Monday, March 2 Saint Edward the Confessor <i>New Fairfield</i> ● Mass 9 am ● Mass 7 pm	Tuesday March 3 Saint Joseph Saint Ladislaus <i>Norwalk</i> ● Mass 7:30 am (<i>Saint Joseph</i>) ● Mass 7 pm (<i>Saint Ladislaus</i>) <i>Mass in Spanish at 7 pm</i>	Wednesday, March 4 Saint Paul <i>Greenwich</i> ● Mass 8 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Adoration at 6 pm</i>	Thursday, March 5 Saint Gregory the Great <i>Danbury</i> ● Mass 8 am ● Mass 7 pm	Friday, March 6 Saint Pius X <i>Fairfield</i> ● Mass 8:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Rosary at 9 am</i> <i>Stations of the Cross at 6 pm</i>	Saturday, March 7 Saint Jerome <i>Norwalk</i> ● Mass 9 am
Monday, March 9 Saint Mary <i>Bethel</i> ● Mass 9 am ● Mass 7 pm	Tuesday March 10 Saint Stephen <i>Trumbull</i> ● Mass 9 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Rosary at 8:30 am</i>	Wednesday, March 11 Saint Cecilia <i>Stamford</i> ● Mass 7:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Adoration/Confession at 7:30 pm</i>	Thursday, March 12 Saint Mary Saint Benedict <i>Stamford</i> ● Mass 9 am (<i>Saint Mary</i>) ● Mass 7 pm (<i>Saint Benedict</i>) <i>7 pm Mass in Spanish</i>	Friday, March 13 Our Lady of Peace <i>Stratford</i> ● Mass 8:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Holy Hour at 7:30 am</i>	Saturday, March 14 Saint James <i>Stratford</i> ● Mass 8 am
Monday, March 16 Saint Ann <i>Bridgeport</i> ● Mass 8 am ● Mass 7 pm	Tuesday March 17 Saint Patrick <i>Redding</i> ● Mass 8:30 am ● Mass 7 pm	Wednesday, March 18 Our Lady of Guadalupe <i>Danbury</i> ● Mass 9 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>7 pm Mass in Spanish</i>	Thursday, March 19 Saint Jude <i>Monroe</i> ● Mass 9 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Adoration/Confession at 6 pm</i>	Friday, March 20 Saint Jerome <i>Norwalk</i> ● Mass 9 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Stations of the Cross at 6 pm</i>	Saturday, March 21 Saint Matthew <i>Norwalk</i> ● Mass 9 am
Monday, March 23 Saint Margaret Mary <i>Shelton</i> ● Mass 7:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Confessions available after each Mass</i>	Tuesday March 24 Saint Matthew <i>Norwalk</i> ● Mass 12:10 pm ● Mass 7 pm	Wednesday, March 25 Saint Thomas Aquinas <i>Fairfield</i> ● Mass 12:10 pm ● Mass 7 pm	Thursday, March 26 Saint Peter Sacred Heart <i>Danbury</i> ● Mass 7:30 am (<i>Saint Peter</i>) ● Mass 7 pm (<i>Sacred Heart</i>)	Friday, March 27 Saint Rose of Lima <i>Newtown</i> ● Mass 9 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Adoration at 6 pm</i> <i>Stations of the Cross at 8 pm</i>	Saturday, March 28 Saint Lawrence <i>Shelton</i> ● Mass 9 am
Monday, March 30 Notre Dame <i>Easton</i> ● Mass 7:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Rosary at 6:30 pm</i> <i>Adoration at 7:30 pm</i>	Tuesday March 31 Saint Leo <i>Stamford</i> ● Mass 8:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Rosary at 9 am</i>	Wednesday, April 1 Saint Catherine of Siena <i>Trumbull</i> ● Mass 7:30 am ● Mass 7 pm <i>Rosary at 8 am</i>	Thursday, April 2 Saint Augustine Cathedral <i>Bridgeport</i> ● Mass 10 am <i>Diocesan Chrism Mass with Clergy</i>	Total Masses Attended: _____ <i>Please submit your forms for recognition to:</i> email: Sfilizzola@diobpt.org or mail: Diocese of Bridgeport (Attn: Steven Filizzola) 100 Beard Sawmill Road, Suite 650 Shelton, Connecticut 06484	



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**FARMING
THE FAITH,
GROWING
IN CHRIST.**



MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT, STACIE L. STUEBER

December 2025

Dear Friends of Catholic Education,


As we reflect on the past year in the Catholic schools of the Diocese of Bridgeport, we are reminded that growth, both academic and spiritual, does not happen by chance. Growth requires intention, care, patience, and faith. This year’s theme, Farming the Faith – Growing in Christ, invites us to reflect on the sacred work entrusted to our schools: preparing hearts and minds to receive the Gospel, nurturing each child’s God-given potential, and trusting that God will bring the growth.

Catholic education is, at its core, a ministry of cultivation. Each day, our educators prepare the soil by creating classroom environments rooted in faith, belonging, and high expectations. They plant seeds through rigorous instruction, prayer, and witness; and they tend the field through ongoing formation, innovation, and care for the whole child. This sacred work takes many forms across our diocese, from classrooms where faith and learning are seamlessly unified to the partnerships with families, parishes, and benefactors who share in this mission. While each school community is unique, all are united by a common purpose: forming disciples and scholars who grow in wisdom, compassion, resilience, and a deepened relationship with Christ, prepared to serve the world with faith and purpose.

This annual report highlights the ways our schools continue to grow, through academic achievement, faith formation, service, and innovation, while also acknowledging the real and ongoing need for support. Some fields may require more tending, not because they are less fruitful, but because they call us to deeper accompaniment. Through tuition assistance, special education services, and mission-driven investment, we strive to ensure that Catholic education remains accessible to all families who seek it.

I am deeply grateful to our principals, teachers, staff, pastors, parents, and benefactors who labor faithfully in this shared work. Your dedication and generosity make it possible for our schools to flourish. Together, we continue to farm the faith with hope, trusting in God’s promise that when we plant and water with love, He will bring the growth.

May God continue to bless our schools, our families, and all those who support the mission of Catholic education.

Sincerely,

Stacie L. Stueber
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Bridgeport



Our students represent
70
cities and towns
in and around
Fairfield County



98%
The percentage of
our High School students
that go onto college
or the military.



100%
The percentage of
students who graduate
from our High Schools.



100%
The percentage of
our schools that are fully
accredited by the
New England Association
of Schools and Colleges.



DATA DRIVEN PRACTICES FOSTERING STUDENT GROWTH

The Diocese of Bridgeport adopted a new online assessment tool, i-Ready. The unanimous decision was based on superior level of data generated, the ease of accessibility, and high level of student engagement.

Teachers and administrators are trained to analyze data effectively. This involves identifying trends, strengths, and areas for improvement in student performance. By interpreting the data, educators can pinpoint specific learning gaps and adjust their instructional methods accordingly.

