

FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

MARCH 2026 | VOLUME 43, NUMBER 3 | LENTEN ISSUE



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Rite of Election 2026

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Holy Week 2026



Celebrate Holy Week with Bishop Caggiano

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano will preside over the following Holy Week festivities in the Diocese of Bridgeport. **All are invited to attend.**

- Palm Sunday Vigil Mass** | Saturday, March 28 at 4 pm—St. Matthew Parish, Norwalk
- Diocesan Chrism Mass** | Thursday, April 2 at 10 am—St. Augustine Cathedral, Bridgeport
- Mass of the Lord's Supper** | Thursday, April 2 at 7 pm—St. Augustine Cathedral, Bridgeport
- Stations of the Cross Procession** | Friday, April 3 at 10 am—Departing from St. Mary Parish, Bridgeport
- Liturgy of the Lord's Passion** | Friday, April 3 at 3 pm—St. Augustine Cathedral, Bridgeport
- Procession and Burial of the Cristo Morto** | Friday, April 3 at 7 pm—St. Mary Parish, Norwalk
- Easter Vigil Mass** | Saturday, April 4 at 8 pm—St. Augustine Cathedral, Bridgeport



Diocese of Bridgeport

Reconciliation Monday Schedule

On Monday, March 30, parishes throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport will offer extended hours for the faithful to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation as Holy Week begins.

The parishes listed below will offer Confessions from 3 to 9 pm unless otherwise noted.

- Queen of Peace Deanery (Bridgeport)**
St. Augustine Cathedral | 359 Washington Avenue
St. Mary Parish | 25 Sherman Street
St. Margaret Shrine | 2523 Park Avenue
- Mystical Rose Deanery (Stratford)**
St. James Parish | 2070 Main Street
- Queen of Martyrs Deanery (Monroe, Shelton, Trumbull)**
St. Lawrence Parish | 505 Shelton Avenue, Shelton
St. Catherine of Siena Parish | 200 Shelton Road, Trumbull
- Our Lady, Queen of Confessors Deanery (Bethel, Brookfield, Danbury, New Fairfield, Newtown)**
St. Joseph Parish | 163 Whisconier Road, Brookfield
St. Peter Parish | 104 Main Street, Danbury
- Seat of Wisdom Deanery (Easton, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, Westport, Wilton)**
St. Mary Parish | 55 Catoonah Street, Ridgefield
Assumption Parish | 98 Riverside Avenue, Westport
- Queen Assumed into Heaven Deanery (Fairfield)**
St. Thomas Aquinas Parish | 1719 Post Road
- Mother of Divine Grace Deanery (Darien, New Canaan, Norwalk)**
St. Aloysius Parish | 21 Cherry Street, New Canaan
St. Matthew Parish | 216 Scribner Avenue, Norwalk
- Cause of Our Joy Deanery (Stamford)**
St. Cecilia Church | 1184 Newfield Avenue
St. Mary Parish | 566 Elm Street
- Mary, Mother of the Church Deanery (Greenwich)**
St. Mary Parish | 178 Greenwich Avenue (4–8 pm)
St. Catherine of Siena-St. Agnes Parish | 4 Riverside Avenue (4–8 pm, en Español 7–8 pm)




ON THE COVER

THE DIOCESE WELCOMED its catechumens and candidates to the Rite of Election on Sunday, March 1. They will formally enter the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil on Saturday, April 4.
(PHOTOS BY AMY MORTENSEN)

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Diocesan News

‘Unpacking’ for the Lenten journey

By ROSE BRENNAN

BRIDGEPORT—In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells a young man to give up everything he has and follow him. And that is also what the Lenten season asks of us, according to Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, who celebrated Mass for Ash Wednesday the evening of February 18 at St. Augustine Cathedral.

The Mass also served as the kickoff of the diocese’s inaugural Lenten Station Church Pilgrimage, in which the faithful are invited to attend daily Mass at a different church in the diocese every day through the morning of Holy Thursday. The pilgrimage started and will end at St. Augustine Cathedral, and spans all nine deaneries of the diocese.

In his homily, Bishop Caggiano

shared that when he was a young man, he loved to travel. However, as he’s gotten older, he’s begun to see it as an ordeal—and it comes part and parcel with another ordeal entirely: packing.

While the bishop tries to pack carefully, he often tries to accommodate every situation he might encounter—as well as the needs of others with whom he is traveling. Inevitably, he said, his bags are filled to the brim, and they get even heavier when he brings new items home from his journey.

However the bishop said, such an ordeal isn’t in store for the journey to eternal life.

“Jesus invites us to take him by the hand and begin another type of journey—a journey that will ask us to walk through a desert and up a mountain to accompany him in the 40 days of fasting in the

desert, and to go up the mountain of Easter so that when we reach its pinnacle, we will see not only a cross, but an empty tomb and the glimpse of light that lasts forever,” he said. “And unlike the journeys you and I take in this world, where we pack and pack and pack, this journey beginning tonight is asking us to unpack, let it go, get rid of it so we can learn to walk and run with Jesus.”

The bishop said much of what we cling to in this life cannot be taken with us into the next one. As such, Jesus is asking us to let it go and to follow him instead.

“Let us begin with our sins, our venial sins and God forbid, our mortal sins, that which you and I have done to offend God and offend our neighbor,” he said. “They are like stones that are wrapped around us. They

weigh us down so we can hardly move and take the next step. And Jesus has come to shed his blood to break those chains and let them go, if only we would ask for his forgiveness.”

It can be very hard for us to let go of what weighs us down, whether it’s sin or something else. But what will life be like when we finally let go?

“When we get to the end of the desert, we will discover what it’s like to truly live life as God meant us to live it—to live it with freedom and joy,” Bishop Caggiano said. “We will have the hand of Jesus, and that’s all we will discover we need in life. And by doing that, we will be able to run up the mountain and discover that this life, with all its blessings, leads us to something we can’t even



begin to imagine, which is the glory of a life and a love and a joy and a peace that will never end.”

As the bishop prepared to bless the ashes and impart them on those gathered, he remarked that they represent everything that we should let go of during the Lenten season.

“Those ashes represent everything in this life that is keeping us from Jesus, from running with him in joy,” he said. “All of that stuff comes out to be ashes. Don’t be afraid of them. Embrace them. Wear them as a reminder of what Lent asks of us. And together, let us begin this journey and see what Christ will do for you and me.” ■

Four undertake diaconate Rite of Candidacy

By ROSE BRENNAN

BRIDGEPORT—On Sunday, March 15, four men—Dan Caron, Andres Mejia, Seamus Walsh and Adryano Wanderley—took the first formal step in their formation as permanent deacons, undertaking the Rite of Candidacy at St. Augustine Cathedral in Bridgeport.

Becoming a candidate during the diaconate formation process formally signifies a man’s commitment to preparing for a life of service in the Church as a deacon. These men remain candidates until they are formally ordained as deacons. Along the journey to the permanent diaconate, they will also receive the Order of Reader in their third year of formation and the Order of Acolyte in the fourth.

At the Mass when the Rite of Candidacy was celebrated, Deacon John DiTaranto, director of the diaconate, offered the homily, reflecting on the Gospel reading of Jesus healing a man who had been blind since birth. Deacon DiTaranto recalled when he was a young boy, there was another boy at his home parish who had been blind since birth. Intrigued by this, young Deacon DiTaranto would sometimes close his eyes and try to navigate his way around his

house without being able to see what was in front of him.

“As you can imagine, after a minute or two, I’m bumping into furniture and my shins are getting bruised,” he said. “I couldn’t go from one room to the other because my eyes were closed. And then I felt guilty when I was able to open my eyes, knowing that young man could never open his.”

While most of us are born able to see, Deacon DiTaranto said, we are nevertheless born spiritually blind, until our heads are anointed with oil and we are baptized into the Spirit. We see this in the story of the blind man Jesus healed, and Deacon DiTaranto contemplated how the once-blind man answers the people of Jerusalem when they ask if he is the man who has been blind since birth, or if he is just someone who looks like him.

“He said, ‘I am,’” he said. “Well, which is it? Are you the beggar or somebody that just looks like him? Well, as I thought about that, the answer is both. He is actually the man that was there—the beggar that went to the pool to wash his eyes, and he had sight. But he’s a new creation because of his relationship with Christ.”

Deacon DiTaranto said a similar journey would be taken by the



four candidates when they would receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders and become deacons.

“When you kneel down and stand up after receiving the sacrament, you will still be that person that knelt down,” he said. “But you will be a new creation. You’ll be converted to somebody new.”

Even baptized, Deacon DiTaranto said, sin is still a reality for us—and so is the spiritual blindness that comes with it. However, Christ and his resurrection ensure that we can repent and begin again.

“Every time we sin and we lose that light, our shins are going to get bruised,” Deacon DiTaranto said. “We’re going to walk into a lot of spiritual furniture and we’ll know that we’ve sinned because of the bruises on our shin. But don’t be discouraged ... There is an opportunity to build up our relationship with Christ, to have our eyes opened again.”

Diaconate Candidates

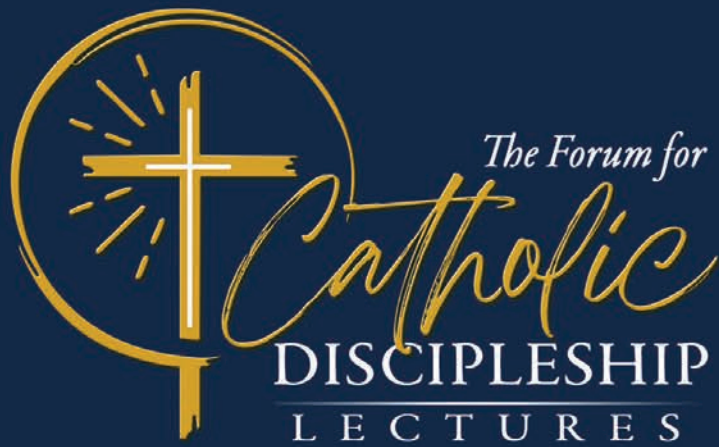
Dan Caron has been married for 28 years and is the proud father of three adult children. A resident of Milford, he has been a parishioner at Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Bridgeport for the past six years, where he serves as chair of the finance council, teaches seventh grade faith formation and Confirmation preparation, and leads the parish’s digital ministry efforts. Caron holds a master’s degree in Business and works at Morgan Stanley, where he leads strategy for money movement platforms.

Andres Mejia, a native of Bona, Dominican Republic, is a parishioner of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bridgeport, where he has served as a lector since 2016. He and his wife, Justina, have been married for 25 years and have raised three wonderful children. He has a computer

science engineering degree and is an IT professional in computer consulting practices.

Seamus Walsh is from Danbury and is the loving husband to Michelle and a proud father of two. Seamus’ parents came to the United States from Ireland and raised him and his brother Patrick in faith. Professionally, Walsh serves as an insurance broker and holds an MBA from Franklin Pierce University. Through teaching faith formation and helping to lead Bible studies, Walsh seeks to proclaim the Gospel, foster a deeper love for sacred Scripture, and serve the people of God at St. Gregory the Great Parish in Danbury.

Adryano Wanderley, a loving husband to Priscilla and proud father of two, moved from Brazil to the United States in 2019. Since then, he has been a member of St. Gregory the Great Parish in Danbury, where he finds joy in serving his community. At 18, he answered his calling to become a Catholic missionary. Today, he serves as his parish’s OCIA coordinator, men’s ministry coordinator, and an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. Professionally, he is a civil engineer and leads projects as the head project manager at Unlimited Carpentry Corp. ■



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 | St. Aloysius Parish
21 Cherry Street, New Canaan

Lecturer | Maureen Pratt

Topic | Two-Fold Prayer and the Journey to Peace



Maureen Pratt, MTS, MFA, is a popular speaker, the award-winning, bestselling author of 10 books. Founder of The Peace in the Storm Project and author of Peace in the Storm: Meditations on Chronic Pain and Illness and Peace in the Storm for Caregivers. The music of our faith can be powerfully prayerful, reaching into our hearts and souls to

bring us closer to God. In this special evening of reflections on prayerful song, award-winning Catholic author, ministry leader, and cantor Maureen Pratt will offer insight on the ages-long tradition of faith-song, encouragement for even the most timid to "raise a joyful noise," and examples of how carrying two-fold prayer throughout difficult days can bring immense comfort, joy, and peace.

To RSVP to this event, please visit:
www.bridgeportdiocese.org/forum-catholic/lectures
or email: bishoplecture@diobpt.org

Appeal News

Finding hope through Catholic Charities, Appeal

By JOE PISANI

BRIDGEPORT—Robert Walsh never expected to become a guest at the Thomas Merton Family Center. He never expected to come down with double pneumonia and a spine infection. And he never expected to lose his job as a corporate recruiter.

Then, things got even worse for him and his sick younger brother, when their apartment building burned down and they had to spend cold nights in an abandoned garage.

"It was in this moment, when everything seemed hopeless, that the Merton Center really became a big part of our lives," he recalled.

The Thomas Merton Family Center is one of the many programs sponsored by Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, which are supported by the 2026 Bishop's Appeal, One in Christ, along with the Morning Glory Breakfast Program in Danbury and New Covenant Center in Stamford.

In announcing the 2026 Appeal, Bishop Caggiano said he was grateful for the continued generosity of the faithful and asked them to consider a gift to the 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. "For that, I need your help in supporting the ministries that are the foundation of our Church, in addition to funding initiatives that are giving further and even greater life to our Church."

Robert Walsh began going to the Merton food pantry for groceries after a three-month hospitalization.

He recalled: "I was alive, but my body was weak and I was dealing with constant, excruciating pain. I had lost my job during my illness, and my health did not allow me to find work. I was living in an apartment with my brother Rick, who has COPD and can't walk more than a couple feet without stopping to catch his breath. Money was getting tight, and from the beginning, Merton showed me a warmth that I didn't expect."

After their apartment burned

down, they lost everything and couldn't afford a new rent. Walsh's younger brother also began treatment for lung cancer.

"Suddenly, for the first time in our lives, we were homeless. We never thought it would happen to us, but it did," he said.

That's when the Merton Center entered their lives in a profound way. They would be fed and warm themselves in the dining hall, and with the help of the staff, they were able to find a room to rent.

"Coming to rely on Merton hasn't been easy for me and my brother," Walsh said. "We worked our whole lives—I spent most of my career as a corporate headhunter and recruiter, and my brother was a professional chef and worked in restaurants while his health still allowed. So, none of this is normal for me. I have a hard time accepting assistance. I wasn't raised to depend on other people. It's not something I've ever had to do."

Their lives still have many challenges, but Walsh says, "Merton made the load lighter on me and my brother. It gave us some warmth in the dead of winter, some peace in the middle of a storm, and some friends when we felt alone in our struggles. What Merton has done for me and Rick, it does for so many people."

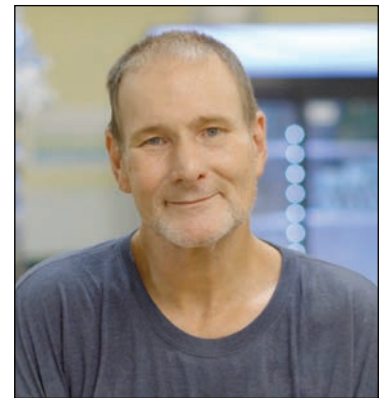
Aaron May was homeless but now has a new apartment, thanks to assistance from New Covenant Center and Pacific House in Stamford.

A year ago, he was working and living in a hotel room, but suddenly got a phone call to say he lost his job. He quickly ran out of cash to pay for his room.

He started going to the soup kitchen at New Covenant, where he was fed and stayed when it was cold outside. He also met with a representative of Pacific House to look for new accommodations.

"I was amazed there were so many people going through what I was going through," he said. "I no longer felt alone in my situation. That's where hope came into play. People gave me hope by smiling and going about their day."

After his experience, he came to one conclusion: "If Catholic people are like the way people are here, then that's a great religion. It's help,



it's hope, it's the environment."

