

BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH



NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC

be healed,
be cleansed

MARCH - APRIL 2023
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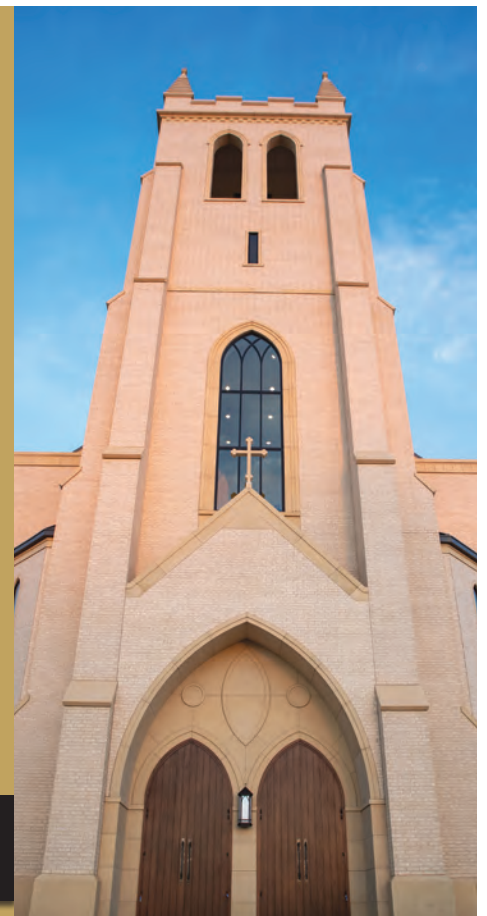
WITH PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING TO ALMIGHTY GOD
The Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth
announces the Transitional Diaconate Ordination Mass of



**BENJAMIN H.
GROTHOUSE**



**ERIC H.
FLORES**



Saturday, March 25, 2023 | 10 a.m.

St. Philip the Apostle Parish, 5201 Cross Timbers Road, Flower Mound

Putting your worst foot forward

We've often heard the phrase "putting our best foot forward." But have you heard of "putting your worst foot forward"?

"Putting your worst foot forward" is how Archbishop Fulton Sheen explained the sacrament of confession in his book, *Life is Worth Living*. He explains that instead of sharing our accomplishments, boasting about our success, and regaling others with tales of our victories, the sacrament of reconciliation calls for us to come forth with our worst traits. Indeed, in confession we tell the priest, who is acting *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ), everything we've failed in, all the times we've come up short, all the times we've hurt others, and all the times we've placed our self-interests above those of God and neighbor (since our last confession, that is).

To be honest, I quite like the phrase "putting our worst foot forward" — it sums up the humble attitude we must take when dragging our sinful souls to the confessional for a heart-to-heart with the Divine Physician. It is there that Our Lord tenderly dispenses graces through the sacrament: medicine for taming our pride. Elixir for seeing things from the point of view of others. A prescription for however many milligrams of humility we need to pull aside the veil of our vanity and bravado and own up to the fact that we are not perfect. We are not God. We do not know better. That alone we can't do it; only with Him.

There's been several times in life where I've fallen into that trap. Others have too. That's why I sincerely believe that the more often we "put our worst foot forward" by bringing our sins before Christ, the more we'll see societal ills such as division, hatred, violence, and dishonesty disappear. Exit the seven deadly sins. Enter the 14 works of mercy. Exit our spiritual rubbish. Enter the start of change.

This Lent, please take the time to make a good confession. Leaning into God's grace together we *can* make a more loving society.

Juan Guajardo
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Sister Huu Thi Chu, LHC, talks with a Dominican sister. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

Consecration Celebration

Religious priests and sisters come together to observe World Day for Consecrated Life

FORT WORTH — A day of prayer and fellowship, yes, but also one of solidarity, Father John Perikomalayil, HGN, said of the Feb. 10 World Day for Consecrated Life celebration.

“Meaningful, but more laid back,” the pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption Parish added. “A chance to sit and get to know each other. Seeing the new faces and celebrating together that consecration we have to God.”

Fr. Perikomalayil joined several dozen priests and religious sisters within the Diocese of Fort Worth to pray vespers at St. Patrick Cathedral followed by dinner in the cathedral parish hall.

The World Day for Consecrated Life, a day of prayer for women and men in religious life, was instituted by Pope St. John Paul II in 1997.

“A wonderful event because it gives us the opportunity to be together,” Sister Rosemary Stanton, SSMN said. “We’re all involved in our ministries and kind of scattered about. It’s wonderful to see and be reminded of the support from all the other religious communities working out there.”

“Today’s a tremendous opportunity for us to say, ‘thank you,’” Father Jonathan Wallis, vicar general, told those assembled.

– Matthew Smith

A hearty welcome to India

As this issue arrives in homes, Bishop Michael Olson, accompanied by Father Thomas Jones, parochial vicar of St. Jude Parish in Mansfield, will wrap up a trip to India.

An early highlight of their travels was the opportunity for the bishop to celebrate Mass at the site of the martyrdom of St. Thomas the Apostle.