Below are the test scores from our online assessment tool, which highlight where our students fall nationally. The results reveal that our students continue to test above the national average in Language Arts and Reading, but we recognized that our math scores weren't reflecting the level of engagement we strive for. This led us to transition to i-Ready, a more personalized and interactive tool, to better support our students' growth and success overall.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Math 48%
Reading 54%

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Math 53%
Reading 58%



FAITH AND SERVICE

A strong emphasis is placed on community service, with students participating in charitable initiatives that help them develop empathy and a sense of responsibility. Students are encouraged to participate in various service projects, such as food drives, environmental clean-ups, and outreach programs for local charities. These initiatives not only enhance learning but also instill a deep sense of social responsibility and compassion, aligning with the teachings of the Church.



VIBRANT COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

Classrooms prioritize not only rigorous academic standards but also the spiritual and moral development of students. The curriculum is infused with Catholic values, encouraging students to explore their faith while pursuing knowledge. This dual approach fosters well-rounded individuals who are prepared for both academic and spiritual challenges.

100%

The percentage of schools who have implemented Education In Virtue throughout their curriculum.

63,000

The number of service hours of our high school students participated in last year.



27

Innovation and Leadership
Grants totaling

\$150,000



More than

\$91M

in college scholarships
were awarded to

900

graduating seniors
from our Diocesan High Schools.



1319

students awarded

\$2,851,855

in tuition assistance

DIOCESAN AND DIOCESAN SPONSORED SCHOOLS

BETHEL

St. Mary School
www.stmarybethelct.org

BRIDGEPORT

Catholic Academy of Bridgeport
www.catholicacademybridgeport.org

*St. Andrew Academy
St. Ann Academy
St. Augustine Academy
St. Raphael Academy*

Kolbe Cathedral Preparatory High School
www.kolbecaths.org

DANBURY

St. Gregory the Great School
www.saintgregoryschool.org

St. Joseph School
www.sjsdanbury.org

St. Peter School
www.stpeterschooldanbury.org

Immaculate High School
www.immaculatehs.org

FAIRFIELD

Assumption Catholic School
www.assumptionfairfield.org

St. Thomas Aquinas School
www.stasonline.net

St. Catherine Center for Special Needs
www.stcatherineacademy.org

GREENWICH

Greenwich Catholic School
www.gcsct.org

NEWTOWN

St. Rose of Lima School
www.stroseschool.com

NORWALK

All Saints Catholic School
www.allsaintsnorwalk.com

RIDGEFIELD

St. Mary School
www.smsridgefield.org

STAMFORD

Catholic Academy of Stamford
www.catholicacademystamford.org

Cardinal Kung Academy

www.cardinalkungacademy.org

STRATFORD

St. James School
www.stjamesstratford.org

St. Mark School
www.stmarkschool.org

TRUMBULL

St. Catherine of Siena School
www.stcatherinesienatrumbull.org

St. Theresa School
www.sttheresaschooltrumbull.org

St. Joseph High School
www.sjcadets.org

INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS LOCATED IN THE DIOCESE

FAIRFIELD

Fairfield College Preparatory School
www.fairfieldprep.org

Notre Dame Prep
of Sacred Heart University
www.notredame.org

GREENWICH

Sacred Heart Greenwich
www.shgreenwich.org

NORWALK

Regina Pacis Academy
www.reginapacisacademy.org

STAMFORD

Mater Salvatoris Preparatory School
www.stamford.matersalvatoris.org

Villa Maria School
www.villamariaschool.org



9024

SEEDS OF GROWTH

Students enrolled in
Catholic Schools in the
Diocese of Bridgeport

5034

Students enrolled in
our 20 Elementary
Schools and 1 Special
Needs School

1484

Students enrolled in
4 Diocesan Sponsored
High Schools

2506

Students enrolled in
6 Independent
Catholic Schools



Catholic Schools Week

A full-circle story of faith, formation and leadership

STAMFORD—Catholic education has a way of planting seeds that flourish long after students leave the classroom. At the Catholic Academy of Stamford, one such seed has grown into a remarkable, full-circle story, one that beautifully embodies the enduring impact of Catholic schools.

More than 20 years ago, Maureen Belford stood at the front of a fifth-grade classroom, shaping young minds with dedication, warmth and high expectations. She retired in 2020 after 44 years of teaching in the Diocese of Bridgeport—29 of those years in Stamford, with 26 at the former St. Cecilia School and three at the Catholic Academy of Stamford.

One of her students was Gaby Dunn, a bright, enthusiastic child with a love for learning and sports. Today, the two women sit side by side once again, not in a classroom, but as colleagues serving together on the Catholic Academy of Stamford Board of Directors.

Reflecting on Dunn as a student, Belford remembers her fondly.

“First and foremost, Gaby was an excellent student who always had a smile on her face and a willingness to help others,” Belford said. “Her warm personality and positive attitude were evident, and she was a good friend to many. She also loved sports, she excelled in softball and was an avid Yankees fan.”

For Dunn, fifth grade was a pivotal year.

“Miss Belford was a guiding light,” she recalled. “She taught me how to be independent and organized at a time when I really needed it. She always encouraged me and championed me. When I loved softball and the Yankees, she told me I could be the first woman Yankee, and she made me believe it.”

That belief proved powerful. Dunn went on to work in Major League Baseball, a testament to the confidence instilled in her during those formative years.

Belford’s influence extended well beyond academics. During a difficult time when Dunn’s sister Christina was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, Belford offered unwavering support.

“She visited Christina in the



hospital, came to our home, helped with schoolwork, and was a friend to my mom,” Dunn said. “We never forgot that.”

Years later, life brought them back together in an unexpected way.

“You often wonder when students leave your classroom how they’ll navigate the adult world,” Belford reflected. “How delighted I was to reconnect with Gaby in 2023 at a Back-to-School meeting. I was there as a board member, and she was there as a parent of a kindergarten student. That meeting marked the beginning of an endearing friendship more than 20 years in the making.”

Today, both women serve on the CAS Board of Directors, united by their shared commitment to Catholic education.

“I am delighted to serve on the board with Gaby,” Belford said. “Her energy and love for the school permeate every meeting. It is wonderful to see her generation so passionate about CAS and dedicated to Catholic education. They are its future.”

Dunn echoes that sentiment with gratitude and pride.

“I love serving on the board with her because I get to know her now as an adult and continue learning from her,” she said. “She is a true historian of our school and brings such wisdom and perspective. As a parent, I feel so confident knowing leaders like her are guiding CAS.”

A graduate of the Stamford Catholic school system herself, Dunn now serves on the Student Life Committee and is committed to fostering a loving, safe and faith-filled environment for today’s students.

“CAS shaped who I am, and now it’s shaping my children,” she said. “It brings me so much joy that my kids get to know and love my beloved Miss Belford, too.”

This Catholic Schools Week, their story stands as a powerful



reminder: Catholic education doesn’t just prepare students for the next grade, it forms leaders, nurtures lifelong relationships, and creates communities rooted in faith, service and love. The Catholic Academy of Stamford continues to build strong founda-

tions for this generation and the next, carrying forward a legacy of excellence, community, and enduring faith that has been cultivated over decades and lived out in classrooms, hallways, and the hearts of families across Stamford and our local communities. ■



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St. Joes Congratulates the Class of 2026 on Just Some of Their Early College Acceptances!

