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At 9/11 Mass, Bishop announces creation of Guardian Angels Guild

By LAURA BRENNAN

NEW CANAAN—Some came to remember someone who was lost. Many came in uniform for those who responded. Some in uniform were responders themselves. All came with stories. All came to remember. All came to pray.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano celebrated Mass in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the events of September 11, 2001 at St. Aloysius Church in New Canaan on September 29, the Feast of the Archangels. He also announced the creation of the Guardian Angels Guild, a community of accompaniment for those in law enforcement, first responders and for members of the military.

"When I looked into the distance, I could see the World Trade Center clearly on fire," he recollected during his homily. At the time, he was a pastor in Brooklyn. "As I stood there, with my own human eyes, I saw the first tower collapse. And that was just the beginning of the unfolding of the enormity of the evil that was transpiring in our midst."

"Equally impressed on my memory, and perhaps yours, were the faces of the heroes of



BISHOP FRANK J. CAGGIANO DISTRIBUTES Communion at 9/11 Mass at St. Aloysius. PHOTO BY AMY MORTENSEN

that day," said the bishop, who in the weeks following the attack, would bury 12 parishioners who died. The oldest was 28 years old.

"They were police officers and the firefighters, the first responders and the captains, who did not care about their own safety," said Bishop Caggiano. "They were interested in nothing other than to be of help to their fellow citizens to whom they had pledged their loyalty and their service."

A procession of uniformed police officers, firefighters and honor guard members from across the diocese, carried their flags down the aisle of St. Aloysius Church. Many others filled the pews. "Every single one of you who has made your life one of service, in whatever capacity, to your fellow man and woman; you are like the angels in our midst," Bishop Caggiano said to them.

"There were so many heroes down there that you never will know," said Melanie Barnard, a first responder on 9/11. A parishioner of St. Aloysius Church, she served as lector at the Mass for the 25th anniversary. An EMT on the day of the terrorist attacks, she traveled with police and firefighters into New York City, and they set up on Chelsea Piers but were told to return home after two days.

"They stood there, and they watched it," Barnard said of the heroes who responded. "They breathed all that air, and they were waiting for people to come."

"There were firemen who came with burned eyes, but no one came," she said. "They were all dead. But we didn't know that at the time. And our job, all of us at emergency services, our job is to save lives. And there were no lives to save."

"It was harder to go home because we wanted to stay," Barnard said. "It brought everyone together in this whole country. And in New York, it brought New York together, and I think it still holds us together."

The name of the newly established guild for law enforcement, first responders and military is "Trusted to the Guardian Angels," Bishop Caggiano said.

There will be three divisions in the Guild: The St. Michael the Archangel Division for Law Enforcement; the St. Florian Division for Firefighters & EMS; and the St. George Division for Military.

"Now is the time to create a space for these everyday heroes to be walked with and to be able to walk with each other in faith," said Luigi Manente, Director of the Diocesan Guilds.

"It's fellowship, it's an association of prayer, of fraternity, of mutual support," said Bishop Caggiano. "And just as many times we forget to say thank you to the guardian angel that's right beside us every moment of every day, today we can make up for that by saying thank you to you. By praying that the angels will continue to protect you."

The guild was announced on the Feast of the Archangels. Bishop Caggiano spoke of Michael, the defender of the gates of Heaven; Gabriel, the messenger of God's mercy and love for the world; and Raphael, who was the healer in the midst of disease.

The guild was officially launched on October 2, the Feast of the Guardian Angels, the spiritual beings created to give glory to God and to serve us, and to bring us to Heaven.

"As I said, you are the angels in our midst, but the guardian angels themselves will be your protectors," Bishop Caggiano said.

(For more information about the new guild, please email: Luigi Manente at GuardianAngelsGuild@diobpt.org.)

Carlo Acutis Learning Center to open

By MELISSA ILSKI

Imagine a three-year-old who has just learned that the Good Shepherd knows each of His sheep by name. Her face lights up with this new discovery. She remains quiet for a moment, and then asks whether He knows her name too. The answer she receives in that moment, and in a thousand moments like it, will shape how she understands God's unconditional love for her and the meaning of His presence in her life.

That is why the St. Carlo Acutis Early Learning Centers exist.

"By the time a child arrives for First Communion preparation," Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has said, "the habits of a little child are largely formed." The earliest years of a child's life are profoundly formative. They are years when children begin to discover who they are, whether they are loved, and how they belong in the world. They are also years when a child's natural wonder and openness create extraordinary opportunities to encounter God. And often, through those very experiences, families begin to discover what place faith will hold in their daily lives.

For generations, the Church has formed children through our Catholic schools, and our preschool programs continue that work beautifully. But many families today need full-day, year-round care for their youngest children, and most of the options they find are secular. St. Carlo Acutis Early Learning Centers will meet those families where they are, in communities where Catholic early learning often does not exist. Our first center will



STATUE OF ST. CARLO ACUTIS at St. Augustine Cathedral.

open at St. Lawrence Parish in Shelton in the fall of 2027, with more to follow.

Where Faith Takes Root

At the heart of our program is the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, an approach to religious formation developed in Rome in the 1950s by Sofia Cavalletti, a Scripture scholar, and Gianna Gobbi, a Montessori educator. Their insight was simple and profound. Young children already possess a deep capacity for relationship with God. Our task is not simply to fill them with information, but to help them hear the voice of the Good Shepherd who is already calling them by name.

That work happens in a space called the atrium, a special room set apart for prayer and wonder. It is filled with child-sized materials, including small figures of the Good Shepherd and His flock, a miniature altar with a chalice and paten, and a map of the land where Jesus lived. A catechist proclaims a short passage of Scripture or presents a moment of the liturgy, and then steps back so the child can ponder and reflect. The child is learning to contemplate.

Central to the atrium for our youngest children is the parable of the Good Shepherd. Children come to know Jesus as the one who calls them by name, who never loses one of His own, and who gathers His sheep around His table. From there they discover the Eucharist, Baptism, the birth of Jesus, and the parables of the Kingdom, like the tiny mustard seed that grows

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Catholic Charities gets new home

By MARIE T. OATES

STAMFORD—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano blessed and helped dedicate the Cohen Family Building on October 1. The newly renovated, 13,500-square-foot facility at 507 Shippan Avenue is now the home of Catholic Charities Stamford and its New Covenant Center. The facility is named for the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation, the lead donor in the capital campaign.

About 140 guests came to the grand opening, including long-time donors, volunteers, public officials and leaders of Stamford social service agencies. They heard remarks from the bishop, Stamford Mayor Caroline Simmons, U.S. Congressman Jim Himes, Connecticut Attorney General William Tong and leaders of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County (CCFC). The Bishop then joined them to cut the ribbon.

"Today is about much more than the opening of a building. It's about strengthening our community and ensuring that more individuals and families across our city have the support and the pathways they need to build stable, independent futures," said Mike Donoghue, executive director of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County.



BISHOP FRANK J. CAGGIANO AND REPRESENTATIVES of Catholic Charities are joined by state elected officials at ribbon cutting of new home for Catholic Charities Stamford and New Convenant Center.

In his remarks, Bishop Caggiano noted that even in a vibrant, growing city like Stamford, many neighbors face impossible choices. "Do I buy medicine or do I buy food? If my landlord raises my rent, where am I going to live?" he asked. In the midst of those anxieties, he said, Catholic Charities comes to be "the hands and the feet and the heart and the voice of the Lord."

"People don't come here simply as a case or as a number," he said. "They come as a brother and a sister. They have a name and a family. They have a history, and the dignity of everyone who comes here is honored and respected in everything we do."

Noting that the dedication fell on the Feast of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Carmelite who found that her vocation was love, the Bishop said: "The vocation of this place is to make love real, and that is the most noble of all missions you and I can work on together." At the close of the program, he led the gathering in prayer and blessed the new facility.

New Covenant Center has served the Stamford community since 1978. For all of those 48 years, it has been the only daily soup kitchen within 10 miles of the city. It is open every day of the year, serving three meals a day on weekdays and two on weekends. Its guests include people who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing, people struggling with mental illness and addiction, and many hardworking service workers who can't make ends meet.

The center also runs one of the largest food pantries in Stamford, serving more than 500 working families each month. It offers a shower program for homeless guests, along with clean socks and underwear. More than 500 volunteers work beside the staff to cook and serve meals and to keep the pantry shelves stocked.

Catholic Charities says the need keeps growing because housing, food and childcare costs keep rising. Donoghue said demand for the agency's food resources across the county has risen by 200 percent over the last three years. According to a recent CT Foodshare survey, one in six children in Stamford doesn't have reliable access to enough food.

The larger building lets Catholic Charities do more than feed people. It brings its hunger prevention and social services together under one roof so it can help clients build more stable lives. Along with meals and the food pantry, the agency plans to offer:

- case management
- culinary job training in the building's large commercial kitchen
- financial literacy training and a microloan program

Through partnerships with neighboring organizations, clients will also be able to get primary medical care from Americares, immigration legal assistance from Building One Community, and addiction and behavioral health counseling from Liberation Programs.

The building also houses Catholic Charities' Senior Nutrition programs. Every day, the agency delivers Meals on Wheels to more than 300

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Deacon Hart ordination set for November 21

By EMILY CLARK

Deacon Ernest F. "Ernie" Hart will be ordained to the priesthood at a Mass celebrated by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano on Saturday, November 21 at 11 am at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Fairfield.

He currently serves this parish as a permanent deacon. Ordained in the Diocese of Brooklyn in 2011, Deacon Hart was assigned to the parish of St. Mary Magdalene in Springfield Gardens, Queens and later accepted the role of diocesan general counsel in Connecticut in 2024.

Prior to his studies for the priesthood, Deacon Hart was a deputy commissioner for the New York Police Department as well as an attorney and a New York State Supreme Court Justice.



BISHOP FRANK J. CAGGIANO and Father Christopher Ford with Deacon Ernest F. Hart. PHOTO BY KRIS GREER

He also worked as a college professor and associate dean at Columbia University. He serves on the Board of Directors for Catholic Charities of Fairfield County as legal counsel.

After graduating from St. Francis Prep and then Fordham University with a bachelor of arts degree, he earned his juris doctor from Villanova University in 1983. In 2018, Deacon Hart completed his studies at St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers, New York.

Reflecting on his preparation for the priesthood, Deacon Hart said: "The call to priesthood has been in my heart since second grade, making discernment a lifelong journey. Although career and life led me in other directions, prayer and Christ's unmistakable call eventually guided me to the diaconate and now to the priesthood. This vocation remains a mystery that I embrace wholeheartedly. Jesus has given me the profound gift and honor of serving Him and His Church."

Born in Brooklyn, NY in 1959, Deacon Hart is the son of the late Leon A. Hart and Marion A. Latty Hart. He is the father of three adult children, Paul, Alexandra and Julianne, who will all have a role in his Mass of Ordination.

Deacon Hart will celebrate his first Mass on November 22 at 10 am at St. Mary Magdalene Church in Springfield Gardens, New York. ■

2026 One in Christ

BISHOP'S APPEAL

ONE in Christ
2026 Bishop's Appeal
DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

Your gift to the 2026 Bishop's Appeal helps sustain vital ministries that serve the most in need, nurture vocations and strengthen our parishes and families in faith.

+ Supports **over 40 seminarians** discerning the priesthood and **15 men** in diaconate formation.

+ Forms youth and adults in the faith through the **Institute for Catholic Formation** and children through the **Formation Satellite Center**.

+ Provides pastoral care to the sick, elderly, hospitalized, and those facing life's challenges through the **Pastoral Companions Program**.

+ Serves **2.2 million+ meals** and provides **7,900 counseling sessions** through **Catholic Charities of Fairfield County**.

+ Provides tuition assistance through the **Bishop's Scholarship Fund** to **1,149 students** attending Catholic elementary schools in partnership with **Foundations in Education**.

Make Your Gift Today!






ONE in Christ
2026 Bishop's Appeal
DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

2026BishopsAppeal.org
203-416-1470

Appeal supports Hispanic ministry

Deacon Edward Carrillo has seen proof that the Hispanic community is a "vital, growing and deeply faithful part of the Diocese of Bridgeport," so much so that it plays an enormous role in the renewal of the Church.

As the diocesan coordinator for Hispanic ministries, he is involved with all aspects of the community, from parish activities to ministries, faith formation and their prayer life. For young and old, their faith is fundamental to their lives.

"In our Hispanic families, faith is handed down from generation to generation in very simple but sacred moments," Deacon Carrillo said. "A grandmother teaching a child to pray, parents bringing their family to Sunday Mass after a long week of work, a catechist patiently helping a young person understand the love of Jesus or an entire community coming together to honor Our Lady. These moments may seem ordinary, but they are places where the Holy Spirit is quietly building the Church."

The Hispanic ministry with its many initiatives is supported by the 2026 One in Christ Bishop's Appeal.

In announcing the 2026 Appeal, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano said: "The Holy Spirit is working powerfully in our midst, and we are beginning to see the fruits of our efforts, and those fruits are growing. Over the last few years, you have heard me say that we are in the work of renewal—of bringing new life, both individually to our own discipleship and collectively to our common life as a Church."

Bishop Caggiano said he was grateful for the continued generosity and urged the faithful to consider a gift to the 2026 One in Christ Bishop's Appeal, which has a goal of $8 million and will provide for works of charity, formation in faith, education and catechesis.

For more information, visit www.2026BishopsAppeal.org.

One example of the Appeal in action can be found in Danbury, where the Institute for Catholic Formation helps coordinate faith-formation services for more than 250 children, indirectly serving over 1000 families.

"Behind that number are individual children. Each child has a name, a family, a story, and a soul precious to God," said Deacon Carrillo. "These children are being prepared to receive a sacrament in collaboration with parishes, catechists, parents, clergy, and lay leaders. They are invited to meet Jesus, to discover that He knows and loves them, and to learn that the Church is their spiritual home."

He said a missionary spirit is directing Hispanic ministry throughout the diocese. Inspired by the renewal known as El Uno, or The One, opportunities are being created for encounter, discipleship, accompaniment and mission.

"We don't want to just create more activities," Deacon Carrillo said. "It is to help people fall in love with Christ, grow in a community of faith, and become missionary disciples who accompany others. Sometimes the most important thing the Church can say to a person is 'You are not alone. You belong here. We will walk with you.'"

That accompaniment takes many forms. Hispanic families are served through Spanish-language and bilingual catechesis, sacramental preparation, retreats, Scripture study, prayer groups, formation for parish leaders, and opportunities to participate more fully in the liturgical and pastoral life of their parishes. Collaboration among pastors, catechists, coordinators, ecclesial movements, and diocesan offices are being strengthened so families receive consistent pastoral care rather than having to navigate the Church alone.

The ministry is especially focused on children, adolescents, young adults, parents, couples, and those disconnected from parish life. Family-centered initiatives seek to help faith take root not only inside the church building, but also in the home.

"Through the inculturation of the bishop's The One initiative, we are not just translating documents, initiative phases, and surveys; we are completely redesigning the initiative so the Hispanic community in our diocese can fully understand it."



DEACON EDWARD CARRILLO

Pamela S. Rittman, Director of Development and the Bishop's Appeal, said: "The Hispanic community is growing and thriving and representative of the renewal of the Catholic Church in Fairfield County."

She said every gift, no matter the size, is a powerful act of faith that sustains the Church's mission for generations to come.

"We are deeply grateful for their generosity and commitment.

(If you have not made your gift, please visit www.2026BishopsAppeal.org or call 203.416.1470.) ■

CATHOLIC CHARITIES FROM PAGE 3

homebound and disabled seniors in the Stamford area, and it serves meals to older adults at eight community dining sites.

Mayor Simmons called the new center "a one-stop shop and a hub for hope for so many families in our community."

"You judge a city or a community by how well it takes care of those who are vulnerable among us," she said. "Judging by the outpouring of support in this room and the many years of dedication to this cause, we're doing pretty well."

Congressman Himes, who spent several years working on affordable housing, said that experience taught him that good housing "comes to nothing unless you also address the nutritional, the medical, the social, the financial needs of people living in poverty." That, he said, is "the animating spirit of this facility."

Attorney General Tong, a North Stamford resident who has volunteered at New Covenant Center, recalled Bishop Caggiano's August statement on immigrant families, which spoke of suffering, dignity and indifference. Anyone who serves a meal at the center will see suffering and dignity, he said. "What you will not see is indifference. Nobody here is indifferent. Everybody cares."

The Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation gave $2.5 million to the project. Since the foundation was founded in 2001, it has given more than $1.5 billion under Alex Cohen's leadership. It supports underserved communities, women's health, sustainability, the arts and children. Representatives of the foundation attended the dedication and joined in the ribbon cutting.

Andy and Susan DiLoreto, graduates of Villanova University, were also recognized for their $1.5 million gift and featured a quote from Pope Leo XIV, a fellow Villanova alumnus. It now hangs above the serving area of the dining hall: "This is true hope: Knowing that God's love sustains us."

The building is owned by the Knights of Columbus. Bishop Caggiano reminded the Knights in attendance that Blessed Michael McGivney founded the order to serve the poor, the disenfranchised and immigrants. "I am absolutely certain that Blessed Michael, in his place in Heaven, is looking down with a huge smile, that this facility that's owned by the Knights is doing exactly what he did." ■

CARLO ACUTIS LEARNING CENTER FROM PAGE 2

into a great tree.

The child is formed not simply through memorized lessons, but through a relationship that is nurtured and lived. Children learn prayer by speaking to God in their own words. They discover that the Mass belongs to them, too. In a world that so often hurries children toward the next milestone, the atrium gives them something precious. Silence, beauty, wonder, and time.

Why a Young Saint

It is fitting that a ministry for the very young bears the name of a saint who died at fifteen.

St. Carlo Acutis, canonized in 2025 as the first saint of the millennial generation, asked as a small boy to receive his First Communion early, and from then on went to Mass every day he could. He called the Eucharist his "highway to Heaven." His mother, Antonia Salzano, has often shared that it was her son's faith that drew her back to the Church.

St. Carlo Acutis reminds us that children are not merely recipients of faith. They can also lead their families toward God. When a three-year-old comes home and asks to pray before dinner or points out the Good Shepherd in a church window, parents notice. Faith begins to move through the household.

This is something I believe deeply. When we welcome a three-year-old, we welcome a whole family. Through the faith and wonder of a young child, we have an extraordinary opportunity to touch the lives of parents, grandparents, and entire families, inviting them into a deeper relationship with Christ and the life of the Church.

St. Carlo Acutis also loved the ordinary things of childhood: friends, animals, games, and computers. He showed us that holiness is not reserved for a select few, nor is it separate from everyday life. It is found in how we live, how we love, and how we use the gifts God has given us.

"Everyone is born as an original, but many people end up dying as photocopies," he said.

We want every child entrusted to our care to know that they are wonderfully and uniquely created by God. We want to nurture their natural wonder, honor the gifts they bring into the world, and help them discover all that God has planned for them.

And perhaps, just as St. Carlo did, these little ones will remind the rest of us what it means to live with faith, wonder, and joy.

(Melissa Ilski is the Executive Director for the St. Carlo Acutis Early Learning Centers.) ■

St. Carlo Acutis Early Learning Centers Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus,
lead the way.
In all I do, in work and play.

Give me faith and wonder too,
Fill my heart with joy in You!

Mother Mary, hear my prayer,
Hold me close
and keep me there.

Angel of God, stay by my side,
Keep me safe and be my guide.

Dear Saint Carlo, help me see
all that God
has planned for me.

Amen

Honor your Mother

Five First Saturdays: A modern Marian devotion

By SISTER MARIA OF DIVINE MERCY and SISTER MARY RUTH

"Honor your father and mother, that it may go well with you (cf. Deuteronomy 5:16)." Has anyone lived the Fourth Commandment more perfectly than Jesus? In His perfect love for Mary, He made her the Mother of all men at the foot of the Cross.

Does His Heart not shudder, then, when men not only refuse to honor her but even scorn her? Because His Mother has been increasingly dishonored in modern times, He has sent her from Heaven to request the Five First Saturdays Devotion: Reparation must be made for the dishonor shown her; devotion to her Immaculate Heart must be established throughout the world.

Eight years after the 1917 Fatima apparitions, Sister Lucia, one of the Fatima visionaries, was visited by the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus. She saw Our Lady's Immaculate Heart covered with thorns, symbolic of the blasphemies and ingratitude inflicted on it by her children.

Jesus asked Sister Lucia to remove the thorns by acts of reparation. The Virgin requested a devotion to be made on the first Saturday of five consecutive months, consisting of the following acts: 1. Go to confession; 2. Receive Holy Communion; 3. Pray the Rosary (five decades); 4. Keep company with Our Lady for 15 minutes, reflecting on the Mysteries of the Rosary. To all those who will observe the Five First Saturdays Our Lady promised assistance at the hour of death with every grace needed for salvation.

When Sister Lucia asked why five Saturdays, Our Lord explained that there are five offenses against the Immaculate Heart of Mary needing reparation: 1. Blasphemy against the Immaculate Conception; 2. Blasphemy against her Perpetual Virginity; 3. Blasphemy against Her Divine Maternity, refusing at the same time to recognize her as the mother of men; 4. Blasphemy of fostering indifference, scorn or even hatred toward her in the hearts of children; 5. Direct outraging of her in her holy images.

The First Saturday Devotion reveals to us the gravity of dishonor paid to the Mother of Jesus as well as the power of traditional means at the disposal of the faithful for obtaining God's favor: The



Sister Lucia

acts of reparation move His mercy toward souls who have the misfortune of offending His Mother.

Neither Confession, Holy Communion, the Rosary, or meditation alone is new, but the combination of them together speaks of a serious epoch in the history of mankind, which requires serious action.