While he was looking for work in the food industry, May found an apartment through the Rapid Re-Housing Program, which offers rental assistance for up to two years.

"I have a one bedroom apartment with a washer and dryer in the unit. I also have a dishwasher, garbage disposal and central air," he said. "It's a quiet community and I feel blessed. I am simply ecstatic. God puts people in your way. Help was given to me, and I'm thankful for New Covenant Center and the staff and volunteers."

"Stories like Robert's and Aaron's remind us that the Bishop's Appeal is a lifeline," said Pamela S. Rittman, director of development and the Bishop's Appeal. "Through the faithful generosity of our donors, ministries such as Catholic Charities of Fairfield County are able to offer hope, dignity and a path forward to our most vulnerable neighbors. Every gift to the Appeal becomes a tangible expression of Christ's love at work in our community, helping individuals and families rebuild their lives with renewed strength and faith. We are grateful for each and every gift, no matter the size."

The Bishop's Appeal supports "The One," which is the diocesan vision of spiritual and pastoral renewal.

Bishop Caggiano said, "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."

(To make a gift, visit www.2026BishopsAppeal. Thank you for your support.)

Rite of Election

Joining *a family of* faith



‘There are no shortcuts in the spiritual life’

By ROSE BRENNAN

BRIDGEPORT—It was standing room only at St. Augustine Cathedral on the afternoon of Sunday, March 1, as Bishop Frank J. Caggiano celebrated the Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion for those who will soon enter full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil next month. According to the Institute for Catholic Formation, 678 catechumens and 584 candidates are set to enter the Church in the Diocese of Bridgeport this year.

During the Rite, the bishop welcomes both catechumens (those who are not baptized) and candidates (those who are baptized but have not received the Sacraments of Holy Communion or Confirmation), who then declare their wish to become fully initiated members of the Catholic Church. It usually takes place on the First Sunday of Lent, but was postponed to the following weekend in the Diocese of Bridgeport due to inclement weather.

In his homily, the bishop reflected on the importance of time, and how it is among one of our most precious commodities. In fact, he noted, we are often looking for ways to move through life faster—whether it’s using apps like Waze to find the fastest route home or pasting an article into an artificial intelligence chatbot to summarize it.

In contrast, he said, the journey of faith is one that takes a lifetime—especially for the candidates and catechumens.

“Since the moment you were conceived, God had foreseen this day and has foreseen the day you will enter into the mysteries of your salvation and mine,” the bishop said. “When you consider all the triumphs and all the failures of life, all the sufferings and all the great victories of life that you have had, all of its ups and downs, twists and turns in that entire journey from the moment you took your first breath, all of that was given to you so you could be formed to receive the very life of God—and not just receive it once, but allow that God to dwell in you and me unto eternal life. There are no shortcuts in the spiritual life.”

The bishop said all of the members of the Catholic Church—including those who have already gone onto eternal life—were rejoicing at the site of all of the catechumens and candidates who were about to enter full communion with the faith. But, he reminded them, the journey of faith continues beyond when they receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil on April 4.

“Your journey does not end in five and a half weeks when you climb ... the mountain of Easter, and you enter into the night that is made holy by the Lord who rose from the dead so that you might enter into that light,” the bishop said. “You have the rest of your life, with every moment of every day, to walk in the hand

of Jesus and continue to make his life dwell in you and announce his love to the world.”

Bishop Caggiano recalled the Gospel reading, which spoke of Jesus’ transfiguration before three of his disciples. And after such a miraculous event, he says something quite strange: he urges his disciples not to tell anyone what they witnessed. The bishop said that was because Jesus knew of our tendency to seek shortcuts, and while the disciples were willing to walk with Jesus through his miracles and teachings, just one of them was with him at the foot of the cross.

“You and I are called to reveal his love in the world—to love everyone who comes to us and will their good no matter what the sacrifice may be, and to pray that others will love us in the same way,” the bishop said. “That demands that we always stand before the cross, confident that it is not the end of the road, but there is no shortcut around it.”

The Catholic life, the bishop said, is not a carefree one. But we are reassured and encouraged because we do not take the journey alone. Rather, we are accompanied by our brothers and sisters in faith—not to mention the creator and king of the universe.

“No matter where the journey takes you, just keep walking and see the marvels and miracles that God will do in you and through you with everyone you meet,” Bishop Caggiano said. ■

Rite of Election



OUR LADY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF APARECIDA PARISH
Bethel



OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL QUASI-PARISH
Bridgeport



SAINT ANDREW PARISH
Bridgeport



**SAINT CHARLES BORROMEIO PARISH—
BRAZILIAN COMMUNITY**
Bridgeport



**SAINT CHARLES BORROMEIO PARISH—
BRAZILIAN COMMUNITY**
Bridgeport



SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL PARISH
Bridgeport



SAINT PETER PARISH
Bridgeport



OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE PARISH
Danbury



SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT PARISH
Danbury



SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
Danbury



SAINT PETER PARISH
Danbury



SAINT THOMAS MORE PARISH
Darien



OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION PARISH
Fairfield



SAINT PIUS X PARISH
Fairfield



SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS PARISH
Fairfield



SAINT ALOYSIUS PARISH
New Canaan



SAINT EDWARD THE CONFESSOR PARISH
New Fairfield



SAINT ROSE OF LIMA PARISH
Newtown

March 2026

Rite of Election



SAINT JOSEPH-SAINT LADISLAUS PARISH
Norwalk



SAINT MARY PARISH
Norwalk



SAINT PHILIP PARISH
Norwalk



SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE PARISH
Norwalk



SAINT MARY PARISH
Ridgefield



SAINT MARY PARISH
Ridgefield



SAINT LAWRENCE PARISH
Shelton



**NOTRE DAME DU PERPETUEL SECOURS
QUASI-PARISH, Stamford**



SAINT CECILIA-SAINT GABRIEL PARISH
Stamford



SAINT LEO PARISH
Stamford



SAINT MARY PARISH
Stamford



SAINT JAMES PARISH
Stamford



SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA PARISH
Trumbull



SAINT STEPHEN PARISH
Trumbull



SAINT THERESA PARISH
Trumbull



SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI
Weston



Women's Conference

Conference volunteers 'arise' to the occasion

By ROSE BRENNAN

NORWALK—Hosted by Women in the New Evangelization (WINE), the diocesan women's conference on April 11 promises an uplifting day of faith and refreshment focused on the theme "ARISE: The King is Calling Your Name." But just as vital to the day's success is the work of a local group of volunteers, focused on making the conference the best it can possibly be.

Joining the women's conference's volunteer team for the first time is Marilyn Kain, who has hit the ground running at her home parish of St. Mary in Ridgefield. In addition to passing out flyers to various parish groups, she has also sought out local businesses who might be interested in helping to sponsor the conference.

One unexpected benefit Kain

is enjoying as a volunteer is meeting women from across the diocese who have a common goal: putting on a great conference.

"One thing that I'm enjoying about being a volunteer for the conference is that it's a diocesan-wide effort," she said. "Being able to meet other women from other parishes and connect with them in a new way is really nice."

Similarly, Kain is particularly looking forward to being together with other Catholic women on the day of the conference itself.

"Bringing a group of women together, no matter how big it is, is so beautiful," she said. "When our purpose is to grow in our faith and just share our hearts with each other, I think that's instant community."

Also new to the conference volunteer team this year is Lissette Barretto, a parishioner at St. Mary in Stamford. She is also

inspired by the work of the other women behind the scenes at the conference, which she says gives her an appreciation of what the universal Church looks like.

"I think it's beautiful—the fact that there's just so many women from different stages of life that are involved," Barretto said.

"Getting different perspectives, seeing how everyone is helping, whether it's an idea or recommendation ... it's really beautiful to be in those meetings and just see how women are coming alive in order to serve."

Maureen Ciardiello volunteered at last year's women's conference, and she's back again to volunteer this year. She said it's important to support programs like the women's conference, which offer safe places for women to share and grow in their faith.

"It's important for women to have a place to go just to be



refreshed and to spend time with God—just dedicating a day to be able to do that, and growing their faith and in fellowship as well," she said.

Last year, Ciardiello particularly enjoyed celebrating Mass with Bishop Frank J. Caggiano—especially since that morning Mass kicked the conference off. She also found St. Matthew's parish grounds beautiful and conducive to prayer, including its Perpetual Adoration chapel, which remained open during the conference.

As a returning volunteer, Ciardiello urged women who didn't attend the conference last year to consider coming this year.

"Even if they're hesitating or they're not 100 percent commit-

ted ... they might hear something that's really going to speak to their heart that day," she said.

While the conference will take place during the Octave of Easter, its registration period will take place during Lent. And Kain suggested women who weren't sure about attending take it as a Lenten challenge.

"Lent is such a beautiful time to be challenged spiritually," Kain said. "I think (the Holy Spirit) is always asking us to grow and take steps forward. So this is one small step forward that I think will reap some wonderful benefits."

Barretto reflected on the conference's patron saint: Mary

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Vendors spotlit at conference

By ROSE BRENNAN

NORWALK—In addition to offering a full day of faith, fellowship and sisterhood, the "ARISE" women's conference on Saturday, April 11 at St. Matthew Parish will offer a full slate of vendors, each of whom offers goods and services that focus on the true, good and beautiful.

One vendor is A&S Fine Foods in Stamford, who will provide lunch for conference attendees. Others, however, will offer something for them to take home.

Many of the vendors are returning from last year's conference, but others will be participating at the conference for the first time.

Among them is Tom Baldwin, a Bridgeport-based photographer, who will have prints of his photos available for purchase. Baldwin said he doesn't exactly have a set "style" of photography but most often finds himself drawn to the beauty of landscapes.

In addition to the natural beauty of his subjects, some of Baldwin's editing choices reflect his desire to produce a work of art.

"I do like to soften the images up," he said. "I soften the edges and I try to make artwork out of the photograph, versus just pictures or images."

Much of Baldwin's work that will be for sale at the conference will reflect its theme: "ARISE: The King is Calling Your Name."

"I'm going to try to present works that have that feel to them," Baldwin said. That might include "sunrises and ... images that just give you a feeling of peace and serenity."

Also new to the conference vendor pool this year is Our Lady's Face, an organic skincare line that supports the work of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. It was founded by Holly Wright, who is the director of Casa Guadalupe, a women's house of discernment founded by the friars.

Wright often made her own skincare products because she was "allergic to just about everything," she joked. One day, when she and the Casa Guadalupe residents were serving one of their mis-

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



Diocese of Bridgeport

WINE: Catholic Women's Conference

ARISE

the King is Calling your name

Sat, Apr 11, 8am-3pm

St. Matthew Church
NORWALK, CT

Answer the Call
Join women from around the Archdiocese for a day of faith, fellowship, and fun.

SPEAKERS


Teresa Tomeo


Maria Morera Johnson


Dr. Haley Riney


Chelsea Buccì

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Men's Conference

Men called to 'radical discipleship' at retreat

By JOE PISANI

TRUMBULL—Men from throughout the diocese were urged to become “radical disciples” for Christ in their families and society at the second annual Men’s Retreat, led by Father Agustino Torres, CFR, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal and EWTN host.

“During times of trial, we are called to radical discipleship,” Father Torres said. “When everything is going great, it’s no problem, but now we are called to respond in a time of great trials.”

He urged the men to consider the example of saints, such as St. John Paul II, who survived an assassination attempt; St. Stephen, the first martyr; St. Joan of Arc, burned at the stake after being convicted by an ecclesiastical court; and St. Jose Sanchez del Rio, a 13-year-old boy executed for refusing to renounce Jesus



during the Mexican revolution.

Father Torres, an author, speaker and spiritual director, was the keynote speaker at the bilingual retreat St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull. The day-long event on March 14 included group discussions, a procession of first-class relics, prayer, Confession, Adoration, and Mass celebrated by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano.

“The cross is the path of the radical disciple,” Father Torres told the nearly 150 men, from

teenagers to seniors. “There have been times like this before, but now there is a combination of factors that make them unique. Each time in history, the Holy Spirit rose up in the hearts of men, and he is doing that now, so I pray the Holy Spirit will descend upon you and set your hearts on fire.”

He assured the men that if they “lived for the Lord,” he would hear their prayers for their families and those who have lapsed from the faith.

“The Church is also your family and needs you,” he said.

He gave practical advice on how to practice radical discipleship in the home, starting with the family table, where Mass and Jesus should be the primary topics of discussion, not investments and careers. He also urged them not to let the role of provider overshadow the more important responsibility of providing love.

“A father must monitor everything that comes into the home through the internet, phones and the media,” he said.

Father Torres told the men to go to church and get involved and make service the fruit of their spiritual life, which should include Confession, praying at least 30 minutes a day, going to Mass, being emotionally present to their families, and standing up when something is not right so they can protect their families spiritually and morally.

Radical discipleship must focus on “learning to love, letting God love you and letting this love transform you and inspire you, which will be your homework for the rest of your life,” he said.

In his homily, Bishop Caggiano discussed the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector and said: “Brothers, we live both sides of this parable. Perhaps many times each day, we find ourselves looking upon the world and our neighbor with disdain. And it doesn’t occur to us how many times we are tempted to say, ‘I’m not like that guy. Lord, I’m doing a better job than he does. Look at him ... and he comes to church. He has some nerve.’”

He said the tax collector was willing to ask forgiveness, while the Pharisee was not.

“Self-righteousness can creep into our lives, so we must get on our knees and ask the Lord for

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

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Nuvance Health is joining Northwell

Parish News

Even now, The Passion of the Christ still serves faithful

By EMILY CLARK

TRUMBULL—Since the spring of 2004, millions have sat in awe watching Mel Gibson's award-winning film *The Passion of the Christ*. Focusing on the last 12 hours of Jesus' life, from the Garden of Gethsemane to his crucifixion at Calvary, it is, for many, a regular part of their Lenten observance. On Saturday, February 21, dozens of the faithful gathered in the St. Theresa School gymnasium to watch—for either the first or the fifth time—this classic film.

Sponsored by the Sursum Corda Young Adult Ministry at St. Theresa Parish, this Lenten Movie Night included not only a viewing of *The Passion of the Christ* but also fellowship, refreshments and a Q&A following the movie led by pastor Father Brian Gannon. With funds collected, this young adult group hopes to attend a silent retreat in March.

Marco Nogueira said he saw the movie when it was released 22 years ago and last year read the book *The Dolorous Passion of*

Our Lord Jesus Christ by Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich from which Mel Gibson took inspiration.

"I'm interested in the scene when, after the scourging, Pilate's wife gave linens to Mary," Nogueira said before the movie began. "I'd like to hear what Father Gannon will say about that."

Later, Father Gannon did speak on that scene, adding that several scenes in the movie are attributed to the mystical visions of Bl. Anne Catherine, who was beatified by St. John Paul II in 2004, the same year *The Passion of the Christ* opened.

"This movie reminds us of the extraordinary suffering of our Lord. It's all about the infinite love he has for each and every one of us, but it's also about the ugliness of sin," Father Gannon said. "We look at a crucifix today, and it's a bit of a sanitized version of what our Lord went through because of the scourging; it's a testimony to the brutality of what he endured."

During the scourging, when Jesus is brutally whipped by Roman soldiers in an extensive

and graphic scene, viewers see firsthand the exceptional evil, prompting attendee Tina Colaco to share, "It is a good reminder to me while watching this that the evil one is ever present. Just as we believe that God is present with us, the evil one is not far away."

Within the movie, evil is also portrayed by Satan—in the Garden of Gethsemane, during the scourging and on the Via Dolorosa.

"We see this androgynous figure—a creepy, ugly figure—and we trace the evil back to Satan. When the Blessed Mother and Satan lock eyes with each other, Satan looks more confident, but the humility of the Blessed Mother is far more powerful and far more beautiful. It's the palpable nature of evil," Father Gannon explained.