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Binghamton University
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Brandeis University
Carleton College
Catholic University of America
Centre College
Chapman University
Clark University
Clemson University
College of the Holy Cross
DePaul University
Drexel University
Duquesne University

Elon University
Fairfield University
Fordham University
George Mason University
Georgetown University
High Point University
Hofstra University
Ithaca College
Le Moyne College
Loyola University
Manhattan University
Marist University
Marquette University
Miami University
Muhlenberg College
Oglethorpe University

Pace University
Penn State University
Princeton University
Providence College
Quinnipiac University
Rollins College
Rutgers University
Saint Joseph’s University
Sarah Lawrence College
Seton Hall University
St. John’s University
Stonehill College
Temple University
Texas Christian University
The New School
The University of

Queensland
Tulane University
University of Connecticut
University of Dayton
University of Delaware
University of Denver
University of Minnesota
University of Notre Dame
University of Pittsburgh
University of Richmond
University of Vermont
University of York
Wake Forest University
Wesleyan University
Wheaton College
Xavier University

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National Catholic Schools Week



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Foundations in Education

FIE readies for Spring Gala

SHELTON—Foundations in Education's 2026 Spring Gala is an event not to be missed. The Committee is hard at work to assure a festive occasion which promises to engage generous supporters and friends on April 15, 2026, for a joyful evening celebrating Catholic education and Foundations in Education's mission.

This special event will honor an individual or organization committed to advancing Catholic education and dedicated to ensuring that children have access to

a high-quality education to be announced at a later date.

Foundations in Education, Connecticut's largest K-8 Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO), exists to strengthen Catholic elementary education by providing tuition assistance to families, supporting innovation in classrooms and fostering opportunities for the professional development of school leaders. Through these efforts, the foundation helps ensure students receive a faith-filled education rooted in academic excellence,

character formation and service. The impact of Foundations in Education's mission is such that children thrive not only in school but throughout their lives.

The evening's program will once again feature the Kolbe Cathedral Preparatory School Select Chorus and Pro Players The Group. Guests at the celebration of Catholic education will hear remarks from Leo Gilberto Dos Santos, a student at St. James School in Stratford and Leaders of Tomorrow awardee whose life has been transformed

by the generosity of donors to Foundations in Education.

Attendees' collective commitment through a high energy Raise the Paddle promises to strengthen the individual students, Catholic schools and the communities in which they live in many ways.

The April 15 Gala will be held at Woodway Country Club in Darien, and the proceeds will benefit the mission and programs of Foundations in Education, including tuition assistance programs and innovation and leader-



ship grants for teachers.

(To sponsor the Gala, volunteer or learn more about supporting Foundations in Education, please contact Emily Carriero-Burger at emily@foundationsineducation.org or at 203.416.1671. To learn more about Foundations in Education, please visit www.foundationsineducation.org.)



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College of Charleston
College of the Holy Cross
Colorado State University
Coppin State University
Creighton University
Drexel University
Eastern CT State University
Elon University
Embry Riddle Aeronautical Institute
Endicott College
Fairfield University
Fisher College
Florida Atlantic University
Fordham University
Georgetown University
High Point University
Indiana University Indianapolis
Iona University
John Carroll University

King's College
LeMoyné College
Louisiana State University
Maine Maritime Academy
Marist University
Marquette University
Marywood University
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy
Massachusetts Maritime Academy
Miami University Oxford
Michigan State University
Montana State University
New England College
Norwich University
Northeastern University
Northwestern University
Oklahoma State University
Pace University
Penn State University
Providence College
Purdue University Fort Wayne
Quinnipiac University
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Rhode Island College
Rochester Institute of Technology
Roger Williams University
Rutgers University
Sacred Heart University
Salve Regina University
St. Anselm College

St. Bonaventure University
St. John's University
Saint Joseph's University
Santa Clara University
St. Lawrence University
St. Louis University
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Southern CT State University
Southern Methodist University
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SUNY University at Stony Brook
Syracuse University
Temple University
Texas Christian University
Trinity College
Trinity College Dublin
Tulane University
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University of Connecticut
University of Dayton
University of Delaware
University of Denver
University of Florida
University of Gloucestershire

University of Kentucky
University of Maine
University of Michigan
University of Mississippi
University of New Hampshire
University of Notre Dame
University of Pittsburgh
University of Rhode Island
University of Richmond
University of San Diego
University of San Francisco
University of Scranton
University of South Carolina
University of Vermont
Villanova University
Wake Forest University
Wentworth Institute of Technology
Wesleyan University
West Virginia University
Western New England University
Williams College
Xavier University
Xavier University of Louisiana



FairfieldPREP.org

Catholic Schools Week

What happens when God comes first?

By SISTER PILAR ABRAIRA, CS

STAMFORD—María Félix Torres, foundress of the Sisters of the Company of the Savior, was born in 1907 in Albelda (Huesca), a small village in the Aragonese Pyrenees. Her parents, aware of the importance of education, sent her as a boarding student to the school of the Company of Mary in Lleida. It was there that she made the Spiritual Exercises for the first time, came to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, was captivated by Ignatian spirituality and received the first graces related to her future consecration to God.

Because her parents opposed her entering a convent, she pursued a degree in chemical sciences, becoming in 1929 one of the first women in Spain to earn a university degree. During those years of study, alongside an intense apostolic involvement, she continued discerning her vocation: to follow Christ in a women's apostolic institute that would live according to the model envisioned by St. Ignatius for the Society of Jesus. This project—and the charisma that radiated from María herself—began to inspire other young women, who



felt called to the same vocation.

During the Spanish Civil War, María risked her life helping persecuted priests and Catholic families who were living their faith in secrecy. With a love that did not calculate the risks, she distributed Holy Communion, safeguarded sacred vessels in her home, taught religion and much more. In 1940, at the end of the war, she gathered several companions in Barcelona and with them founded the Company of the Savior.

This community was approved as a religious institute in 1952 and later received Pontifical Right by the Holy See in 1986.

Passionately devoted to the glory of God, she understood that she would collaborate most fruitfully in that glory by uniting herself with Christ in the work of the salvation of souls. A true master of discernment of the signs of providence, she gradually recognized that God was entrusting her, within the Church, with the mission of educating girls and young women in Catholic doctrine and Christian social principles. To this end, she founded schools and residence halls, plac-

ing them under the protection of Our Lady, Mother of the Savior, or "Mater Salvatoris."

Mother María Félix came to the United States in 1961, and the first house of the Sisters in this country was founded in the Diocese of Bridgeport in 1962. After serving in different schools and parishes, the sisters now serve the Lord and His Church through the Mater Salvatoris College Preparatory School in Stamford.

Her testimony not only illuminates consecrated life but is also a beacon of hope for all who want to follow Jesus Christ closely. Recently, commenting on Mother María Félix's first complete biography, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano stated, "Her life of prayer, sacrifice, humility, and leadership in founding the Company of the Savior and Mater Salvatoris Schools serves as a powerful testament to the transformative power of faith."

God Above All, a documentary that just premiered at Mater Salvatoris School in Stamford, traces the life of this woman who placed God first in everything. The impact of her "yes," given at the age of fourteen with the confidence that comes from grace, has transformed thousands of lives and continues to touch hearts today. Thanks to the support of the Knights of Columbus, who collaborated in its production, the

documentary is a work of great beauty that faithfully conveys both her spiritual journey and the legacy she has left to the Church. It is a hymn to the light that flows from the Eucharist and to the love born of an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

The saints are companions along the way. Mother María Félix is currently recognized by the Church as Venerable. Accordingly, the Church no longer celebrates funeral Masses for her but rather Masses of Thanksgiving—such as the one that was celebrated at the Mater Salvatoris School in Stamford on January 12, 2026, commemorating the 25th anniversary of her entrance into eternal life.