Bishop Olson visited extensively with the Franciscans, Heralds of the Good News, and the Pallottines, religious orders with priests who serve in the diocese. He attended an ordination, blessed schools, and set a cornerstone for a new dormitory.

The bishop has received a warm welcome at schools, seminaries, orphanages, shrines, and parishes. At every location, the hospitality for the visitors from Texas has been massive: processions, banners, concerts, and dance performances.



Father Balaji Boyalla, SAC, at left, and others welcome Bishop Michael Olson.

The bishop has been given shawls and floral garlands to signify respect, friendship, and gratitude.

In the next issue, the *North Texas Catholic* will have an in-depth report on the prelate’s travels.



Views from the Pews

Ordinary time became extraordinary in the Diocese of Fort Worth in January and February. The faithful turned out to worship, witness, and serve at commemorative Masses, rallies, and celebrations.

TCU for life. About 20 students from the Texas Christian University Catholic Community went to Austin for the Texas Rally for Life on Jan. 28, accompanied by Father Brett Metzler and TCU Campus Minister Gabe Gutierrez.

St. Andrew School blessing. Bishop Michael Olson kicked off Catholic Schools Week with a Mass and a blessing of the new building additions to the school, which include a small chapel, pre-school classrooms, a cafeteria, middle school classrooms, and outdoor living spaces.

Young Catholic Professionals. The Fort Worth Chapter of YCP began its executive speaker series at St. Patrick Parish Hall on Jan. 19 with a reception and an address by Bishop Olson, who spoke on the enduring role of the sacrament of marriage in a changing society.

VIEW THE
PHOTOS



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NTC/Ben Torres



NTC/Rodger Mattison



NTC/Juan Guajardo

Journey continues to transitional diaconate



Bishop Olson presents Eric Flores (left) and Benjamin Grothouse as candidates for holy orders. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

ARLINGTON — In a simple, brief ceremony, Eric Flores and Benjamin Grothouse were formally admitted as candidates for holy orders during a Mass

celebrated by Bishop Michael Olson at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Arlington.

The Rite of Candidacy to the Priesthood is an invitation

from the Church for seminarians to continue their formation as they prepare for the next step in ministry — ordination to the transitional diaconate.

“The rite is truly marked by the simplicity of faith — it is the faith required to hear the call with the ‘yes’ of obedience,” Bishop Olson said.

After publicly responding with a resounding “I do” to questions from the bishop about their intention to receive holy orders and faithfully serve Christ and His Church, the seminarians received applause and a standing ovation from an appreciative congregation.

Both Flores and Grothouse entered St. Joseph Seminary in 2015 after each discussed with their parents the decision to study for the priesthood.

All are welcome as Bishop Olson ordains the two men to the transitional diaconate on March 25 at 10 a.m. at St. Philip the Apostle Parish in Flower Mound.

If God wills, the men will receive holy orders to the priesthood in May 2024.

— Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

A vision of faith



Xavier Society for the Blind helps visually impaired Catholics practice their faith

FLOWER MOUND — When Neva Fairchild was an elementary student in the 1960s, the only place where children with impaired vision could go to learn necessary life skills was a residential school for the blind.

Her parents refused to consider that option.

“I couldn’t read my textbooks, so I just listened in class,” said the Flower Mound resident born with an eye disease that worsened over time.

Those early struggles made

her empathetic toward other visually impaired persons who may not have the same resources as sighted individuals.

That is one of the reasons why she is an ardent supporter, as well as a patron, of Xavier Society for the Blind.

For more than 120 years, the New York-based nonprofit has provided free Mass propers (liturgical texts that change daily), faith-based books, and religious publications in braille and other technologies to 700



Xavier Society for the Blind provides resources to visually impaired Catholics.

visually disabled Catholics in the U.S. and 20 countries around the world. It is the only organization specifically serving this demographic.

“I’m a convert, so it’s really allowed me to enhance my faith,” Fairchild added.

— Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

No kidding! Catholic students compete at Fort Worth Stock Show



Nolan senior Jenna Moreno, second from right, and Cassata sophomore Hudson Rios, third from right, brace their goats for judging. (NTC/Ben Torres)

FORT WORTH — Ten students, representing Nolan and Cassata Catholic High Schools and St. Joseph Catholic School, brought 10 goats and one lamb to exhibit at the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo on Jan. 23. Jenna Moreno, a senior at Nolan, said the discipline she’s learned from showing goats has carried over to her faith life. “Ultimately, these skills we learn in the barn extend far beyond,” she said.

VIEW A VIDEO



Bishop Olson invokes blessing on opening of state legislature

AUSTIN — Bishop Michael Olson was the main celebrant and homilist for the Mass for the Blessing of Elected Officials at St. Mary Cathedral in Austin on Jan. 16, the eve of inauguration ceremonies.

Among the Massgoers were state representatives, judges, attorneys, and Gov. Greg Abbott.

In his homily, Bishop Olson stated, “We ask the Lord’s blessing upon each and all of you, for He has asked you to govern and to serve a



NTC/Thao Nguyen

people so vast that they seem to be beyond numbering and prone to disorder.”