Another viewer questioned the relevance of Satan carrying a demonic child in the courtyard during the scourging, a scene Father Gannon calls a "twisted mockery." One of the most beautiful and poignant images in Christianity is Mary holding Jesus,



he said. "But here," he added, "in the midst of our Lord's scourging, is a twisted mockery with Satan holding the demon child and looking at Christ with mocking smiles on their faces. That scene mocks everything."

As other viewers asked about the portrayal of Pilate as a sympathetic character, the role of women in the movie or the characterization of Simon of Cyrene, Father Gannon commented that in many cases, such portrayals were mainly Mel Gibson's artistic interpretations. Though no one can be certain of the complete accuracy of each scene, the movie's profound impact leads many to think more about their faith.

Elaine Creatore previously saw *The Passion of the Christ* and believes the faithful should watch it every year.

"We are awed at what Jesus Christ did, so it's meant to be a part

of our Lenten observance," she said.

Barbara Bruderman agreed. "This is the third time I've seen it, and it's even better," she said. "It's good for meditation and perfect for Lent."

For Juliana Moskowitz, a member of the Youth Adult Ministry, it's also something she and her family watch every year, and she was glad others came out to see it.

"I enjoy this group, this ministry and the way we share the faith. And we chose this because it's Father Cosmin's favorite movie!" she said, attributing the selection to the parish's parochial vicar.

Father Gannon concluded the evening with a story of him bringing students from the Catholic school where he taught to see the movie when it premiered in 2004. One freshman girl, he remembered, said nothing about it for several days. He later learned that when prompted by her mother to talk about what she saw, this 15-year-old girl answered with a simple but profound comment: "Now I know how much Jesus loves me." ■

CONGRATULATIONS CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES!

"Heartfelt congratulations to you as you receive the Sacraments of Initiation! It has been a privilege to walk with you on this journey to full communion with the Church.

May the Holy Spirit continue to guide, inspire, and uplift you now and always."

Saint Edward the Confessor

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Betty Flores	



Saint Michael Parish in Greenwich

CONGRATULATES

Harry Collins
Darien Gonzales
Dylan McConway
Keira Pollock

May God who began
this good work in you
bring it to completion
on the day of Christ Jesus.
(Phil 1:6)

VOLUNTEERS FROM PAGE 8

Magdalene, to whom the risen Christ appeared first in the Gospel of John. Perhaps, she said, the women who attend the conference will be able to see themselves in her: first as unworthy, but then as the "Apostle to the Apostles."

"Have you ever been in her position feeling a little unworthy that he has called you?" Barretto asked. "But Mary (Magdalene) was brave and she stood by him and she was able to see his glory. If you have also been healed or saved or called by Jesus, listen to this calling and come and be present and be a witness of his resurrection." ■

"The whole body of the Church rejoices at the glorification of its sublime members"

(St. Leo the Great, *The Book of the Sacraments of the Roman Church*)

The Parish family of St. Leo, Stamford wants to congratulate its new members received this Easter Vigil.

Katherine Curry	Raasikh Joseph	Michael Pratico
Mark Edens	Emma Nielsen	John Spencer
Paulina Gerner	Patricia Palermo	Cameron Thompson

Parish News

‘The Ten Commandments’ as art, inspiration

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

DANBURY—On the eve of the Lenten season a spectacular one-of-a-kind showing of the 1923 epic movie *The Ten Commandments*, with live organ accompaniment, both enlightened and entertained more than 100 people gathered at St. Peter Parish.

“The showing of the film is part of our 175th anniversary celebration and (the movie) fits quite nicely in our liturgical year,” said pastor Father Gregg Mecca. He added that the film preceded the Sunday lectionary readings focused on God’s law including Sirach which begins: “If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you,” and the Gospel reading in which Jesus says: “Whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

The Ten Commandments silent movie by Cecil B. DeMille was shown on a giant screen in the Main Street church, accompanied by organist Peter Krasinski, who specializes in silent movie accompaniment.

“He has been with us three times before and what he does on the organ is a brilliant coordination of action with sound,” Father Mecca said. “It’s amazing how his improvisations are so perfectly aligned with the action on the screen.”

Krasinski has previously played the Peregallo Opus 574 pipe organ at the Gothic Revival style church to enhance silent movies presented there including *Speedy*, *The Cameraman* and *King of Kings*, over the past six years.

“During the *King of Kings* performance, the parish choir participated,” said Glenn Segger, director of music ministries at St. Peter Parish. “Since that was such a popular performance we thought we would go ahead and continue with the spiritual epic silent movie, *The Ten Commandments*.”

The century-old film is a story within a story which first depicts that of Moses and the biblical exodus, from slavery to the golden calf and then evolves into a modern tale of two brothers living in San Francisco in the 1920s with opposite moral paths—one

religious, one not—who both love the same woman. The movie focuses on the consequences of breaking the commandments in modern life, featuring themes of corruption and tragedy.

“I am fascinated by the second part of the play, the moral dilemmas,” said Father Mecca, adding, “I almost see our society today as not having changed much.”

As the movie played on the big screen, Krasinski watched on a smaller screen placed on the organ in front of him and imbued the movie with emotion through his entirely improvised and impassioned playing.

Krasinski said each time he plays the music accompaniment to a silent movie, it is different, even if he’s played the piece before, his interpretation at that



time will never be the same.

Some fascinating facts about the movie include the mere size of the movie set. DeMille built an 18-acre set depicting the “City of Ramses” in the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes of Central

California, making it the largest film set ever at the time. The set consisted of a 110-foot temple, an 800-foot-wide gate, 35-foot-tall statues of Ramses, and no less than 21 giant sphinxes. He also built an enormous tent city to

house the cast, extras and crew of 2,500, as well as 3,000 animals.

The film featured nearby St. Peter and Paul Church, which was under construction in 1924.

DeMille also filmed water pouring over two large blocks of gelatin, then reversed the film to make it appear that the Red Sea parted and stood as walls of water.

Father Mecca said not only is the message of *The Ten Commandments* an important one, but the movie offers insights and an appreciation of the film industry and the development of cinematography.

Steve Jacober, a parishioner of St. Peter’s for 35 years and a fan of Krasinski’s work, said he came to hear the organist play.

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

**CONGRATULATIONS
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EDITORIAL

Preparing for Holy Week

As I type out this editorial, we are fewer than two weeks away from Holy Week. Where did all the time go?

I must admit, even though Lent is a time to slow down spiritually and to become more intentional, it's been full speed ahead at the Diocese of Bridgeport, at least for me! I've had assignments for the paper nearly every weekend, meetings, and even just keeping track of what is happening when has been a bit overwhelming.

But it's nearly Holy Week, and now more than ever, it's time for me to slow down a bit.

It's often been said that the Book of Psalms is a written account of the full range of human emotion and experiences, but I think the same can also be said of Holy Week. And now more than ever, I want to walk with the Lord through it all. I want to feel the excitement of Palm Sunday, the contemplation of Holy Thursday, the grief of Good Friday, the anticipation of Holy Saturday and finally, the unabashed joy of Easter Sunday.

Personally, my favorite Holy Week tradition is the Seven Church Pilgrimage, which you can learn more about on page 27. Following one of my most treasured liturgies of the year, I have the opportunity to sit in silence with the Lord in seven of the churches in our diocese. And these opportunities for silence are becoming fewer and further between for me, making them all the more precious on this holy night.

More than anything, I think about how the Christ that's hidden away in the repository is the same one that was taken captive by Roman soldiers, and the same one that knew what was to come for him. I try to imagine what that was like for him in the late hours of Holy Thursday. This is not to brush off the horrors he'd endure the following day, but I know as well as anyone that anticipation can be awful as well. I wonder what was going through his mind, between his agony in the garden, his heartbreak at his friends' betrayal, and the knowledge and dread of what was to come.

I begin to wonder if he was lonely. I think he probably was. And that thought often leads me to linger just a little longer, and I spend just one more moment in silence with the one who died for me.

Join Bishop Caggiano in Mexico!

Join Bishop Frank J. Caggiano for a pilgrimage to Mexico from October 9 through 12, 2026!

The pilgrimage, titled "A Journey of Faith and Joy: Guadalupe to Girlstown," will bring the faithful through Mexico City to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and to the homebase of the Sisters of Mary. It will be hosted by Bishop Caggiano and Chris McMahon, philanthropist and founder of MFA Wealth and Aquinas Wealth Advisors.

Pilgrims will be able to visit the tilma of Marian visionary St. Juan Diego, take a sacred walk up Tepeyac Hill where Our Lady appeared to him, partake in daily Mass—including at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, learn about the work of Ven. Aloysius Schwartz and witness the great work of the Sisters of Mary, who are transforming the lives of poor children through education, faith formation and vocational training before sending them out into the world as missionary disciples.

Space is limited, so register today for this moving and inspiring experience centering on Our Lady of Guadalupe!

(To register for this pilgrimage, visit www.worldvillages.org/events/caggiano or call 800.662.6316.)

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Marggie Laurie named LAOH Honoree

STAMFORD—Stamford's Irish Catholic Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians (LAOH) are thrilled to announce that Marggie Laurie has been selected as their 2026 LAOH Honoree.

Laurie joined the Stamford LAOH in 2016. She has served in several capacities including President

of the Stamford LAOH, Secretary of the Connecticut LAOH and also Secretary of the Stamford Hibernian Association. She obtained the degree of the order in 2022 and is described as consistently living a life of amazing friendship, fierce loyalty and genuine Christian charity.

Laurie was honored at the

Hibernian's Annual Communion Breakfast at Stamford's Hibernian Hall on March 1. She was also honored at the Stamford Government Center St. Patrick's Day Flag Raising Ceremony on March 17, with the annual St. Patrick's Day celebration following at Stamford's Hibernian Hall. ■



CLERGY APPOINTMENTS

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

PASTOR

REVEREND MONSIGNOR MARK PINTO, appointed to serve as Pastor at Our Lady of Peace Parish, Stratford. Effective date was February 1, 2026, for a term of six years.

PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATOR

REVEREND BRENDAN H. BLAWIE, appointed to serve as Administrator at Saint Pius X Parish, Fairfield. Effective date is July 1, 2026, for a term of one year.

DEACON ERNEST HART, appointed to serve as Administrator of Saint Anthony of Padua Parish, Fairfield. Effective date was February 1, 2026.

EPISCOPAL VICAR

REVEREND SAMUEL KACHUBA, appointed to serve as Vicar for Young Adult Ministries. Effective date is July 1, 2026.

REVEREND COREY V. PICCININO, appointed to serve as Episcopal Vicar for Clergy and

Religious. Effective date is May 1, 2026, for a term of three years.

REVEREND SAMUEL SCOTT, appointed to serve as Episcopal Vicar for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. Effective date was March 1, 2026, for a term of three years.

RESIDENCE

REVEREND FERRY GALBERT, appointed to take residence at Saint Pius X Rectory, Fairfield. Effective date is July 1, 2026.

REVEREND JOHNSON SINGARAJAN, appointed to take residence at Saint Matthew Rectory, Norwalk. Effective date was February 1, 2026.

PRIEST MODERATOR

REVEREND ADRIANO BICCHERI, appointed to serve as Priest Moderator of Our Lady of Good Counsel Quasi-Parish, Bridgeport. Effective date was February 1, 2026, for a term of three years.

REVEREND DOAN VAN NGUYEN, SSS, appointed to serve as Priest Moderator of Holy Vietnamese Martyrs Quasi-Parish, Bridgeport. Effective date was March 1, 2026, for a term of three years.

OTHER

REVEREND GUSTAVO FALLA, appointed to serve as Assistant at Saint Thomas More Parish, Darien through April 30, 2026.

REVEREND FERRY GALBERT, appointed to serve as Diocesan Director of Vocations. Effective date is July 1, 2026.

REVEREND JOSEPH GILL, appointed to serve as a member of the College of Consultors for the Diocese of Bridgeport. Effective date was March 1, 2026, for a term of five years.

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

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Editorials



Finding our way back to God's love

COLLECTING MOMENTS

BY EMILY CLARK

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

For the past few years since my daughters have been in college, we've read together the Lenten reflections emailed to us each morning by my eldest's campus ministry office. Sure, we've missed a few here and there but make an effort to stay committed—our way of giving to each other rather than giving up something else. With only weeks left until Easter, the chosen readings from Scripture seem to become more profound, almost as if they're appearing just when I

need to hear them.

So busy I was this morning that I almost skipped over the email that dings my inbox regularly at 5:50 am. I'm glad I didn't, for I was greeted with a short but familiar passage from John 1:3: "See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are." An alumni from a recent graduating class had the privilege of reflecting on this and the sacredness of our Catholic identity, writing at one point, "On this day, we are called to pause and

consider the moments where we were lost and how we found our way back to God's love," as those belonging to him.

Lost? During Lent? This is one of those seasons of the year to feel most connected to God, one in which I typically identify most with being Catholic, meditating on Jesus' sacrifice, fasting more often than usual. We do tend to stray though, a result of all those other identities we have. I wouldn't say I was lost. Distracted is more like it.

Of all the parts we're meant to play, we are "children of God" first—from the moment of conception until natural death, as our priests remind each Sunday at Mass. Sometimes, like this morning, a more secular part takes over, pulling us away from that reality into what appears more important in the moment. Grocery runs. Doctors' appointments. Attending to others who need more care than we do. Yes, distracted it is.

I think about how, over the course of five decades, my identity has been defined by the roles I've had. As a child, I was simply my parents' daughter, my classmates' friend, my brothers'

and her friend, a tiny three-year-old, called out, "You're Abigail's mom!" Is this who I am now? I wondered at the time. But time it is that determines these roles, ones that can change in a moment. It's about remembering the one role that is eternal.

In rereading that familiar passage, I am reminded of the "love the Father has bestowed on us," on me and on all those who influence—and are influenced by—the roles I play. How do they help me become a more faithful child of God? And how do I do that for them? In these last weeks before Easter, I pray that my focus remains on that, and on Jesus himself to whom we belong.

As I picture my daughters reading this same passage, maybe while eating breakfast or walking to class, I hope their distractions cease for a moment as well, allowing them to remember that though they are my children, so loved and cherished, they are first "the children of God." ■

"Of all the parts we're meant to play, we are "children of God" first—from the moment of conception until natural death as our priests remind each Sunday at Mass."

sister. As an adult, I've been a wife, a mother, an aunt, teacher, friend, neighbor. I remember when my oldest was in preschool,



A spiritual 'to do' list

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

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

I have a lot of lists to help organize my chaotic life, starting with my notoriously long "to do" list, which is largely inspired by my wife—who has an even longer list of things (for me) to do.

It includes errands, such as go to dump, go to deli, go to car wash, get sale items at supermarket, get sale items at second supermarket and get sale items at third supermarket that they didn't have at first and second supermarkets. You get the idea.

I also have another tremendously long list of home improvements I've been meaning to do for years. They're projects like

fix leaky faucet, patch driveway, replace leaky windows, replace screens, replace garage door—around here, we need a lot of replacements.

I try to keep that list manageable, so if a project is on it for more than a year, I cross it off and forget about it. Let my descendants put it on their lists.

Then, there's my bucket list, which has the places I want to see before I head for the Great Hereafter, such as the Grand Canyon, the Louvre, Graceland and the Grand Ole Opry.

However, my most important list has nothing to do with errands, projects and vacations,

and it's by far the longest one. It's my prayer list, which I've had for years and keep adding to because if there's anything this sorry world needs, it's not more money or more politics or more opinions. It's more prayer.

I have several versions. The master prayer list is on my iPad so I can update it and print it out regularly. I keep a shorter version in my missal, which I take to Mass. I also have an abbreviated version on my nightstand, which includes people in really desperate need who asked me to pray for them. I review it when I say my Rosary.

Many people on my list have health issues, including cancer, physical infirmities, mental health problems and addictions. Or their family members do.

Others are suffering spiritually and don't even realize it. They've lost faith or they shun faith or they ignore faith and seek comfort in the enticements of the world.

Never hesitate to pray for people in need of conversion. The Blessed Mother told St.