Yet, in order to propose her to all the faithful as a model and intercessor, the Church awaits God's confirmation. Only a miracle will open the door to her beatification and eventual canonization. This is the same woman who, already in this life, could write: "One day, the Lord opened His Heart to me, and I entered."

May the 25th anniversary we celebrate be an opportunity for many to enter that same Heart of God our Father.

(To learn more about Mother María Félix, please visit www.mariafelix.org. For more information about the documentary, please visit madrefelixlapelicula.com/en.)



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Catholic Schools Week

DiMatteo Scholarship Fund created at Notre Dame Prep

FAIRFIELD—When the late Tony and Lena DiMatteo founded their family business in 1960, they wanted the next generation to carry on their original mission of giving back to the community. The couple, who celebrated 50 years of marriage, were parishioners of St. Lawrence Parish in Shelton. Sixty-five years later, the company founders would be proud of the legacy their four children, grandchildren and extended family have created.

In 2005, a formal foundation was established by the DiMatteo Family as a tribute to Anthony “Tony” DiMatteo, company founder and their late father, who was battling colon cancer at the time. Now celebrating its 20th anniversary, the DiMatteo Family Charitable Foundation in Shelton has contributed an impressive \$759,000 to over 20 charities on the local and national levels.

One of the beneficiaries of their family’s generosity was Notre Dame Prep of Sacred Heart University.

“In 2020, our family foundation established the Tony

DiMatteo Scholarship Fund in honor of my dad’s passion for football,” said Rosemarie Esposito of Shelton, a partner with DiMatteo Group Tax and Accounting in Shelton. “He helped start the Notre Dame Catholic High School football program with Lou Saccone in 1958 through 1965 as an offense and defensive line coach.”

This scholarship is awarded annually to a deserving student athlete who otherwise would not be able to attend Notre Dame. Over the past five years, the DiMatteo Family Charitable Foundation has contributed a total of \$87,000 to the Tony DiMatteo Scholarship Fund. This endowment scholarship is now fully funded into posterity from the proceeds of their golf tournament and other direct donations.

Loretta Lesko of Shelton, a partner with DiMatteo Group Tax and Accounting, added, “My father believed that the discipline required to be a good student and an athlete were necessary to create a solid foundation for a successful future. Creating a scholarship in

his memory for a candidate that embodies these characteristics made perfect sense.”

The late Tony DiMatteo graduated from Warren Harding High School in Bridgeport and played on coach Steve Miska’s 1947 Connecticut State Championship Football Team. He attended Louisiana State University on a football scholarship in 1949 and was drafted into the US Army in 1952 during the Korean War. He then completed his education at the University of Bridgeport. He spent many years coaching football and mentoring children and young adults. He started his coaching career in 1956 at the University of Bridgeport and then at Notre Dame. In addition, he was a defensive and line coach with the Bridgeport Buccaneers North Atlantic Professional Football League and helped originate the Town of Stratford Pop Warner football program in 1963.

The values Tony DiMatteo and his wife Lena lived by—responsible stewardship and a spirit of generosity and kindness—have been carried on by the second and third generations.

“Last year, the DiMatteo Family Charitable Foundation started organizing two charity events to increase and more than double or triple our support to the community,” said John



DiMatteo of Bethany, president of DiMatteo Group Financial Services in Shelton. “This year’s golf classic and gala contributed \$110,000 to five nonprofits around the state—the single biggest donation we have made to the community in one year. Now, third-generation family members are getting involved in charity events and invigorating everything with new ideas.”

The 20th Annual DiMatteo Family Charitable Foundation Golf Tournament kicked off this year’s fundraising campaign to help others in need. Nearly 109 golfers showed their support and played the championship golf course at Blackhawk Country Club in Stratford.

Due to the community’s generosity, the Foundation donated \$36,000 to three regional nonprofits. The Foundation is funded primarily from the proceeds of the DiMatteo Family Charitable Foundation Golf Tournament.

The following three nonprofits each received a generous check of \$12,000: Project Purple of Seymour, Conn.; the Boys & Girls Club of the Lower Naugatuck Valley of Ansonia and Shelton and the Tony DiMatteo

Scholarship Fund, affiliated with Notre Dame Prep, Fairfield.

Fourteen area companies and business associates of DiMatteo Group were golf sponsors. DiMatteo Group includes two companies in Shelton: DiMatteo Group Financial Services and DiMatteo Group Tax & Accounting, both located at 1000 Bridgeport Ave.

A special thanks is extended to the top platinum sponsor, which was Cross Insurance in Shelton. Another special thank you is extended to Joe Bottone from Corporate Display Specialties in Shelton for preparing all the sponsorship and tee signs for the tournament. In addition, for 20 years, Steve Geremia from A & A Windshields in Shelton has donated proceeds from “Break the Windshield.”

Volunteers who deserve special recognition include Shelton residents Rosemarie Esposito, Loretta Lesko, Maureen Yash, Natalie Kaszei, Rose Grzybala, Donna Farens, Victoria DiMatteo, Karen Minopoli, Jill Bruno and Jenine Motasky; Alyssa Zavadsky of Middlebury, Conn.; Chelsea Dirienzo of

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 23



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Catholic Schools Week

Retirement to classroom: Steve and Mary's journey

TRUMBULL—Steve and Mary Sinise are shining examples of what it means to give your gifts back to a community you love. After long and successful careers, they embraced a new calling at St. Theresa School in Trumbull where they now teach with joy, purpose and deep faith.

Steve joined the St. Theresa family in 2025 as a physical education teacher for students from pre-K through eighth grade. Mary returned to the Diocese of Bridgeport in 2022 and teaches algebra, pre-algebra and sixth grade math. Their retirement years look very different from slowing down. Instead, they have become two of the most energetic and dedicated educators in the building, pouring their hearts into the school that shaped their own daughter's life and continues to feel like a second home.

Steve and Mary's story began in 1978 at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in East Norwalk when she was 16 and he was 19. Forty-one years of marriage later,



their faith, love and commitment to Catholic education continue to inspire everyone around them. Their daughter Sarah attended St. Theresa School and St. Joseph High School in Trumbull. She is now 25 and thriving in her third year of doctoral studies in organic chemistry at Boston College after graduating at the top of her class from Fordham University and Columbia University. Some of her sweetest memories from St. Theresa include reading

the Biscuit books with Mrs. Hutvagner, dressing up for All Saints Day with Mrs. Mulford and shopping the Scholastic Book Fairs with Mrs. Gibbons.

Steve dedicated 38 years to United Parcel Service in Stamford, where he worked as a delivery driver and leader in Hazmat certification and union relations. After injuries led him to choose early retirement in 2015, he devoted his time to healing and caring for the people he loves, including his 95-year-old father. Mary is a Tufts University-trained electrical engineer who became the first female engineer at Pitney Bowes in Stamford in 1984. She later earned an Executive MBA from Babson College and eventually stepped away from her corporate engineering career to welcome Sarah after years of pregnancy challenges.