Indeed, at Fatima, from which the First Saturday Devotion flows, Our Lady spoke not only of the warfare that was raging at the time (World War I) but of an even greater battle: the spiritual warfare for the eternal destiny of souls.

The vision of hell, which Lucia and the other children saw on July 13, 1917, and the Blessed Virgin's warnings that mankind must stop offending God, clearly indicated the precariousness of the world's spiritual state, which has only worsened in ensuing years.

Yet, true mother that she is, Mary gives us in this devotion the weapons with which to fight. Confession and reception of Holy Communion are powerful sacraments that remove obstacles to grace and increase charity. The Rosary has long been part of the Church's spiritual arsenal, especially in times of great need, such as the Battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571.

To spend time with Our Mother, reflecting on the mysteries of salvation expands our hearts, enabling us to receive with grateful love all the graces she longs to pour from her Immaculate Heart upon us and upon hurting humanity, which so needs to learn the power of reparative Love.

Honor your Mother, and it will go well with you. And with the whole world.

Note: The confession may be made within eight days before or after the First Saturday, but the other elements must be performed on the day itself. The Rosary and the meditation may be performed at any time of the day. The 15-minute meditation may be made on all the mysteries as a whole or on one specific mystery. The rosary and meditation may be combined by thinking on each mystery a few minutes before or after reciting the decade. A sermon for the occasion may be substituted for the meditation.

(The Carmelites of Mary Ever Virgin have their community at the Oratory of St. Emery in Fairfield.) ■

FIRST SATURDAY MARIAN DEVOTION



FIRST SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH

7:00 A.M. – 10:00 A.M.

7:00 a.m. Mass followed by Exposition & Confession

8:15 a.m. Flame of Love Rosary

8:45 a.m. Terce followed by Benediction

9:00 a.m. Marian Reflection and Refreshments

* * * * *

CARMELITES OF MARY EVER VIRGIN

Oratory of St. Emery

838 Kings Highway E., Fairfield, CT

Rosary Weekend started

By LAURA BRENNAN

A framed image of Our Lady of the Rosary, crowned and holding the Christ Child in her left arm and a Rosary in her right hand, greeted St. Rose of Lima parishioners in Newtown for Rosary Weekend.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano introduced Rosary Weekend as a new tradition in the Diocese of Bridgeport. It will be celebrated the first weekend of October each year. In the announcement, he said it will "draw us all closer to Christ through the loving intercession of His Blessed Mother."

Father Peter Cipriani, Pastor of St. Rose, always has a Rosary in his pocket. During his homily at the 9:30 am Mass, he shared the story of his introduction to the Rosary, which came long before his call to the priesthood.

He was teaching at a Catholic school because that is where he was able to get a job. While there, he rediscovered his Catholic faith. He befriended a religion teacher at the school who invited him over for dinner. After dinner, his friend asked if he minded joining them for the family Rosary.

"What, no dessert?" he thought, but didn't say.

His first reaction was to excuse himself to the other room and see what game was on the television. Not wanting to be rude, he accepted a Rosary. The three young children swung their Rosaries above their heads as they gathered. Then, they dropped to their knees and began to pray.

Father Cipriani recalled mumbling the words to the Our Fathers and Hail Marys.

In the weeks that followed, he reflected in gratitude on the friendship and the providence of teaching at that Catholic school. He remembered the kids on their knees. "What better way to honor Mary, and to say thank you to Mary, than the Rosary?" he said.

So, Father Cipriani made a commitment to pray the Rosary. He started slowly. He prayed a decade every few days. Then every day. Then a full Rosary.

Then another commitment. "I remember making this promise to the Blessed Virgin Mary. I said to her, 'Mary, I promise, from here on out, to the day I die, to pray the Holy Rosary every single day,'" Father Cipriani recalled saying, "if, in doing so, you simply help me to find my way through life, and to show me what it is that Jesus Christ and God Our Father want me most to do."

Then he added, "'Not just by way of vocation, but literally each and every day.'"

"Of course, she kept the promise," he said.

That was more than 20 years ago. "I get to pray the Rosary every single day," he said. "Through the Rosary I've been able to discover the meaning and the purpose, not just for my life, but of life in general. I love the Rosary."

Beginning a few weeks before Rosary Weekend, Father Cipriani reminded St. Rose parishioners to bring their Rosaries to be blessed. "Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary" prayer cards were handed out at every parish throughout the diocese. St. Rose had a basket of Rosaries and pamphlets on "How to Pray the Rosary" and "How to Pray the Rosary for Children."

On his podcast, "Let Me Be Frank," Bishop Caggiano shared the history of the Rosary and details about Rosary Weekend. The episode was released on September 30 and is entitled "The Holy Rosary & the American Blesseds."

"For me personally, the Rosary changed my life," Father Cipriani said. ■

Parish honors Our Lady of Rosary, St. Catherine

By JOE PISANI

TRUMBULL—The pews were packed at St. Catherine of Siena for a Mass honoring Our Lady of the Rosary.

It was a special day in the life of the parish, with Bishop Frank J. Caggiano blessing the new St. Catherine of Siena Shrine and a renovated Marian Prayer Garden, along with the veneration of relics of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, not to mention the blessing of pets and stuffed animals.

At one point in his homily, the bishop looked out at the packed church, filled with crying babies, youngsters and teenagers, parents and grandparents, and offered them words of hope:

"The tide is turning," he said. "The world is beginning to realize the emptiness of the promises that many made. More and more young people are yearning for meaning and purpose in life. Young parents are looking to place their children where they can grow in wisdom and grace, where they can be kept safe and understand that life has hope and a purpose and a destiny. And so, as that tide begins to turn in this contemporary world, let us commit ourselves to walk in the footsteps of Our Lady and remain faithful to Jesus, despite the struggles we face."

Then, he told the faithful: "Take up the Rosary and pray it every day."

"Pray it when you're suffering, when you're doubting, when you're anxious, when you're fearful," he said. "Pray it, and you will feel the eternal love of Our Lady guiding you."

The bishop previously announced the new tradition of Rosary Weekend, honoring Our Lady of the Rosary, to be celebrated each year on the first weekend of October.

"The Rosary should be on the lips of us all, please God, every day in this journey to becoming ever more faithful," he said. "We are here together so that you and I can walk to Heaven together. And when I fail, you can lift me up. When you fail, I will lift you up. As we will do with one another. And along the way, Our Lady, the Morning Star, the Sacred Crescent Moon, will lead us."

He used a metaphor of Blessed Fulton Sheen, who described the Blessed Mother as the moon, which having no light of its own, perfectly reflects the light of the sun—her Son.

"The moon is brightest, my friends, when the sky is darkest," he said. "And so, Our Lady, in those moments of fidelity was never more faithful than when she was suffering, as she was also Our Lady of Sorrows."

He also urged them to pray for the graces to become ever more faithful, like Our Lady, whom he described as "the perfect disciple," a model for all Catholics.

"We, too, are called to reflect the light of truth that we have heard from the lips of the Savior in a world that doesn't want to hear it. The world will just have to hear it from you and me in word and in action. The times when we are in suffering and pain and challenge and doubt are the times when you and I must run to Our Lady, who will bring us to her Son, and in those moments, the Lord is never closer to us than when we are suffering for he knows what it's like to suffer."

In his comments, pastor Father Joseph A. Marcello thanked Bishop Caggiano and congratulated him on the 20th anniversary of his ordination as bishop on August 22, 2006. He also expressed gratitude to everyone responsible for the Marian Prayer Garden improvements, including Mia Romano, a LIFE Scout in BSA Troop 168 in Trumbull, who undertook the installation of the outdoor Stations of the Cross as her Eagle Scout project.

He also explained the genesis of the St. Catherine of Siena Shrine, dedicated in memory of Monsignor Richard Shea, the fourth pastor of the parish. Father worked with sculptor Cody Swanson of Florence, Italy, to create the shrine with a statue, modeled after Bernini's colonnade in the Vatican, which Monsignor Shea long admired.

"We are grateful also that the bishop has extended to the whole diocese this beautiful celebration of Rosary Sunday, which we have observed with his permission for several years at St. Catherine's," Father Marcello said. "This first weekend in October around the Diocese of Bridgeport from now on will be set aside to honor Our Lady and to spread devotion to the Holy Rosary."

After Mass, parishioners went out to the lawn for the unveiling of the statue by the bishop, who blessed it, along with the Marian Prayer Garden with the Stations of the Cross. Then, students from St. Catherine of Siena School recited the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary in front of the statue of the Blessed Mother.

Parishioner Leah DeVito attended the ceremony with her daughters Gloria, a third-grader, and Josephine, a fifth-grader. She said Gloria has had a devotion to the Blessed Mother since she was 4, which has influenced the other members of their family.

She also praised Father Marcello for his work as pastor.

"This is so wonderful. We owe it all to him," she said. "He is the most remarkable human being, and everything he does is for all of us."

Mia Romano, whose scout master was parishioner Kate Gombos, said she began the Eagle Scout project for the outdoor Stations in October 2023, and with the help of her fellow Scouts did everything from fund-raising to clearing out the overgrown garden to installing the posts. The original garden was dedicated in April 2016 to Monsignor Shea on his 80th birthday.

"I was a little apprehensive because it had to be perfect," she recalled. "The Stations are beautiful—better than I could have imagined."

She said that with the help of many others, the garden was a perfect place for prayer and meditation in honor of Our Lady.

Trustee Jeff Wright said the parish was blessed to have Father Marcello as pastor and summed up the weekend: "We had a grand slam weekend at St. Catherine's. Between having the major relics of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque with us, having Bishop Caggiano, who is such a gifted homilist, to celebrate the Votive Mass of Our Lady of the Rosary, and then having him bless our new beautiful outdoor St. Catherine of Siena Shrine in honor of our late pastor, Monsignor Richard Shea, as well as our newly revitalized Marian Prayer Garden and the new outdoor Stations of the Cross that are part of the garden, it was an incredibly special weekend for our parish family." ■



BISHOP FRANK J. CAGGIANO AND DEACON PATRICK TOOLE BLESS new Stations of the Cross at the Parish of St. Catherine of Siena in Trumbull. PHOTO BY MARK CONRAD





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They came to Our Lady of Lourdes for healing

By JOE PISANI

STAMFORD—They came to Our Lady of Lourdes, looking for hope and healing. And she heard their prayers.

A troubled marriage, a son with an addiction, survivors of sexual abuse, a father diagnosed with ALS, and many others whose suffering was known only to them and the Mother of God. They celebrated Mass, they prayed the rosary, they processed, they heard stories of healing.

Hundreds of faithful from throughout the diocese and beyond brought their petitions to the Blessed Mother during the fifth annual Lourdes Retreat and Mass of Hope & Healing at St. Mary of Stamford Parish on September 27.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano celebrated Mass with Father



Juan Colon, assisted by Deacon John DiTaranto. A woman named Grace offered a testimony of her brother who experienced a healing after being diagnosed with stage-three cancer because of the prayers of family and friends and people across the country.

Bishop Caggiano's homily gave a clear message: "There can be no healing of any kind unless you and I are people of hope."

He talked about Pope Leo XIV's historic visit to Lourdes the day before, which brought a quarter of a million people to the shrine, where he told them to be "missionaries of hope" in a country considered the most secular in Europe.

Lourdes, France, is most famous Marian shrine in the world, and more than 7,000 healings have been attributed to the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes.



BISHOP FRANK J. CAGGIANO DELIVERS homily at Our Lady of Lourdes Healing Retreat at St. Mary Stamford Parish.

The bishop said that in Lourdes—as in Stamford—there were many different reasons people come to Our Lady.

"Of those 250,000 people who gathered, some came because they looked for physical healing. Perhaps it was a disease they have been battling, perhaps even more so, a disease that a relative or friend is battling. Some came with wounds, wounds at times self-inflicted by our sinfulness and carelessness. Wounds that were inflicted by others that have cut deep, wounds that have cut within our hearts, wounds that perhaps take a lifetime to heal, years perhaps even to admit they are there. But they all came looking for healing."

He told the packed church they were no different.

"My dear friends, perhaps there are those here tonight who will leave with their physical suffering eased," he said. "Perhaps you will leave this sacred place, and a wound that you have carried has become lighter, perhaps even healed. Perhaps you have come here with a sin that you have battled a long time and have found the grace to conquer that sin in a way like never before. And for all those graces, we thank the Lord Jesus and Our Blessed Lady, who is the instrument of those graces."

He said that God is always merciful and loving, and while he may not tell us why we endure suffering, he will never allow us to suffer alone.

"For the Lord walks with you and me, even in our darkest moments. He is always there when we think no one else is there," the bishop said. "He is there, caressing us, crying with us, holding our hand, lifting us up, giving us strength, leading us forward. For you see, my friends, hope is the gift God gives us."

In the world, many turn their backs on those who are suffering and in need, he said.

"We have too many who are alone in their suffering, except for the fact that Jesus does not abandon them or us. And whatever healings come from that hope, I ask you to leave this church as a missionary of hope, as Peter [Pope Leo] has asked us — to be the hands and feet and heart and voice of God to those around us."

Bishop Caggiano also talked about the renewal in the diocese and the Church.

"What did Pope Leo find when he came to France? A million people came to the Mass in the heart of Paris," he said. "And tens of thousands of young people sang the praises of Our Lady in a stadium where everyone was brought to tears because he came as a missionary of hope …. Today the Church was reborn in France because hope was reborn in France, and as it was done in France, it is being done in this country."

Linda's family came with a special intention: "We're here because my husband was diagnosed with ALS, and we know the Blessed Mother will hear our prayers."

Rosa Vargas said, "I am here because I love what the Blessed Mother is doing for humanity. I pray the rosary every day. We must pray for the conversion of sinners."

Ive Lyne Jaboin said, "Mother Mary has done a lot for me, and I believe what she says is true, and she taught me how to pray."

Amy and Roger Favano have come to the Lourdes retreats every year. A member of the diocesan sexual misconduct review board, Amy said: "I'm on the board because a family member was affected by sexual abuse in the diocese, so it's important for me to come. This is not just for the board but also for the victims and survivors."

The Lourdes Retreat was organized by David D'Andrea of Greenwich in collaboration with the parish and the diocesan survivor support group.

"I just want to pay back for everything that Mother Mary has done for me," said D'Andrea, who is a survivor of cancer and clerical sexual abuse. "I have had health crises in my life, including polio and cancer, and Our Lady of Lourdes has been there for me every time. So I want the retreat to reach people who are hoping for healings, whether spiritual or physical. I know there will be some."

D'Andrea thanked Bishop Caggiano for conducting the retreat and for his inspiration and leadership.

Erin Neil LCSW, Director of Safe Environment & Victim Assistance Coordinator, said: "The Mass of Hope and Healing is something our survivor support group is very passionate about. It's a blessing to be together and pray for those who could not be with us. We are reminded at this retreat that we are never alone, even during times of illness, loss and suffering. God is always with us and will never leave us."

She said it was a sacred event that reminds survivors of abuse and those who accompany them that they are not alone.

Mary, a member of the support group, said, "This is such a special day that our group looks forward to every year."

"The group is a safe place to lay down a burden I've been carrying too long by myself," Michael said. "Being part of this very special day reminded me that healing can happen when we are heard, supported and never made to feel alone. I am grateful for our survivor group and for the opportunity to come together in faith, hope, and healing."

(If you or someone you know is a survivor of abuse by any person from the Church, contact Erin Neil, LCSW, Director of Safe Environment & Victim Assistance Coordinator at (203) 650-3265 or Email: eneil@diobpt.org.) ■

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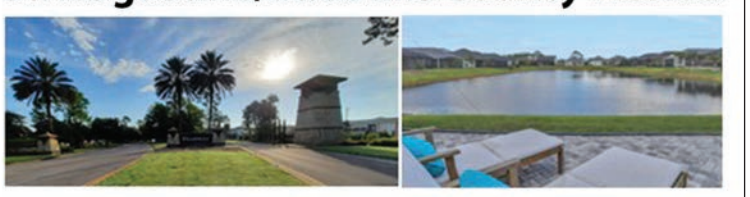

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EDITORIAL

‘Rebuild My Church’

A lot can happen in 800 years. And in our era, even more can happen in 50 years, especially when it comes to technology. But spiritual change moves at a decidedly different pace. The Holy Spirit keeps his own time table.

Some eight centuries ago, a young bon-vivant named Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone had a conversion experience and left behind his life of wealth and privilege to follow Christ in ways that even devout followers today would find startling.

In one of the many famous stories of his life, the man known affectionately in Italian as “Il Poverello,” or “the little poor man”—and more notably as St. Francis of Assisi—had a momentous encounter with Christ. Praying at the abandoned, rundown Church of San Damiano in 1205, the Byzantine cross spoke to him, and Jesus said, “Francis, go rebuild My house, as you see it is all being destroyed.”

Thinking he was called to repair the collapsing chapel, he sold his father’s cloth at the market to raise money and set about the project. However, Jesus had bigger plans in mind. He wanted Francis to renew the Catholic Church through a return to the true Gospel message.

Are we not, 800 years later, being called to do the same during this springtime of renewal? Does anyone doubt the Holy Spirit is at work? The signs are obvious and everywhere. May we respond as St. Francis did.

This special edition of Fairfield County Catholic titled, “‘Rebuild My Church’ 2.0” is a tribute to one of our greatest saints on the 800th anniversary of his death. It is also a call to action for all Catholics to join the renewal.

In this issue, you will find a piece by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano on the renewal taking place in the Diocese of Bridgeport, along with articles on how to pray like St. Francis, testimonies from a Franciscan priest, a Franciscan nun and a lay Franciscan about how Il Poverello spoke to their hearts, art immortalizing the life of Francis, articles on what you can do to further the renewal, and more. Plus, what would a section about St. Francis be without the blessing of pets? Special thanks to seminarian Colin Firda, who spent his summer with us preparing this project.

Pope Leo XIV composed a prayer for this Franciscan Jubilee Year, which lasts until January 10, 2027:

Saint Francis, our brother, you who eight hundred years ago went to meet Sister Death as a man at peace, intercede for us before the Lord. You recognized true peace in the Crucifix of San Damiano, teach us to seek in Him the source of all reconciliation that breaks down every wall.

You who, unarmed, crossed the lines of war and misunderstanding, give us the courage to build bridges where the world raises up boundaries. In this time afflicted by conflict and division, intercede for us so that we may become peacemakers: unarmed and disarming witnesses of the peace that comes from Christ. Amen

Pray the Rosary daily

During this month of the Rosary, Bishop Caggiano had a message for all of us in his homily at the Votive Mass of Our Lady of the Rosary: “Take up the Rosary and pray it every day. Pray it when you’re suffering, when you’re doubting, when you’re anxious, when you’re fearful. Pray it, and you will feel the eternal love of Our Lady guiding you.”

The bishop established a new tradition of Rosary Weekend, which will be observed every year in the diocese on the first weekend in October. “The Rosary has been, for centuries, one of the great treasures the Church offers her people,” he said. “It is a prayer that is simple enough for a small child and rich enough to occupy a lifetime of contemplation.”

Our Lady of the Rosary, pray for us.

To our readers

For more news about what’s happening in the diocese, please visit www.bridgeportdiocese.org And if you have a story idea, please send it to FCCStories@diobpt.org ■

St. Francis of Assisi in art

By **COLIN FIRDA**

St. Francis of Assisi is one of the most frequently depicted saints in Western art. There are an estimated tens of thousands of paintings, frescoes and sculptures, including millions of pop art representations in garden statuary and bird baths.

From as early as the 13th century, masters of classical art such as Giotto, Murillo, El Greco, Caravaggio and Peter Paul Rubens did works about the saint.

A Prayer Before the Cross

Lord Jesus, speak to me
as You spoke to Francis. Show
me what is falling
into ruin — in my heart,
my family, my parish.
Give me the courage
of simple obedience:
to gather the stones
that are before me,
to do the work that is near, and
to trust that the fuller meaning
will come in time.

Amen

He is commonly shown with birds and animals, and pictured receiving the stigmata — the wounds of Christ. One of the most widely recognized is The Legend of St. Francis, a cycle of 28 frescoes in the Upper Church of the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, attributed to Giotto.

Pictured here are three of the most famous paintings.

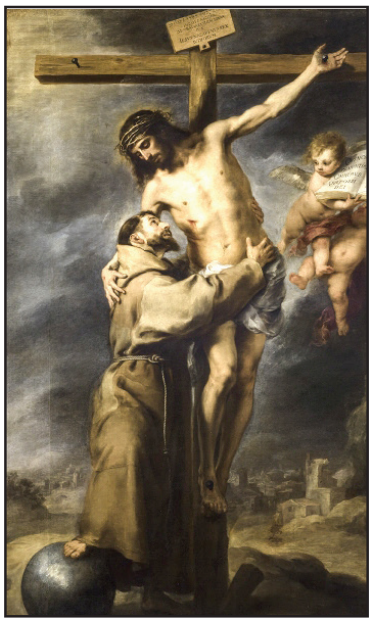
St. Francis in Ecstasy: Caravaggio’s Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy is a late 16th work of Italian Renaissance art painted by the world-famous painter Merisi de Caravaggio. The work takes a unique perspective on the story of St. Francis receiving the Stigmata, treating it as an experience of spiritual ecstasy, in a similar way to Bernini’s Ecstasy of St. Theresa. Caravaggio’s work is now held at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford.



First Depiction of St. Francis: Ciambue’s fresco of St. Francis in lower church of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi is widely believed to be the earliest depiction of St. Francis after his death.



For this reason, it is also believed to be the most accurate depiction of the saint. St. Francis is pictured as a weaker man with the marks of the stigmata visible on his hands.



Saint Francis Embracing Christ on the Cross: Spanish painter Murillo’s famous image of St. Francis embracing the crucified Lord was painted in the mid-17th century. It was intended to depict the embracing of the cross integral to Franciscan spirituality. It is now held in the Museum of Fine Arts in Seville, Spain.