Bernadette Soubirous in her apparitions at Lourdes to always pray for sinners. As St. Bernadette recalled, the beautiful lady said, "Penance, penance, penance. Pray to God for sinners."

Before Mass, I review my list and offer prayers for everyone—friends with cancer, a couple whose little daughter has serious disabilities, a couple who lost a child at birth, a woman who lost her job and can't find another one, a priest caring for his mother with dementia, a middle-aged woman trying to overcome a drug problem, a man caring for his aging mother with Alzheimer's, a professor who abandoned his Catholic faith long ago, a mother whose children and husband scoff at her religious beliefs, a man distraught because his marriage ended ...

It's a long list. They all need prayer. We all need prayer.

With prayer, there's always hope because prayer works. Every so often I go back over my master list and come upon names I forgot. And guess what? A person who left the Church returned and

is on fire with the love of Christ. A woman who had breast cancer has been in remission. A mother sad over her troubled child is happy because the troubled child found friends who brought her to Jesus. A person who was ill for a long time died a happy death. A happy death? Yes. It's a gift.

We'll never know the full benefit of our prayers until we meet Jesus face-to-face in heaven, but be certain of this: he will maximize the good that our prayers accomplish many times over because he's a master at getting the greatest possible returns on our spiritual investments.

Our prayers are like a spiritual 401(k), which we'll be able to appreciate in eternal life. So make investments now. And keep investing.

Anyway, I'm changing the way I do business. I'm tearing up the bucket list because in the next life, Jesus will have far greater wonders for me to experience than the Grand Canyon. But I'm hanging on to the to do list, because I really have to get the oil changed and the gutters cleaned. ■

Catholic Schools

Father Schmitz to headline St. Theresa School gala

By EMILY CLARK

He's a well-known Catholic priest and evangelist. He's a dynamic author, speaker and podcast host. He's a youth minister and college chaplain. He is Father Mike Schmitz, and he's coming to Connecticut—as the guest speaker at St. Theresa School's annual spring gala.

"This is going to be the Catholic event of the year for Fairfield County!" exclaimed school principal Barbara Logsdail. "We are very excited to have Father Mike here."

Planned for Friday, April 17 at Rolling Hills Country Club in Wilton, this gala, now in its fourth year, has previously welcomed other well-known members of the faith including Peter Wolfgang, president of Family Institute of

Connecticut Action; and Cardinal Raymond Burke, an American prelate of the Roman Catholic Church. Each year, Logsdail said, the school, which is rooted in the Catholic classical tradition, aims to honor someone in a position to evangelize or make school curricula stronger so students can become well-formed and virtuous adults. This year, she thought, wouldn't it be great to have someone like Father Mike?

"He has a dynamic personality, and people enjoy the way he speaks, the way he explains the catechism," said Logsdail, adding that he is so engaging when teaching the faithful how to read and interpret the Bible. "We don't feel like we're being judged by him. What he says makes sense."

With a strong online presence, this priest from the Diocese of

Duluth, Minn. has been instrumental in drawing in young people, especially those in their late teens and early 20s. His "Bible in a Year" and "Catechism in a Year" podcasts have been downloaded by millions.

"I feel Mother Angelica brought evangelization through television with EWTN, and I think Father Mike can really be considered the person who brought it to the internet," Logsdail said.

Though the students in kindergarten through eighth grade at St. Theresa School may not have yet listened to or even heard of Father Mike, their parents, teachers and the greater Catholic community certainly have. Tina Colaco, president of the school's advisory board, said she feels very blessed to have him at the gala.

"He is such a well-known name not just in Catholic circles but in Christian circles too. Many Protestants also follow him," said Colaco, whose daughter graduated from this Trumbull school several years ago. She remained on the board because she believes in the importance of the classical model.

"The curriculum and the people are so Christ-centered. The students can really talk about the faith, and that's important to me," she added. "Everything taught is in keeping with Christian principles. I also see these wonderful teachers who embody their faith."

According to Logsdail, all Catholic schools should be trying to do the work of evangelization. "That's why we're a Catholic school and not a secular school, so the work Father Mike does inspires all of us. It's a great opportunity to have him here," she said.

Funds raised from the gala, Logsdail explained, will go toward the maintenance and repair of the facility. Following the recent renovation of the school gymnasium, they will now focus on the four student bathrooms—two boys rooms and two girls rooms—which have not been touched since 1957. Additionally, the school security system needs to be updated.

"Many of our students benefit from the Bishop's Scholarship Fund, and we're grateful they have the opportunity to receive such a strong elementary school



education," Logsdail continued. "That helps so much with their scholarship and tuition but doesn't cover all of the other things that are needed to run a school which is why we need these fundraising efforts."

The annual spring gala will feature dinner, a 50/50 raffle, an auction which includes an image of Our Lady among other items, and, of course, a talk by Father Mike. Additionally, the St. Theresa School choir will be singing, and students' artwork will be displayed, all to showcase, as Logsdail said, "how we are forming the children here at St. Theresa."

VIP sponsors will have the chance to meet and talk with Father Mike an hour before the event begins at 6:30 pm.

(For tickets and information on the annual spring gala and on Father Mike Schmitz, visit the St. Theresa School website at www.sttheresa-schooltrumbull.org.)



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WOMEN'S CONFERENCE VENDORS FROM PAGE 8

sions, one of the women's faces broke out, so Wright offered her some of her homemade face lotion.

"She tried it and she cleared up," Wright said. "And she's like, 'This stuff's amazing! We should stop selling empanadas and start selling this.'"

From there, Our Lady's Face took off—and expanded. The products run the gamut from moisturizers to body scrubs, hair oils and even men's cologne and beard oil. Wright said that sometimes, she and Casa Guadalupe's residents refer to their product's namesake as "Our Lady of the Immaculate Complexion" because in all of her apparitions throughout the world, the Blessed Mother always has flawless skin.

But according to Wright, the desire to have "Our Lady's face" goes beyond just having beautiful skin.

"All of us want to have Our Lady's face," she said. "We want to not just to look like her, but to be like her, to have her presence with us, to have her heart with us, to become more like her."

(To purchase tickets for *ARISE: The King is Calling Your Name*, visit www.tinyurl.com/WINEBpt26. Early bird discounts are available through March 25, and registration closes April 4.)

*“Become his one family:
in the one Christ, we are one.”*

Pope Leo XIV



ONE *in Christ*

2026 Bishop's Appeal

DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT



ONE *in Christ*

2026 Bishop's Appeal

"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**

Accompanying Our Neighbor

The **Institute of Catholic Formation** coordinates services among the parishes, including the **Satellite Faith and Formation Center Program**, which accompanies more than 1,000 children in the Bridgeport and Danbury communities, providing faith and sacramental preparation directly within their community. Demand continues to grow each year.

"Last year was my daughter's first year in the First Communion program. The materials used were very helpful, and the wonderful part was that they were provided in both English and Spanish, which allowed me to be part of my daughter's learning process. The Diocesan Danbury Satellite is very organized and serves the Hispanic community in such a beautiful way."

- Dilcia De La Cruz, St. Peter Danbury

The new **Pastoral Companions Program** will empower over 1,000 dedicated Eucharistic Ministers to accompany the isolated, grieving, and ill. Ministries such as the parish-based **Peace in the Storm** for those with physical and emotional suffering, **Diocesan Guilds, Walk with One**, and the **Ambassadors**, create opportunities for friendship, discipleship, healing, and outreach to those who feel especially distant from the Church.



Fostering Works of Goodness

Aaron lost his job, his home and was angry and hurt. He found assistance through **Catholic Charities** New Covenant Center in Stamford. Counselors mentored and accompanied him on his journey to find a place to live, refocus and begin his job search.

"God puts people in your way. Help was given to me, and I am thankful for the staff and volunteers. I obtained my new apartment through one of their programs that assists people who are unhoused, are seeking employment and are motivated to move forward with their lives."

- Aaron May, Catholic Charities, Client

Respect Life Ministry strives to build a culture of life, providing accompaniment, healing, education, and advocacy through initiatives like **Project Rachel** and **Walking with Moms in Need**.






\$8 MILLION
Bishop's Appeal Goal

For more information about all the work that is made possible thanks to the collective generosity of the faithful, visit:



2026BishopsAppeal.org

Celebrating the Truth in Jesus Christ

A vocation to the priesthood is a profound call. 38 men are currently in formation for the priesthood, receiving guidance and support on their journey so they may one day accompany others in their ministry.

"I want to help people discover their true identity as sons and daughters of God. I desire to bring them closer to the graces offered through the sacraments, and to walk with them on their journey toward Christ—listening, offering spiritual direction, and ultimately celebrating with them the sacred mysteries."

- Herley Mendez, *seminarian*



Forming the People of Our Diocese:

The **Called By Name, St. Andrew Dinners** invite men to learn about the priesthood. In 2025, over 300 men were recommended by fellow parishioners.

The **St. Jerome Center** assists priests, deacons, and laity to preach, lead, and evangelize more effectively.

The **Apologetics ministry** is engaging believers and seekers, communicating the truth of Jesus Christ with clarity, reason, and compassion.

The **Institute of Catholic Formation** is exploring new initiatives to foster opportunities to encounter Christ, welcome new parishioners, and expand faith formation.



BECOME A LEADER: GIVE & JOIN THE COURT OF HONOR

The *Court of Honor* offers special recognition to those individuals or families who have demonstrated extraordinary generosity to the Bishop's Appeal by contributing gifts of \$2,500 or greater.

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

For more information, please visit 2026BishopsAppeal.org, call (203) 416-1470 or email 2026BishopsAppeal@diobpt.org.

BECOME A SUSTAINING DONOR!

Sustaining gifts are secure and convenient, and they allow the Diocese of Bridgeport to better plan for current needs and future growth to make a lasting impact. They also allow your donations to be more timely and cost effective. Once you set up a sustained gift, it will repeat at that monthly amount and continue from year-to-year until you change or cancel it.

To become a sustaining donor, check the sustained monthly gift option box on your commitment card or the online giving form.

WAYS TO GIVE:



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Please do not send cash.



MATCHING GIFTS:

Contact (203) 416-1312 for more information



GIFTS OF SECURITIES:

Contact (203) 416-1470 for more information



ONLINE:

Scan the QR code at left, or visit:
2026BishopsAppeal.org



Catholic Academy of Bridgeport

Golf Classic to honor NDP's head of school

BRIDGEPORT—On May 18, the Catholic Academy of Bridgeport will hold its 14th Annual Golf Classic at the Country Club of Fairfield. This event is the final major fundraiser of this academic year, with proceeds going toward the over \$3 million in need-based scholarships that have to be raised annually by June 30.

“As 85 percent of CAB families live at or below the poverty level and 96 percent receive need-based assistance, the success of the Golf Classic is critical for us to continue to provide an education with ‘Something More’ in the city of Bridgeport,” said Susan Cecere, CAB’s director of development.

The outing will include great door prizes, a delicious barbeque lunch, a full day of golf on the beautiful links-style course and contests on the course. Following golf, there will be a cocktail reception with a dinner buffet, auction and brief program honoring Dr. Christopher Cipriano, head of school at Notre Dame Prep of Sacred Heart University (see sidebar).

“We are so grateful to Chris, a great friend and partner of CAB, for allowing us to honor him,”



said Angela Pohlen, CAB’s executive director.

Pohlen often refers to CAB as “the great equalizer” in a city that struggles with providing the same opportunities to its students as those living in other Fairfield County ZIP codes.

“Despite CAB receiving \$0 per-pupil funding from the state, we do more with less and have superior results,” she explained.

“We’re not just a great school for Bridgeport; we’re a great school, full stop,” said CAB Board Chair John Kreidler. “We are able to educate each of our students for less than half of what public and charter schools spend. We also raise all of our needed funding privately. We are ‘the little engine that could,’ ensuring that our students achieve their immense potential and that they

have a strong, faith-based foundation to live a successful life of leadership and service.”

One hundred percent of CAB alumni graduate from high school and 99 percent go on to college or a post-secondary school.

(Foursomes, sponsorships and cocktail reception tickets sell out quickly! To register, go to www.CABgolf2026.givesmart.com, email rbobroske@catholicacademybridgeport.org or call 203.378.2310.)

Honoree for CAB Golf Classic

Dr. Christopher Cipriano has been a strong advocate for the students of the Catholic Academy of Bridgeport for almost two decades through his role as Head of School of Notre Dame Prep (NDP) of Sacred Heart University. He is a committed partner and a supporter of CAB’s mission and provides generous financial aid to help our students attend NDP.



Cipriano has served at Notre Dame in various roles since 1998, including teacher, assistant principal, athletic director and director of admissions.

Cipriano holds a bachelor’s degree from Fairfield University and a master’s degree and doctoral degree in education leadership with a focus on social and emotional learning from Sacred Heart University.

MEN’S CONFERENCE FROM PAGE 9

forgiveness for the times we have failed, the times we have sinned and the times we have betrayed the Lord,” the bishop said. “Let us ask, ‘Lord, be merciful to me, at times a Pharisee, and help me see where I’ve become self-righteous, where I’ve closed the door of my heart to your grace and forgiveness.’”

Bishop Caggiano thanked Father Torres and the organizers, and urged everyone to reflect on the “immense, indescribable love of God for us, that Christ chose to die to redeem mankind.”

He suggested they spend time in reflection “on the fact that if you were the only person who ever lived, Christ would have endured all that for you, so if you are worth that much before the Father, then we have to work to allow every human heart to discover what we have discovered in Jesus Christ.”

“Whether we’re on our knees or in moments of self-righteousness, he’s always loving, and that is a message this crazy, messed up world needs to hear now more than ever,” he said.

Afterward, Steven Filizzola, special assistant to the bishop, who led the team that organized the retreat, said: “The men were inspired and challenged to embrace radical discipleship, a total commitment to follow Jesus Christ despite the obstacles and sacrifices. Father Agustino provided the path for us to travel—a profound and passionate dedication to fall in love with God through faith, acts and love.”

He said the men were enthusiastic about next year’s theme, which he described as “spiritual friendship, in which men help one another on their spiritual journey to find love, peace, devotion and true faith as the pathway to heaven.”



CATHOLIC ACADEMY OF BRIDGEPORT

Something more.



14th

ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC



Register Online

MAY 18, 2026

Country Club of Fairfield
936 Sasco Hill Road, Fairfield, CT

HONORING
Dr. Christopher Cipriano,
Head of School Notre Dame Prep

Limited to 24 foursomes
Reserve your spot today!
Questions? Call 203-378-2310

Youth News

Sacred Heart teens off to strong start this Lent

By CECILIA BOWERS

Editor's Note: Cecilia Bowers is the youth leader at Sacred Heart Parish in Greenwich.

GREENWICH—Thanks to the St. John Paul II Fund for Faith Formation, our relatively new Youth Ministry had the flexibility to grow and host events that made this Lenten season a meaningful start to our community's journey. What a wonderful way to begin Lent as our youth follow Jesus' call to serve others and care for our neighbors!

Lent is more than giving things up; it's an invitation to grow closer to God through service, compassion and intentional time together.

Last month, 24 high school teens and nine Confirmation candidates participated directly in our Lenten outreach, with



additional parishioners contributing food even when they could not attend. Together the teens prepared 270 sandwiches for Covenant House and Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, providing meals for individuals in

need. Their teamwork and commitment were inspiring examples of faith put into action.

Our outreach also included a Tea Party for parish seniors, attended by 24 seniors. The teens were attentive and respectful,

helping make the afternoon warm and joyful for our elders. We also held Stations of the Cross followed by a relaxed pasta and movie night—an opportunity for reflection and fellowship that helped teens and leaders grow closer as a community.

On Saturday, February 28, 18 teens spent three hours serving through Neighbor to Neighbor, offering meaningful labor and compassion to support local families. We are deeply grateful to all the teens, parents and volunteers who made these events possible. ■

Guided by Mary

DANBURY—At a time when our Church and our communities urgently need young people of integrity, courage and faith, one local ministry is answering that call with conviction. CREW—Leaders for Mary (CLFM)—is dedicated to forming the next generation of Catholic leaders today.