Their faith life is at the heart of everything they do. Steve and Mary attend daily Mass, a tradition that stretches back 40 years for Mary and ten years for Steve. They treasure spending time in Eucharistic Adoration every week.

Mary's most meaningful moments as a teacher come when graduates return to tell her how well prepared they are for high school math. Steve's happiest memories include teaching younger students how to tie their shoes and showing them how to balance maple seed whirly birds on their noses. One of his most touching experiences was serving as Confirmation sponsor for one of Mary's students and bringing him to Sunday Mass throughout the year.

Their previous careers continue to strengthen their work as Catholic school educators. Steve relies on the routine, discipline

and physical activity that defined his UPS career. Mary draws on her engineering background to teach students how math is used in the real world and to work collaboratively with colleagues. Together, they remind students that virtuous habits built today will help them become responsible and successful adults.

Steve and Mary encourage other retirees to consider teaching in Catholic schools because the students bring energy and joy, the parents express genuine gratitude and the work is filled with purpose. They say they will continue as long as their minds and bodies allow and as long as the Spirit is willing.

We are grateful for the dedication of Steve and Mary and for the beautiful example they share. Their story reflects the heart of what makes all of our Catholic schools so special. ■

DiMATTEO SCHOLARSHIP FROM PAGE 22

Beacon Falls, Conn., and Nicole Esposito of Long Beach, N.Y.

Four days after their golf tournament, 160 guests attended the Second Annual DiMatteo Family Foundation Gala at Anthony's Ocean View in New Haven, Conn.. This Gala raised \$74,000 through sponsorships and a live and silent auction for Project ALS and Her ALS Story in honor of Alexandra Cavaliere-Gasser of Bethany, Conn.

"We chose to support these particular charities because our friend's family is affected by and deeply passionate about ALS and the organizations that fund their research and advocacy," noted John DiMatteo.

Four businesses made generous contributions: Coldwell Banker, Presenting Sponsor; Procyon Partners, Dinner Sponsor; Tito's Handmade Vodka, Cocktail Sponsor; and Coastline Insulation, Entertainment Sponsor.

This event was chaired by Jessica DiMatteo of Bethany, Conn., a third-generation family member with DiMatteo Group Financial Services. She was assisted by the following dedicated committee members: Bethany, Conn. residents John and Kim DiMatteo, Anthony DiMatteo and Nicole Kelley of Guilford, Conn., Michael DiMatteo of Tampa, along with Dave and Pat Raffauf of Orange, Conn., and Bethany, Conn. residents Tom, Lorri, Alex, Ashley and Tom, Jr. Cavaliere.

According to Rosemarie Esposito, "The mission of our Foundation in conjunction with our Golf Tournament and Gala is to provide funding to organizations who are dedicated to research, education and finding a cure for diseases that have touched the lives of our friends, families, clients and staff. In recent years, we have expanded our reach to many other worthwhile charities because of the ever-increasing needs in the community."

(Over the past 20 years, the DiMatteo Family Foundation has donated to over 20 nonprofits. For more information, visit www.dimatteofamilyfoundation.com.) ■



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Parish News

Knights of Columbus honors work of Off the Streets

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

BRIDGEPORT—Off the Streets, a national organization that aims to end homelessness, with chapters in Danbury and Bridgeport, was recognized internationally as the Community Program of the Year by the Knights of Columbus at their 143rd annual Supreme Convention in Washington.

This honor was awarded to a Knights of Columbus council in Maumee, Ohio, a suburb of Toledo, for its exceptional work in founding a chapter of Off the Streets (OTS) in 2021. The OTS program stood out for its transformative impact on homelessness.

Joe Simons, an administrator of Off the Streets in Danbury, said the international recognition by the Knights of Columbus highlights the importance and meaningful impact OTS has in communities.

“We’re continuing to help people in need,” said Simons. “The housing environment throughout the state of Connecticut is just getting tighter and tighter. It’s particularly challenging for people at the lower end of the income scale.”

Simons said rent increases are outpacing income increases.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition

(NLIHC), a minimum-wage earner would have to work 70 hours a week to afford a modest one-bedroom rental home at fair-market rent.

OTS, an all-volunteer group, works with social service agencies to identify those they can help. Candidates must have a source of income, such as a job or disability income, and Off the Streets will supply the security deposit directly to the landlord. The organization will deliver furniture and household goods to transform any empty apartment into a home.

The Off the Streets chapter in Danbury has been active in the community for 18 years with more than 40 volunteers to assist in collecting and organizing furniture and household goods.

Last year, the Danbury chapter helped 131 people get off the streets, including someone who had been living in a tent for three years.

In Bridgeport, Gerard Agoglia, managing director of the OTS chapter in the Park City, said this year the chapter made 40 placements helping 99 homeless people—49 adults and 50 children—establish a place to call home.

Agoglia said over the past 10 years the organization has helped about 800 people get off

the streets. “We have an 85 percent retention rate, and most people are able to sign a lease for a second year,” Agoglia said.

Simons said the organization will offer guidance and support to help any community looking to establish an Off the Streets chapter. So far, they have helped set up 10 chapters in the United States and are looking for people to help start chapters in Norwalk, Stamford, Waterbury, New Haven and other cities in the state where there is a need.

In addition to monetary donations and donations of household items, both Simons and Agoglia said volunteers are needed to support the chapters and the need in communities. Volunteers are always welcome and especially those who can help run the organization by managing multiple social media accounts and helping with organizing the collection of donated household items that are stored in local storage units until needed.

“One of the most gratifying things is to spend time with people as they move in and hear their stories,” Simons said. “Off the Streets Toledo President Greg Schaffer shared, ‘This honor (from the Knights of Columbus) is a testament to our dedicated volunteers, whose



unwavering service fuels everything we do. But more importantly, it’s a reflection of the remarkable, life-changing work being done every day by all of our chapters. This award truly belongs to all ten chapters—and reflects our shared commitment to restoring dignity and hope,

one person at a time.” Simons echoed those sentiments. “They are so appreciative of the time we spend with them. It’s wonderful to experience the excitement with people as they are about to start a new chapter in their lives,” he said.

St. Peter Parish to host film screening

DANBURY—As a part of its 175th anniversary festivities, St. Peter Parish will screen the 1923 silent film *The 10 Commandments* on Friday, February 13 at 6:30 pm. All are welcome and invited to attend.

The film will be accompanied on the organ by Peter Krasinski, a conductor, organist, and music educator who “consistently delivers imaginative performances that elevate and inform diverse audiences.”

“We have has Peter here before, and without exaggeration, the combination of film and musical accompaniment is fantastic,” said Father Gregg Mecca, pastor of St. Peter’s. “We are transported back in time.”

(For more information, visit www.stpeterdanb.org.)