(Colin Firda is a seminarian of the Diocese of Bridgeport.)

FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

Office of Communications
Diocese of Bridgeport
100 Beard Sawmill Road, Suite 650
Shelton, Connecticut 06484-6156

telephone | **203.416.1461**
email | **fcc@diobpt.org**

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Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Publisher
Marie T. Oates
Director of Communications | marie.oates@diobpt.org
Renée A. Stamatis
Art Director | rstamatis@diobpt.org
Cristina S. Napolitano
FCC Advertising Manager | *cristina.napolitano@diobpt.org*
Emily Clark
Copy Editor | emily.clark@diobpt.org
Colin J. Firda
Copy Editor | Colin.Firda@diobpt.org

Web | **www.bridgeportdiocese.org**
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VIEWPOINTS



May this new home be welcoming

COLLECTING MOMENTS

BY EMILY CLARK

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

Years ago, when I got my first apartment, my aunt sent me a card with a passage from Proverbs: "By wisdom, a house is built; through understanding, it is established; through knowledge, its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures." Though I've moved many times since then, I have often revisited this little prayer of what it takes to create a home. Now, I share it with my daughter.

On move-in day, Abigail stacked the dishes in the narrow cabinet but had to leave the crockpot on the counter. The hallway rug was just the right length, and by some miracle, the desk fit beside the closet of her tiny bedroom. After months of searching, hopes raised, dashed and raised again, she is settled in her first apartment—a third floor walk-up in New York City.

After securing a job just after graduation last spring and commuting for hours each day to the city, Abigail was more than ready to make the move. The decision was easier than the search, however, as each apartment she and her roommate saw was snatched up quickly by someone else.

Selfishly, I wanted her home with us a little longer but also knew the time had come for her to test that independence we had instilled in her. As she searched realtor sites in the evenings after work, I petitioned St. Joseph, praying: "May this new home be welcoming (and safe), peaceful (and clean) and have good neighbors and relations between everyone. Fill this home with the love of Jesus. Amen." The "safe" and "clean" insertions were my add-ons, and as a mother, I couldn't help but plead to Mary for her intercession as well. My child was moving, creating a home in another city without me, and I would miss her. Nothing could change that.

And move she did. Close to work and friends, the place they found wasn't perfect—with a drippy faucet and a drafty window—but the two of them set out to turn this blank, physical space into one of belonging. It wouldn't be an overnight task, for a living space does not equal a home. I tried to help with that, creating a care package with her favorite chocolates and scented soap. Every Irish dwelling should have a St. Brigid's cross, so that went in as well, along with a bottle of holy water, a mini succulent, a collection of family recipes and boxes of herbal tea. My husband was more practical, giving her a toolbox, like my father did for me when I moved to my first apartment. It still sits on the top shelf of our hall closet, collecting dust and reminding me of my dad. Nothing could change that either.

As we unpacked the boxes and assembled the table and chairs, this little New York apartment started looking like it was Abigail's, due in part to that toolbox my husband filled, as much with love and concern for his oldest child as with a hammer and nails. A few days later, Abigail sent photos: the succulent sitting by an open window, the table with placemats ready for dinner



and the St. Brigid's cross above the doorway, thanks to her boyfriend and his handy step stool. Her rooms were filling with treasures, rare and beautiful, as mine once did; knowledge and wisdom waited by the door. As it should, her new life was beginning, one with the love of friends and the foundation of faith from which she grew over the years.

Even if she doesn't come home—to Connecticut—next weekend as she promised, that's ok. She will return soon enough. Home is with her anyway, even miles away.

(Emily Clark can be reached at emily.clark@diobpt.org.)



Why did Jesus pick *him*?

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

Joe Pisani has been a writer and editor for 40 years.

He was 5-foot-1, small of stature, a party animal … and his Latin was terrible.

So why would Jesus choose him?

Why would Jesus say to him from the cross of a rundown chapel, "Francesco, va' e ripara la mia casa che, come vedi, è tutta in rovina!"

What was He thinking?

We do know that when Jesus said three times, "Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is falling into ruin!" a young and impetuous Francis of Assisi responded without hesitation, deliberation or negotiation, and according to some accounts said, "Yes, Lord, willingly!"

Considering our contemporary corporate sensibilities, Jesus should have put more thought into that decision. Why not a bureaucrat? Why not an academic? Why not a medieval CEO? Why not a political leader? Why not a celebrity? Fortunately, Jesus knew darn well what he was doing.

There was no need for a search firm, no need for a LinkedIn profile, no need for interminable job interviews because, as it says in 1 Samuel 16:7—when the prophet was looking at the sons of Jesse for the new king and chose the least likely, David: "The Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him, for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'"

God looks to the heart, not to the incidentals, because God works with imperfection and can make it perfect. All that is required is a simple "Yes, Lord," which was Francis' answer.

As the saint, himself, said, "What a man is in God's eyes that he is … and no more. Then, let us be what God intended us to be … and move forward rebuilding the Church.

The celebrated author Walker Percy, a convert to Catholicism, once wrote, only somewhat facetiously, that to renew the Church, "All it takes is a couple of high livers like Francis of Assisi, a real dude, and Clare, a rich teenage groupie, to turn it around, to actually put into practice the living truth of the Church's teachings, of the Gospel."

This St. Francis was not the St. Francis of the bird feeders; this St. Francis preached the Gospel in season and out of season, with words and actions.

When we think of him, we think of the stigmata, his simplicity, his love of nature and animals, his love of the poor, his pursuit of peace. He was a rich man who renounced wealth and privilege to live the Gospel radically.

He was known as "Il Poverello," which means "the Poor Little Man," but he had another self-bestowed nickname, "Joculator Dei," which means God's jester or minstrel.

Unlike many other saints, he believed that a sullen countenance, and a gloomy, austere attitude have no place for a follower



of the Gospel, despite the suffering he endured. Joy is contagious, and during this time of renewal, joy should be our calling card because a heart open to the Holy Spirit will overflow with joy and attract others.

So, young Catholics, take some advice from an old man: Turn off your cell phones, cut down on your social media, party less and pray more, put the Gospel ahead of your careers and set forth on this great adventure of renewal with the Holy Spirit as your guide.

The challenge for all of us—young, middle-aged and old-timers—is to figure out exactly how Jesus is asking us to rebuild the Church. This much you can be sure of: He is definitely asking something of you although you may not be sure what it is. Nevertheless, don't doubt for a moment that you were born in this particular place and time for a particular purpose.

Go before the Blessed Sacrament. Sit and listen, and you'll get your directions sooner rather than later because God has already looked to your heart. Then, respond, "Yes, Lord, willingly" just as Francis did.

Christ is calling all of us—the short and the tall, those who are Latin scholars and those who aren't, the partiers and contemplatives. You see, grace compensates for our deficiencies and even for our presumed adequacies. So go forth joyfully in the spirit of St. Francis … and get to work.

(Joe Pisani can be reached at jpisani@diobpt.org)

Wedding jubilarians celebrate 5000 years

By EMILY CLARK

With hands clasped and heads bowed, 105 couples from the Diocese of Bridgeport renewed their commitment to each other during annual Wedding Jubilarian Mass on Saturday morning, October 3 at the Cathedral Church of St. Augustine. Celebrant Bishop Frank J. Caggiano recognized those married for 25, 40, 45, 50 and more years by saying, "We honor you and thank you for being a sacrament of love in the church."

As young children scrambled down the pews for hugs from their grandparents, guests greeted each other warmly and couples sat quietly, enjoying a moment together, the impact of nearly 5000 years of marriage, the bishop calculated, was clearly evident in the church that morning.

"In a world where commitments are easily broken, you come here having lived a covenant, not just a commitment, a sacred bond, that images the love of Christ and this whole Church, a commitment that God made to his chosen people and fulfilled in Jesus Christ," Bishop Caggiano said in his homily.



COUPLES FROM DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT RENEW their marriage vows at a special Jubilarian Mass at St. Augustine Cathedral. PHOTOS OF ALL COUPLES IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES BY AMY MORTENSEN



He recalled the bond of marriage that his own parents shared for many years, one that endured even when his father told stories with "colorful language" at the dinner table, horrifying his mother. Each time, when the retelling was complete, she would remind him that "the most beautiful word is the one not spoken," and, the bishop said, his father would just look at her and smile.

"Actions speak louder than words, and in many ways, we have come here today to celebrate the fact that the words you spoke 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 69 years were matched by actions all these years that made those words come alive," he said. "In the times you were gentle with each other, affectionate, when you cherished each other and forgave each other for words spoken that were regretted, through countless acts of random kindness and when you stood by your spouse in moments of suffering, you did not need to say a word. Your actions screamed your love."



The bishop explained that in a world with many words – a lot of them empty – where actions at best do not tell the story that God wants, his followers are called to lives that are in service to others. Those present, he said, live it every day.

"My dear friends, you have no idea the good that you do by the example you live," he continued. "Many have noticed and been inspired by your married life. You have powerfully spoken by your actions that love is real, and God is alive in you. In a world that revels in the fact that the only thing that matters is 'me,' you're teaching the world the truth. And the truth is that we exist because of 'we,' not 'me.'"

Following the homily, the bishop asked couples to turn to each other for the Renewal of Commitment. Together, husbands and wives spoke to each, saying, in part: "Blessed are you, Lord, for in the good and the bad times of our life you have stood lovingly by our side. Help us remain faithful in our love for one another."

For the past 64 years, Ralph and Sally DeGruttola, originally from Shelton, have shared that commitment. "When we took our vows, we meant it, but they were not just to each other. They were vows to God, too," said Ralph. "He has given us strength to continue our marriage and that comes from love. God's love keeps us together."

"Love, but patience too," Sally added. "We hope to get to Heaven together."

"We hope to get to 65!" Ralph laughed, taking her hand.

Linda and John Szantyr, longtime parishioners of Our Lady of Grace in Stratford, will celebrate 50 years together in mid-October.

"We have been blessed abundantly and feel the Holy Spirit here today," said John. He and Linda were joined by their daughter and grandson, who missed Scouts, he said, to be with his grandparents on this special day.

"I could really relate to the bishop's homily in a spiritual way because of his real-life comments," John added.

After being married for 45 years, Deacon Tom and Diane Fekete of Our Lady of Peace in Stratford continue to feel the importance of faith in their lives. Leaning back from the kneeler after praying, Diane said, "I'm so grateful to the Lord. He has always helped our marriage. We give everything to him."

"I wouldn't be here without her!" Deacon Tom said.

Darien couple Natalie and Charles Alini, who belong to St. John Parish, Darien, celebrated 25 years of marriage this year. "Faith is very important to us and has helped us in so many ways," Charles said. "We've been blessed with two wonderful kids. The bishop confirmed them both."

Looking at her husband and nodding, Natalie added, "Just what he said! We've spent 25 years relying on our faith." ■



























































































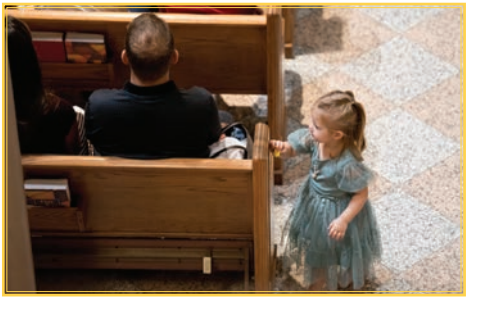

Wedding Jubilee couples 2026

Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. and Nancy L. Ahern | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Charles and Natalie Alini | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Anthony and Camille Aiello | 55th
Mr. and Mrs. Jay and Valerie G. Annis | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Eugene and Edna Arthurs | 55th
Mr. and Mrs. Jacques and Kettlie Bellejacques | 45th
Dr. Nicholas and Mrs. Mary Ellen Bertini | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Hank and Betsy and Bianco | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Edward and Maura Bitsco | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Gary A. Brennan | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Frank Robert and Martina Bria, III | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Douglas MacNeil and Patricia Ryan Brown III | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Ralph and Maria Bucci | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. David Burns and Susan Gebhardt-Burns | 40th
Deacon Joseph and Mrs. Fran Cann | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Pasquale and Carol Delli Carpini | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Antonina and Marino Casole | 50th
Deacon Anthony and Mrs. Gabriela Cassaneto | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. James Catino and Patricia Catino | 62nd
Mr. and Mrs. John A. Croffy, Jr. and Theresa M. Croffy | 57th
Mr. and Mrs. Michael and Christine Darcy | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Ralph and Sally DeGruttola | 64th
Mr. and Mrs. Peter and Catherine Denkus | 53rd
Mr. and Mrs. Mathias de Figueiredo and Raquel Rye Huruta Dias | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Paul and Nancy DeVitto | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. David and Carolyn Dolan | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Joe and Deanne Donia | 69th
Mr. and Mrs. Cyril P. and Carla V. Dosmond | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas and Eva Marie Duffy | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. Christopher and Lorelei Elsberry | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Muradieu and Roseline Exantus | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Roger and Janet Fabryk | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Jack and Debbie Fahey | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel and Kathleen Falzarano | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. James and Joanne Feehley | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. Jack and Sharon and Feighery | 59th
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas and Diane Fekete | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas and Anita Field | 56th
Mr. and Mrs. John and Mary and Fitzpatrick | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Kevin and Paula Flaherty | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Gregory James and Donna Marie Flayhan | 31st
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph and Palma Flewellyn | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. James and Mary Florindi | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Steve and Meg Francis | 60th
Mr. and Mrs. Peter Burg and Kelly Lynne Frank Jr. | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Patrick J. and Charlotte A. Gannon | 60th
Dr. and Mrs. Paul and Linda Gargano | 57th
Mr. and Mrs. Mario and Pina Gentile | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. George and Joan Godfrey | 64th
Mr. and Mrs. Richard and Marie Godfrey | 60th
Mr. and Mrs. William Scott and Cynthia Gramling | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. Bob and Debbie Grosso | 60th
Mr. and Mrs. George and Karen Hangos | 61st
Mr. and Mrs. Owen and Janet Kieran | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas and Maryellen Kleszczewski | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew and Ellen Kolesk | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Fernanda and Cristiano de Souza Leao | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Frederick and Brigitte Lee | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Manuel Jorge and Manuela M. Lopes | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. Luis Manuel and Jennifer Stosuy Malta | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Enkel and Lucia Mari | 25th
Deacon Thomas and Mrs. Eileen Marie Masaryk | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. Daniel R. and Patrice M. McAuliffe, Jr. | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Anita McCord | 66th
Mr. and Mrs. Kevin J. and Carolyne E. McEnery | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Yves and Marie Jacqueline Metellus | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Mario and Donna Migiano | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Dennis and Karen Millea | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth and Diane Moran | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph and Margaret Niedermeier | 66th
Mr. and Mrs. Joao Vieira and Lenita Celia Ferreira Nunes | 51st
Mr. and Mrs. Hector B. and Maria E. Ortiz | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Haydn and Elizabeth O'Shea | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Bernie and Peggy Pasierb | 54th
Mr. and Mrs. Frank and Pina Pergolizzi | 65th
Mr. and Mrs. Donald and Claudette Perley | 60th
Mr. and Mrs. Mark Steven and Arlene Theresa Perricone | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. John and Jacqueline Perrotta | 56th
Mr. and Mrs. Terrance and Laurel Petiprin | 61st
Mr. and Mrs. Tim and Sheila Pettee | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph and Diane Pratt | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Leonel and Vilma Portillo | 38th
Mr. and Mrs. Ray and Linda Quinlan | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Rainone, Sr. | 68th
Mr. and Mrs. Peter and Antoneeta Lalanthi Ratnavel | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Georges and Erline Rene | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. John and Anne Rich | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Bruce and Patricia Richards | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Patricia Silk | 60th
Mr. and Mrs. Patrick and Susan Smeraldi | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Joanne Smith | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. William and Wendy Sopchak | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Brendan and Jeanne Soraghan | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. Frank and Christine Staltaro | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Jim and Carol Steffen | 40th
Mr. and Mrs. John and Linda Szantyr | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Bill and Robin Taylor | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph and Anna Lourdes Thampoe | 68th
Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Jeanann Thuss | 40th
Deacon William C. and Mrs. Caryl P. Timmel | 55th
Mr. and Mrs. Tiago and Laura Vitorino | 51st
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew and Donavel Vizcarra | 25th
Mr. and Mrs. Francesco and Rachele Vonella | 50th
Mr. and Mrs. Keith and Julie Wax | 45th
Mr. and Mrs. Anthony and Rosemarie Xavier | 60th
Mr. and Mrs. John F. and Rose Marie P. Zaharek | 61st
Ông Giuse Trần Ngọc Thu and Bà Maria Cao Thị Tuyết | 60th
Ông Gioan Baotixita Trần Hoàng and Bà Maria Phạm Thị Hằng | 45th
Anh Laurence Nguyễn Ngọc Long and Chị Maria Têrêsa Nguyễn Kim Uyên | 25th
Anh Giuse Nguyễn Phạm Thanh Tùng and Chị Maria Đinh Thị Len | 25th
Anh Đôminicô Nguyễn Quốc Tuấn and Chị Anna Đặng Thị Hằng | 25th
Anh Phanxicô Saviê Nguyễn Tùng Nghĩa and Chị Anê Nguyễn Thị Ánh Chi | 25th



‘Go Rebuild My CHURCH’ 2.0



Why ‘The One’ is only just beginning in our diocese

By BISHOP FRANK J. CAGGIANO

The initiative (known as The One) that has shaped these last three years of my life as your bishop, and the entire diocese, became clear to me during a long drive on the New Jersey Turnpike, somewhere between Exits Two and Three. Since that fateful day, I have relived that moment hundreds of times.

I was driving home from a conference in Washington, D.C., where the presenter had spent the day pressing a room full of bishops with one question. What is your one goal? What is ‘the one’ hope for your people that ties every other hope together?

I hesitated to answer him that day. But on that highway I realized the answer that was deep within my heart. I want our Church to be renewed. I want our Church to be reborn. I want our young adults to be joyful in their faith. I want our children and grandchildren to know what I knew as a boy and still know as an older man, i.e. the unconditional love God has for me in and through the Lord Jesus and his Catholic Church. I want everyone to know what I learned from my parents, teachers and those who loved me.

That was my one hope and desire. And once I could name it, the Lord said: “If that is what you want, let me show you how.”

After 36 years as a priest, I knew there was nothing new to invent, only something ancient to rediscover. Consider that young man in Assisi who knelt before a crucifix at San Damiano and heard the Lord say, “Rebuild my Church.”

Saint Francis took it literally, gathering stones and repairing the walls with his own hands. Only later did he understand that the Lord was asking for something more important than masonry.

The Church that needed rebuilding was made of people, and it began with one life, his own, wholly surrendered, dedicated to sharing the faith and modeling self-giving that is part of that faith. This year the Church marks 800 years since Francis went home to God, and that renewal is still working its way through history.

All the popes for the last 60 years have been calling us out of the sacristy and into the street, insisting on a Church of encounter and accompaniment that goes out to find people where they live. The One is our answer to that same summons, parish by parish, in our corner of Connecticut.

So what does The One ask of you? It asks that you and I believe that the best days of our Church are not behind us but ahead of us. More specifically, if we wish to rebuild our parish and school families, we must rediscover the two elements that made the early Church explode with life.

The first element is encountering the Lord daily in a personal, living way that there is no option to choose mediocrity. We do not pray because we are forced to pray. We pray because the Lord Jesus has captured our minds and hearts the way anyone in love wants time with the beloved. Ask yourself when you were last able to pray, as a close friend, with Jesus. If the answer is never or rarely, we can help you to discover how to do so. It is an invitation. Say yes to it!

The second is accompaniment. Jesus teaches us one great com-

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A 21st Century Church renewal

By FATHER STEPHEN M. KOETH, C.S.C., PH.D.

Assistant Professor | Department of History | University of Notre Dame



Concern about the health of parish life has been a consistent theme in American Catholicism since at least the 1940s. In the era of European immigration, the urban ethnic parish had developed as a highly successful means of weaving geography, education, culture, family, and faith into robust community. Even through the late 1940s and 1950s, the number of American Catholics attending Mass on Sunday continued to rise until it peaked at an astonishing 74 percent in 1958.

As early as the 1940s, however, some Catholic leaders worried that parishes were merely sacramental “service stations” where the faithful came briefly, once a week, for a distribution of spiritual graces but had little real engagement with the Liturgy, their priests, or their fellow parishioners. The decline of the urban ethnic parish, the rapid expansion of the postwar suburbs, and the explosion of parish size in the suburbs all compounded this problem. Although newly suburbanized Catholics tried mightily to replicate the institutional and associational infrastructure they had known in their urban parishes, they were hampered by financial constraints, a shortage of priests and religious sisters, political divisions within the Church, and even the spatial arrangement of suburbia.

By the 1970s, the priest-sociologist Andrew Greeley began sounding an alarm in his weekly syndicated newspaper column. Surveys indicated a steep decline in Sunday Mass attendance and a rise in the number of Americans who were raised Catholic but no longer identified themselves as such—a process referred to as disaffiliation.

Data from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), confirms that the percentage of American Catholics who attended Mass every week dropped from 55 percent in 1970, to 42 percent in 1980, 32 percent in 1990, 30 percent in 2000, 24 percent in 2010, to just 17 percent in 2020. The number of disaffiliated Catholics has risen sharply, so that today more than a third of Americans who were raised Catholic no longer consider themselves part of the Church. Altogether, the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the postwar generation who pioneered suburban parishes attend Mass, have their marriages blessed and their children baptized, and send their children to parochial schools at lower and lower rates.