Founded on May 3, 2022, CLFM was consecrated and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano on September 8, 2023, during Mass on the Patronal Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. From its beginning, the ministry has been rooted in Marian devotion and committed to raising up teenagers who lead with faith, virtue and responsibility.

CLFM's mission is clear and simple: to save souls through authentic Catholic formation by providing opportunities for deeper spirituality, leadership development, and accompaniment to Jesus through Mary.

In a culture that often leaves young people spiritually adrift, CLFM offers a path anchored in truth, tradition and the beauty of the Church. The ministry's educational programs provide moral, spiritual, and leadership formation designed to help teens grow in character, confidence and responsibility. The goal is not simply to prepare them for the future but to empower them to positively influence their communities right now.

Every young person who enters the CLFM receives formation that is both deeply Catholic and profoundly practical. They are invited to become a leader who serves

with humility and conviction; build an authentic relationship with Christ through Mary; learn the truth and tradition of the Catholic faith; fall in love with the Church, especially the Sacraments and the sacredness of the liturgy; pursue holiness and the salvation of their soul through devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and gain

a community that supports, challenges and walks with them. In a world where many teens feel isolated, unseen or spiritually disconnect-

ed, CLFM ensures that they are never alone.

CLFM is more than a leadership program. It is a movement of young people discovering their identity in Christ, learning to lead with virtue and stepping forward as the responsible, faith-anchored leaders our Church and world desperately need. Through retreats, formation sessions, service opportunities and Marian devotion, these teens are being shaped into witnesses of hope.

As the Church looks toward the future, ministries like CLFM remind us that renewal begins with formation rooted in truth, guided by Mary and lived out in courageous leadership.

(CREW—Leaders for Mary is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in the Greater Danbury area. To learn more, visit www.crewlfm.org.) ■



EASTER TRIDUUM - TRIDUO PASCUAL

THE CATHEDRAL PARISH

ST. AUGUSTINE CATHEDRAL & ST. PATRICK CHURCH

March 30 - April 5

† 170 Thompson St. Bridgeport, CT. 06604 | (203) 368-6777
office@thecathedralparish.org | www.thecathedralparish.org

Reconciliation Monday - March 30

Confessions: 3:00-9:00 PM

St. Augustine Cathedral

Holy Thursday - April 2

Chrism Mass: 10:00 AM, St. Augustine Cathedral

(No 7:00 AM Mass at St. Patrick)

Mass of the Lord's Supper: 7:00 PM

- St. Augustine with **Bishop**
- St. Patrick - Vietnamese
- Adoration: Following 7:00 PM Mass to midnight



Good Friday - April 3

Morning Prayer: 9:00 AM, St. Patrick

Stations of the Cross: 10:00 AM Procession from St. Mary to Our Lady of Fatima (with **Bishop**)

Celebration of the Passion:

- 3:00 PM English, St. Augustine (with **Bishop**)
- 7:00 PM Spanish, St. Patrick
- 7:00 PM Vietnamese, St. Augustine



Holy Saturday - April 4

Morning Prayer: 9:00 AM, St. Patrick Chapel

Easter Vigil: 8:00 PM

- St. Augustine Cathedral with **Bishop**
- St. Patrick Church - Vietnamese
- Note: No confessions or 4:00 PM Mass

Easter Sunday - April 5

- 7:00am St. Augustine | 8:30am St. Patrick
- 10:00am St. Augustine | 11:30am St. Augustine (Español)
- 2:00pm St. Augustine (Vietnamese) | 4:00pm St. Patrick (Igbo)



Please note: There are no confessions or 4:00 PM Mass on Holy Saturday

The One

Immaculate triumphs at first Theology Bowl

By ROSE BRENNAN

DANBURY—Immaculate High School juniors Maximillian August and Robert Pattison emerged victorious at the Diocese of Bridgeport's first Theology Bowl championship on Saturday, March 14.

The Theology Bowl was held at Immaculate and hosted by the diocesan apologetics office. Three



high schools were represented at the March 14 championship round: Immaculate, Cardinal Kung Academy in Stamford at St. Joseph High School in Trumbull.

Prior to the first round, students could be heard quizzing each other on Marian dogmas, Bible verses and the origins of sacraments, preparing themselves for what was to come. And after an opening prayer from Father Philip Phan, Immaculate's chaplain, it was off to the races.

Eight teams faced off against each other in the elimination round—four teams of two from Immaculate, two teams of two from St. Joseph and one team of three from Cardinal Kung. Quizmaster Suan Sonna, the diocese's director of apologetics, informed the teams that there would be no points awarded in the elimination round. Rather, for the first 20 questions, it would be "three strikes" for incorrect answers. After the first 20 questions, teams could only have two strikes.

"This is survival," Sonna joked.

Eventually, the pack whittled down to two teams: August and Pattison from Immaculate and Will Evans, Chris Iturralde-Manriquez and Johnny Weaver from Cardinal Kung. Guest judge Father John Connaughton, pastor of St. Cecilia-St. Gabriel Parish in Stamford, joined Sonna to judge the final rounds.

Both teams nailed all eight written questions, confidently holding up whiteboards with their answers. And so, it all came down to the oral argument section.

Each team was asked to pick one member to offer a spoken answer to a specific question. They were given six-and-a-half minutes to prepare the answer and three minutes to deliver it.

In the first round, Immaculate was asked to explain the difference between initial and final justification, while Cardinal Kung was asked to explain three ways by which the Church can teach infallible. In the second round, Immaculate explained the communication of idioms, and Cardinal Kung explained the

meaning of natural law theory in Catholic moral teaching.

Following a brief lunch break, Immaculate's team was declared the winner and received a \$600 prize. The team from Cardinal Kung received a second place prize of The Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma by Ludwig Ott, which Sonna called "probably the most systematic and clear exposition of the Catholic faith in print." The third place team—Sophia DaSilva and Shayleigh Barrett of Immaculate High School—received personal-sized Ignatius Catholic Study Bibles.

Pattison said he learned about the theology bowl at school, and was inspired to participate.

"I knew that I knew a little bit

about Catholic theology, and I'd love to study and learn more," he said. "I thought it'd be a great opportunity to compete and participate in stuff that was in the Catholic community and support the apologetics mission of the diocese."

While August said he thought winning was "a nice culmination of all the effort we put in," he was also very complimentary of his and Pattison's opponents from Cardinal Kung.

"Based on my conversations with them, Cardinal Kung seems even more invested and involved in apologetics," he said. Yeah. "They had a really good showing. I think both teams deserved to go as far as we did."

For their victory lap, August and Pattison were put up against an ultimate test: a team of Diocese of Bridgeport seminarians consisting of Joseph DiProperzio, Bill Izuazu and Joseph Perotta. To even the odds, Iturralde-Manriquez from Cardinal Kung's team joined the pair from Immaculate.

After a round of trivia questions, the teams once again presented oral arguments. Notably, Immaculate's team was asked how they would bring the Eastern Orthodox Church back into communion with the Catholic Church, while the seminarians were asked which Marian dogma they'd like the Church to officially declare.

Ultimately, the seminarians emerged victorious—but not by much, just nine points.

"I have heard from Bishop Caggiano and every adult who watched the competition about how encouraged they are in seeing our young people brilliantly answer these theology questions," Sonna said of the theology bowl. "I know that the students were passionate, and many were asking for harder trivia questions. Our young people will know the Faith!"

Saint Theresa

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
The Mother Church of Trumbull

Rev. Brian P. Gannon, *Pastor* — Rev. Peter Anumaka, *Parochial Vicar* — Rev. Cosmin Cimpoesu, *Parochial Vicar*
Deacon Gerald M. Lambert — Alex Hodgkinson, *Music Director*

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE 2026

MONDAY – WEDNESDAY
Daily Mass – 8:00 am, 12:00 pm and 5:30 pm

WEDNESDAY, April 1
Tenebrae Service – 7:30 pm

HOLY THURSDAY – April 2
Morning Prayer – 8:00 am
Celebration of the Lord's Supper – 7:30 pm
Adoration at the Altar of Repose –
8:30 pm to Midnight

GOOD FRIDAY – April 3
Morning Prayer – 8:00 am
Commemoration of the Lord's Passion – 3:00 pm
Solemn Stations – 7:30 pm
Good Friday is a Day of Fast and Abstinence from Meat

HOLY SATURDAY – April 4
Morning Prayer – 8:00 am
Blessing of Easter Food – 12:00 pm
Easter Vigil – 8:00 pm
(Attendance at Vigil satisfies obligation for Sunday)

EASTER SUNDAY – April 5
(Please note change from regular Sunday schedule)
7:00 am, 8:00 am, 9:30 am, 11:00 am and 12:30 pm

CONFESSION SCHEDULE
Tuesday – 7:00-9:00 pm
Holy Thursday – 3:30-4:30 pm
Good Friday – 11:00 am-12:00 pm and 4:30-5:00 pm
Holy Saturday – 11:00 am-12:00 pm



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Foundations in Education

Bishop's Scholarship Fund impacts students' lives

SHELTON—The mission of the Bishop's Scholarship Fund (BSF) is to help families afford a Catholic education. Over the past year, BSF awarded nearly \$3 million in tuition assistance to families with children attending diocesan elementary schools in Fairfield County.

Families with children currently enrolled—or newly applying—to a diocesan-sponsored Catholic elementary school in Fairfield County (grades K–8) who demonstrate financial need are encouraged to apply online at www.FACTSmgt.com/aid. Applications are reviewed and award decisions are made by the Bishop's Scholarship Fund Committee without regard to race, religion, ethnicity or gender. Families are notified of award decisions through FACTS, and scholarship funds are distributed directly to the school on behalf of the student.

Applications opened on February 1. The deadline for returning families is March 15, and the deadline for new families is April 15.

The impact of the Bishop's Scholarship Fund is best reflected in the students it supports. One recipient, Greyce, is described by her principal, Patricia Brady at the Catholic Academy of Stamford, as "an outstanding



young woman with a bright and promising future. She is well poised, well spoken and well prepared for her next step in Catholic education at Notre Dame Prep of Sacred Heart University."

Greyce served as the student speaker at the 2025 Foundations in Education Gala, where she shared her gratitude for the schol-

arship support she received and the difference it has made for her and her parents.

"Greyce is well respected in our school community and exemplifies the qualities in The Portrait of a Graduate at the Catholic Academy," Brady said.

Brady is one of Foundations in Education's (FIE) Gala honorees. FIE will host its annual Gala at Woodway Country Club on Wednesday, April 15, 2026. Proceeds from the Gala support Foundations in Education's mission to provide tuition assistance for low-income students and innovation grants for teachers in the classroom. Guests will enjoy an engaging program led by auctioneer Pat Tully.

(To purchase sponsorships, tickets or advertisements, please visit: www.foundationineducation.org/fie-gala/tickets-sponsorships-and-ads. If you wish to support Foundations in Education or volunteer with the 2026 Gala, please contact Emily Carriero-Burger at emily@foundationineducation.org or call 203.416.1671.) ■

FIE spring gala set for April 15

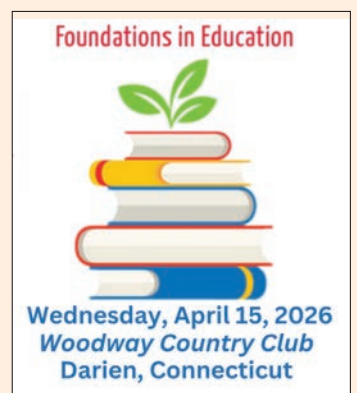
SHELTON—Foundations in Education (FIE) will host its annual Gala at Woodway Country Club on Wednesday, April 15, 2026. Proceeds from the Gala will benefit Foundations in Education's tuition assistance programs for families and innovation and leadership grants for teachers.

FIE exists to strengthen Catholic elementary education by providing tuition assistance to families, supporting innovation in classrooms and offering leadership and professional development grants for teachers. Through these efforts, the organization helps ensure that students receive a faith-filled education rooted in academic excellence, character formation and service. FIE has awarded over 14,000 scholarships valued at \$29 million since inception.

FIE will be honoring the Invest in Education Foundation; Patricia Brady, Catholic Academy of Stamford principal; and Terry O'Connor, Kolbe Cathedral Preparatory School board chair.

The evening will include a reception, program and live auction beginning at 6 pm. Guests will enjoy a lively program led by auctioneer, Pat Tully and performance by the Kolbe Cathedral Preparatory School and Pro Players the Group. Guests will also have the opportunity to hear from current scholarship recipients and alumni.

(To purchase sponsorships, tickets or advertisements, visit www.foundationineducation.org/fie-gala/tickets-sponsorships-and-ads. To support Foundations in Education or volunteer at the gala, contact Emily Carriero-Burger at emily@foundationineducation.org or call 203.416.1671.) ■



THE PARISH OF ST. CECILIA – ST. GABRIEL



PALM SUNDAY- March 29th

Saturday Vigil Masses

St. Gabriel 4:00 p.m. St. Cecilia 5:30 p.m.

Sunday Masses

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

HOLY WEEK

St. Cecilia Church

Holy Thursday - April 2nd

Mass of the Lord's Supper 7:30 p.m.

Altar Repose until 11:30 p.m.

Good Friday - April 3rd

Liturgy of the Lord's Passion 3:00 p.m.

Stations of the Cross 7:00 p.m.

Holy Saturday - April 4th

Blessing of the Easter Food 12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Solemn Easter Vigil 8:00 p.m.

EASTER SUNDAY - April 5th

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

St. Cecilia Church ~ 1184 Newfield Ave

St. Gabriel Church ~ 948 Newfield Ave

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FROM PAGE 11

"His interpretations highlight what the organ in this church can really do," he said.

Some moviegoers were cuddled under warm throws they brought with them to enjoy the near 3-hour performance. Popcorn and water were provided for free.

Conversations during intermission echoed the sentiment that it was easy to forget that the music was not originally part of the movie.

"I thought it would be a good way to spend the evening," said Cecilia Burns, a parishioner at the Sacred Heart of Jesus campus in Danbury. Burns, a flautist, attended the performance with her mother. "It's great to experience this live," she said of the performance. ■



Catholic Schools

All Saints names Angel Benefit honorees



NORWALK—All Saints Catholic School is proud to announce the distinguished honorees for its annual Angel Benefit, set for Saturday, May 9 at the Water’s Edge at Giovanni’s in Darien. This signature fundraising gala recognizes individuals who exemplify the values and mission of Catholic education and provide extraordinary support to the school and community.

“Our 2026 honorees represent the very best of leadership, dedication and faith,” said Steven Virgadamo, head of school. “From Mrs. Dunn’s 50 years of service to Bishop Caggiano’s tireless advocacy and the Devine and Sylvestri families’ vital philanthropy, each of them has profoundly strengthened the mission of Catholic education in Norwalk and beyond.”

This year, ASCS will present

four prestigious awards to leaders whose commitments to faith, service and philanthropy have left an indelible mark:

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Award

The St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Award is the highest and most prestigious honor given by ASCS, named for the founder of Catholic schools in the United States. It recognizes an honoree who has played a significant role in the founding and growth of All Saints Catholic School.

Linda Dunn is being recognized for her 50 years of dedicated service to Catholic education, a milestone celebrated with the “Faithful for 50” campaign. As principal of All Saints Catholic School since 2011, Dunn has championed the education of the whole child, bringing her expertise in curriculum design and notably opening the All Saints Catholic

School Learning Academy for Special Education in 2018. She is a true model of sustained faithfulness and leadership.

St. John Neumann Award

Named after the patron saint of Catholic education, the St. John Neumann Award is presented to a priest in the Diocese of Bridgeport who manifests leadership in the promotion of ASCS and Catholic education.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano is being honored for his tireless advocacy and leadership in Catholic education across the diocese. He is the visionary behind Foundations in Education, which began as the Bishop’s Scholarship Fund in 2015. This foundation has distributed millions in tuition assistance, ensuring that hundreds of families—including many from ASCS—can access quality Catholic education regardless of their financial situation.