DECEASED CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

JANUARY 25—FEBRUARY 21

JANUARY

27	Msgr. Francis G. Galla	1996
	Deacon Daniel N. Myott	2022
28	Msgr. Joseph R. McCarthy	1964
30	Msgr. John F. Cavanaugh.....	1990
	Rev. James F. Desmond	1963
31	Rev. Addison G. Wright	2017

FEBRUARY

2	Rev. Joseph W. Kupec.....	1978
	Deacon Bartholomew J. Mauceri	2004
3	Msgr. Martin F. Doran	1967
	Rev. Robert F. Albert.....	1995
4	Msgr. William F.X. Casey	1978

	Rev. Francis Sangiovanni.....	2019
5	Deacon James Michael Volpe	2023
6	Msgr. Martin J. McDermott.....	1986
8	Rev. James F. McGrath	1971
10	Rev. William R. Nagle.....	1979
	Rev. John R. Polinski	2001
12	Rev. John J. Filip.....	1984
13	Deacon Matthew Ashe.....	2008
	Deacon Rodney L. Varney.....	1988
15	Deacon Brian J. Kelly, Ph.D.....	2023
16	Rev. George M. Karcinski.....	2006
18	Rev. Grazioso Artuso	2018
20	Msgr. Andrew J. Hajus	1988

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Sports

St. Joe's, Prep football: 'A' for effort

By **DON HARRISON**

For St. Joseph High and Fairfield Prep, the 2025 football season was a mixture of multiple pluses and, at the end, a disappointing minus.

Both Diocese of Bridgeport school teams finished with

Then, the minuses. In the state semifinals, the Cadets were unable to cross Brookfield's goal-line and came up short, 6-3—their lone score being Jake Rios' ninth field goal of the season. For Brookfield, this triumph was extra sweet; St. Joe's had defeated the Bobcats, 21-20, in last sea-

son. veteran coach Joe Della Vecchia, who was seeking a repeat from last fall when the Cadets gained the school's 16th state championship. "Brookfield scored first, but we blocked the extra point. Then we got down to their six-yard line, but had to settle for the field goal."

Della Vecchia was quick to point out St. Joe's challenging 2025 schedule.

"Twelve of the 13 teams we played made the playoffs," he stated. "We lost to Hand (30-28) on the last play of the game. And New Canaan (the eventual undefeated Class L champ) beat us, 7-3. You know, we were 12 points away from an undefeated season."

The Cadets' most impressive victory this year?

"Wilton," he declared. "They were undefeated when we beat them at their place (24-12)."

Rios, a junior who divides his playing time among wide receiver, free safety, placekicker and punter, excelled in all facets of the game. Both he and defensive end Will Zaccagnino were selected to both the Connecticut Coaches and New Haven Register's 93rd annual All-State teams.

Offensively, Rios was St. Joe's leading receiver (35 catches, 542 yards, 15.5 yards per catch, five TDS). He approached perfection with his placekicking (9-11 field goals, 35-37 extra points) and averaged 50.7 yards per kickoffs and 37.5 yards per punt.

Among the players Della Vecchia has coached across 26 seasons, he ranks Rios as "probably a top 10 guy."

Two of the Cadets' linebackers, juniors Kyle Wicker and Finn Kilmartin, were named to the Register's All-State second team, while St. Joe's senior defensive end Jamar Bailey was chosen to its All-State third team. Wicker also made the Coaches' All-State squad. Kilmartin, also a running back, was the team leader with 11 touchdowns, although Rios scored the most points (92).

"Wicker, who was coming off shoulder surgery, returned two punts for touchdowns this season," Della Vecchia pointed out.

In his 10 seasons as Fairfield Prep's head coach, Keith Hellstern's teams have won 68 percent of their games (78-36),

highlighted by appearances in two state championship games, three state semifinals and seven state playoffs overall.

This season?

"We didn't go as far as we would have liked," he responded.

Ben Conelius, the Jesuits' outstanding senior placekicker and punter, was the lone Prep player to be selected to both the Connecticut Coaches and Register All-State first teams. In extra points, he was perfection personified this fall: 44 for 44. He also connected on 7 of 10 field goal attempts—two of which came from 42 yards out.

"He won our game with North

Haven, kicking a 27-yard field goal with two seconds remaining," Hellstern said. "And it was pretty windy, too."

Conelius also excelled as a punter, averaging 36.9 yards per attempt, with 15 of his 43 punts landing inside the 20-yard line. He will continue his education and football career next fall at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa.

Jordan Louis, one of Prep's four senior co-captains, was named to the Register's All-State second team for his first-rate play as a defensive end and tackle.

"He was a terrific leader and outstanding defensively," Hellstern said. ■



BEN CONELIUS, FAIRFIELD PREP'S ALL-STATE KICKER



JAKE RIOS, ST. JOE'S ALL-STATE KICKER

identical 9-3 won-lost records, registered a few notable victories and won their quarter-final game in the CIAC State Tournament. (For the record: St. Joe's shut out Waterbury Career Academy, 37-0, in Class S, while Prep upended Danbury, 31-17, in Class LL.)

son Class M title match.

Also in the semifinals, the Jesuits encountered Greenwich for the second time this fall and lost again, 31-10. The Cardinals went on to wallop Southington, 45-6, to capture the Class LL title.

"Against Brookfield, we didn't have a good day," said St. Joe's

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Nuestra Voz

‘¡Viva, viva, el Señor de Esquipulas!’

POR MARICARMEN GODOY

NORWALK—El Comité del Señor de Esquipulas de la parroquia St. Joseph-St. Ladislaus, al ritmo de: “¡Viva, viva, el Señor de Esquipulas!” el pasado domingo hacia el mediodía festejó al patrono de Guatemala con una procesión, una misa de Acción de Gracias y una fiesta de marimba y tamales en donde también se recordó el bautismo de Jesús y el fin del tiempo de Navidad.

Para celebrar la fiesta en honor al Señor de Esquipulas, el padre Edicson Orozco, párroco de la iglesia, agradeció al Comité organizador de la fiesta porque por varias semanas quienes organizaron la procesión que salió el domingo once de enero a las once de la mañana desde la iglesia de St. Ladislaus, donde la imagen se encuentra empotrada, hacia la iglesia de St. Joseph, donde se celebró la misa de Acción de Gracias y el convivio de tamales; amenizada con música de marimba, el instrumento nacional del país.

Durante la misa el Padre Orozco recordó a los fieles en base a los evangelios: Isaías 42:1-

4, 6-7; Hechos 10:34-38; y Mateo 3:13-17, “...que Jesús, el siervo elegido por Dios, no solo será manso sino que tampoco se desanimará jamás y que establecerá una alianza que liberará a todo el pueblo. Así como también Jesús ha sido ungido en su bautismo con el Espíritu Santo y con poder. Dios está con él mientras hace el bien y sana a los oprimidos... mientras Jesús se acercaba a Juan el Bautista (su primo) para ser bautizado aun cuando él se resistió y Jesús le dijo: “Conviene que cumplamos así toda justicia”.

Versículos que le permitieron al sacerdote abrir una reflexión en donde predicó que el bautismo es un derecho de todo hijo de Dios que está asentado para la salvación y el inicio de una vida en gracia de Dios y que se revive en los padres del hijo bautizado el valor de creer en forma sencilla y por tanto sembrar la fe.

Así como también en la necesidad de que los niños sean bautizados a temprana edad para que puedan ser parte de la iglesia tan pronto sea posible. Y recordó que a un niño los padres no le preguntan si es que quiere recibir las vacunas o si quiere comer tal alimento o si desea ir a la escuela.

Lo que hacen los padres, en forma responsable, es prodigar salud, alimento y cobijo desde el momento en que nacen y por ende, reflexionó el Padre Orozco: ¿Si se buscan las vacunas, la leche adecuada, la ropa sin esperar que un niño decida?, ¿entonces!, ¿por qué no se hace actúa en la vida espiritual?. El bautizo.