Many of the most plausible explanations for these declines are deeply connected to the changes in American Catholicism

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Praying like St. Francis

By DEACON PATRICK TOOLE

Have you ever seen a child pray the Lord's Prayer? They often recite it slowly and deliberately, carefully pronouncing each word. They may not completely understand what they are saying, but you can tell they know they are doing something sacred. How about Rosary groups after Mass? Sometimes it's hard to keep up with them as they rush through each decade. I guess after reciting thousands of Rosaries, it's difficult not to race through words that are so familiar. One of the challenges of rote prayer is ensuring that we don't lose sight of what we are saying.

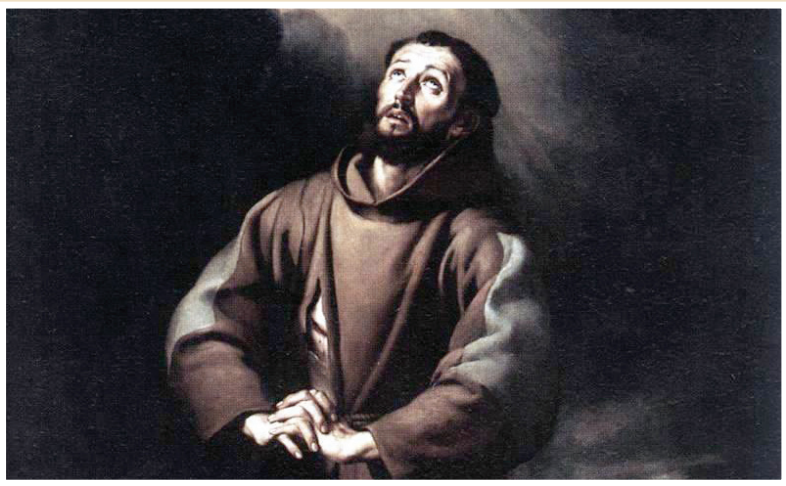
Prayer, and especially the Lord's Prayer, was close to St. Francis's heart. He regularly spent hours in conversation with God, often going off by himself to practice silent meditation. According to Franciscan tradition, one morning, a brother in the friary noticed that Francis had gone off early to pray. The sun rose high, the day wore on, and still Francis had not returned. When he finally came back in the evening, the brother gently asked him, "Father Francis, where have you been all day?"

Francis, with his eyes still full of quiet joy, answered simply: "I was praying the Our Father." The brother was puzzled. "All day? Only that?" Francis nodded, and then explained: "I began to say, 'Our Father who art in heaven…' but my heart was immediately seized with such love and reverence for God as my Father, that I could not move past it. I stayed there, repeating it, tasting it, letting it fill me. I saw how deeply He loves us, how He calls each of us His child, how everything in Heaven and Earth belongs to Him—and yet, He desires to be our Father. It overwhelmed me. So, I remained there with Him. I could not rush past such love."

For Francis, prayer wasn't about many words—it was about presence. Even one line of the Our Father could become a deep well of contemplation. He didn't just recite it—he reflected on each phrase with genuine devotion. Eventually, he composed a commentary, "Expositio in Pater Noster," and instructed all his friars on how to pray the "Our Father" with reverence and devotion.

St. Francis didn't just pray the Lord's Prayer—he lived it. His life was a testament to what it means to honor God as Father, to forgive, to hunger for Christ, and to do God's will on earth. For example, take the petition: "Give us this day our daily bread." He understood the reference to the Most Holy Eucharist. However, he also understood the need to surrender completely to divine providence.

In the early days of his conversion, St. Francis had given up everything—wealth, comfort, status. Once known as the charming son of a wealthy merchant, he now walked the streets of Assisi dressed in rags, begging for crumbs like the poor he once ignored.



One cold afternoon, alone and hungry, Francis had no food and no shelter. His stomach ached with hunger, and his spirit trembled with loneliness. But he remembered the words of Christ in the Gospel: "Take nothing for your journey… not a second tunic, nor bread, nor money." So, with trembling hands and a heart heavy with shame, he approached a house where he was not known. He knocked on the door and whispered, "For the love of God… a piece of bread." The woman who answered looked at him with contempt. She thought he was a madman or a lazy beggar. With a scornful glance, she handed him a hard crust of stale bread and slammed the door.

Francis stood there, stunned. His face flushed with humiliation. He felt the old pride rise up in him—that pride that once wore fine clothes and basked in praise. Now, he was a fool in rags, rejected and despised. He stepped away and sat under a tree, holding the dry bread in his hands. Tears filled his eyes, and he prayed aloud, "Lord… this is my daily bread. You have given it. And I receive it—not just with my mouth, but with my soul."

And in that moment, something changed. The tears of humiliation became tears of peace. Francis saw that even rejection could become holy, that even stale bread could be sacred when received in love. He took a bite. It was the most bitter, and yet the most beautiful meal of his life. Daily bread is not just what we ask for—it's what we receive, even when it doesn't come in the form we expected.

It might come as humiliation.

It might come as rejection.

It might come as silence, or waiting, or even a crust of stale bread when we were hoping for something more. But for Francis, what mattered wasn't what he received—it was who it came from. He trusted that whatever God gave him that day was enough. Enough to live. Enough to pray. Enough to love.

We are all being called to live the Lord's Prayer not just as a text to recite, but as a daily reality to embody. To learn how to depend on God for what we need, and to receive what He gives—not with entitlement, but with gratitude.

There will be days when the "bread" you receive feels small or hard or dry. There will be moments when your pride is tested, when your plans fall apart, or when people misunderstand or even reject you. Those are the moments when the petition—"Give us this day our daily bread"—becomes real.

And it's there, in the quiet, hidden places that you'll be asked to do what Francis did:

To trust.

To receive.

To give thanks.

And to begin again.

Because the daily bread God gives—however simple, however unexpected—is always enough… when it's received with love.

Deacon Patrick Toole is Chancellor & Secretary of the Curia of the Diocese of Bridgeport. ■

Leaving all to serve God

By COLIN FIRDA

Walking through the streets of Assisi, you notice a few things: the view of the valley beneath you, the many bell towers and churches around you, and the constant presence of Franciscan priests and religious. Everywhere you look, there are reminders of the lasting impact left by St. Francis, St. Clare, and the Franciscan orders on that small, once insignificant hill town.

Last summer I went on a pilgrimage to Assisi. On the first day of my trip, one of my friends and I walked from where we were staying to the Basilica of St. Francis. It was around 8 pm, but—to our surprise—the crypt housing St. Francis's tomb was open. So, we went inside, and immediately, I was overcome with a deep sense of God's presence and of holiness.

St. Francis's tomb is simple. His body is encased in a pillar above an altar with a tabernacle housing our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Surrounding the pillar are the tombs of the four co-founders and closest friends of St. Francis, who assisted him in setting up the Order of Friars Minor.

When we entered the chapel that evening, around 20 to 30 people were there, slowly walking around the tomb or praying in the pews in front of the altar. As we sat down, my friend suggested we pray the rosary, in silence, in front of the tomb.

The week before visiting Assisi, I had gone to Rome and seen the tombs of many saints. Now, in the presence of St. Francis, I felt different. My friend and I each prayed the rosary in silence, united in our gaze toward Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and St. Francis. It was one of the most powerful rosaries I have ever prayed. I was in awe of the presence of holiness I felt in that small chapel. The presence of God and of St. Francis was almost tangible.



COLIN FIRDA

The next day, I felt a similar presence across town at the tomb of St. Clare. Although I did not pray a rosary in her presence, I again felt the tangi-

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St. Francis still speaks to us

By FATHER NORBERT M. SIWINSKI, OFMConv, PhD

When people discover that I am a Franciscan friar, one of the first questions they ask is, "Why did you become a Franciscan?" My answer has become simpler over the years: because I met St. Francis, and through him I learned to love Jesus Christ more deeply.

I have lived as a Conventual Franciscan for almost thirty years. During those years I have studied theology, served in Poland, Germany, and now in the Diocese of Bridgeport, celebrated countless Masses, heard confessions, accompanied people through moments of joy and suffering, and discovered that the wisdom of St. Francis never loses its freshness. The world changes, cultures change, technology changes—but the human heart does not. It continues to long for peace, meaning, forgiveness, and hope.

That is why Francis still speaks to us.

Many people think first of birds, animals, or the beauty of creation when they hear the name of St. Francis. Those images are certainly part of his story, but they are not its heart. The heart of Francis was Jesus Christ. Everything else flowed from that encounter. Francis was captivated by the humility of God—God who became a poor child in Bethlehem, who walked among ordinary people, who embraced the Cross out of love, and who remains with us in the Eucharist.

Francis did not try to invent a new way of living. He simply took the Gospel seriously.

I often find myself returning to that simplicity. As a parish priest at St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Bridgeport, my days are rarely extraordinary. They are filled with ordinary encounters: celebrating the sacraments, visiting the sick, preparing homilies, meeting parishioners, listening to people's struggles, praying with them, and sharing life with my brother friars. Yet I believe Francis would smile at that. Holiness is rarely found in spectacular moments. More often, it grows quietly through fidelity to the small things God places before us each day.

Living in a Franciscan community has also taught me something I could never have learned alone. Our fraternity is not simply a practical arrangement for priests who live together. It is part of our vocation. We pray together, eat together, support one another, and occasionally challenge one another to become more patient and charitable. In a society that often celebrates radical individualism, fraternity itself becomes a form of evangelization.

Another lesson Francis continues to teach me is gratitude. The older I become, the more convinced I am that gratitude changes everything. Francis possessed very little, yet he experienced the world as overflowing with God's gifts. He saw every person as a brother or sister because each one reflected the Creator. He praised God for the sun and the moon, for water and fire, even for "Sister Death." Only a heart transformed by Christ can see the world with such freedom and joy.

Serving here in the Diocese of Bridgeport has strengthened that conviction. I have encountered generous parishioners, faithful families, devoted volunteers, and people whose quiet acts of charity rarely make headlines but reveal the presence of God every day. They remind me that the Franciscan spirit is alive wherever people choose love over indifference, forgiveness over resentment, and hope over fear.

As we celebrate the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis, I do not think he would want us to admire him from a distance. He would ask us to look beyond him—to Christ. That was always his desire. Francis became a saint because he never wanted people to see Francis; he wanted them to see Jesus.

Perhaps that is why his message still speaks so powerfully after eight centuries. Our world does not need another celebrity. It needs witnesses.



Father Norbert Siwinski, OFMConv, PhD

Men and women whose lives quietly proclaim that the Gospel is not an impossible ideal but a joyful way of life.

"The Lord give you peace." Those were among the first words Francis spoke wherever he went. Eight hundred years later, they remain the prayer I hope to bring into every parish, every family, and every heart I have the privilege to serve.

Pax et Bonum ■

An encounter with the Blessed Sacrament

By SR. JAIME MITCHELL, FSE

My call to become a Religious Sister came several years before I found the right community for me. I had a powerful experience of encountering Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in my early 20's on a retreat. That encounter led me to seek Truth and ultimately a calling to Religious Life. After looking at a few communities that were obviously not the right fit, I simply gave up. Through further prayer, the Lord led me to serve Him at Maggie's Place, a home for women who are pregnant and in need of support, while living in community together. I ended up serving there for almost three years, when the Lord called me to move back to Connecticut. It was then my call to Religious Life reignited because a friend of mine sent me an email about a new community, the Franciscans of the Eucharist of Chicago.

This young community was founded and approved by the Church in 2010. Their love for the poor was manifested by living and working in the poor neighborhood of West Humboldt Park in Chicago. Most of all, their love of Jesus in the Eucharist sealed the deal for me. I knew God was calling me there to serve Him in the poor through food pantries, community events, and evangelization and best of all, Eucharistic Adoration. Most recently, I reflected in wonder and amazement that God called me to a Franciscan community. It made much more sense as St. Anthony of Padua is my patron saint from my childhood. I wanted to simply hold the infant Jesus.

I knew St. Anthony of Padua very well and in this year of St. Francis, I have come to a deeper appreciation and gratitude for our seraphic father, asking him to help me grow more in my Franciscan identity. Francis's love for the Eucharist is striking when reading his writings. His words are simple and direct. For example, he exhorts priests to take care of the vessels that carry the precious body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His heart is wholly focused on the Gospel; in fact the first line of Francis's Later Rule is to follow the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

My Franciscan roots started when I was young, and even though I was unaware, upon my entrance to my community and cleaning out my stuff, I came across a prayer that we would pray at St. Joseph High School (graduate 1995). It looked awfully familiar—it was the Prayer before the Crucifix that St. Francis wrote. That is the prayer my community prays every day after Mass:



Sister Jaime Mitchell, FSE

Most High Glorious God
Enlighten the darkness of my heart
Instill in me a correct faith,
A certain hope, a perfect love,
A sense and knowledge, Lord,
That I may do your holy and true command. Amen.

This is simple but not easy. It's challenging and many people today need to hear Francis's words once again. Francis tried to direct his own life and it came crashing down. This prayer is his turning back to God; in a word: conversion. Francis's conversion was just not a one-time event that sealed the deal. His conversion was ongoing throughout his life; a reminder for all of us, that our conversion is also lifelong. How generous is our Lord that He is so patient with His creatures, that He gives us the freedom to turn away from Him and the grace to turn back to Him ■



Frescoes by Giotto di Bondone

a MISSION *to* serve



SUSAN BALDWIN, OFS

BY SUSAN BALDWIN, OFS

I remember when I was a youth that I was drawn to the story of Creation and the Gospels. My mentors for faith were the sisters assigned to Saint Mary Parish in Stamford. They taught us about the poor, and at an early age, I would steal a can of vegetables or a box of cereal from the kitchen cabinets at home and bring them to the church for the sisters. Stealing them from the cabinets at home is a story for another day.

Over the course of my youth and young adulthood, I learned more about serving the poor and what social justice meant. I had no idea that God was preparing me for something. My life was traditional -- marriage, kids, grandparenting, career.

But In 2012, I knew I was being drawn closer to the Church and the mission to serve. Having participated in mission work through the Church and bringing youth on various mission trips, it became apparent to me that the inclusion of homeless and marginalized people was a big part of my whole life story.

I don't remember a time when my heart didn't feel an ache when I saw the news on TV, watching and learning about the condition of homelessness and hunger in developing countries. Then, I found out this condition was in my own back yard. I began to learn more about our Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy and the people in our Catholic history who made a difference. I wanted to go deeper about a commitment to serve.

One of my favorite people, Father Gene Szantyr, began to talk with me about the Third Order Franciscans. He even went so far as to say, "Do a little research on third orders." I had never heard of this. I took Father's advice.

By March 2013, I was pretty sure that God was calling me to the Secular Franciscan Third Order. I prayed in adoration for months and finally made the phone call. A big thank you to Pat Heile, who became my mentor to "come and see." She was so welcoming. That final confirmation for me was on March 13, 2013, when Pope Francis walked out onto the balcony. It just seemed to be a beautiful sign that this is where God was calling me.

Saint Francis and many of the Franciscan saints have impacted me and continue to inspire me as a professed Secular Franciscan. Like Francis, there was every luxury available to me, none of which mattered except maybe the AM/FM radio. The most important part of who I am was learned through the Church, not through material possessions and not so much in the secular world. St. Francis was bold and radical enough to leave everything and live the Gospel. I believe much of that example continues to drive me to serve even when it may be inconvenient, especially when it calls me to be with that one person, who is not noticed.

When I wear the Tau cross, it is the outward and inward sign to live in Simplicity, Fidelity and Charity. It is a reminder of the profession I have made. St. Francis is my example of humility, compassion toward the poor and helpless, gratitude for the work God has done, the resources that suddenly come to help serve, the love and support of my family, the Catholic Church and what it teaches, and the graces received.

June 11, 2016, three years after that phone call, with my family and formators present, I professed to live "Gospel to life and life to Gospel." Is it easy? No. Is it pure love? Yes. I was called at an early age by God to be in community to serve. The Third Order Franciscan Order is exactly what God was preparing and calling me to do.

There is peace holding the hand of someone who has had no physical touch, sharing a meal with someone who is hungry with nowhere to go, wrapping a blanket around someone who is cold, sitting down with a person learning their name and praying.

St. Francis and St. Clare, pray for us.

(Susan Baldwin belongs to the Third Order Secular Franciscan Holy Spirit Fraternity, which meets at St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Fairfield. For further information, contact Marilyn Mitchell, Fraternity Minister, at 203-521-2583.) ■

St. Francis: Find God in simple things

BY EMILY CLARK

EASTON – The muted sunlight of late afternoon gradually faded as gray clouds moved in, bringing light drizzle and then a steady rain with subtle breezes. Eventually, that all subsided and the sun emerged again, this time brighter than before and accompanying it, a rainbow.

For those present in the fields of Gilbertie's Organics on a recent Sunday afternoon, this cycle of sunshine and rain seemed to perfectly illustrate the Canticle of the Sun in its natural form, bringing to life the 13th-century religious poem and prayer written by St. Francis of Assisi.

With autumn leaves framing the 100-year-old family farm, close to 200 local residents and guests from as far away as Maryland gathered for "A Feast with Saint Francis." This celebration, held within the Jubilee Year of this beloved Italian friar, included Mass and a multi-sensory arts experience, all based on the sacred verse.

"We choose to believe that Francis was with us and he was smiling, almost like saying, 'you want a canticle?' Here's a whole canticle! The sun, the clouds, the wind and the rainbow as the climax of it all," said Ewa Krepsztul, a Catholic artist from Redding and the event coordinator.



A RAINBOW APPEARS over Gilbertie's during a St. Francis of Assisi festival.

The Canticle of the Sun was Francis' song of praise to God for all of creation, one that Krepsztul wanted to make come alive through art. A parishioner at St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Bridgeport, she first approached pastor Father Norbert Siwinski, himself a Franciscan friar, with an idea after visiting Assisi and finding inspiration in the Canticle.

"I had a dream of exhibition and wanted to bring the Canticle to where I live," Krepsztul said.

That dream came to fruition on Sunday afternoon, October 4 after months of planning. Once a creative dialogue between Krepsztul and Father Norbert began, she crafted 12 original egg-tempera paintings reflecting the Canticle of the Sun, and he wrote original meditations to accompany them. The artwork is all connected to Francis, she explained.

"They are moments of meeting with God's beauty. I needed Francis to be in them, and he is, starting and ending the Canticle," Krepsztul said. She noted that the Angel Gabriel is waiting for the Annunciation in one painting while the Holy Spirit is present in another. The appearance of birds and hidden angels add to the symbolism.

"It had to be my experience or it wouldn't be authentic," she continued, saying she included scenery from Redding as well as images from Iceland, Poland and Italy. "I painted moments where I felt part of creation and started crying because he's right there. God is present right there."

Father Norbert's meditations aligned with Krepsztul's scenes and were complimented by the music of composer Michael Ferrarai and performed by cellist Gjorgj Kroqi.

When the artistic elements were in place, Bilal Gilbertie, a former iconography student of Krepsztul's, offered his grandfather Sal's herb farm in Easton as the backdrop for the exhibition. Without question, Father Norbert would be the celebrant at Mass, along with parochial vicar Father Grzegorz Kordek, also of St. Michael the Archangel. Because natural elements are vital to the Canticle, Krepsztul knew it would all take place outdoors.

"The whole thing was just an abundance of God's gift," she said. "Even when the rain came!"

And it came, during the showcase of the fourth painting "Sister Moon and the Stars," an image of the dark night with a full moon, deer grazing by a river and a large dove, wings spread and concealed in the clouds.

As attendees began donning jackets and opening umbrellas, reader Hannah

➤ *CONTINUED ON PAGE 21*

Catholic men told to 'Start rebuilding'

By JOE PISANI

WATERBURY—How do 600 Catholic men respond to an 800-year-old request of Jesus to a man named Francesco di Assisi?

In this Jubilee Year of St. Francis, which marks the eight centuries since his passing, Jesus's words, "Francis, go repair my house, which as you can see is falling completely to ruin" have particular relevance during a time of renewal in the Church.

And so, speakers at the 19th annual Connecticut Catholic Men's Conference focused on the theme "Rebuild My Church" and what it means for the modern Catholic. For the high school students to the seniors in the audience, the mandate was clear: Start by renewing yourself first and set out on the path to deeper personal holiness.

Father Declan Gibson, director of the Most Holy Eucharist Foundation, said the first step in accepting Christ's invitation to rebuild the Church is "to allow Christ to rebuild us" and then to bring that renewed faith into the home and make Jesus visibly present in family life because the domestic church will strengthen the Church.

This transformation, Father Gibson said, does not come from personal strength but rather through surrendering to Jesus by putting aside the distractions of the world and developing "a deep personal relationship with him in the Holy Eucharist" through weekly attendance at Adoration.

"Have an appointment with Jesus Christ, a private audience," Father Gibson said. "Go to Adoration. Sit before your Lord. There is no greater choice. Do not worry about doing everything perfectly or having the right words. Just go, and if you don't know what to say, don't speak. Just be with the Lord. Look at him as he looks at you. Let him capture your heart."

Jeanne Mancini, former president of the March for Life, whose talk was titled "Rebuilding a Culture of Life and Love," stressed the importance of "good, holy, masculine men" in shaping a culture that respects human dignity.

She outlined several practices to live as "a man of God," including the daily practice of meditating for at least 15 minutes in order to hear the voice of God and where he is directing us.

In addition, she recommended regular fasting, not only from food but also technology and entertainment because it is "a powerful tool to change hearts and help us become a better instrument of the Holy Spirit."

If we adopt a willingness to say yes to God's will, we become receptive to divine promptings from the Holy Spirit, which is immeasurably more productive than simply "coming up with good ideas,"she said.

The men were urged to prioritize their marriages and families because the primary path to holiness can be found in the domestic church, which is the home. Regular sacramental confession and fraternity with other men are necessities on the spiritual journey, Mancini said.