St. Aloysius Gonzaga Award

The St. Aloysius Gonzaga Award is named for the patron saint and model for servant leadership. It is given to a community leader committed to improving the quality of life in greater Norwalk.

Jay and Cathy Devine are being recognized for their deep ties to the Catholic education community, as their five children all attended All Saints Catholic School. They are active members of St. Philip Parish in Norwalk and are both proud alumni of Central Catholic High School. Their commitment to the local community extends through generous support for vital organizations embodying the qualities of servant leadership.

St. Katharine Drexel Award

The St. Katharine Drexel Award is named for the second American-born saint and patron

saint of philanthropists. It is given to an individual influential in providing or securing philanthropic support for All Saints Catholic School.

Ron and Donna Sylvestri are honored for their lifelong commitment to philanthropy, leadership, and service. Through their generosity, advocacy, and dedication to faith based and nonprofit organizations, they have had a lasting impact on their community and on All Saints Catholic School. Their support reflects a deep belief in education, compassion and the responsibility to give back in meaningful and enduring ways.

(To learn more about the event, purchase tickets or sponsorships, visit www.allsaintsnorwalk.com or contact Eileen D’Andrea at mrs.dandrea@ascs.net or 203.847.3881, Ext. 5.) ■

ST. JAMES

HOLY THURSDAY
8:00am-Morning Prayer
7:30pm
Mass of the Lord’s Supper
Adoration until 10:00pm

GOOD FRIDAY
8:00am-Morning Prayer
Noon-2pm-My Personal Way of the Cross
3:00pm-Passion of the Lord
7:00pm-Stations of the Cross

HOLY SATURDAY
8:00am-Morning Prayer
10:00am-Food Blessing
12:15-1:30pm-Confessions
7:30pm-Easter Vigil

EASTER SUNDAY
8:00 & 10:00am (no 5pm Mass)

HOLY NAME OF JESUS

HOLY THURSDAY
7:30pm
Mass of the Lord’s Supper
Adoration until 10:00pm

GOOD FRIDAY
3:00pm-Passion of the Lord

HOLY SATURDAY
12 Noon-Food Blessing
7:30pm-Easter Vigil

EASTER SUNDAY
7:30 & 10:00am

OUR LADY OF PEACE

HOLY THURSDAY
8:00am-Rosary & Morning Prayer
7:00pm
Mass of the Lord’s Supper
Adoration Following

GOOD FRIDAY
8:00am-Rosary & Morning Prayer
3:00pm-Passion of the Lord
7:00pm-Stations of the Cross

HOLY SATURDAY
8:00am-Rosary & Morning Prayer
11:00am-Food Blessing
11:30-12:30pm-Confessions
7:30pm-Easter Vigil

EASTER SUNDAY
8:30 & 11:00am

OUR LADY OF GRACE

HOLY THURSDAY
7:30pm
Mass of the Lord’s Supper
Adoration Following

GOOD FRIDAY
1:00pm-Outdoor Stations
3:00pm-Passion of the Lord

HOLY SATURDAY
1:00pm-Food Blessing
7:30pm-Easter Vigil
1:30-3:00pm-Confessions

EASTER SUNDAY
9:00 & 11:30am

ST. MARK

HOLY THURSDAY
7:30pm
Mass of the Lord’s Supper
Adoration Following

GOOD FRIDAY
11:00 to Noon-Confessions
3:00pm-Passion of the Lord
7:00pm-Stations of the Cross

HOLY SATURDAY
1:00pm-Food Blessing
7:30pm-Easter Vigil

EASTER SUNDAY
7:30, 9:30, 11:30am
Live Stream on Thursday, Friday, Vigil and 9:30 Easter Sunday

Holy Week Celebrations

Please see individual Parish websites for more detailed information

Finance News

Diocese releases audited financials

BRIDGEPORT—In the continued practice of full transparency, the Diocese of Bridgeport has released its Consolidated Financial Statements for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2025.

Mac Bryant, CPA, the diocese's Chief Financial Officer, said, "Consistent with the prior year, the independent auditing firm issued an unqualified opinion that the financial statements presented fairly in all material respects, the financial position of the diocese for the fiscal years ended June 30, 2025, and June 30, 2024. This opinion should give the faithful Catholics within the diocese confidence that their donations are handled properly, and that the diocese has sound stewardship practices."

The audit report presents a consolidated financial position with an increase in net assets of \$14.8 million, from fiscal year 2024 to 2025.

"In particular, we are grateful to all of the generous supporters, whose contributions of time, talent and treasure have fueled tremendous growth in the diocese, and in particular to its many ministries such as The One, a major priority for the diocese, which leads to a lifelong personal encounter with Christ and the Church's accompaniment throughout this process," he said. "I am thrilled that Mass attendance has increased 22 percent since 2021, and this is a sign that the diocesan ministerial initiatives, led by the Holy Spirit, are bearing fruit."

Financial Transparency

At the time of the publication of this article, the Voice of the Faithful (VOTF), an independent organization of Catholics promoting transparency in the Church, which reviews the financial transparency and accountability of 143 dioceses and 33 archdioceses by analyzing transparency practices and policies and website disclosures, had not yet published its results for 2025. For 2024, the Diocese received an excellent rating for its transparency. Based on discussion with this entity, our understanding is that once again, the Diocese of Bridgeport received a respectable rating (rated higher than the vast majority of dioceses in its 2025 annual report on diocesan financial transparency practices, policies and procedures.

"This very good rating assigned to the Diocese of Bridgeport should provide further comfort to our faithful that the diocese remains committed to transparency and adherence to best financial practices," he said. "In addition, we continue to follow transparency and not-for-profit industry best practices mandated by Bishop Caggiano upon his arrival in 2013. Under Bishop Caggiano's leadership, we remain committed to full financial transparency and best practices."

The newly released Consolidated Statements of Financial Position reports total assets of \$143.5 million, liabilities of \$31.7 million and net assets of \$111.9 million as of June 30, 2025. This is compared to total assets of \$127.3 million, liabilities of \$30.2 million and net assets of \$97 million as of June 30, 2024.

The audited Consolidated Statements of Financial Position from more than a decade ago, as of December 31, 2013, reports total assets of \$95.7 million, liabilities of \$108.8 million and a net deficit of \$13.1 million. This turnaround in the diocesan financial position is clear evidence that the fiscal strategy initiated by Bishop Caggiano upon his arrival in 2013 has worked.

The Consolidated Statement of Activities reports revenues, support and other changes totaling \$58.1 million and total expenses of \$55.2 million, resulting in income from operations before depreciation of \$2.9 million for the year ended June 30, 2025. This is compared to revenues, support and other changes totaling \$57.6 million and total expenses of \$52.4 million, resulting in income from operations before depreciation of \$5.2 million for the year ended June 30, 2024.

Continued Diocesan Support

During the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, the diocese recognized increased support and revenues in many areas of its operations. The Annual Bishop's Appeal (ABA) and the development office, led by Joseph Gallagher, focused ABA efforts on partnerships with parishes on achieving the ABA goal of \$8 million and increased participation for 2025, which remained virtually unchanged from the prior year goal. Revenue recognized as of June 30, 2025, totaled

\$9.1 million compared to \$8.8 million as of June 30, 2024.

The ABA also provided rebates to parishes for cash over-goal amounts collected to be used to support parish operations, contribute to other diocesan parishes in need, or charitable giving. Rebates to parishes which exceeded ABA goals totaled approximately \$1 million, the highest rebates ever, indicating strong participation in the ABA.

Bryant mentioned, "In recognition of the 2025 Jubilee Year and in the spirit of mercy and forgiveness, under the direction of Bishop Caggiano, the diocese forgave \$1.12 million of parish debt owed to the diocese, as of July 1, 2025, as reflected in the subsequent event footnote of the audited financial statements."

Cathedraticum revenue is an assessment on parishes based on certain revenue to support the administration of the diocese—remained stable at \$6.4 million for both 2025 and 2024.

Cemetery revenues decreased to \$11.2 million as of June 30, 2025, compared to \$11.1 million as of June 30, 2024.

Nonoperating activities include gain on sale of assets, pension related changes, investment returns, financial support to other diocesan entities such as schools and parishes, and other activities considered to be more unusual in nature or nonrecurring. Change in net assets from non-operating activities totaled an increase of \$14.8 million as of June 30, 2025, as compared to an increase of \$7.6 million as of June 30, 2024. These changes are further details in the Consolidated Statement of Activities. This major change is related primarily to the following: an increase in the gain on sale of assets of \$17.4 million; an increase in support of diocesan-related entities of \$15.3 million; and an increase in the beneficial interest in Foundations in Faith from \$7.3 million.

The diocesan investment strategy is annually reviewed by a diocesan-wide investment committee, led by Joseph D. Roxe in fiscal year 2025, and other volunteer investment professionals from throughout the diocese. The investment strategy has a current long-term goal of 6.5 percent annually, net of expenses.

Controlling Expenses

Bryant said, "We strive to exercise good stewardship practices, carefully balance the ministry financial support with controlling operational expenses and spending. Operating expenses increased moderately due primarily to expanded support to diocesan entities, inflationary pressures, and expanding ministries."

The Consolidating Schedule of Activities reports "diocesan operations" total revenue and support and other changes of \$28.3 million, expenses of \$27.1 million, resulting in income from operations before depreciation of approximately \$1.1 million for the year ended June 30, 2025. This is compared to total revenue and support and other changes of \$28.3 million, expenses of \$25.6 million, resulting in income from operations before depreciation of approximately \$2.7 million for the year ended June 30, 2024.

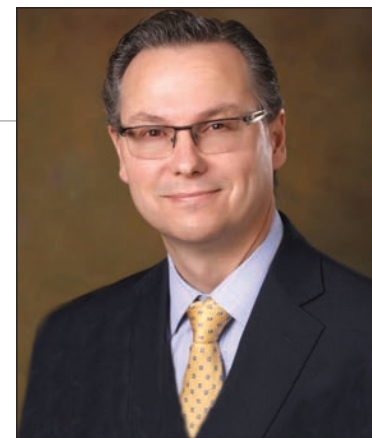
"The audit reports positive operational results for the ninth consecutive year, a goal targeted by the bishop and the diocesan finance council as part of our fiscal strategy mandates," Bryant said.

Employee benefits and insurance programs continue to be the largest expense recorded within the Consolidating Statement of Activities totaling \$19.3 million, as compared to \$19.1 million in 2024. On the Consolidated Statement of Functional Expenses, religious and lay personnel costs totaled \$15 million in 2025, compared to \$14.6 million for 2024. Grants and contributions from the Consolidated Statement of Functional Expenses remained relatively unchanged at \$6.2 million for both 2025 and 2024.

Grants and contributions support seminary formation, mission-related, educational and youth programs including the Redemptoris Mater Seminary, Bishop's Scholarship Fund within Foundations in Education, Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, the Cardinal Shehan Center, The One, and other diocesan-related programs.

Future Focus

"While the diocese is financially strong, it still faces many long term financial challenges in the following key areas: price inflationary pressures have driven up



costs with many vendors and contractors, most significantly in the annual increase in medical benefit and insurance costs, the underfunded diocesan lay pension plan, and the unfunded liability related to the postretirement priests' medical and dental plan," Bryant said. "The multi-employer lay pension plan (frozen to new participants in 2008), continues to be a focus of a sub-committee of the diocesan finance council, to explore alternatives and develop recommendations to resolve the underfunding of the lay pension plan. Based on actuarial estimates, the minimum necessary annual contribution to this pension plan is between \$4-5 million to satisfy its future pension obligations."

Effective July 2025, the diocese formed the St. John Vianney Trust (Trust) as a separate funding entity during fiscal year 2026, dedicated solely to care for retired diocesan priests. The Trust manages and ensures adequate funding for priest pensions, medical and other post-retirement benefits and other priest retirement costs. Priests' postretirement medical benefits are paid as incurred and totaled \$580,000 in fiscal year 2025. Priest pension and other postretirement benefit obligations liabilities account for approximately \$11.4 million or 36 percent of total liabilities as of June 30, 2025 (\$11.2 million or 36 percent of total liabilities as of June 30, 2024).

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

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

Catholic Charities

Merton Center to host Celebrity Breakfast



dignity, compassion and hope. Community participation and sponsorship support sustain these vital services that help ensure no neighbor in Bridgeport goes without food, care or opportunity. (For more information about the event, ticket sales or sponsorship opportunities, please contact Marianne Kahn at mkahn@ccfc-ct.org or call 203.520-9507. Tickets are also available at www.TMFCBreakfast.givesmart.com.) ■

By **MARIANNE KAHN**

BRIDGEPORT—The Thomas Merton Family Center, a program of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, will host its 32nd Annual Celebrity Breakfast on May 13, 2026, from 7 to 9 am at the Martire Family Arena at Sacred Heart University. The annual event brings together community leaders, supporters and neighbors to raise critical funds for services that provide meals, case management and essential support to families facing food insecurity and financial hardship throughout Greater Bridgeport.

This year's featured guest speaker is former National

Football League quarterback Matt Hasselbeck. Hasselbeck played 18 seasons in the NFL, most notably with the Seattle Seahawks, where he led the team to multiple playoff appearances and a Super Bowl appearance in 2005. A three-time Pro Bowl selection, he later served as an NFL analyst for ESPN before transitioning into coaching and community service initiatives. A graduate of Boston College, his faith and commitment to charitable work supporting families and education continue to guide his efforts off the field.

During the breakfast program, the Thomas Merton Family Center will present the Joe Mulcahy Award to Bill Tommins

in recognition of his longstanding dedication to serving neighbors in need and his generous support of charitable efforts throughout the community. His leadership and commitment to helping others reflect the spirit of compassion and service that the Joe Mulcahy Award honors each year.

The Thomas Merton Family Center continues to meet rising demand as many households face ongoing economic pressures. In addition to serving daily breakfast and lunch meals, the Center provides a client-choice food pantry, case management support, housing assistance, job readiness programs, and connections to health and social services designed to foster long-term

stability and independence.

Recent service statistics from the first two months of the year highlight the scope of the Center's outreach. In January and February, the Eat Smart pantry served 1,165 households, which is over 3,720 individuals. In addition, TMFC provided emergency groceries to over 80 households through the pantry. During that same period, the Center provided 17,252 meals, including 6,132 breakfasts and 11,120 lunches.

Funds raised through the 32nd Annual Celebrity Breakfast will directly support these essential services and help ensure that every person who walks through the Center's doors is welcomed with

People of Hope Museum to visit Fairfield County

By **MARIAH KASPAREK**

FAIRFIELD—Every day across Fairfield County, the staff and volunteers of Catholic Charities encounter moments that stick with them. These are occasions marked by courage, vulnerability and profound resilience—experiences that reflect the humanity at the heart of the mission of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County.

Stories of service are at the center of "People of Hope: Faith-Filled Stories of Neighbors Helping Neighbors," a nationwide storytelling initiative designed to amplify the profound impact of Christian service. The People of Hope Museum is an immersive experience housed in a retrofitted tractor-trailer that is touring the United States for two-and-a-half years. From April 1 to April 2, the museum will be hosted by Catholic Charities of Fairfield County at Fairfield University behind the Mahoney Arena. Guests can visit at no charge. Hours are April 1 from 10:30 am to 5 pm and April 2 from 2 to 6 pm.

Through the People of Hope Museum, visitors can watch first-person video accounts from staff and volunteers of Catholic Charities agencies across the country about meaningful and memorable encounters with families and individuals in need. Visitors will also be able to share

their own stories of hope and service through the on-site recording studio, explore U.S. and state-level poverty data through visual displays, experience an interactive poverty simulation and listen to audio book excerpts about poverty, social isolation, bridge-building and community action from authors such as Arthur Brooks, Oprah Winfrey, Matthew Desmond and Robert Putnam.

Here in Fairfield County, Catholic Charities accompanies individuals and families facing hardship through programs such as the Thomas Merton Family Center, New Covenant Center and Morning Glory Breakfast Program. These services meet immediate needs, but they also nurture the hope that can grow when people feel seen, supported and valued.