Y en base al libro de Hechos que dice: “...Jesús es ungido en su bautismo con el Espíritu Santo y con poder. Dios está con Él mientras hace el bien y sana a los oprimidos por el diablo...”, el sacerdote habló de la importancia de la responsabilidad de los padres de cumplir con sus hijos con el sacramento del bautismo para enseñar a los niños que la esperanza de la vida está en la fe. Y enseguida reflexionó, cómo antiguamente, las familias tenían tanta fe en que los hijos no son una carga sino una bendición y por eso tenían tantos hijos como Dios los enviaba. “Un hijo no era una carga. Era una bendición”, dijo.

Y contó cómo sus padres en 1972, a pocos días de su nacimiento, lo bautizaron y a partir de ese momento lo inscribieron en el libro de la vida; porque sus progenitores entendieron que ellos tenían una responsabilidad con su fe y por tanto, decirle a él: “¡Tú naciste para la vida eterna!, porque el bautismo es el nacimiento a la vida espiritual”.

Por eso, recaló la importancia de escoger unos padrinos que pro-



feser también los mismos valores y estén dispuestos a ser los padres espirituales de sus ahijados. Además, de inculcar las primeras oraciones como el Ave María, el Salve, el Padre Nuestro... para que durante la catequesis los niños tengan desde sus hogares las bases religiosas y los catequistas solamente refuerzan lo aprendido en sus hogares.

Mientras el Padre Orozco oficiaba la misa del Señor de Esquipulas, en el coro de la iglesia, el Mariachi Servidores del Rey, venidos desde la parroquia San Francisco de New Haven, preparaban los cantos de la liturgia; e igualmente, el maestro de capilla, Juan David Corrales, intercalaba las canciones con el mariachi.

Mariachi que está conformado por un cien por ciento de músicos guatemaltecos y una cantante mexicana que tocó también la vihuela.

Rolfi Bartolón, trompetista y director del mariachi, dijo que

vino a tocar la misa del Señor de Esquipulas en Norwalk, luego de recibir una invitación del Comité guatemalteco. Para la ocasión ensayaron la mayor parte de cantos litúrgicos para poder cantar la misa, pero se centraron en cantar el Himno al Señor de Esquipulas que interpretaron al inicio y al final de la misa.

El Comité organizador de la fiesta del Señor de Esquipulas, presidido por Reynaldo Oliva, logró llenar la iglesia de St. Joseph para la misa de Acción de Gracias, adquirir decenas de flores para adornar el Altar de las dos iglesias, traer el mariachi formado por músicos guatemaltecos, brindar decenas de tamales y poner un desfile de trajes típicos que bailaron al ritmo del son, el género musical nacional, durante la presentación de las ofrendas y poner una banda de marimberos como parte de la fiesta nacional del Cristo Negro, el patrono de Guatemala. ■



Un mensaje del Obispo Frank a nuestros feligreses de Bridgeport

Recientemente, completamos la construcción del muro para cremados del Jardín de Santa Mónica en la Catedral de San Agustín en Bridgeport.

Se ha reservado para que los feligreses de Bridgeport compren una parcela y entierren dos urnas de restos cremados en el terreno sagrado de la catedral.

Si tiene una urna en casa que contiene los restos de un ser querido fallecido, es una oportunidad ideal para brindarle el descanso seguro y sagrado que se merece. Y, para aquellos de ustedes que aún necesitan hacer sus planes finales, ¿por qué no reservar una parcela que familiares y amigos pueden visitar fácilmente y de forma regular?

Las parcelas han sido muy rebajadas por un tiempo limitado a \$1,500 por dos urnas. Es posible que haya asistencia financiera disponible para quienes necesiten ayuda para pagar esta cantidad. En el momento del entierro, habrá una tarifa de apertura y cierre de \$ 500.

Solo hay 312 parcelas disponibles y el 25 % de ellas ya han sido reservadas.

La información está disponible en sus parroquias y puede comunicarse con Susan Ontra al 203-742-1459 o info@ctcemeteries.org para hacer una reserva.



Called by Name begins next month

SHELTON—The Diocese of Bridgeport will once again host the Called By Name campaign the weekend of February 21 and 22 in an effort to invite more young men to consider a vocation to the Catholic priesthood.

The campaign invites the faithful in the pews to identify young men in their parishes who demonstrate essential character traits for the priesthood, such as faith, generosity and leadership. Once identified, the diocesan vocations team reaches out to these young men directly, inviting

them to further consider their vocation through events and other discernment opportunities.

The diocese hosted this campaign for the first time last year, and it has already seen results.

“We accepted 10 new seminarians this past fall, bringing the total number of seminarians for the diocese to 38,” said Bishop Frank J. Caggiano. “We also have at least four men in application for the next academic year.”

The bishop thanked the faithful for their participation in last year’s campaign, but also said that the work is not yet done.

“We want to connect with even more incredible young men this year,” Bishop Caggiano said. “I invite you to nominate young men in your community who live their faith with integrity, serve generously and show potential for Christian leadership. Your nomination may be the spark that helps a young man open his heart more fully to God’s call.”

(To nominate a young man from your parish family, use the cards provided in-pew the weekend of February 21 and 22 or visit www.bridgeportpriest.org.) ■

Vocations

The vocational presence of God

By FATHER CHRIS FORD

Christmas has come and gone, and with it the temptation to believe that life has simply returned to normal. The decorations are put away, routines resume and the extraordinary gives way once again to the familiar.

Yet the Incarnation does not allow for such a conclusion. In the light of Christ's coming among us, there is no longer such a thing as "ordinary time" in the way we might mean it. What has been inaugurated in Jesus is a new moment in the history of humanity: one in which God continually comes, is continually present and quietly addresses the human heart.

God does not come for his own sake. He comes so that we might encounter him. And from that encounter, we might come

to recognize who we are, why we are here and what our lives are meant to become.

In other words, the presence of God is always vocational. It calls. It proposes. It asks for a response that shapes how we live here and now.

We often say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, usually meaning that beauty is subjective, a matter of taste or preference. But that understanding is itself superficial. Beauty is not so much subjective as it is subject to a willingness to see more: to see beyond appearances, to linger long enough for meaning to reveal itself. True beauty is not merely seen; it is beheld.

This is why the Gospel repeatedly invites us to behold. John the Evangelist does not rush past Jesus with explanations or arguments. He asks us to stop, to look, to contemplate. John the Baptist gives us the same

witness. "I did not know him," he admits, "but the one who sent me told me." John is able to recognize and proclaim who Jesus is because he first listened. He waited. He allowed himself to be taught. His vocation flowed not from activity, but from attention.

This has profound implications for how we understand vocations today. The transformation of a life does not begin with action, strategy or even generosity. It begins in contemplation. Our steps become unsure, and our choices become reactive, when we have not first taken the time to recognize what stands before us. Without an interior life, even good intentions lose their direction.

Every vocation in the Church—priesthood, religious life, marriage, consecrated single life—is first a response to a presence, not a solution to a problem

or a fulfillment of a plan. God's call is not heard by those who are merely busy, but by those who have learned to stand still, to watch, to weigh things in their hearts. If God does not come, we can do nothing. But if God comes and we do not recognize him, do not welcome him or allow his presence to change us, then his coming bears no fruit in us.