FATHER GLENN SUDANO CFR TALKS about the example of St. Francis of Assisi at men's conference. PHOTO BY AARON JOSEPH

Father Glenn Sudano CFR, a founding member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, called the men to a deeper holiness sustained by God's grace and said that like the saints, they should strive for "greatness" in their faith, rather than settling on merely being "good." He said we are part of "the most wonderful religion in the world," and while it is not perfect, it is the Mystical Body of Christ.

Father Sudano encouraged them to strive for self-knowledge and practice daily prayer, regular confession and frequent attendance at Mass. They should also avoid distractions such as politics and instead focus on the Gospel.

Other speakers included Dr. Karlo Broussard of Catholic Answers.

In his homily at the Vigil Mass, Bishop Juan Miguel Betancourt of the Archdiocese of Hartford, told the men to respond to God's invitation with charitable acts in family and parish life and not to procrastinate in responding, until "life settles down."

"In this Franciscan year, these words 'Rebuild my Church' should stir something seriously generous within us, so we respond," Bishop Betancourt said. "We want our families to flourish, our parishes to be alive, and our communities to know the goodness of God. And today, we place that renewed desire before Jesus and ask him to give us direction: 'Show me where you are calling me to love more faithfully. Once more, Lord, show me the good I can begin to do when I leave this place.'"

The conference, which was held at Holy Cross High School, offered opportunities for confession, veneration of 30 first-class relics and a Eucharistic procession with Bishop Richard Reidy of the Diocese of Norwich.

Conference director Ken Santopietro said, "Our goal is to help men increase their faith and to build themselves up from the inside … and sometimes that happens through a speaker, a priest or fraternity with other men."

Santopietro expressed his gratitude to all the speakers, particularly Mancini.

Chaplain, Father James Sullivan, said that in recent years, he has seen signs of renewal in the Church, with more young people searching for answers and finding them in Catholicism.

Deacon Rick Lawlor, a member of the conference committee, says he used to worry about the future of the Church when he saw only old people in the pews, but then something happened. He calls it a revitalization and says that just as Jesus told St. Francis 800 years ago, "Rebuild my Church," the Church is being rebuilt now.

Peter Galasso of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Newtown said that he and his wife Christian have committed to attending daily Mass as a step toward holiness and that as you deepen your faith, the desire to go further increases. ■

FIND GOD IN SIMPLE THINGS FROM PAGE 20

Chomiczewski read Father Norbert's reflection: "Your sister, Moon, and the stars in Heaven [were] formed, clear and precious and beautiful. Over hills and hidden valleys, the river moves without haste. It carries the night as a quiet offering. Small lights glisten in the distance, faithful and unafraid of the dark. The moon keeps watch with a gentle light. The stars remain faithful, teaching the soul patience and trust. Under this sky, one rests."

As the rain continued, organizers covered each painting for preservation, though Krepsztul said that she wouldn't have minded if there was damage, for they were meant simply as the background. "For me," she said, "the Word was the most crucial."

Following the art exhibition, Mass began with the hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King," the familiar song based on the Canticle of the Sun. Despite the continuous rain, which one woman called "holy water from the sky," most attendees remained, connecting with Father Norbert's abbreviated homily where he acknowledged the appropriateness of the weather.

"Sister Water – you are here now; you are happening now," he said. "So, nothing is what we planned. Therefore, this is, my friends, what we learn from. We find God in the simple things of everyday life, in Brother Sun – who is somewhere today, behind the clouds – in Brother Wind, in Sister Water. She is definitely here! Brother Fire, Sister Mother Earth. All of them were brothers and sisters. Francis found God in the creatures, in the world around him. And let this rain be a sign of God's grace, pouring down from heaven on our heads and into our hearts."

At the conclusion of Mass, the rain gradually subsided and the clouds parted, revealing first a few peeks of sun, and then a high, glorious rainbow over the roof of Gilbertie's barn, awing the crowds as they looked heavenward.

Beata Sidorowicz, who knows Krepsztul personally from St. Michael, said, "I'm not surprised at the gift of these paintings that Ewa created and gave for so many to see. She said it would be rain or shine! This is the perfect proof of what Father said: the grace is pouring down on us."

Justin and Melissa Giorlando belong to Notre Dame of Easton and attended with their three small children. The visual aspect combined with the outdoor setting awed them. "This was such a beautiful ceremony with the art and music," said Melissa Giorlando. "We could really feel God's presence here."

Added her husband: "I think this is the only outdoor Catholic Mass I've ever been to!"

As attendees enjoyed a community dinner in the field and the sun began its descent, Sal Gilbertie and his wife Marie, both 89, came out to enjoy the fellowship. Devout Catholics with a Marian shrine on their property and carvings of St. Francis in their barn, they were honored to host this Feast of St. Francis.

"I've been a fan of St. Francis all my life, and I love his prayer, all the hymns and the Canticle of the Sun," said Sal Gilbertie, whose grandson Bilal built an altar from a fallen tree on their property especially for this occasion. "I actually got emotional when we set up the altar with the crucifix and all the paintings in line with the witch hazel. It's perfect, all part of God's plan."

"Saint Francis teaches us to recognize God's goodness in everything He has created: Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Wind, Sister Water, Mother Earth — and yes, even the rain falling upon us as we celebrated the Eucharist," said Father Norbert.

Krepsztul hopes to bring the Canticle project – the paintings, meditations and music – to parishes in the area so all have an opportunity to share in the beauty and simplicity of St. Francis, whose words "Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures" have echoed across the fields and the centuries, in honor and remembrance. ■

‘Live simply like St. Francis’

By LINDA NASH

WESTON—Parishioners filled St. Francis of Assisi Church to mark the 800th anniversary of the death of their patron saint, in a Mass celebrated by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano.

In his homily, Bishop Caggiano talked about the life of St. Francis of Assisi and focused on the theme of what we need, not what we want.

Born into a wealthy family, St. Francis was moved by a leper who rang his bell to keep people away and called out to Jesus. In a life-changing moment, young Francis embraced the man, and this act led him to see Jesus in outcasts.

He realized the leper had everything he needed, the bishop said. Moreover, it was not what he needed, but rather Who he needed—Jesus.

Francis left behind the trappings of material wealth and spent the rest of his life serving Jesus.

Bishop Caggiano challenged everyone in church to consider what they need in their lives of faith. “We are conscious of the things we want but what about the things we need?” he asked. Bishop Caggiano acknowledged that many people may not be sure, and that is one reason we come to Mass every Sunday and take time to ask that question in prayer.

The bishop pointed out that St. Francis was told by Jesus from a cross at San Damiano, “Rebuild my Church,” and that he transformed it with a radical, joyful rejection of wealth and status, showing that spiritual renewal comes from holiness, helping others and living as Jesus did.

“It was a truly beautiful day for our Saint Francis family,” said Pastor Father Augustine Nguyen. “Having Bishop Caggiano with us to celebrate Mass made the occasion especially meaningful as we continue to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the death of our patron, St. Francis of Assisi.” ■



Leaving all to serve God from page 18

ble holiness surrounding her body. These two saints, whom I have always known about but never had a particular devotion to, came storming into my life. Their example of leaving everything behind to serve God as He wanted them to serve Him sparked a desire in my heart to love our Lord in a more radical way.

In the year since that trip, as I went back to seminary for my second year, our Lord continued to pour out his love for me, calling me to serve him in this more intimate way. I have never felt called to become a Franciscan, but I do feel that God is calling me to embrace the simplicity and the love that St. Francis and St. Clare had for Him.

To truly live out the Christian life, we must all be willing to suffer, to offer all that we have and all that we are to God, trusting that He will take care of everything. St. Francis and St. Clare are two of the best examples of radical trust in divine providence that God has ever given to His Church. Each lived a life of humble service to God’s will, taking to heart our Lord’s exhortation to St. Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,” (2 Corinthians 12:9 RSV-CE).

Colin Firda is a seminarian of the Diocese of Bridgeport. ■

A 21st Century from page 17

wrought by postwar suburbanization. So, attending to these transformations may prove especially helpful in formulating pastoral strategies to address religious disaffiliation and revitalize parish life.

Firstly, we must attend to the quality of our worship. In the postwar suburbs, Sunday Masses were first held in temporary spaces like drive-in movie theaters and school auditoriums. They lacked both the sense of community and the sense of the sacred that many of the faithful sought. And the modernist churches that eventually replaced them were hardly any better. But young people today, who have grown up in an era of cellphones and social media, are ever more visual and therefore especially attracted to ritual and symbol. To capture the spiritual imagination, the Church needs to recapture beauty and a sense of the transcendent in its architecture and liturgical worship.

Young people today are also deeply attuned to authenticity and seek a meaning and truth beyond their own egos. An experience of the Church’s ritual and symbol, which provides a spiritual encounter with Christ, must therefore be accompanied and sustained by an introduction to the Scripture, tradition, and moral teachings of the Church. In the decades after the Second Vatican Council, forays into novel theology and experiments in pedagogical methods left a whole generation of Catholic youth less knowledgeable about the tenets and practices of the faith and less likely to maintain it in the face of a pluralistic society. To successfully combat religious disaffiliation, the Church needs improved preaching, catechesis, and apologetics to offer modern men and women the meaning for which they long.

Finally, in the postwar period, suburbanization, the automobile, and the television combined to heighten individualism and undermine traditional civic organizations including the parish community. So, too, today there is a rapid evolution of technologies that isolate us from one another, call into question what is essentially human, and exacerbate political divisions. But many young people lament the isolation and depersonalization of our culture and are seeking ways to connect. To combat religious disaffiliation, the Church must focus on being a place for human connection and the building of authentic community.

(Father Koeth is author of “Crabgrass Catholicism,” published by the University of Chicago.) ■

Why ‘The One’ from page 17

mandment when he says: “The first is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mk 12:29-31)

Our renewal invites us to learn how to accompany our sisters, brothers, neighbors and friends in a variety of ways. Some involve the work of ministry, such as serving as a catechist, liturgical minister or volunteering our time and talents to our parish family.

Other ways are more informal and equally powerful, such as helping people when they face sufferings with our presence, kindness or friendship. We also have a variety of guilds and ministries in our diocese through which we can accompany others.

Our many young adult events and programs sometimes involve accompanying the less fortunate or those in need. The important thing is to find ways to give ourselves to others, to be present to help others, especially those in need, to be generous with our gifts and our time.

Another way to accompany others is to assist the work of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County. It is one of the largest private family service agencies in Fairfield County. It offers plenty of opportunities for us to accompany others either through volunteering (in person) or also through giving in different ways, e.g. with monetary donations or goods.

Is this One effort bearing fruit? I think so. Mass attendance is up 22 percent over the past four years. Two years ago, 235 adults sought the Easter sacraments; this past Easter there were 565.

The St. Jerome Center Parish Bible studies have grown from six to 18, and we have more seminarians than in a generation—over 40 at last count, among the most on the East Coast. There are also 75 different parish and chapel-based locations throughout the diocese at which to participate in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. And there is so much more going on, but not enough space here to list them all. The Holy Spirit is hard at work. Everyone needs to heed His call.

I am grateful for those first signs or renewal. They serve as invitations from God who is calling each of us to make a choice. Do we wish to grow in our relationship with the Lord and accompany each other to Heaven or not? I have made my choice, but I cannot make a choice for you. So, my dear friends, what will you choose? ■

Signs of renewal in the diocese

- 565 adults entered the Church at Easter 2026
- 42 seminarians, the most in over 30 years; Called by Name campaign has led to 340+ young men to explore a priestly vocation
- 3 priests ordained this year, with 10 more ordinations expected
- 18 parishes now host St. Jerome Center Bible studies
- 800+ attended the inaugural St. Jerome Conference with Scott Hahn, John Bergsma and Jeffrey Morrow
- 500+ teens at Diocesan Youth Day 2026
- 180 members of the diocesan guilds, with 25 more waiting to join
- 74 parish opportunities for Eucharistic adoration
- From 32 to 400: Sunday Mass attendance at Our Lady of Good Counsel, since Koinonia John the Baptist arrived in 2022
- 14,500+ tuition awards totaling $29 million+ from Foundations in Education in its first decade funding children in need
- Deacon Edward Carrillo named the diocese’s Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry
- Fiat Mental Health and Church Life Fellowship launched with Notre Dame’s McGrath Institute
- Forum for Catholic Discipleship launches a 12-part apologetics course
- First Lenten Stational Churches Pilgrimage: 68 Masses in 30 churches
- Catholic Charismatic Renewal recognized as a private association of the faithful; 80+ young people attend its first youth meeting
- Father Sam Kachuba named Vicar for Young Adults
- Diocesan Youth Day, “Follow Me to the Cross”
- Steven Velardo named President of Foundations in Education, which has set a goal of closing the scholarship gap by 2035
- Diocese re-consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus
- Ordinations: three priests, three permanent deacons and one transitional deacon
- Tallis Academy children’s choir launches in Greenwich
- St. Carlo Acutis Early Learning Centers to open at St. Lawrence, Shelton
- Bishop Frank Teaches the Faith animated series begins streaming (52 episodes; 225+ toolkits sent to parishes and schools)
- First annual Padre Pio relic novena across nine parishes
- First annual Rosary Weekend, with a diocese-wide consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary
- Launch of the new business owners’ guild with His Way At Work
- Priesthood ordination of Deacon Ernest Hart

Blessing of the animals, our faithful companions

By LAURA BRENNAN

Hundreds of cats, dogs and other pets throughout the diocese were blessed at parishes, including St. Leo Roman Catholic Church in Stamford, St. Francis of Assisi in Weston, St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull and St. Margaret Mary in Shelton.

St. Francis of Assisi in Weston celebrated their patron saint with an animal blessing followed by their 16th annual Family Fun Carnival. Father Augustine Nguyen, pastor, began the blessing by saying that the animals are part of God's creation and have a role in human life. The many dogs and cats in attendance received medals for their collars that read, "St. Francis of Assisi – Protector of Animals – Protect My Pet."

Three horses, two turtles, two snakes and one goose received blessings from Deacon Chris Greer at Notre Dame of Easton for the 800th anniversary of the passing of St. Francis of Assisi.

The animal blessing on the Feast of St. Francis is an annual tradition at Notre Dame of Easton.

"It is a wonderful way to celebrate this great saint by honoring creation and giving appreciation to our animal companions," said Deacon Rick Scinto, who planned the event.

St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals and ecology, died a deacon on October 3, 1226. He was the founder of the Franciscan Order, and he is said to have preached God's word to birds and animals. Pope Leo XIV declared that the special Jubilee Year of Saint Francis will take place from January 10, 2026 to January 10, 2027.

More than 200 people brought dogs, cats, rabbits, ducks and a lizard to St. Leo's in Stamford for blessings. The date coincided with the 65th anniversary of the first Mass at St. Leo's, doubling the celebration.

"When we bless the animals we give thanks to God for the wonderful gift of his creation, we ask his protection for our pets, and we pray for their owners: that we learn from what God wants to teach us through our animals," said Father Javier Nieva, DCJM, pastor.

Raasikh Joseph, who was fully initiated into the Catholic Church on Holy Saturday 2026, brought ice cream and pup cups from his newly opened Longford's Ice Cream store for the celebration. His confirmation sponsor, Kathy Heslin, helped plan the event and served by his side that day.

Children of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull brought their favorite stuffed animals to the 9am Mass for blessings. The children showed their stuffed animals their best Mass behavior and Father Marcello offered the blessing. Many of the children brought their stuffed animals to venerate the relics of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, which were on display that weekend. At 3 pm, the live blessing of the animals took place outside. ■



















Around Our Schools

A new year begins with a focus on faith

By JEN HANLEY

St. Rose School celebrates faith and community

St. Rose School has begun the 2026-27 school year with a strong focus on faith, learning and community. September brought students and families together for the school's Second Annual Car Show and monthly Family Bingo, along with a special Mass honoring the 65th jubilee of Sisters Thaddeus and Mary Ellen.

The fall calendar offers additional opportunities for families to connect with the school. St. Rose's Fall Open House on October 4 invited prospective families to tour the campus, meet faculty and students, and learn more about the school community. Eighth graders are also preparing for the annual Pumpkin Bowl, a longstanding flag football tradition. Later in the month, families will gather for Trunk or Treat.

Across classrooms, athletic fields and community events, St. Rose continues to bring students together through academics, athletics, service and faith formation. These traditions help strengthen the bonds among students, families and faculty while making the school year a time of growth, connection and shared purpose.

St. Ann Academy strengthens faith and family connections

St. Ann Academy in Bridgeport has begun the school year with enthusiasm and a renewed commitment to family partnership. Guided by the theme "Eyes fixed on Jesus," scholars and staff are growing together through prayer, weekly Mass and meaningful classroom experiences.

September offered several opportunities to strengthen the school community. Back to School Night welcomed families into classrooms to meet teachers, connect with one another and learn about the year ahead. At the first PTA meeting, families began planning Trunk or Treat, the school's October 16 Hispanic Heritage celebration and improvements to the cafeteria.

Scholars also completed their first i-Ready diagnostic assessments, giving teachers information to identify student strengths and plan targeted instruction. Eighth graders led a September 11 remembrance through prayer and reflection, encouraging their classmates to consider hope, compassion and service.

Under the leadership of Principal Jennifer Meléndez, St. Ann Academy continues to cultivate a joyful, supportive environment where every scholar is encouraged to grow academically, socially and spiritually.

Greenwich Catholic School hosts annual High School Fair

Greenwich Catholic School welcomed representatives from more than 60 high schools, academies and preparatory schools from Fairfield County, surrounding counties and across the Northeast for its annual High School Fair on September 23.

Students in Grades 6–8 and their families attended to explore options for the next stage of their academic journeys. Representatives shared information about admissions applications, tuition, curriculum and student life, helping families better understand the opportunities available at each school.

"Our mission is to provide our students with a life-long intellectual and spiritual foundation and prepare them for high school and beyond," said Head of School Rebecca Steck. She added that Greenwich Catholic takes pride in graduates who are faithful, inquisitive, generous, determined and collaborative, and described the fair as a valuable opportunity for students and families.

The event also welcomed Greenwich Catholic alumni, who reconnected with former teachers and helped answer questions about the high school enrollment process. Their participation offered current students and families a personal perspective as they consider the next steps in their educational journeys.

St. Thomas Aquinas celebrates annual Special Persons Day

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School in Fairfield welcomed family members, friends and other important people in students' lives on October 2 for its annual Special Persons Day. The tradition gives students an opportunity to share their school experience with the people who support and encourage them.

The day began with Mass, accompanied by music from the school choir. After the liturgy, visitors joined students in their classrooms, where they met teachers, saw learning spaces and gained a closer look at daily school life.

This year's celebration also featured *Our Daily Bread*, a cookbook created by the St. Thomas Aquinas community. The collection brings together recipes contributed by families, grandparents, faculty, clergy and friends of the school. More than a collection of recipes, the cookbook reflects the many generations and relationships that help shape the St. Thomas community.

Through prayer, classroom visits and shared traditions, Special Persons Day celebrated the partnership between school and family and recognized the important role that loved ones play in students' educational and spiritual growth.

All Saints begins the year as a growing faith family

All Saints Catholic School has welcomed the new school year with renewed energy, new friendships and a strong sense of community, from its youngest PK3 students to its eighth graders. The school also welcomed Dr. Lou Howe as its new Principal and Instructional Leader, beginning an exciting chapter while keeping its Catholic mission at the center of school life.

The House System is already bringing students together across grade levels through leadership training and Big Buddy connections. Older students have met with younger buddies to build friendships and learn that leadership is rooted in faith, service, responsibility and care for others.

Students are also getting involved beyond the classroom. They have joined volleyball and cross-country teams, auditioned for Drama Club, and participated in Scouts and other activities. Meanwhile, parents are connecting, friendships are forming, and new families are becoming part of the community.

At All Saints, students are encouraged to learn, lead, serve and grow together. With a new school year underway, the school's faith family is building on familiar traditions while welcoming new opportunities and experiences.

St. Joseph High School introduces Pathways

St. Joseph High School is launching a signature Pathways Program with the Class of 2029, giving students a structured opportunity to explore their interests through a four-year sequence of courses and experiences in a specific field.

Students can choose between two pathways: Health Sciences and Business & Innovation. Each pathway includes courses designed to deepen students' knowledge and provide hands-on experiences related to their chosen area of interest.

The programs culminate in distinct senior-year opportunities. Health Sciences students will complete a Capstone Research Methods course, while students in Business & Innovation will participate in an off-campus internship. These experiences are intended to help students connect classroom learning with practical applications and future academic or career goals.

Students who successfully complete a pathway will be recognized at graduation and receive a distinctive academic designation on their transcripts. The new program reflects St. Joseph's commitment to helping students discover their strengths, investigate possible career directions and make informed decisions about life after high school. More information is available at sjcadets.org/pathways.

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Kolbe Cathedral celebrates 50 years of excellence

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

NEW CANAAN—Alumni, teachers and supporters were among the hundreds of people gathered at the Anniversary Gala for Kolbe Cathedral Preparatory School to celebrate 50 years of changing countless lives for the better.

The celebration held at the Country Club of New Canaan on Oct. 1, honored all who have supported the school and students over the decades but especially Jo-Anne Jakab, who served and led the school for over forty years in various roles, as well as posthumous honorees Leo Van Munching, Jr., Jonathan O'Herron Sr. and Joaquin Paul Rodriguez.

"I refer to them as Kolbe's own Trinity," she said of the men who were instrumental in establishing a strong foundation for the school to thrive.

"This Trinity gave time, talent, and treasure to ensure a robust financial program, recognizing that while hosting the most affordable tuition in Fairfield County, the working-for-low-income, or poverty-level families, could not afford to choose it for their children, without exceptional aid," said Jakab during her acceptance speech.

The story of a small Catholic high school in one of Connecticut's poorest cities, boasting exceptional graduation rates and college acceptances, resonated with the men in different but profound ways.