"Fairfield County is consistently ranked number one in the United States in income inequality. Rising costs for housing, food, childcare and basic needs have forced many of our hardworking neighbors to struggle to pay rent and put food on the table," said Mike Donoghue, executive director of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County. "The stories you will see in the People of Hope Museum serve as an important and timely reminder of the great need in our community and how rewarding it can be to serve a neighbor in need. Our Catholic faith compels us to put our faith into action. We all can

make a meaningful impact in our community by lifting up another human being and treating them with dignity and respect."

The stories shared at Catholic Charities of Fairfield County each day deepen our understanding of the needs in our community and inspire our ongoing work. The agency invites community

members to learn more about this work and consider getting involved through volunteering or other forms of support.

"Please join us for the People of Hope Museum exhibit on April 1 and 2 at Fairfield University," said Donoghue. "I believe you will find it to be a sobering, educational, but

uplifting experience to see the work that Catholic Charities and the Catholic Church across the diocese are doing to assist our neighbors in need. You will see how you can make a significant impact in your community. We are a people of hope, and we all need to lean on each other during our times of need." ■



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HOLY WEEK 2026

<p>PALM SUNDAY † MARCH 28 & 29</p> <p>Saturday Vigil Mass: 4:30pm</p> <p>Sunday Masses: 7:30am, 8:45am</p> <p>10:00am Family Mass</p> <p>11:30am Choir Mass & 5:15pm</p> <p>MERCY MONDAY † MARCH 30</p> <p>Confessions heard from 3:00pm to 9:00pm</p> <p>HOLY THURSDAY † APRIL 2</p> <p>8:00pm Mass of the Lord's Supper</p>	<p>GOOD FRIDAY † APRIL 3</p> <p>3:00pm Veneration of the Cross</p> <p>7:00pm Stations of the Cross</p> <p>HOLY SATURDAY † APRIL 4</p> <p>8:00pm Easter Vigil Mass</p> <p>EASTER SUNDAY † APRIL 5</p> <p>Sunday Masses: 7:30am, 8:45am</p> <p>10:00am Family Mass</p> <p>11:30am Choir Mass</p>
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Obituaries

Deacon Paul Reilly, 87

Deacon Paul Reilly passed away on Saturday, March 14, 2026. He was 87. Born on March 22, 1938 to Thomas and Winifred Reilly, he was baptized and received the Sacrament of Confirmation at St. Mary Parish in Norwalk. He attended Norwalk High School.

On December 5, 1970, Paul and Margaret were married at St. Philip Parish in Norwalk, and together raised four children: Kathleen, Anne, Elaine and Karen. Paul served two years active duty in the U.S. Army and four in the Army National Guard from October 1961 to October 1967. After Paul was widowed, he received permission to remarry, and married Barbara at St. Philip Parish in 2000.

Deacon Reilly was ordained to the permanent diaconate on June 9, 1990 by Bishop Edward M. Egan at St. Augustine Cathedral in Bridgeport. Paul was assigned to serve at St. Philip Parish in Norwalk, where he remained in joyful service until his retirement on February 28, 2015.

Deacon Reilly had a lifelong career as a carpenter and builder, and successfully ran his own business. He spent many hours of volunteer work at St. Philip prior to his ordination, coordinating their youth group and being an integral member of the parish faith formation team, which he continued throughout his diaconal ministry.

The wake was held at Collins Funeral Home in Norwalk on Thursday, March 19. The Funeral Mass was at St. Philip Parish on Friday, March 20. Bishop Frank J. Caggiano was the celebrant, and Father Michael Boccaccio was the homilist. Committal followed at St. John Cemetery in Norwalk.

Mass for grieving parents on May 9

NEWTOWN—A special Mass for parents who have suffered the loss of a child will be held on Mother's Day weekend at the Little Angels Shrine at Resurrection Cemetery.

The Mass will be celebrated by Father Peter Cipriani, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish, assisted by Deacon Don Ross, on Saturday, May 9 at 4 p.m. at 208 South Main St. in Newtown.

"We want to support all grieving parents who have lost a child, including those who silently suffered the loss of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth or infant loss, no matter how long ago," said Carolyn Killian, director of bereavement of Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport. "We invite any parent who is grieving to join us that day."

The special Mass will fulfill the Sunday obligation.

At the Mass last year, Killian said many people told her how grateful they were.

"They had suffered in silence for many years and often hid on Mother's Day and didn't want to talk about their loss," she said. People were invited to write the names of their children on cards, which were brought up with the offertory gifts and kept at the altar. Killian recalls one card in memory of a miscarried baby that said, "Unnamed but loved."

The Little Angels Shrine is dedicated to babies who have gone home to God, said Kenn Devane of Catholic Cemeteries.

"This consecrated ground honors the memory of all deceased children, and offers a reverent place of prayer and healing for parents and others who have experienced the death of a child," he said.

The shrine has an altar area with seats and benches for services, surrounded by 14 Carrara marble Stations of the Cross on granite platforms. There are five memorial walls where remains, when available, are buried, and a plaque is affixed to the wall. When remains are not available, a plaque honoring the child is placed on a memorial wall at the shrine.

Depending on the need, a priest or deacon will offer a Committal Ceremony one Saturday each month to bury the remains of any miscarried babies, Killian said. The Catholic Cemeteries will work individually with families who request the burial of a stillborn baby or a baby who died shortly after birth. There is no charge for the service, burial or plaques or inscriptions.

"Losing a baby, at any stage and in any way, leaves an imprint on the soul," said Andrea DePaola, a mother who lost a baby through miscarriage. "It changes the shape of your heart. And yet, in places like the Little Angels Shrine, there is a gentle reminder that we are not alone. The Church walks with us, teaches us to hope, and assures us that these little ones—though unseen—are forever held in God's merciful care. Here, little ones are remembered; grief is seen; and love has somewhere to go."

Quoting Jesus, Father Cipriani



said: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves."

"When Jesus made this statement, I believe he had grieving parents in mind," Father Cipriani said. "What is the Church if not the Body of Christ? And from this Body, Christ especially extends his arms to embrace these parents and their families, and drawing them to his Sacred Heart may provide them with that comfort, consolation, that healing and hope that only his Body, the Church, can provide."

Killian said that Mother's Day can be a painfully difficult day for anyone who has lost a child, since this secular holiday is widely celebrated.

"Most people buy cards and flowers for their mothers and grandmothers and thank them for the special role they have played in their lives," she said. "We know, however, there are countless women whose hearts are breaking on this Sunday in May, since they are living with the unthinkable—they have lost a child. But when we pray for strength, support and healing, God sends someone to walk with us."

An estimated 20 million Americans have experienced the death of a child. Research shows that bereaved parents are more likely to suffer depressive symptoms, poorer well-being and health complications.

In addition, one in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage, and each year about 24,000 babies are stillborn in the United States.

"Sometimes when you are in pain, just being with others who have experienced the same loss can bring profound comfort," Killian said. "We invite anyone who believes in the power of prayer and the healing power of community to join us on May 9 so we can walk together."

(For more information on interment options at the Little Angels Shrine, visit www.bit.ly/4sD2vJp.)



At St. Joseph High School, our students are challenged and inspired. They are celebrated and supported. But most importantly, they are cared for and they are known. See for yourself why so many students choose St. Joes.



Spring Open House: April 8, 2026, 6:30pm-8:00pm

Shadow Days

Scheduling now for the future Class of 2031!

First Look: High School Search & Admission Summit
May 20, 2026, 6:30pm-8:00pm

Personal Family Tours

Schedule Online

Visit sjcadets.org/visit to see the many ways you can discover St. Joes for yourself!

Trumbull, CT | www.sjcadets.org | admissions@sjcadets.org

Holy Week

Seven Church pilgrimage: A treasured tradition

By FATHER JOSEPH MARCELLO

Editor's note: Father Joseph Marcello is the pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull.

One of the cherished customs of Holy Week, which many people cite as one of the highlights of their whole year, is the custom of visiting Christ in the Blessed Sacrament at seven churches on the night of Holy Thursday. In recent years, many people have discovered or rediscovered this ancient and beautiful custom, one which speaks deeply to the heart on a most holy night, a night which is filled with graces and blessings from the Lord.

Every year on Holy Thursday, at the conclusion of the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, the Mass does not end as usual; instead, the celebrant, servers and the assembled faithful process with the Blessed Sacrament from the altar to a beautifully decorated repository usually located outside the church's sanctuary—either at a side shrine, or in the lower church, or elsewhere.

This movement from the altar to the repository is an entering into the moment at which Jesus and the Apostles left the Upper Room, crossed the Kidron Valley, and made their way into the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ underwent his agony of anguished prayer.

During his time in the Garden of Gethsemane, an additional suffering for Christ was that he found his disciples asleep during his hour of need. "He said to Peter, 'So you could not keep watch with me for one hour?'



Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26: 40-41).

Through the centuries, generations of Catholics, moved by this haunting and poignant question of Christ, have responded to him from their own time and place, accompanying him in his agony in the Garden by maintaining a vigil of prayer and presence with him at the repository, which represents the Garden of Gethsemane, on Holy Thursday night. There they are present before the same Christ, now in the Eucharist, who suffered in the Garden on Holy Thursday.

Some people prefer to remain in prayer at one repository, perhaps in the same church where they attended the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Others visit the Blessed Sacrament at and pray in

up to seven churches. The practice of visiting seven churches on Holy Thursday seems to have originated with St. Philip Neri (1515-1595) who, to foster the faith and devotion of the people of Rome, organized pilgrimages to visit Christ in the Eucharist in churches around the city on Holy Thursday.

As they walked from church to church, the group would sing and pray while fasting, uniting themselves with Christ in his agony. St. Philip Neri's pilgrimage itinerary included the four major basilicas of Rome—St. Peter's in the Vatican, St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, and St. Paul Outside the Walls—as well as three of its principal minor basilicas: St. Lawrence Outside the Walls, Holy Cross in Jerusalem (in Rome), and St. Sebastian Outside the Walls.

In St. Philip's time, and until the Holy Week reforms of Pope Pius XII in 1955, the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the morning, so this pilgrimage extended through the remainder of the day. In our own time, the Mass of the Lord's Supper is fittingly celebrated in the evening, and adoration at the repositories is maintained for a prolonged period after Mass, with many parishes extending it until midnight.

"The Mass of the Lord's Supper always weighs on my heart as Our Lord begins his passion," said Andrew Pavia, a parishioner at St. Catherine. "After Mass, while praying at our

repository at St. Catherine's, I would always find myself wanting to give more to Our Lord, as he asks his disciples, 'Could you not stay with me one hour?' It's not possible for me to just go home and continue on with my regular routine of life at that moment, because we are entering into the beginning of Our Lord's passion on Holy Thursday night."

For Madisen Palmieri, making the visits to the seven churches on the night of Holy Thursday with her mom, Lisa, has become an annual tradition, one to which they both look forward.

"Visiting the seven churches is a good way to really bring your preparation for Easter to a culmination and center yourself for the

events coming up for the next few days," she said.

She continued: "It is important to be in the right frame of mind to truly understand what is happening. The whole experience is deeply moving, and it definitely furthers your connection to Jesus and what he went through. You are traveling along with him and praying with him. What could be more important than that?"

John Esteves echoed this, saying, "On the night before his Passion, Jesus asked some of his chosen Apostles to stay and keep watch with him. What a privilege it is for us to do the same, and to pray with Jesus before we enter into the events of his passion and resurrection."

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Column: Apologetics



Why do bad things happen to good people?

NO NEED TO APOLOGIZE

BY SUAN SONNA

Suan Sonna is the apologetics director for the Diocese of Bridgeport.

When someone asks us, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” we need to remember three things. The first is that there are limits or boundaries in how we approach this problem. The second is to

propose explanations that might make sense of evil. The third is to share how we and the saints have faced suffering.

Let us begin with some boundaries. You are not obligated to give the answer to the problem of evil. In a sense, that is actually

God’s responsibility. For example, it is possible that there are many reasons why God allows evil, but we will not live long enough or lack the brainpower to process those reasons. Whatever answers we propose are simply proposals and not dogma. People should therefore seek whatever answers make the most sense to them without denying the goodness, power and existence of God.

The other boundary worth mentioning is that our explanations for God’s permission of evil do not imply that evil is OK. When Joseph forgives his brothers after they sold him into slavery, denying him the chance to see his mother Rachel again

before she passed, Joseph says, “Even though you intended to do evil to me, God intended it for good” (Gen. 50:20). The evil was evil, and yet God still brought about a good, redemptive ending. In other words, our proposed answers are not meant to belittle or downplay someone’s suffering.

The final boundary worth remembering is that there will ultimately be justice for victims. St. John writes, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). St. Paul famously declared, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55). Our faith tells us that evil and death will not have the last word. Thus, the problem of evil is really a question of “delayed” rather than “denied” justice.

Someone might protest that “justice delayed is justice denied.” From the perspective of human courts, dealing with human beings limited by space and time, human courts should deliver justice sooner rather than later. On the other hand, St. Paul writes in his own prison cell, “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

God, in other words, is working from the perspective of eternity and humans as immortal souls, and therefore he too is giving justice in a timely manner but from that vantage point.

This response might be cold comfort. It is not saying that suffering is unserious from an eternal perspective. Rather, it is saying that suffering does not eliminate the eternal and that we should not despair and thereby tell death that it will ultimately win.

It seems clear that God is not working under an ordinary human timetable and that he retains certain privileges, reserved for the divine nature alone, in how and when he dispenses justice.

There is, however, a bit more we can say, especially since theologians down the ages have proposed many explanations for

God’s allowance of suffering.

The most famous explanation is probably the “free will defense.” In short, God has given us the freedom to choose good or evil, rather than artificially limiting our freedom and making us robots. If he made us robots, he would have eliminated evil, but he also would have eliminated the possibility of true, genuine love and real relationships.

There are many other “theodicies” or explanations for why God allows evil. For example, perhaps God wants certain people to exist as they are, which involves the permission of evil and suffering. Think of someone like Helen Keller who was blind, deaf, and mute. God wanted Helen Keller to exist and be a source of hope for others; he found her beautiful and worth creating as she was. On the other hand, she would not have existed—or at least a significantly different person—if all evil and suffering were eliminated. This is known as the “non-identity theodicy” and was proposed by the philosopher Vince Vitale.

Obviously, one theodicy will cover some—but likely not every—instance of evil. This is why, as I said with the first boundary, people should seek whatever answers (plural) make sense to them.

Finally, we should reflect upon and share what has worked in our lives or look at the saints, many of whom suffered horribly. Moreover, we should be God’s presence to those who suffer and, as God did in the Incarnation, share in the pain of humanity, reminding people that they are not alone or burdens.

In my own life, I have lost close friends. One died of a disease that caused her to lose every memory of me before she passed. As I reflect upon the doctrines of Catholicism, that there is a soul deeper than just the body and that the resurrection of the dead is coming, I know that I will see her again thanks to Christ’s victory over death and that she never truly forgot me because she was not just atoms in motion but a beautiful, everlasting soul now in heaven.

(To submit a question for Suan to potentially answer in an upcoming issue of *Fairfield County Catholic*, email suan.sonna@diobpt.org.)

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Sports

Giaquinto to receive Gold Key award

By DON HARRISON

PLANTSVILLE, Conn.— Nick Giaquinto is unique. He reached the heights in football as an athlete—he played in back-to-back Super Bowls with the Washington Redskins (now the Washington Commanders)—and as a coach in another sport.

For 29 seasons, he was the head coach and guiding light behind Sacred Heart University baseball, leading the Pioneers to the 1992 NCAA Division-II World Series, elevating the program to Division I in 2000, and then directing the team to four NCAA regional tournaments.

In recognition of these accomplishments and other highlights, the Bridgeport-born, Stratford-reared Giaquinto will receive the prestigious Gold Key award at the Connecticut Sports Media Alliance's 83rd annual Gold Key Dinner on Sunday, May 17 at the Aqua Turf Club in Plantsville, Conn.