This is why the Church continually draws us back to the altar. Each time we gather for the Eucharist, the gift of God's presence is placed before our eyes and our hearts. The Spirit is invoked, and the words of the Baptist are echoed once more: "Behold the Lamb of God." This is not merely a liturgical formula. It is a school of vocation. We learn, slowly and patiently, how to see.

In a culture marked by noise, urgency and constant distraction, the renewal of vocations will not



FATHER CHRIS FORD

come first from better programs or louder appeals. It will come from teaching people how to behold, how to cultivate silence, how to recognize the quiet movements of God within the heart. Only a contemplative heart can respond freely and courageously when God calls.

If we learn to look at everything, not only with our eyes but with our hearts, we will begin to live each moment in God's presence. And from that presence, vocations will emerge naturally, not as burdens to be carried, but as gifts to be received. ■

HOLY TRINITY CHAPEL FROM PAGE 8

Damiano, where Jesus told St. Francis, "Rebuild my church."

"In his simplicity and perhaps his purity, Francis understood that the church had to be a place of dignity and of beauty because of the One who dwells within," the bishop said. "Oftentimes you and I forget when we come into a sacred space, into whose presence we come. But in a few moments, we will have the consecration of this beautiful place, where heaven and earth kiss, where you and I enter into the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection. It is the festival of our salvation, where he paid the price. It is the most sublime act of love the world has ever seen and reveals to us the nature of who God is."

The ritual included the prayer of dedication, holy water, anointing the walls and altar with chrism, and the celebration of the Eucharist. The dedication set the church apart as a permanent, sacred space for the sacraments and worship.

The bishop told the congregation that it was an occasion for the parish family to begin anew.

"I have come as your spir-

itual grandfather to remind you that this is the day a new chapter must begin in the Catholic community of Sherman," he said. "History is history and it belongs written on the pages of a book. There are many triumphs and much sadness in the history of this place. But this is the day to take that page and turn it aside and begin to write a new page."

He encouraged the faithful to come often to "this chapel in its quiet beauty and spend time with the Lord so that he can refresh your souls, lighten your minds, and give you strength so that you can become joyful witnesses of a message the world does not know and oftentimes does not welcome, but is the only message that will bring the true happiness every human heart is seeking."

He urged them to evangelize one soul at a time and invite those who have fallen away from the faith to return.

"Ring their doorbells and personally invite them to come back," he said. "There will be a thousand reasons why they stopped coming. But there's only one reason why they should come: Because the Lord wildly loves them. Be the messenger that St. Francis was. Invite them home."

Bishop Caggiano told them it was a day of great joy, not only because of the completion of the chapel but also because it was overflowing with worshipers.

"My dear friends, thank you," he said. "Thank you for your generosity. Thank you for your commitment to the mission of the Church and for your commitment to each other."

Father Wolfe praised the parishioners and thanked the bishop for his support, along with those whose efforts made the new chapel possible.

"Throughout the course of these years, there were many moments to be thankful for and many people as well ... and many of them have gathered here to join us in our celebration," he said. "We thank all of those who have made this place into what it is."

He expressed his gratitude to Kastilahn for his efforts in completing the chapel despite the challenges and announced that a 10-foot crucifix, which will hang from the chapel, was being dedicated to Kastilahn: "In recognition of someone who has made this place fit together, that cross, that image of our salvation, is dedicated to you and your family in thanksgiving from us."

Father Wolfe said the chap-

el marks the beginning of a new chapter for the Catholic Church in the northern part of the diocese.

"It's the continuation of a lot of years put together," he said. "And when it comes to our faith, it's the assurance the sacraments continue and the faith continues to be proclaimed. Lives are sanctified and saved by God's grace. The poet John Keats said, 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' Praise be to God that we've got what we've got."

Kastilahn said the chapel was constructed in a timber frame "hammer structure beam pattern" with materials from an Amish company, recognized for traditional craftsmanship.

The voice of ABC News for many years, Kastilahn said that inscribed on one of the steel beams is his name with a Latin saying that has had meaning for him since he was a student at Cathedral Latin High School in Cleveland: "In service of God."

"I was made a trustee about 12 years ago and then we lost our church, and I felt I had to take responsibility for bringing a new one back," he said. "I've been very blessed in my life, and I was faced with a situation where I could do something, so I was

here seven days a week for three years."

Michael and Jeannene Burruano, parishioners for 30 years, praised Father Wolfe for his vision and bringing it to life. Jeannene said the church was the heart and soul of the community and one of the reasons they came to Sherman.

In his final comments, Bishop Caggiano said: "This is truly a beautiful place, and I'm looking forward to returning in the evening and driving by when this magnificent stained glass window will be illuminated for everyone to see. It's the proclamation of who we are and who our Lord is and who our God is, who loves us so deeply."

The bishop said he has already begun conversations about how to invite others to benefit from the beautiful campus.

"It's a crown jewel in our diocese, and I'm hoping you'll welcome others to come for days of prayer and reflection and just to be able to spend time in the beauty of the outdoors," he said. "You have accomplished more than resurrecting your chapel; you've given a gift to the whole diocese." ■



New Year Blessings from the **Padre Pio Foundation of America**



A new year sparks a sense of excitement and renewal for all that is possible. For Padre Pio, every new day was a gift from God. He famously said, *“Pray, hope, and don’t worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer.”* He is reminding us to entrust ourselves to God’s will and surrender our fear of the unknown.

Wishing you and your loved ones a peaceful and healthy New Year, from all of us at the Padre Pio Foundation of America. May this New Year bring you closer to your faith, inspire hope and trust in God’s guidance for the year ahead.



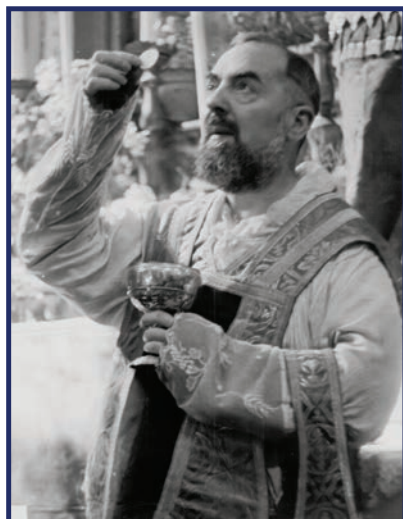
Prepare for Lent with Padre Pio

Padre Pio viewed Lent as an invitation to grow closer to Christ through prayer and intentional acts of sacrifice. As the first priest in Catholic history to bear the Stigmata, he reminds us that Lent is not about seeking discomfort for its own sake, but about embracing sacrifice as a path to true spiritual growth.

Padre Pio said, *“Love Jesus, love Him very much, but to do this, be ready to love sacrifice more.”* He embraced the intense pain and suffering of the Stigmata with humility and trust, knowing it would deepen his union with Jesus and allow him to offer his suffering for the salvation of others.

As you prepare for Lent this year, we invite you to let Padre Pio’s words guide and encourage you.

May this Lenten season offer you the opportunity to reflect, embrace sacrifice with an open heart and feel God’s loving presence in your daily life.



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.



For more information, to become a benefactor or to request prayers, scan this QR code, call (860) 635-4996 or visit www.padrepio.com.



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