Van Munching was instrumental in the expansion of Kolbe's footprint in the neighborhood.

O'Herron, who was able to attend Catholic school tuition free, established an annual appeal to help fund the need-based financial aid program, while on the board at Kolbe.

Rodriguez, actively mentored students and served as treasurer managing the annual appeal fund.

All three gentlemen recognized the value of a school that offers opportunity to an underserved community, Jakab said.

"We are forever grateful to them," she said before asking members of those families in attendance to stand and be recognized for the legacy those men created.

Successive boards continue to build upon that foundation with partnerships and internships with local businesses as well as special celebratory fundraisers such as the first-ever Anniversary Gala.

"I'm blessed and truly honored to help celebrate our school's union 50 years ago," said Class of 1972 alumnus and former Connecticut broadcaster Kevin Hogan, who was the Master of Ceremonies for the gala.

St. Maximilian Kolbe became a martyr when he volunteered to take another person's place for execution when he was imprisoned in Auschwitz. St. Kolbe is known as the patron saint of prisoners, families, and media for his work in publishing Catholic media in radio and print.

Jakab said she wanted to do everything she could to improve the school and make it more available to young people in Bridgeport.

"Education alone is empowering, but a Kolbe Cathedral Preparatory education is transformative," Jakab said.

Students from the school's choir performed during the evening and were excited to share their experiences at Kolbe.

"I really like the sense of community at Kolbe," said 17-year-old senior student Catalina Rosales, who was one of the members in the choir. "It feels like a second family to me."

"I like the fact that we have a lot of freedom. They really allow our creative talents to show," said Ariel Wansley, a 14-year-old Sophomore student, who started a fashion design club at the school. "In the club we are going to teach others to sew," she said, while proudly showing photos of her creations to a fellow student.

Students and choir members Kysir Booknight and Kenton McFarland met and became friends after joining the track team.

"I love how many opportunities we are given here," said Booknight, adding that when he started AP classes, he found belonging with like-minded students.

Testimonials such as these and others were given throughout the night as a testament to the impact the school has had on countless lives.

"My heart is filled with so much joy to see how our young people are impacted by what we're doing and how we're helping them to encounter the love of Jesus Christ," said Father David Roman, chair of Kolbe Cathedral Board. "We're impacting their futures."

Alumnus Chris Smith, from the Class of 1988 played basketball at the school and later went on to play for UConn and professionally in the NBA and in Europe for many years before returning to the area and coaching basketball at Kolbe for seven years.

"Kolbe was the bridge for me doing well in life," he said, crediting Jakab with encouraging him to go to UConn.

Another notable alumnus, Walter Luckett, who was recently honored with the naming of a street near the school after him, Walter Luckett Way, attended the Anniversary Gala, with his wife Valita.

"Kolbe has been a blessing to me," Luckett said. "The best investment we can make in our community is our young people."

Luckett, a Class of 1972 graduate, established the Walter E. Luckett Foundation, to provide programs for youth in need of additional support.

The bishop thanked the community for standing with Kolbe for 50 years.

"With your generosity, your presence, and your prayers, we gather for an historic moment," Bishop Caggiano said. "We pause to look back at 50 years of extraordinary academic excellence, an environment that was safe and secure for thousands of young people."

Bishop Caggiano said the continued stewardship of the school is transformational. The school campus is being renovated to support modern-day academic success, family counseling and a work-study program.



KOLBE CATHEDRAL CHOIR performs at Anniversary Gala.

Bishop Caggiano said the campus is being expanded to include a piazza between the school and Kolbe's Louis V. Gerstner III Center for Students and Families which creates a place to study, socialize, and grow in friendship, fellowship and love.

"Much is changing, but much remains the same because the miracle that is Kolbe has existed from the very beginning," Bishop Caggiano said. "A place that is true to the dignity of our students, for the miracle that Catholic education is to allow them an opportunity, to find their proper place in society, but with the values and faith that will make them leaders themselves for future generations."

The bishop said none of that would be possible without those gathered at the gala supporting the mission of Kolbe, including honoree Jakab.

"If it was not for your leadership, we would not be here tonight, celebrating the miracle of Kolbe," said Bishop Caggiano.

A plaque will be installed at the school recognizing the four honorees.

Following the presentation, and a performance by the Kolbe Cathedral student choir, a fundraising auction led by Terry O'Connor, former Kolbe Cathedral Boad Chair, raised thousands of dollars toward scholarships for students.

"What you did tonight," O'Connor said, "is going to have a dramatic effect in students' lives." ■



Panel discusses benefits of scholarship tax credit

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

GREENWICH—Potentially expanding opportunities and options for school-age children through the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit program was the topic of discussion at a coalition meeting of educators, religious and civic leaders, and organizations.

"We are here to consider how we can continue to further the gift of education, to further our commitment to the next generation," said Diocese of Bridgeport Vicar for Education & Formation Father Christopher Ford, adding that the gift of education is a gift of hope and an investment in the growth potential of future generations to fulfill their destiny.

The group that met at Indian Harbor Yacht Club was interested in finding out more about the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit (FSTC) program and sharing different perspectives. The Federal program approved last year, takes effect in January. So far, 30 states have opted into the program. Connecticut has not yet opted into the program. Governor Ned Lamont has said he is waiting for additional guidance and details from the federal government about how the program will work which is expected within the next month.

Katja Landau from Education Reform Now, a non-partisan, nonprofit education advocacy organization, spoke about the benefits of the program.

"It really empowers every taxpayer to become a philanthropist in their own right," said Landau, noting it is a tax credit not a tax deduction and could offer a significant injection of funds into K-12 education in a generation.

The FSTC program is the nation's first federal scholarship tax credit program. It allows individuals to redirect the first $1,700 of their federal tax liability to an eligible 501(c)(3) scholarship granting organization (SGO), which then directs scholarships to eligible children in elementary or secondary schools. Students from families that are at 300 percent of area median income, or below, are eligible to receive scholarship funding.

Data shows there are more than 600-thousand eligible taxpayers in Connecticut that could choose to participate in the program, Landau said.

An SGO must be registered in the state, design their own programs and direct scholarships, for such things including tutoring, equipment, internet, school supplies, transportation, special needs services, to eligible students.

There is no limit on the number of SGOs that can be established in the state of Connecticut. The SGO needs to register as a 501(c)(3), create a separate account for FTSC funding and ensure that at least 90 percent of funds go directly to scholarships and no more than 10 percent of funds is used for administration. Scholarships must be awarded to at least 10 students in two different schools.



RABBI JORDAN SOFFER, Head of School at Bi-Cultural Hebrew Academy in Stamford discusses Federal Scholarship Tax Credit program.

Connecticut taxpayers can participate in the federal tax credit even if the state doesn't opt in but children can only receive FTSC program funds if the state participates in the program.

"The big difference is whether Connecticut taxpayer dollars stay here to serve students, including public school students, or if it flows outside the state," Landau said.

Landau's colleague Harrison Farnsworth pointed to polling in the state with Emerson College that showed overall 65 percent of voters were in favor of the federal program.

Derrell Bradford, President of 50CAN, a national education reform advocacy group, said a tax credit policy for education is not new, pointing to states such as Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota which have established state education tax credits. The placement of education tax credits in federal tax credit law is new, he said.

"We're trying to improve education in the states," Bradford said. "We are school choice people. We care very much about optionality."

President of the Yankee Institute for Public Policy, Carol Platt Libaeu said although Connecticut spends more than almost any other state in the country on education, about $22,000 per student, the state has one of the largest education gaps in the entire country.

The federal program could provide the funds necessary to help families choose how to help their children succeed, she said.

"No one opportunity is going to be the right choice for every child," Libaeu said, adding affluent families have the opportunity to move or provide additional tutoring but non-affluent families need support and scholarships give them the ability to choose how to best provide additional educational services.

"The FTSC has the potential to put educational opportunities within reach of people who just never had them before," Libaeu said. "Connecticut's only decision is whether to participate and let our states' students benefit from it," Libaeu said.

Tony Fox, a former student and now board member of Catholic Academy of Bridgeport, said being the recipient of a scholarship changed his life and he supports providing that opportunity to others.

"I received a scholarship that helped me attend school from third grade to eighth grade in Bridgeport. At that age, I didn't understand tax credits. I just knew that someone had given me an opportunity and that opportunity changed my life," Fox said.

Fox, a graduate of Fordham University, who is now building a career in engineering, construction and project management, said he supports the FTSC program. It is personal to him.

"Someone helped open a door for me in third grade. I walked through it. As I got older, I learned that part of my responsibility was to hold that door open for the people coming behind me," Fox said.

State Representative Steven Meskers acknowledged the hesitation some people may have in the state opting into the program, including the concern students will choose private over public schools or the potential lack of oversight of the SGOs.

Meskers said regulations and oversight are needed for the program and are expected soon.

Attendees in support of the program were asked to contact the governor's office to express their support. ■



Bishop commissions Eucharistic Ministers

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

GREENWICH—More than two dozen Sacred Heart Greenwich senior class students were recently commissioned as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion during a Mass of the Holy Spirit celebrated by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano.

The annual school Mass highlighted the theme of love and friendship for this academic school year.

"The Scripture says that he who finds a friend, finds a great treasure," said Bishop Caggiano, noting that in addition to a good education, some friendships forged at the school will become lifelong friendships. "That is a gift that is beyond price."

Bishop Caggiano referred to the Gospel reading where Jesus asked Simon Peter, three times, 'Do you love me?'

He explained that the third time Jesus asked, he used a Greek word that when translated, the question was, "Would you be my friend?"

"The only thing we need to say to the Lord every day is, 'Yes, Lord, I want to be your friend. I want you to be mine,' and He will help us to do whatever is needed to grow closer to Him, to know Him more deeply, to love Him more deeply, to pray ever more deeply, to be able to walk with Him or recognize His presence," Bishop Caggiano said.

"Fall in love with the one friend above all of us, who will never, ever leave you behind," said Bishop Caggiano, adding that friendship with Christ is confirmed each and every time a person receives the Eucharist.

"You are going to be blessed to have this great ministry in service," Bishop Caggiano said to the 25 girls who volunteered to become Extraordinary Ministers. "When you stand up today, as I will, and say to a person, 'The Body of Christ,' and the person says, 'Amen,' I want you to hear in the back of your mind, 'Will you be my friend?' When we say 'Amen,' we are also saying, 'yes,' and Jesus will do everything else."

"Of all the gifts you will receive, the friendship with Jesus will be the greatest gift of all," the bishop said. "He lives in us, so that there is never a moment of any day of your life and mine that we face it alone."



BISHOP FRANK J. CAGGIANO COMMISSIONS Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Sacred Heart Greenwich recently.

The senior students prepared for the ministry through formation and training instruction that teaches the reverence and responsibility involved in serving the Eucharist and the Church, in addition to the practical responsibilities.

Senior student Caeley Clough was also recently commissioned at her home parish of St. Aloysius in New Canaan.

"I'm just so honored to have the privilege and the blessing to give out the Eucharist. I think it's such an honor in the Catholic Church," Clough said.

"It just really feels like I'm much closer to God and stronger in my Catholic faith," said Clough, adding, "It's such a privilege to be able to give the Eucharist to my fellow classmates."

Classmate Charlie Caffray agreed.

"I love distributing the Body and Blood of Christ; it just feels really rewarding, because this Church has given so much to me and has instilled so much of my faith, and guided so much of my life," Caffray said.

For classmate Olivia Franco becoming an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion continues her family legacy.

"It's really, really exciting. My sister went here, too, and she was also a Eucharistic Minister," Franco said. "So, it feels great to continue that legacy from my family, and also to serve God in a new way."

"I've been an altar server in the past, so to be able to continue my journey with God in a new way is fantastic, and I'm really excited for the coming year of getting to be a Eucharistic Minister here," Franco said.

Sacred Heart Greenwich School President, Michael Baber said the role of Extraordinary Minister gives students another opportunity to express the love of Christ and live a life of service.

"Love is not simply our theme for the year, but it's how we're told to live, how we learn, how we lead, and how we care for one another," said Baber adding, "This is a wonderful opportunity for them to see their role in the Church. Hopefully, it's the beginning of many roles in the Church throughout their life that starts here."

Caffray said she is honored to be an Extraordinary Minister for the Sacred Heart Community. "I am very blessed and very excited to see what else is to come," she added.

The Mass, held in the gymnasium of the 110-acre campus, was attended by many parents of the students and also live-streamed for others who could not be there.

At the conclusion of Mass, the bishop thanked the students, teachers, parents and all those that support the students in their lives and with their education at Sacred Heart Greenwich. ■



Diocesan novena to Padre Pio draws hundreds

By EMILY CLARK and JOE PISANI

BRIDGEPORT—Hundreds of the faithful throughout the diocese took part in the nine-day novena to the Franciscan friar St. Pio of Pietrelcina, celebrating Mass and venerating relics of a beloved saint of our era.

At St. Augustine Cathedral, Esther Rivera, with her 5-year-old great-granddaughter Nyzelise, brought prayer cards and a plastic bag filled with rosaries to touch to the five relics—a crust from Saint Pio's wounds, a piece of his mantle, his brown fingerless glove, a handkerchief he used at Mass to wipe his tears, and a lock of his hair.

Others shared stories of their devotion to the saint and examples of his intercession during times of distress and suffering.

In his homily, Bishop Caggiano talked about the crises of faith people often experience when they witness the suffering of their loved ones and said that Padre Pio's saying, "Pray, hope and don't worry," is a simple reminder of the importance of trusting in God's love and timing, the power of prayer, and the need to refrain from excessive worry during the storms of life.

He told the faithful: "You and I can look to the example of this man, whom we have come to ask for his prayers and intercession — this remarkable friar, a simple man born in the farmlands of Campania in Southern Italy, a man who suffered mightily in his life. But the sufferings of his life were not moments of crisis for him. They were moments that drew him closer and closer to the Lord Jesus."

Almost his entire life, Padre Pio carried the stigmata—the wounds of Christ—which for the saint were not just the signs of the cross, but the actual sufferings of the cross.

There are countless cases of physical and spiritual healings through Padre Pio's intercession. The saint had the ability to read hearts and knew people's sins even before they confessed them. He is said to have heard confessions 10 to 15 hours a day.

Padre Pio also had the gift of bilocation — the ability to be in two places at the same time — even though he never left the Capuchin Friary of Our Lady of Grace in San Giovanni Rotondo in Italy, where he stayed from 1916 until his death in 1968.

Bishop Caggiano said he plans to install one of St. Pio's relics along with a statue of the saint in the back of the cathedral. Another relic is in the Chapel of Padre Pio at St. Charles Borromeo Parish and one will be on display at a garden chapel in Greenwich, yet to be constructed. The novena to the saint will become an annual diocesan tradition.

Throughout the day, people came into St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull, many in reverent prayer with petitions for the saint.



BISHOP FRANK J. CAGGIANO CELEBRATES Mass before relics of St. Pio. PHOTO BY AMY MORTENSEN

During his homily, Deacon Patrick Toole recounted a red-eye flight from California while he was working at IBM. To pass the time, he began reading a book about Padre Pio that his mother Mary Ann had given him.

"I couldn't put it down," he recalled. I was fascinated by this Franciscan friar and his many supernatural gifts. He bore the stigmata, the wounds of Christ in his hands, feet and side. He could bilocate, meaning he could be in two places at once. In the confessional, Padre Pio often knew people's sins before they confessed them, and he had the gift of healing. But somewhere in that book was an exchange I have never forgotten. Someone asked Padre Pio why he spent so much time hearing confessions, sometimes 12 to 14 hours a day. I don't remember his exact words, but he essentially said: 'To help souls.'"

On that flight, Pat Toole asked himself what he was doing to help souls and the answer startled him: Nothing. For years afterward, the question haunted him, and it was partly responsible for his eventual decision to enter the diaconate.

If he were alive today, St. Pio would minimize the supernatural gifts and emphasize the importance of prayer, confession and the Mass, Deacon Toole said.

Following the Mass, pastor Father Joseph Marcello urged the faithful to come forward and hold up holy cards, rosaries and sacramentals to the relics.

"God's blessings will be upon you," he assured them, "and all of the intentions you hold in your heart tonight will be brought by Saint Pio to the Throne of God."

In Fairfield, the faithful braved the beginnings of a nor'easter to gather at St. Thomas Aquinas Church. During his homily, pastor Father David Roman, who concelebrated with Father Herley Mendez, said that he always connected with the motto of Padre Pio – "Pray, hope, don't worry."

"These are such powerful, simple words from the heart of a man who understood the nature of suffering. There is just something about Padre Pio that really connects to our hearts," he said.

"When we look at the life of Padre Pio, whatever time he found himself in, he trusted God, no matter what situation he found himself in life," he said.

Fernando and Fabiana Neupmann of Our Lady of Aparecida Parish had driven down from Danbury because of their devotion to the saint.

One of the youngest attendees was 9-year-old Justin Melaragno, an altar server who assisted with the evening's Mass. Standing with his parents after veneration, he talked about wanting to serve God.

"When I'm carrying the cross, I'm carrying the Lord," Justin said.

For the Padre Pio Prayer Group of Fairfield County, it was a day dedicated to the Franciscan friar at St. Jude Parish in Monroe, which had Eucharistic adoration from 9 in the morning to 9 at night.

For Bonnie Thibodeau, leader of the group, said the day was nothing short of "amazing."

"People dropped in all day," she said. "People I had never seen before came from around the diocese. They prayed and lit candles. It was so simple, nothing fancy —it was what Padre Pio would want. He lived in a little cell and just wanted to be a prayerful friar. And that's what people were looking for, to come and be very quiet and pray for their intentions through his intercession."

In the evening, Father Jozef Ukaj, parochial vicar, concelebrated Mass with Father Richard J. Gemza, pastor of Christ the King Parish. During his homily, Father Ukaj drew comparisons between St. Pio's suffering and that of the biblical figure Job. Father said God permits suffering not to crush people but to strengthen their faith and bring them closer to Christ. Job was rewarded with blessings for his endurance while Padre Pio became a great saint.

Erica Reily, a member of the Padre Pio prayer group, said, "I am always amazed to see the vast number of people that are devoted to our saint." ■



The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano

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

DECREE MANDATING THE PROMULGATION OF THE PRIEST PERSONNEL MANUAL

On January 1, 1983, my predecessor, the Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, following the Third Synod of the Diocese of Bridgeport, published the *Pastoral Book* that contained all policies and procedures of the Diocese. Section 300 of the *Pastoral Book* was concerned with issues related to priests serving in the Diocese.

I promulgated a new *Priest Personnel Manual* for the Diocese of Bridgeport on May 31, 2017, which was to be observed for a period of one year. After further consultation, a revision of the manual was revised and promulgated on August 22, 2019. A further revision of the Priest Personnel Manual was promulgated on January 1, 2023.

Now having taken into consideration additional modifications needed to address the changing circumstances that we have faced over the last few years, I the Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, the undersigned Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, do hereby declare and decree;

1. That this *Priest Personnel Manual* shall be in effect for all priests serving in the Diocese of Bridgeport and assigned to pastoral ministry by me or my successors effective **June 30, 2026.**
2. All norms found in any subsequent revisions of the *Pastoral Book* of 1983, as well as the *Manual* promulgated on January 1, 2023 are superseded by this updated *Priest Personnel Manual.*

I order that the provisions of this decree have firm and stable effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and that they be promulgated by inclusion in the official diocesan newspaper, The Fairfield County Catholic, entering into force on **September 30, 2026.**

Furthermore, I order that the present provisions be duly communicated electronically and/or by ordinary mail to all pastors, administrators or clerics in charge of diocesan parishes, quasi-parishes, shrines, oratories and chapels that are subject to these provisions.

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

Reverend Monsignor Robert Kinnally
Vicar General

St. Vincent de Paul Day celebrated with Mass, soup

By LAURA BRENNAN

BRIDGEPORT—The chapel at St. Vincent's Medical Center of Hartford HealthCare was filled with doctors, nurses, staffers, family members and friends recently, celebrating the feast of St. Vincent de Paul, who began the Daughters of Charity, the religious order that founded the hospital almost 125 years ago.

> **"Charity toward the neighbor is an infallible sign of the true children of God."**

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano celebrated Mass in honor of the saint for which the hospital is named and said, "Compassionate, dedicated, one who stood with the poor, and the poorest of the poor describes the life of this remarkable man."

During his homily, he said: "Here we celebrate the fact that Vincent de Paul understood that it wasn't just giving, right? But it's to accompany them. It's to walk with them. It's to know that when you are sick, or when you are in a part of your life where you're not in control, that you're not doing it alone. That's the genius of this place."

He later shared a story from his childhood about accompaniment. As a boy, he was diagnosed with rheumatic fever, "which is not life-threatening, but for a 10-year-old, it was as close as you get," Bishop Caggiano recalled. "I was in bed for 45 days and not a single friend came to visit me because their parents would not allow them to come … but one person did come."

Each week, the deacon of his parish came to his home and they played Monopoly together.

"He didn't come as a doctor or nurse, but he accompanied me," the bishop said. "And I must confess, by that example, helped awaken in me the very vocation I now have in front of you. Don't underestimate your presence and the power of accompaniment. I thank you for that ministry, and keep doing it in the power of Jesus."

Bishop Caggiano also talked about the life of St. Vincent de Paul, who was not a stranger to suffering. He was captured by pirates, enslaved for two years, sold to a first master, and then to a second master who eventually set him free.

"I mentioned that because he knew what suffering was like," said Bishop Caggiano.

St. Vincent de Paul founded the Daughters of Charity in 1633 to serve the sick and the poor. Bridgeport, in the late 1890s had both sick and poor, and Catholic doctors felt the call to serve.

They approached Father James Nihill, pastor of St. Patrick's Church on North Avenue, who reached out to the Daughters of Charity, who recognized the same need. In 1905, the 75-bed hospital opened its doors, serving 70 patients on its first day.