Gold Keys will also be presented to James Jones, highly successful coach of Yale men's basketball; Kara Wolters, a two-time first-team basketball All-American at UConn; Dave Wallace, a pitching star at the University of New Haven and later an outstanding Major League pitching coach whose resume includes the 2004 World Champion Boston Red Sox; and Rachele Fico, an unhittable softball pitcher at Masuk High and Louisiana State.

Nicholas Albert Giaquinto's early football career encompasses two years as an All-State running back at Stratford High and a

first-rate performer at two universities—Bridgeport and, after UB disbanded its program, UConn.

Nick was the Huskies' leading rusher for two seasons (1975, '76), he tied the school record for longest kickoff return, 100 yards against New Hampshire in 1975; and he still holds the university's single-game rushing record—277 yards against Holy Cross in 1976—in his final collegiate game.

"UConn has been playing football since 1896, and to have the highest single-game rushing record in school history is pretty cool," he said.

Giaquinto's step up from UConn to the NFL required a combination of determination and resilience. He failed to survive free agency tryouts with the Giants (1977), Jets ('78) and the Ottawa Rough Riders of the Canadian Football League ('79). In the interim, he played semi-pro ball with the Connecticut Sea Raiders of the Atlantic Football Conference and completed his degree requirements at UConn.

In the fall of 1980, Giaquinto finally earned a position with the Miami Dolphins, appeared in all 16 games and responded with nine receptions for 192 yards and a touchdown. "After getting cut three years and having (coach) Don Shula tell me that I'd made the Dolphins was a dream come true," he said.

Giaquinto was released by the Dolphins in mid-season 1981, but it was his good fortune to be picked up by the Redskins, thanks to an assistant coach, Dan Henning, who had been with Giaquinto in Miami and

recommended him.

In consecutive Januarys, 1983 and '84, Nick and the Redskins played in pro football's championship game, Super Bowls XVII and XVIII. On the team led by quarterback Joe Theismann and running back John Riggins, the



NICK GIAQUINTO

5-foot-11, 205-pound Giaquinto generally performed in a supporting role. He provided pass protection for Theismann, returned punts and kickoffs, and caught an occasional pass.

Significantly, his most noteworthy contribution to Washington's 27-17 victory over the Dolphins in Super Bowl XVII, achieved before 103,667 fans in the Rose Bowl, was a crunching block on a blitzing linebacker.

"We were up 20-17 and driving for another score," he recalled. "I made a nice block on Bob Brudzinski, knocked him down. Theismann threw a touchdown pass and that clinched it for us."

More than two dozen family members and friends, including his parents, Anthony and Helen Giaquinto, and his Stratford High coach, Pat Caseria, were present.

The 1983 NFL season was Giaquinto's most productive. Washington won the NFC East Division with a 14-2 record, and Nick was the club's fourth leading receiver with 27 catches and 372 yards. He also set up an early touchdown in the Redskins' 51-7 rout of the Los Angeles Rams in the divisional playoff with a

48-yard punt return.

However, Washington came up short in Super Bowl XVIII, bowing to the Los Angeles Raiders, 38-9. And shortly thereafter, Nick made the decision to retire.

"I left pro football because I wanted to get out in one piece," he said. "I knew it was just a matter of time before the bumps and bruises took their toll or a major injury occurred."

Nick was pursuing a master's degree in education at George Mason University and serving as assistant baseball coach when he learned Sacred Heart was seeking a new baseball coach. "When the SHU job opened up, I applied." Athletic Director Dave Bike hired him as coach, director of intramurals and coordinator of events and practices in the small campus gym known as the SHU Box.

In his fourth season at the helm, the Pioneers assembled a 27-9 record, swept the Northeast Regional and competed in the D-II World Series in Montgomery, Ala.

Asked to compare his 1992



squad with his four D-I teams that won Northeast Conference titles and advanced to the NCAA regionals, he responded:

"Very similar in the sense that we had solid pitching and were very good defensively. All of our championship teams fought through the struggles that they encountered individually and as a team. It takes talent and commitment to win a championship, and all of these teams made that commitment."

Three of Giaquinto's later SHU proteges would advance to the Major Leagues: pitchers Troy Scribner (2017) and Jason Foley (2021), and infielder Zack Short (2021).

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POR MARICARMEN GODOY

DANBURY—Ricarda López, de diez años, alumna de la catequesis parroquial, pidió al Padre Frank, al finalizar la misa dominical donde el sacerdote habló de cómo Jesús le devolvió la vista a un ciego, pidió le firmara el boletín como parte de la prueba de asistencia para seguir avanzando en sus estudios de Confirmación. Ejercicio que hicieron decenas de niños que como ella, junto a sus padres, pertenecen a la parroquia y están estudiando para recibir los sacramentos.

El Padre Francis “Frank” Snell, vicario de la parroquia de St. Peter (San Pedro) en la misa en español de las cinco de la tarde del cuarto domingo de cuaresma; hizo una reflexión sobre cómo Jesús curó a un ciego el sábado, día de descanso del pueblo judío y cómo sus retractores (fariseos) trataron de opacar este milagro porque no era permitido hacer nada ese día porque estaba en contra la ley de Moisés;

sin embargo, Jesús respondió que era el “Hijo del Hombre...; Yo soy la luz del mundo!”, (Jn.9:35v)

Con esta analogía, dio paso al anuncio sobre un curso especial de seis semanas para preparar a los feligreses al sacramento de la Confirmación. “Es una pequeña luz para quienes necesitan la confirmación”, dijo; así cómo la parroquia se prepara para la celebración del 175 aniversario de fundación

En el boletín del domingo 13 de julio del 2025 el Padre Gregg Mecca, superior y párroco general de la Parroquia de San Pedro, anunció la venida del Padre Frank, un sacerdote nativo de New Haven, con un español perfecto, que a primera vista parece ser un hispano más de la comunidad y no un caucásico estadounidense.

“Me complace anunciarles que otro sacerdote, el Padre Frank Snell, se une a nuestro personal. Llega a nuestra diócesis y parroquia con una amplia experiencia en atención pastoral y, como expárroco, en administración. El

Padre Snell es un exlegionario de Cristo y pasó gran parte de su sacerdocio en Perú. Es bilingüe y, por eso, el Obispo Caggiano pensó en nosotros. El obispo me sugirió el nombramiento cuando estuvo aquí para la Confirmación. Reconoce la magnitud del ministerio que se lleva a cabo en nuestra parroquia y cómo ha crecido más allá de las posibilidades”, escribió el Padre Mecca.

A la salida de la misa de cinco, los niños del catecismo esperaban al Padre Snell para que estampase su firma en los boletines parroquiales como señal de que vinieron a la eucaristía. Y él, como si fuera un chiquillo más, jugó con ellos mientras firmaba los papeles.

En ese encuentro con los niños y sus padres, narró que vivió varias décadas en Perú, Chile, Centroamérica y el Caribe y que su formación la hizo en la Pontificia Universidad Católica de los Jesuitas así como en Roma; pero, al enfermar su madre decidió regresar a New Haven para cuidarla y pidió a la Arquidiócesis de Hartford que le permitieran servir ahí.

Y, poco después fue trasladado a la Diócesis de Bridgeport donde se siente agradecido con el Obispo Frank J. Caggiano quien decidió acogerlo y enviarlo a la parroquia de San Pedro, donde fue nombrado vicario parroquial y se encuentra completamente feliz. “Cuando se hace lo que le gusta cada momento de su vida no solo se es feliz sino que se siente tanta gratitud en el cora-



zón”, repuso el sacerdote.

Anuncios

Durante la Cuaresma los padres Snell y Klein confesarán en español los miércoles de 5:30 a 7 pm. El Lunes de Reconciliación se confesará en español en la iglesia Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.


El grupo de oración Siervos de Cristo invita a vivir la conmemoración y muerte de nuestro Señor Jesucristo a través del viacrucis actuado que se llevará a cabo este 29 de Marzo a las 6:30 pm en el sótano de la parroquia.

Se invita a todos los adultos que no han recibido el sacramento de la confirmación a que llamen a la oficina para dar su nombre y número de teléfono. Después de la Pascua comenzará una serie de seis clases de formación para adultos para recibir la confirmación.

Camino a Cumplir 175 de Fundación Parroquial


Las obras de la capilla del sótano y la aguja, iniciadas en julio de 1889, continuaron hasta el otoño de ese mismo año. La capilla se consagró en septiembre, pero las obras de la aguja continuaron hasta octubre. Con una altura de 58 metros, la aguja estaba coronada por una cruz dorada de 3,6 metros de alto y 2,4 metros de ancho. El 14 de octubre de 1889, la aguja, que rápidamente se convirtió en un monumento histórico de Danbury, fue inaugurada por un conocido sacerdote jesuita, el “renombrado Padre Jeremiah O’Connor”.

Estas mejoras, al igual que la construcción de la propia iglesia, se financiaron con las contribuciones de los feligreses. Estos, en su mayoría obreros y trabajadores de fábricas, sin duda se enorgullecían del magnífico edificio en el que celebraban su culto, como lo hacemos todavía hoy 150 años después



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Vocations

The radical promise of new life

Lent begins with a truth that is both simple and unsettling: something in us must die.

Every year the Church invites us into 40 days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. At first glance, these practices can seem like a spiritual self-improvement plan—an opportunity to clean up a few habits, strengthen our discipline or become a slightly better version of ourselves.

But that is not really what Lent is about.

The Gospel never promises us a refined version of the life we already have. Instead, we are promised something far more radical: new life.

From the beginning of the Christian story, the path has always been the same. Before Easter morning comes Good Friday. Before resurrection comes the cross. Before new life appears,

the old life must pass away.

This pattern is not only the story of Jesus. It is the pattern of every Christian vocation.

When the Lord calls someone to the priesthood, to marriage, to consecrated life or to a particular mission in the Church, he is never simply inviting that person to add something on top of the life they already planned. His call always opens a door to something new, something we could not have imagined for ourselves.

And that new life always requires a kind of dying.

Sometimes that dying takes the form of leaving behind certain plans or expectations. Sometimes it means surrendering control of our future. Sometimes it means letting go of an identity we have carefully constructed for ourselves.

None of that is easy. In fact, much of the anxiety people feel

about vocation comes from precisely this truth. We worry that God's call will take something away from us, that it will diminish our freedom, narrow our possibilities, or close off paths we might otherwise have explored.

But the mystery of the cross tells a different story.

The dying that Lent invites us to embrace is transformative. The Lord never asks us to let go of something without opening the possibility of something greater.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the grain of wheat that must fall to the ground and die in order to bear fruit. If it remains safely preserved, it stays exactly what it is. But if it is willing to be given away, something entirely new begins to grow.

That image is a helpful way to think about vocation. God does not call us to protect our lives, to

hold them tightly, or to preserve them exactly as they are. He calls us to give them. And in that giving, something unexpected happens: life begins to multiply and be renewed.

This is why the saints often speak about vocation as an expansion of our hearts. When we finally say yes to the Lord, when we entrust our lives to his purposes rather than our own we discover that our hearts and our world becomes larger, not smaller.

Both the gift of Lent and the discernment of our vocation prepare us for that discovery.

Through our Lenten journey of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we begin loosening our grip on the illusion that we are the authors of our own lives. We begin learning how to entrust ourselves more fully to the One who



FATHER CHRIS FORD

truly knows us. In small ways, we practice letting go. And as we do, Easter comes into view.

The promise of Easter is not simply that life continues after death. The promise is that God can create something entirely new from what we place in his hands.

Every vocation in the Church is, in its own way, a participation in that promise. Whether someone is called to the priesthood, to marriage, or to another form of service, the heart of the call is always the same: trust the Lord enough to give you new life. ■

Father Sam Kachuba named first Episcopal Vicar for Young Adults

By ROSE BRENNAN

SHELTON—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has named Father Sam Kachuba as the diocese's new Vicar for Young Adults, effective July 1. And that's a little daunting, because as far as he knows, he's the first person to have that role.

Nevertheless, he's honored the bishop picked him to spearhead what he knows to be a major focus area for the Diocese of Bridgeport.

"He wants to be creative, and he wants to try to meet needs that are ever-changing, and also needs that are very diverse across a big chunk of the population," Father Kachuba said. "He wants the young adults to be set up for success in their faith."

Much of Father Kachuba's priesthood has been focused on the needs of young people, whether in parish youth groups, the Convivio conference for Catholic high school students or as a high school chaplain. That being said, he

thought working with young adults would be a different ministry space altogether—until the bishop informed him just how wide-ranging it can be.

"I didn't think that I had that

"There's hunger out there that's really evident, and I'm excited to go and be in that with them."

much experience with young adult ministry because ... I thought of young adult ministry as the different regional young adult groups" in the diocese, he said. "But as the bishop explained it to me and was expanding that definition, he was including things like college campus ministry (and) marriage preparation."

It's clear that young adult ministry is wide-ranging, and needs vary depending on age groups, whether it's college students, young professionals or young couples preparing for marriage and children. And between each of them, there are

moments of transition that Father Kachuba feels are particularly important to focus on and encourage young adults through.

"There's moments of transition from college back into parish life, into the workforce, and then into marriage preparation and into young family life," he said. "Those flex points are really important to pay attention to."

Transitions can be particularly difficult to navigate, and Father Kachuba is not exempt from that himself. He has spent the majority of his time as a priest at St. Pius—during summer assignments, as a parochial vicar, and as pastor since 2015.

"St. Pius is the reference point of my adult life," he said. "It's very, very hard to leave this community and the people here. At the same time, I'm comforted knowing that leaving the place does not mean leaving the relationships and the friendships that have built up. It doesn't really matter where we go; we stay connected to people."

The diocese is already home



FATHER SAM KACHUBA

to several regional young adult groups. Father Kachuba is encouraged by that, and is hopeful he can be a resource for these groups as they continue their ministries and grow their communities.

"My goal is not to come in and say, 'We're going to do it this way,'" Father Kachuba said. "I would rather go out and find out what's happening. How can I help? Where can I provide assistance and resources? How can I be a support to what's already good and in place?"

In addition, Father Kachuba hopes he can provide support not just to these regional young adult groups, but to brother priests who serve them in their parishes.

"I want to be a resource ... to

help them to connect with the young adults, and to (learn) what are the things that priests are facing that make it difficult to do that," he said.

Starting any new job can be challenging—especially if you're the first one to ever have it. But with that uncertainty comes hope for Father Kachuba.

"There's an increase in people coming into the Church, an increase in Mass attendance and an increase in Confession practice," Father Kachuba said. "There's hunger out there that's really evident, and I'm excited to go and be in that with them, and to see where God is asking us to meet that need." ■



Happy Easter from the Padre Pio Foundation of America

Throughout Padre Pio's life, he endured profound spiritual and physical suffering, yet he never lost trust in God. As we enter into the Easter season, let's remember that this was the time of year Padre Pio connected the most with Jesus, as he bore the stigmata, the five wounds of the crucified Christ. And through all his pain and suffering, it was Jesus who offered him comfort during his most trying moments. This humbling physical union was just one of the many deep spiritual connections he shared with Jesus.

This Easter, as we celebrate the Resurrection, Padre Pio reminds us that suffering is never the end of the story. Even in moments of pain and confusion, our Lord is present. May we remember that every cross we carry draws us closer to God and an eternal life with Him.

Padre Pio told us to *"Pray, Hope and Don't Worry."* These are powerful words, but even more powerful when we complete his thought. He goes on to say that *"God is merciful and will hear your prayer."* As a confessor, often for 16 hours a day, at the Eucharistic altar, and in his tireless care for the sick, the distressed and the troubled, Padre Pio made the mercy of Christ visible and deeply personal.

From all of us at the Padre Pio Foundation of America, we wish you and your family a joyous and holy Easter as we give thanks for the Resurrection of Our Lord! May the Risen Christ bless you, and may Padre Pio intercede for you, your loved ones and all your needs.



The Padre Pio Foundation of America

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463 Main Street, Cromwell, CT 06416
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