In closing, the bishop said, "So let me end by saying again, thank you for your profession, for your work as healers. Thank you for making this place an oasis of the kingdom of Jesus Christ."

Matthew Kenney, PhD, Vice President of Mission Services, told those at Mass, "We are blessed to carry out, as Pope Francis called for, medicine of mercy on behalf of the Church."

"So today we offer soup and bread, through all shifts, and all throughout the hospital," said Dr. Kenney, "because Saint Vincent de Paul often would give soup and bread to the poor, and to those who had no one to feed them or care for them."

The closing hymn, "God Bless America," was sung by Milton Samms, chef from the hospital cafeteria. Carts of soup and bread were pushed throughout the hospital, making deliveries to every department.

Bishop Caggiano went to the cafeteria, Our Daily Bread Café, put on an apron and served. Seeing Father Al Forlano, Catholic chaplain on the pastoral care staff, he said, "This man looks like he needs soup!"

Steven Valassis, MD, Chair of Emergency Medicine, arrived to serve soup and bread in the cafeteria and Bishop Caggiano declared, "You can take my apron. You are very well manned here."

The words of St. Vincent de Paul appeared on announcements of the event and in the services throughout the hospital: "Charity toward the neighbor is an infallible sign of the true children of God." ■

Masses set for All Souls Day

On All Souls Day and throughout the month of November, Catholics make a special effort to pray for their loved ones who passed and to console one another who are grieving.

This year, the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed will be celebrated at Catholic cemeteries throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport on Monday, November 2 at 11 am, rain or shine, according to Kenn Devane of Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport. A Mass will also be celebrated at St. Rose of Lima II and Little Angels Shrine sections of Resurrection Cemetery at noon at 208 South Main Street (Route 25) in Newtown.

He said Catholic Cemeteries provides tents, seats, music, programs, holy water and facilities each year.

The Masses will be offered for the repose of the souls of all the faithful departed at six diocesan cemeteries. Afterward, holy water from the Lourdes, France, will be distributed.

Masses will be held at:

1. St. Mary-Putnam Cemetery at 399 North Street in Greenwich. ***Bishop Frank J. Caggiano will be the principal celebrant.***
2. St. Michael Cemetery at 2205 Stratford Avenue in Stratford
3. St. Peter Cemetery at 71 Lake Avenue Ext. in Danbury
4. St. John Cemetery at 25 Camp Avenue in Darien
5. St. John Cemetery at 223 Richards Avenue in Norwalk
6. Gate of Heaven Cemetery at 1056 Daniels Farm Road in Trumbull
7. Resurrection Cemetery at 208 South Main Street in Newtown

The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano

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

DECREE
PROMULGATION OF THE
PARISH FINANCE MANUAL

To promote the proper, transparent, and accountable administration of ecclesiastical goods throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport, the Parish Finance Manual has been revised to incorporate updated policies, procedures, and best practices consistent with the universal law of the Church and the pastoral administrative needs of the Diocese.

Therefore, by virtue of the authority entrusted to me as Bishop of Bridgeport, and in accord with the norms of canon law, I hereby promulgate the PARISH FINANCE MANUAL as particular law governing the administration of temporal goods within the Diocese of Bridgeport.

By means of this decree, I order that the provisions of this manual have firm and stable effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and that the provisions contained herein be promulgated by inclusion in the official diocesan newspaper, *The Fairfield County Catholic,* and on our official diocesan website, entering into force on September 30, 2026. Furthermore, I order that the present provisions be communicated both electronically and by ordinary mail to all diocesan personnel subject to these provisions.

Given at the Chancery Office in Shelton, CT on the Memorial of Saint Jerome, Priest and Doctor of the Church this 30th day of September of the Year of the Lord 2026.

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

Deacon Patrick Toole
Chancellor

The Most Rev. Frank J. Caggiano

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

Bishop of Bridgeport

DECREE FOR CERTAIN NORMS
FOR OCIA CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES

In virtue of my office of Diocesan Bishop, I, the Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, duly concerned with the spiritual welfare of the souls entrusted to me (c. 383 §1), having prayerfully considered the following:

Whereas, there is a need for adjusting certain norms for the sacramental preparation for different age groups, and;

Whereas, I consider that this is an opportune moment to adjust these norms,

ESTABLISH THAT

1. Any catechumen (one in need of all three sacraments of initiation) over the age of reason and 17 years of age or younger must attend at least 24 months of continuous catechetical formation before he or she can be presented for the Easter sacraments at the Easter Vigil. Given the unique needs of this population (and its diverse ages), the form that this formation will take will be tailored by each parish to meet the needs of its catechumens.

2. Any candidate (one in need of Penance, First Communion, and Confirmation) over the age of reason and 17 years of age or younger will receive formation in their parish with two options from which to choose:

   Option #1: The candidate will enroll in the same parish formation program offered to young people of similar age, with a minimum of two years of continuous formation. When the candidate has completed the required two years of proximate preparation, he or she will receive immediate preparation for the sacraments that one is missing and then will receive the remaining sacraments of initiation with his or her peers.

   Option #2: A pastor may also choose to keep an older candidate in the same formation experience as described in #1 above for a catechumen. If so, the same minimum time requirement applies.

I order that the provisions of this decree have firm and stable effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and that they be promulgated by inclusion in the official diocesan newspaper, The Fairfield County Catholic, entering into force on October 1, 2026.

Furthermore, I order that the present provisions be communicated both electronically and by ordinary mail to all pastors, administrators or clerics in charge of parishes, quasi-parishes, chapels and shrines that are subject to these provisions.

Given this 1st day of October of 2026, at the Catholic Center, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

Deacon Patrick Toole
Chancellor

Head of St. Vincent's named to national board

By JOE PISANI

Throughout William Jennings' career, he has focused on improving healthcare in communities, neighborhoods, towns and regions.

Since being elected to the American Hospital Association's Board of Trustees, however, he finds himself in "a whole new dimension," at the highest level of healthcare policy-making.

President of Hartford HealthCare's Fairfield Region, Jennings is in charge of operations and strategy for St. Vincent's Medical Center and the Fairfield County network of Hartford HealthCare.

As a trustee of the AHA board, his policy focus will be elevated from a regional to a national platform. The AHA represents almost 5,000 hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations nationwide and advocates on issues affecting hospitals, health systems, clinicians, caregivers and the communities they serve.

"This takes me to a whole new dimension of policy-setting at a time when healthcare is undergoing extraordinary change," he says. "Not taking care of a neighborhood at a time, or a town at a time or a region at a time but setting policy at the highest level in this country … and it's going to be not only a challenge but a real privilege."

Healthcare in the United States is confronting challenges over rising costs, affordability, access to care and workforce shortages.

Jennings says Hartford HealthCare's strategic imperatives align closely with the major policy priorities of the American Hospital Association on such issues as protecting patient access and ensuring financial affordability, addressing workforce shortages through recruitment and retention, reducing excessive administrative and regulatory burdens, along with innovation for safer, better care, and advocating for rural hospitals so they do not close.

This gives him a vantage point to help promote changes in the industry. He also believes that initiatives Hartford HealthCare has begun offer a touchstone for other parts of the country, particularly when it comes to access and affordability.

"We are adding more points of access to healthcare in convenient and affordable settings so people don't have to go to the emergency room," Jennings said. "They can go to an urgent care setting when it's appropriate. They can go to an outpatient surgery center instead of coming to the hospital, where it's much more expensive, and in many cases we have an app called 24/7, which is literally a physician—an on-demand clinician on your phone so you don't even have to come to the urgent care anymore. You can sit at your kitchen table and see a doctor."

The AHA is working to eliminate excessive and outdated administrative burdens that produce additional costs in the industry, Jennings said, in addition to protecting critical safety net programs and hospitals in rural communities.

"Hartford HealthCare has an interesting vantage point on the health systems across the country because we have two large inner-city teaching hospitals, Hartford and Saint Vincent's," he said. "We also have two rural hospitals and a handful of suburban community hospitals. When people ask what your vantage point is (somebody with a lens towards rural health or large academic medical centers?), I say Hartford Healthcare has them all. As a trustee, I can bring a variety of different perspectives, along with insights into things that are important for us in Connecticut."

HHC strategic imperatives of health equity and excellence also align with the national association's priorities.

Jennings said Hartford HealthCare, in partnership with Yale New Haven Health, recently opened the first of its kind proton beam center in Wallingford, a $75 million piece of equipment that is crucial in the arsenal against cancer. It provides a specialized form of radiation treatment used with children and adults who have a recurrence of cancer.

"This is an extraordinary and well-deserved recognition of Bill's leadership, his commitment to the communities we serve and his deep understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing health care today," said Jeffrey A. Flaks, President and Chief Executive Officer of Hartford HealthCare. "Bill brings tremendous energy, experience and purpose to everything he does. His voice on the AHA Board will help shape important conversations about the future of healthcare across our nation, while reflecting Hartford HealthCare's commitment to transforming care and making healthcare better for the communities we are privileged to serve."



William Jennings

Jennings is chairman of the New England Regional Policy Board for the AHA, and he has served as president of Hartford HealthCare's Fairfield Region since July 2021.

Deacon Patrick Toole, Chancellor & Secretary of the Curia, is a board member of Hartford HealthCare's Fairfield Region and has worked with Jennings for almost five years.

"Bill is an exceptional leader whose commitment to quality and patient care is both genuine and sustained," Deacon Toole said. "During his tenure, St. Vincent's Medical Center improved its Leapfrog rating from a D in 2019 to an A in 2023, which it remains—a remarkable achievement that reflects disciplined leadership and a relentless focus on safety and outcomes."

He said Jennings also expanded access to care across the region, including the opening of ten new urgent care centers, improving convenience and affordability for patients. Another important milestone was the launch of the first-ever partnership with Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, bringing nationally recognized cancer expertise to patients close to home, Toole said.

Before joining Hartford HealthCare, Jennings served as executive vice president of Yale New Haven Health and president and CEO of Bridgeport Hospital for eight years. His career includes executive leadership roles at Tower Health and Reading Hospital in Pennsylvania, SSM St. Mary's Hospital Center and Heart Institute in St. Louis, Missouri, BayCare Health System in Florida and Cookeville Regional Medical Center in Tennessee. ■



Broadway came to Shelton for St. Joseph Parish

By LAURA BRENNAN

On a sprinkly October Sunday, Broadway came to Shelton. Vibrant yellow, orange, red and summer green leaves were still holding onto the trees as St. Joseph Parish welcomed parishioners and friends to its October concert.

Greeters with programs and warm welcomes stood at every door. Floral arrangements on the pews, before the Blessed Mother, and wreaths on the altar brought the spectacular beauty of the fall inside for the show. A man wore a piano key tie for the occasion.

The theme was A Broadway Melody. "At its heart, Broadway is all about storytelling," Daniel Horstmann, artistic director, told the audience. "So, I hope you're in the mood for a few good stories."

The show was a journey arranged in three movements. First, the birth and the golden age of Broadway, including familiar favorites from "Oklahoma!," "My Fair Lady" and "West Side Story." Next came Broadway reinvented with bigger, bolder and more adventurous storylines, including selections from "Fiddler on the Roof," "Chicago" and "Les Misérables." Lastly came Broadway of today, celebrating music and stories that bring Broadway to life before new generations, including songs from "Wicked," "The Lion King" and "Hamilton."

The children's choir performed two familiar pieces for their sing-along. The children carried their oversized music folders to the stage, but the audience didn't need lyric sheets to add their voices to the children as they sang "Do-Re-Mi" from "The Sound of Music" and "Tomorrow" from "Annie."

Musical concerts have a long and treasured history at St. Joseph Parish, said Pastor Michael Dogali, who has been at St. Joseph for its annual concerts for more than a decade.

"We have different musicians at every Mass, and here, in a concert like this, everybody comes together, every choir, every instrumentalist, every cantor, all of the organists," he said.

The adult choir from the Saturday 4 pm Mass, the children's choir from the Sunday 9 am Mass and all the musicians from all the Masses took the stage.

"They are family to us, whether they are violinists, pianists, flutists," said Father Dogali. "Each and every one of them add to the beauty and majesty of our liturgies here at St. Joseph."

He said music is a charism at St. Joseph's.

"There are so many musically talented people in the parish," he said, adding that Darwin Shen, a violinist in the orchestra pit, plays at Carnegie Hall, and his little boy, who is 6, made his debut at Carnegie Hall in the spring. "He's up there with his little custom violin."

Current director of music, Allison Fay, was joined by the two previous music directors, Daniel Horstmann and Nicholas Stampone, as part of the musical family at St. Joseph that transported the audience to Broadway. Kaitlyn Genovese, children's choir director, as well as cantors from St. Joseph Parish and guest singers and instrumentalists, performed 18 Broadway tunes.

Broadway-themed mini-cupcakes and coffee were prepared by the Women's Devotional Group for after the show. This group of women was a principal sponsor of the concert, along with Nuovo Pasta Productions, Ltd.

The Women's Devotional Group provided financial support. "The Women's Devotional Group is very active in this parish," said Marie Meresko, president of the group. "It's the heart and soul."

Bingo nights, cookie walks and fundraisers throughout the year hosted by the Women's Devotional Group make this concert possible, said Mary Jane Paris, one of the group's founding members and a lay member of the Parish Corporation Trustees for St. Joseph Parish. The group fuels its service to the concert and many other initiatives at the parish through its mission of spiritual wellness, which is the focus of its monthly meetings, said Paris. "Our group is nourished every month by something very spiritual."

Guest artist and soloist Nicholas Stampone said his parish will always be like family to him. Stampone served as music director at St. Joseph Parish from 2023 to 2025 while he was a student at Fairfield University. Following graduation, he returned to his hometown in New Jersey.

When the invitation to participate in this concert came, Stampone accepted the chance to perform and the opportunity for a reunion. He said that the concerts were a highlight of his years as music director, adding, "It's a good way to bring people together, elevate the music of our parish and put a spotlight on it."

"Looking out into the audience, I saw people from every generation, and it felt like there was truly a song for everyone," said Horstmann. ■



GUEST ARTISTS PERFORM DURING "A Broadway Melody" musical event at St. Joseph Church in Shelton. PHOTO BY AMY MORTENSEN

All Souls Day Mass

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2026

12:00 noon, rain or shine; tents and portable facilities will be provided

This Mass will be offered for the repose of the souls of all the faithful departed. Catholics are encouraged that day to pray that all those who have died may rest in the peace of Christ.

At the **Saint Rose of Lima II** *and* **Little Angels Shrine** *sections of* **Resurrection Cemetery**

208 South Main Street *(Route 25)* in Newtown
(across from the Newtown Police Department)

Principal Celebrant: **Father Peter Cipriani**



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DECEASED CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT SEPTEMBER 27—OCTOBER 24

SEPTEMBER

27	Rev. John Punnakunnel	2023
28	Rev. Edward A. Morgan	1992
29	Deacon Thomas W. Coyne	2002
	Rev. Ed McCall	2020

OCTOBER

2	Deacon Joseph Filingeri	2013
	Rev. Robert Morrissey	2014
	Rev. Ralph Seraphim Rohlman	2017
3	Msgr. John H. Anderson	1967
5	Msgr. Victor Balcerak, O.F.M. Conv.	1960
6	Rev. Francis Posluszny	2015
	Deacon William O. Murphy	2017
12	Deacon William Sedlock	1998
	Deacon Michael Wolfer	2013
14	Msgr. Raymond H. Guidone	1965
15	Msgr. William F. Schultz	2013
16	Msgr. John V. Horgan Kung	2009
17	Msgr. Benedict Tighe	2004
	Rev. Walter P. Coleman	2016
18	Bishop Walter W. Curtis	1997
19	Rev. Cornelius J. Looney	1974
20	Rev. Roy N. Henderson	2020
22	Msgr. David F. Bannon	1979
	Deacon Donald Fonseca	1989
	Rev. Louis M. Dytkowski	2016

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Señor de los Milagros toma las calles

Por MARICARMEN GODOY

STAMFORD. Ni las fuertes lluvias lograron detener a cientos de devotos del Señor de los Milagros que el domingo 11 de octubre en la iglesia de Santa María acompañaron a la misa y procesión del Señor de los Milagros por las calles del vecindario del East Side, en una jornada marcada por la fe, oración, promesas personales y la devoción al Patrono del Perú.

La celebración, organizada por la Cuadrilla número Uno de la Hermandad del Señor de los Milagros de Stamford, congregó a integrantes de las cuadrillas locales y delegaciones provenientes de Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport y New Rochelle de Nueva York. Hombres y mujeres cargaron y caminaron junto a las andas, mientras las sahumadoras esparcían incienso, en tanto cantaban canciones religiosas, rezaban el rosario y elevaban plegarias en medio de la lluvia.

"La procesión volvió a demostrar que esta tradición va más allá de una ceremonia religiosa: representa una expresión de identidad, memoria y pertenencia para los inmigrantes que mantienen vivas sus raíces lejos de su país de origen", dijo el cónsul del Perú en Hartford, Elvis Tuesta Cuadros, quien asistió a la fiesta del patrono peruano para acompañar a sus connacionales.

Durante la misa dominical, la imagen gigante del Señor de los Milagros no estuvo colocada en el Altar Mayor; en su lugar se presentaron dos imágenes pequeñas: una, la del Señor de los Milagros y otra de la Virgen de la Nube, patrona de los migrantes ecuatorianos. La presencia de la Virgen tiene un significado especial para los fieles, quienes comparten este vínculo de fe desde el convento de las monjas Nazarenas de Lima, Perú, guardianas de la imagen del Señor de los Milagros y de la imagen de la Virgen, en honor a una religiosa ecuatoriana que vivía en ese convento.

En el boletín semanal el Padre Juan José Colón, vicario parroquial, reflexionó basado en la segunda lectura dominical la necesidad de confiar en la Divina Providencia para poder cumplir con tranquilidad el costo excesivo de la canasta básica, "así como le dio a Pablo la fortaleza de soportar todo" (Fil 4, 19)".

El padre Juan Gabriel Acosta, párroco general, en la homilia, agradeció a la comunidad peruana su fe, su devoción y por compartir con Stamford sus expresiones culturales y religiosas. Posteriormente, el sacerdote expuso y sacó el Santísimo Sacramento en procesión a pesar de la lluvia, acompañado por el himno del Señor de los Milagros interpretado por el coro parroquial.



Este año, la imagen grande del Cristo morado permanecía resguardada en el jardín adyacente a la casa parroquial. Desde allí salió en procesión cargada en andas por los miembros de la Cuadrilla número Uno y acompañado por los devotos que, pese a las inclemencias del tiempo, siguieron el recorrido por las calles del vecindario del East Side.

La devoción al Señor de los Milagros en Stamford se remonta al 14 de febrero de 2004, cuando Alberto Rochabrún, peruano de nacimiento, impulsó la creación de la Hermandad del Señor de los Milagros en agradecimiento por un milagro en la vida de Isabel Párraga Martínez, su esposa.

Según Alberto Rochabrún, un líder comunitario que está a punto de cumplir 80 años relató que, pese a que los médicos habían ofrecido un pronóstico poco alentador, ella logró recuperarse y sobrevivir. Esta experiencia fortaleció su fe y le motivó a promover en Stamford la devoción al Cristo morado, trayendo desde Lima-Perú, las andas y una copia del cuadro original que reposa en el Convento de las Nazarenas.

Desde entonces, la celebración anual ha continuado gracias a los integrantes de la Hermandad y al apoyo de la comunidad que encuentra en esta tradición una manera de expresar su gratitud, cumplir promesas y mantener viva su identidad cultural. Tal como se ve en la muchedumbre dentro de la iglesia durante el rezo del Rosario previo a la misa o en las calles cuando es la procesión y en las veredas con el consumo de comidas típicas peruanas como picarones, alfajores, salchipapas y ceviche.

Desde el viernes previo a la celebración, los integrantes de la Primera Cuadrilla trabajaron en los preparativos de la misa y la procesión, bajo la dirección de su presidente, José Palacios. La organización de la jornada incluyó la preparación de las andas, la coordinación de los arreglos de flores y la atención a las delegaciones invitadas.

Según Palacios, las cuadrillas de la Hermandad se encargan de cargar las andas durante el recorrido, una labor que exige coordinación, resistencia física, disciplina y, sobre todo, profunda devoción. Junto a ellos caminan las sahumadoras ataviadas con hábito púrpura y velo blanco. Ellas esparcen incienso mientras rezan y cantan en veneración al Señor de los Milagros.

La mayoría de las sahumadoras son de origen peruano, aunque también participan mujeres de otras nacionalidades, especialmente ecuatorianas. Esta participación refleja los vínculos culturales y religiosos que se han desarrollado entre las familias latinoamericanas establecidas en la ciudad, así lo calificó Rira Guillén, nativa de Venezuela, casada con un peruano miembro de la Hermanad.

Acorde con Palacios, en Stamford existen actualmente tres cuadrillas de hombres y una cuadrilla de sahumadoras. En total hay 86 personas inscritas en las agrupaciones locales, con un promedio de 25 integrantes por cuadrilla. "La Hermandad ha abierto las puertas de sus cuadrillas a quienes deseen participar, independientemente de su nacionalidad. Para esta celebración se contempló la participación de alrededor de 300 cargadores durante la jornada, incluyendo a los integrantes de las delegaciones visitantes", dijo Palacios.

A pesar de la lluvia terminada la misa de Acción de Gracias, la banda de músicos Armonías del Perú, inició su participación en la procesión interpretando los himnos nacionales de Estados Unidos y Perú como un gesto de gratitud al país que acoge la tradición peruana. Práctica que se realiza desde el 2004 en la presidencia de Alberto Rochabrún.

Durante el recorrido, la banda ejecutó marchas religiosas y acompañó los cantos dedicados al Señor de los Milagros y a la Virgen. La música marcó el paso lento de las andas, mientras los devotos avanzaban por las calles, algunos con rosarios entre las manos y otros llevando flores para acompañar la imagen.

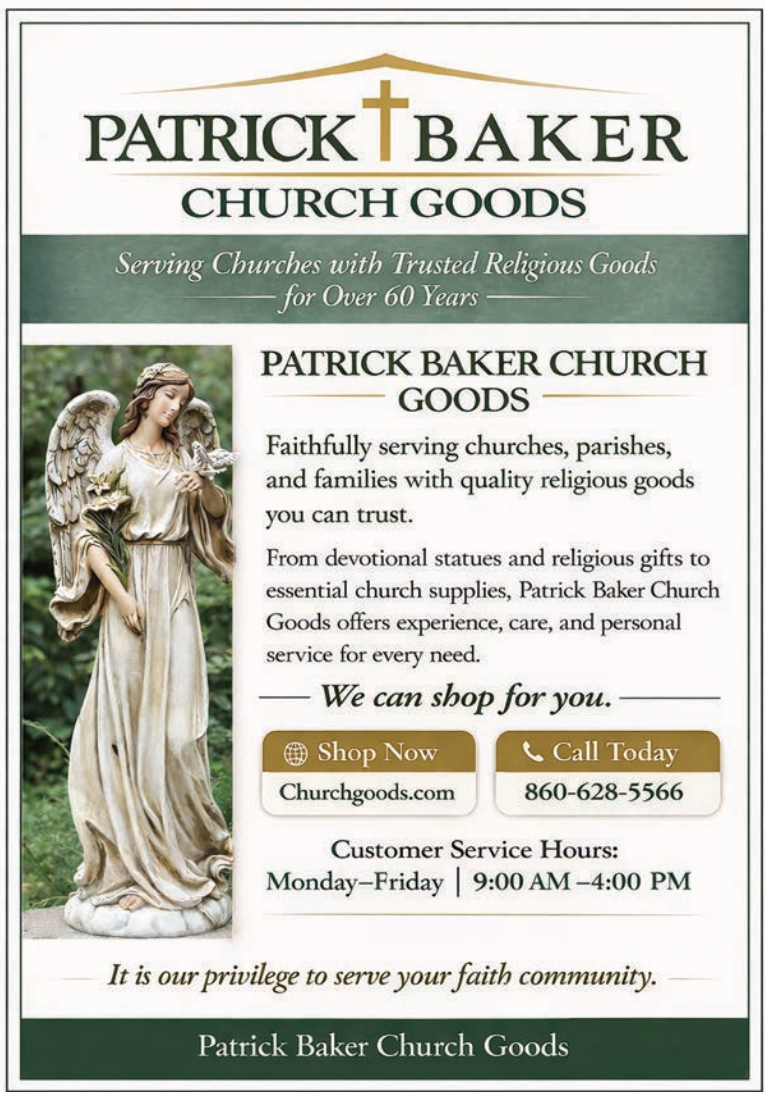
La celebración también tuvo expresiones de la cultura popular peruana con vendedores de alfajores, dulces tradicionales elaborados con galletas y relleno de dulce de leche. A prudente distancia, una patrulla policial acompañó la actividad para contribuir a la seguridad durante el recorrido.

El recorrido contempló las calles Cove Road, Frederick Road, Soundview Avenue y Saint Benedict Circle, hasta llegar a la iglesia Saint Benedict, donde tradicionalmente se guardan las andas y la imagen hasta la celebración del siguiente año.

Entre los testimonios que reflejan la dimensión personal de esta devoción está el de Hilda Molina, quien reside en Stamford desde hace 19 años y es originaria de Apurímac, Perú. En su país trabajó como maestra, pero las dificultades económicas la obligaron a inmigrar a Estados Unidos.

Año tras año, Hilda acudía a la celebración del Señor de los Milagros con una petición que marcaba profundamente su vida: encontrar una solución a su situación migratoria. Su historia tomó un giro favorable cuando ganó la lotería de visas, lo que

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 33



Update on Alexa Pino; St. Joe's keeps foes scoreless

By DON HARRISON

It seems like it was just a few weeks ago that Alexa Pino was scoring goals for St. Joseph High's outstanding girls soccer team. The three-time All-American and thrice-named Connecticut Gatorade Player of the Year scored with such frequency during her four-year career at the Diocese of Bridgeport high school.

Alas, Pino's final goal—her school-record 123rd—was recorded on November 16, 2024, in the Cadets' stunning 2-1 loss to Mercy High of Middletown in the Class LL state title match. St. Joe's had won three straight state championships during the Pino

> **"She wanted a place that would push her out of her comfort zone and help her grow ..."**

Era and, indeed, had lost only four games during that period.

Well, since then, Pino graduated from St. Joe's and enrolled at the University of South Carolina on scholarship. But her stay with the Gamecocks didn't work out, and so she transferred to the University of Kentucky and is now a sophomore midfielder with the Wildcats. She scored her first goal of the 2026 season in Kentucky's second game a 5-2 victory over Kent State.

Why Kentucky? She wanted a place that would push her out of her comfort zone and help her grow, both on and off the field.

Back on St. Joseph's Trumbull campus, girls soccer coach Jack Nogueira has kept the Cadets' winning tradition intact. In fact, his 2026 team is both undefeated and unscored upon through 13 matches. The only "blemish"—if it can be deemed as such—was the scoreless tie with FCIAC rival Ridgefield on September 29.

Junior Cailyn O'Hara has managed the bulk of the goalie duties thus far, following up on her standout play as a sophomore. When St. Joe's captured the 2025 FCIAC championship on a penalty-kick shootout against Greenwich last October, O'Hara was the Cadets' goalkeeper. She prevented two of Greenwich's three penalty-kick attempts, too. ■



Alexa Pino

Señor de los Milagros from page 32

le permitió regularizar su estatus migratorio. Para Hilda, aquel resultado fue el milagro que había pedido con fe y devoción.

En agradecimiento, hizo una promesa: "Mientras Dios le conceda vida, continuaré asistiendo a la celebración, rezando el rosario y cubriendo el cabello con el velo de la cuadrilla de sahumadoras.

"Detrás de la procesión existe un trabajo comunitario que comienza meses antes de octubre", así explicó José Palacios, presidente de la Hermandad. La preparación de las andas, la coordinación de las cuadrillas, los permisos municipales, los servicios de seguridad policial, las bandas de música y la alimentación de las delegaciones invitadas forman parte de una organización que demanda tiempo, esfuerzo y recursos económicos.

Según Palacios, llevar adelante esta tradicional devoción representa un costo de entre 12.000 y 14.000 dólares. Para cubrir los gastos, cada cuadrilla realiza sus propias actividades de recaudación de fondos y se prepara con anticipación para la celebración de octubre.

Después de la verbena del sábado en la noche, algunos miembros permanecen como guardianes de las andas y de los preparativos. "Son tareas que muchas veces transcurren lejos de la mirada pública, pero que resultan indispensables para mantener viva esta tradición", dijo Palacios.

La presencia del público comenzó el sábado 10 de octubre a las 7 de la noche, con el rezo del Rosario, seguido de una verbena organizada por la Primera Cuadrilla, que se extendió aproximadamente hasta las 10 de la noche.

José Palacios, destacó la importancia del trabajo colectivo para mantener esta celebración y la relación de la organización con la comunidad religiosa local. Reconoció el acompañamiento del padre Juan Gabriel, a quien describe como una persona cercana, servicial y comprometida con los feligreses.

"La procesión del Señor de los Milagros volvió a demostrar que las tradiciones de los inmigrantes no desaparecen al cruzar las fronteras. Por el contrario, se transforman en puntos de encuentro entre generaciones, familias y comunidades de distintos países", indicó Guadalupe Galarza, nativa de Ecuador, antropóloga de profesión, quien, llevada por una amiga, asistió a la fiesta del Señor de los Milagros. ■

PROFESSIONAL NETWORK AND CLASSIFIED











Why do Catholics venerate saints?

No Need to Apologize

By Suan Sonna

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

With the beatification of Fulton Sheen, many onlookers have asked about why Catholics are so obsessed with holy men and women. Why do we honor or venerate them? Many people, not just Protestants, have expressed curiosity to me about the biblical, historical and theological roots of this Catholic dogma.

In terms of Sacred Scripture, there are several examples. In Exodus 13:19, the Israelites take the bones of Joseph out of Egypt and bury them in Shechem. Joseph had become such an important figure for the Israelites that his wishes were remembered and granted generations after his death. This burial was so significant that it is mentioned again in the New Testament (Acts 7:15-16; Hebrews 11:22). In 2 Kings 13:21, a dead man is thrown onto Elisha's tomb (Elisha is the successor of Elijah) and "as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he came to life and stood on his feet." If I may, this sounds like a relic performing a miracle: the bones of a saint raised a person back to life in the Old Testament.

If you aren't convinced yet, there are more direct references to saint veneration later in the canon. We read in Sirach 48:4-11 of a hymn to Elijah who at this point had already been assumed into heaven. And we cannot forget the episode where the long dead prophet Jeremiah and the more recently deceased high priest Onias appear to Judas Maccabeeus in a vision from Heaven, declaring their ongoing intercession for the Jewish people (2 Macc. 15:12-16). This vision reflects not only the Jewish people's veneration of Jeremiah in the second century BC but also further encourages remembering and honoring Jeremiah for his unceasing prayers.

Jesus explicitly tells us in the New Testament that even the Pharisees continued to honor the saints: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous…" (Matt. 23:29). St. Peter likewise says, "Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). In other words, the tombs of the great men and women of the Faith were preserved and honored by the ancient Jews. The later pagan historian Cassius Dio even reveals in his Roman History that eventually "the tomb of Solomon, which the Jews regard as an object of veneration, fell to pieces of itself and collapsed, and many wolves and hyenas rushed howling into their cities" (69.14.2).

There are many other sources that show how our ancient Jewish brothers and sisters were venerating the saints in the first century AD. We also have early Christian accounts that show this practice continued. For the sake of space, I will move to the final question: what is the theological explanation for why Catholics venerate the saints?

There are many potential answers, but here's my favorite one.

Aside from the fact that the belief is found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, Catholics venerate the saints ultimately to bring glory and honor to God. Just as by complimenting a painting we compliment the painter, so too by honoring a saint do we honor God and His sanctifying work. We affirm that God has indeed made this person holy and beautiful. We are also encouraged that God can do the same for us.

Nicaea II, the seventh ecumenical council of the Catholic Church and the last Council we share with the Eastern Orthodox, declared, "Nor should it scandalize anyone that lights and fragrant incense are placed before the images of the saints, for this practice was devised as a symbol in honour of those who rest with Christ and whose honour passes over to him, for, as the wise Basil [of Caesarea] said, 'the honour paid to the good among our fellow servants is a display of good will towards our common master" (Trans. Fr. Richard Price, The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea (787), 352).

Of course, Catholics do not worship the saints as gods or as God. There is no competition between the saints and God, just as a husband is not unfaithful by showing honor to his wife's mother and father. In a sense, by honoring his in-laws, he shows honor to his wife as well. However, the husband can show a special kind of love to his wife that he should not share with anyone else but her. In the same way, by honoring the saints we honor God, but we reserve the special act of worship for God alone. ■

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The Most Rev. Frank J. Caggiano

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

Bishop of Bridgeport

DECREE PROMULGATING
ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS DIRECTIVES FOR CATHOLIC HEALTH SERVICES

In virtue of my office of Diocesan Bishop, I, the Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, to safeguard the integrity and unity of the truths of the faith, moral principles, and ecclesiastical discipline in the works of the apostolate pertaining to health care in the Diocese of Bridgeport (cf. CIC canons 392, 394, 678, and 747);

ESTABLISH THAT

Any physical, moral or canonical person working in the health care service in the Diocese of Bridgeport are bound, in the exercise of their apostolate, to adhere to the Seventh Edition of the USCCB's *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services.*

I order that the provisions of this decree have firm and stable effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and that they be promulgated by inclusion in the official diocesan newspaper, The Fairfield County Catholic, and published on the official diocesan website, entering into force on September 23, 2026.

Furthermore, I order that a copy of the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services,* along with a copy of this decree, be made available to all those assigned as chaplains in health care ministry in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

Given this 23rd day of September of 2026, at the Catholic Center, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

Deacon Patrick Toole
Chancellor

One yes, then one step, toward God

By FATHER CHRIS FORD

I have always been fascinated with Moses. As he leads the Israelites, he makes some interesting choices. One that has always intrigued me is that Moses seems most worried about the people of Israel not when they are wandering through the desert, but when life is finally about to get easier.

They are preparing to enter the Promised Land, where they will have homes, food and some stability. And Moses knows the danger: Once God's gifts become familiar, they may forget where they came from. So he keeps telling them, not merely to do certain tasks, but ultimately: Remember. Remember what the Lord has done and beware, lest you forget it.

That same temptation is part of our spiritual lives too. We usually do not consciously forget God. We just get used to His gifts. Something that once filled us with gratitude or wonder slowly becomes ordinary.

The same thing can happen with vocation.

Most vocations do not begin with a dramatic moment when everything suddenly becomes clear. Usually, God works much more quietly than that. Maybe the thought of priesthood keeps coming back. Maybe someone sees something in us and encourages us to consider it. Maybe there is an experience at Mass, in prayer, or in serving others that stays with us. None of those things, by themselves, necessarily answer the question. But over time, they can begin to form a pattern.

Part of discernment is learning to pay attention to that history.

Where has God already been at work in my life? What has He given me? What desires keep returning? When have I felt most free, most generous, most drawn toward Him? Sometimes we become so focused on figuring out what God wants us to do next that we forget to look at what He has already been doing.

Our Blessed Mother gives us a beautiful example of this.

At the Annunciation, Mary does not know everything that lies ahead. She is not given a full explanation of how her life is going to unfold. She listens, asks a real question, and then responds: "Let it be done to me according to your word."

But that first yes has to be lived out over an entire lifetime.

Mary carries it with her to Bethlehem, through the hidden years at Nazareth, to Cana, and eventually all the way to the foot of the Cross. Along the way, St. Luke tells us that Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart. She remembered. She kept returning to what God had done and allowed that memory to shape the way she received whatever came next.

That is one reason the Rosary can be such a good prayer for someone discerning a vocation. With Mary, we keep returning to the mysteries of Christ's life. We spend time with the Annunciation and the Nativity, with the ministry of Jesus, with His suffering and death, and with the joy of the Resurrection. We are not trying to discover something new every time we pray, but keeping the reality of what God has done close to us.

The question becomes a little less, "What am I supposed to do with my life?" and a little more, "Lord, what have You already given me, and how are You asking me to respond?"

Mary shows us that we do not need to see the whole road before we begin walking it. We need enough trust to take the



next step. For someone wondering whether God may be calling him to the priesthood or her to religious life, that next step might simply be having a conversation, spending some real time in prayer, or being willing to take the possibility seriously.

Moses told Israel to remember because he knew how easily we can lose sight of what God has done for us. The Rosary helps us do the same thing. With Mary, we remember where God has already been at work. And sometimes, when we pay attention to that history—and to the faithfulness of God it reveals—our next step becomes a little easier to see.

Father Christopher J. Ford, PhD is Episcopal Vicar for Education & Formation, Director of Seminarians and Pastor of Notre Dame of Easton Parish. For further information, visit bridgeportpriest.org or email discern@bridgeportpriest.org.

Malta House names new board members

Malta House, a Norwalk-based non-profit committed to providing shelter, support services and independent living skills to pregnant and parenting mothers and their children, announced the appointment of three new directors:

Father Sam Kachuba, Vicar for Young Adult Ministries of the Diocese of Bridgeport, the former pastor of St. Pius X Parish, and the co-host of "The Tangent" on Veritas Catholic Network.

Heather Keane, owner and Chief Marketing Officer of Stamford-based Visiting Angels, an organization dedicated to enriching the lives of aging adults.

Troy Pinto, a LinkedIn executive who leads client-facing teams focused on talent acquisition and development, supporting LinkedIn's mission to create economic opportunity for the global workforce.

"These talented and passionate individuals will be a tremendous asset to our board," said Michael O'Rourke, Chair of Malta House's Board of Directors. "Each brings a unique set of skills for supporting our long-term vision for transforming the lives of vulnerable mothers and their young children."

Malta House is committed to providing a lifeline of hope, safety and stability for their residents experiencing homelessness, O'Rourke said. Since its founding in 1998, it has grown into a ministry that has helped more than 900 vulnerable mothers and their children. Mothers receive counseling, financial education, and parental development followed by transitional and post-residential support.

"Malta House is very close to my heart," said Keane. "The support provided to mothers navigating crisis pregnancies is a life-giving vocation. I look forward to introducing moms who have experienced their caring support to our team at Visiting Angels for potential future employment opportunities."

"I was inspired by the difference Malta House made in the lives of women and babies when I leveraged my experience in the recruiting field to help their moms build resumes and search for jobs," Pinto said. "As a Catholic, I believe strongly that if we are going to encourage women to have children, even in tough circumstances, we need to do everything in our power to support them. This is a calling that the Lord is asking me to be part of and I am honored to be of service. "

For Father Kachuba, Malta House is a natural extension of the diocesan ministry he leads for advancing and supporting those in need.

"The nurturing home environment and support programs for needy moms of all faiths are a lifeline for women marginalized by society seeking direction in their lives," he said. "Malta House's track record in helping hundreds of women and their children break the cycle of poverty is impressive and I am thrilled to support them."

Established in 1998, Malta House is an independent 501c 3 non-profit organization in Norwalk, committed to promoting the dignity of God-given life by providing a nurturing home environment, support services, and independent living skills to pregnant and parenting mothers of all faiths and their children. Representatives said it is the only transitional living program in the state where a mom can stay with her baby for long-term support and a "hand-up" as she journeys to independence and hope. Since opening it has welcomed over 900 mothers and babies to its home and provided over 8,900 nights of shelter.

(For more information: www.maltahouse.org.)

DECREE OF ESTABLISHMENT
OF
THE GUARDIAN ANGELS GUILD

AND PROMULGATION OF STATUTES

WHEREAS it is my desire to establish a public association of the Christian faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport dedicated to promote and foster the mission of first responders and military personnel;

WHEREAS proper statutes have been redacted for such purpose, and they were reviewed and approved by me;

THEREFORE in virtue of c. 299, I, Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, by this decree, hereby establish *The Guardian Angels Guild* as a Public Association of the Christian faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport which is to enjoy the same rights as any canonically established public association of the faithful in the diocese in favor of the spiritual and pastoral needs of the People of God entrusted to my care and for the purposes outlined in its Statutes.

With this recognition, I make it known to the Association, in accord with cc. 305 §1 and 323 §2, that it is my responsibility, as Diocesan Bishop, to exercise vigilance so that:

- the goods of the association are used for its proper purposes
- the integrity of faith and morals is preserved in the association
- the dissipation of energies of the association is avoided
- the exercise of the apostolate of the association is ordered to the common good

All the Members of the Association enjoy the right to exercise the forms of pastoral activity defined in the statutes in accord with universal and particular law.

The diocesan center for the Association will be The Catholic Center of the Diocese of Bridgeport. Other centers of the Guild may be established in accord with its statutes.

I impart my apostolic blessing upon all the Members of the Guild and associates. I also encourage other members of the faithful of the diocese to join in the apostolic work of the new Association (c. 298 §2).

Given at the Catholic Center, Bridgeport, CT on October 12, 2026

+Frank J. Caggiano

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

Deacon Patrick Toole
Chancellor

PADRE PIO
FOUNDATION OF AMERICA

Honoring Our Veterans

This Veterans Day, the Padre Pio Foundation of America would like to express its heartfelt gratitude for the courage, sacrifice and selfless service of our nation's military men and women. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the families of those who have served, recognizing the sacrifices they, too, have made in support of our country.



Padre Pio shared a special bond with American servicemen, many of whom encountered the beloved Capuchin friar while stationed in Italy during World War II. These soldiers would later play an important role in introducing Padre Pio and his message of faith, hope and prayer to the American people.

One of the most fascinating stories from this time is that of the "Flying Monk." During World War II, allied pilots reportedly encountered a mysterious friar appearing in the sky as they approached San Giovanni Rotondo, the small Italian town where Padre Pio lived. According to accounts, the friar appeared with his arms outstretched, preventing the pilots from dropping their bombs over the town. Some pilots reportedly returned to San Giovanni Rotondo after the war and recognized Padre Pio as the mysterious figure they had witnessed in the sky.

This Veterans Day, we pray for all who have served and thank the American servicemen who helped bring Padre Pio's spiritual legacy to America.

Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, pray for our veterans and all those who serve our country!



SAVE THE DATE

Christmas Open House



Celebrate the most wonderful time of the year at the Padre Pio Foundation of America's annual Christmas open house. Enjoy light refreshments, browse the Padre Pio Gift Shop and Bookstore, and spend time in prayer in the Padre Pio Chapel. The hourly raffles begin at 10 AM!

December 5, 2026 | 9 AM - 2 PM
463 Main Street
Cromwell, CT 06416

Please scan the QR code to RSVP by December 2:

THE PADRE PIO FOUNDATION OF AMERICA
EST. 1977





Mention that you read about us in Fairfield County Catholic, and you will receive a small gift.

The Padre Pio Foundation of America

Founded in 1977 to spread devotion to Padre Pio, the PPFOA carries on his mission today by preserving the places near and dear to his heart, fostering vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and continuing Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy in his name.

The PPFOA, Chapel and Gift Shop are open to the public Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Our Padre Pio prayer group meets daily and prays for all our benefactors and those in need of prayer.

463 Main Street, Cromwell, CT 06416 | (860) 635-4996

"Pray, Hope & Don't Worry" padrepio.com