The prelate also gave the

invocation at the inauguration of Gov. Abbott and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick the following morning at the Capitol.

READ THE HOMILY

Scan the QR code to find this homily and others by Bishop Olson



ASSIGNMENTS

BY MOST REV. MICHAEL OLSON

REV. JOSE IGNACIO OLVERA ALVAREZ, CORC

Previously Parochial Vicar of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Fort Worth, has been appointed **Pastor** of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Fort Worth, effective Dec. 16.

VERY REV. BALAJI BOYALLA, SAC

Previously Pastor of St. Michael Parish in Bedford, has been **recalled** by his religious order, effective Dec. 29.

REV. FRANCISCO MARTIN ALANIS GONZALEZ, CORC

Previously Pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Fort Worth, has been **recalled** by his religious order, effective Dec. 15.

REV. RUBEN TENA GUZMAN, CORC

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed **Parochial Vicar** of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Fort Worth, effective Dec. 16.

REV. VIJAYA RAJU MAREEDU, SAC

Previously Pastor of St. Rita Parish in Ranger, Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish in Cisco, St. Francis Xavier Parish in Eastland, and St. John Parish in Strawn, has been appointed **Pastor** of St. Michael Parish in Bedford, effective Feb. 1.

REV. JOHN MARTIN

Previously Pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Pilot Point, has been appointed **Pastor** of St. Peter Parish in Lindsay, effective Feb. 1.

REV. CLAUDIUS STEPHEN MNDOLWA, SAC

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed **Parochial Vicar** of St. Rita Parish in Fort Worth, effective Feb. 6.

REV. JOSEPH MORENO

Previously Pastoral Administrator of St. Jude Thaddeus Parish in Burkburnett, Christ the King Parish in Iowa Park, and St. Paul Parish in Electra, has been

appointed **Pastor** of those parishes, effective Jan. 1.

REV. BONIFACE DANIEL MURO, SAC

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed **Parochial Vicar** of St. Martin de Porres Parish in Prosper, effective Jan. 25.

REV. MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN, SAC

Previously Parochial Vicar of St. Stephen Parish in Weatherford, has been **recalled** by his religious order, effective Nov. 23.

REV. MARIA JOSEPH KIRAN KUMAR PUDOTA, SAC

Previously Parochial Vicar of St. Michael Parish in Bedford, has been appointed **Pastor** of St. Rita Parish in Ranger, Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish in Cisco, St. Francis Xavier Parish in Eastland, and St. John Parish in Strawn, effective Feb. 1.

REV. ELISEO HERNANDEZ VILLAREAL, CORC

Currently Parochial Vicar of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Fort Worth, has been elected to serve on **Community Counsel**, effective Nov. 25.

DEACON JOSE ROMAN-MALDONADO

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed to St. Joseph Parish in Arlington, effective Jan. 12.

DEACON RICHARD STALDER

Previously at Holy Cross Parish in The Colony, retired effective Jan. 12.

DEACON RAYMOND DAVID WEISS JR.

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed to St. John the Apostle Parish in North Richland Hills, effective Jan. 12.

SISTER THI KIM THUAN PHAN, LHC

Has been appointed to St. Maria Goretti School in Arlington, effective Oct. 11.

National Serra Rally meets



Chapters promote and affirm religious vocations



Father Maurice Moon (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

IRVING — About 120 individuals representing almost 50 U.S. Serra chapters and five international chapters met Jan. 12-14 for three days of inspiration and information to further the organization's mission of supporting religious vocations and responding to God's call to holiness in the members' own lives.

More than 20 speakers, including several clergy, addressed the attendees. Father Maurice Moon shared his personal perspective of fostering vocations as chaplain of Nolan Catholic High School and director of collegiate seminarian formation for the Diocese of Fort Worth.

Serra Club chapters work closely with the bishop and vocations office to promote vocations through prayer and practical support, such as facilitating the Vocation Awareness Program each summer.

In the Diocese of Fort Worth, the Serra Club has three chapters: Fort Worth, Arlington, and Northeast Fort Worth.

Bishop Olson celebrates MLK Mass



NTC/Juan Guajardo

BEDFORD — On Jan. 7 Bishop Michael Olson celebrated Mass at St. Michael Parish in Bedford, marking both the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord and the Diocese of Fort Worth’s 37th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Mass. Bishop Olson drew parallels between Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s efforts toward racial healing and unity and Christ’s call to all of us to conversion.



STORY AND PHOTOS HERE

Longtime teacher and principal Sister Teresa Honkomp, SSMN, dies at 89

FORT WORTH — Sister Teresa Honkomp, a Sister of St. Mary of Namur for more than 70 years, died Jan. 26 at 89. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Feb. 6 at St. Andrew Church.

A Wichita Falls native, she joined the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur after graduating from Academy of Mary Immaculate where she became familiar with the order and its mission to educate and serve.

She attended Our Lady of Victory College and earned her bachelor’s in education from Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio and later, a master’s in

education from Texas Woman’s University.

Sr. Teresa spent most of her life teaching in elementary and middle schools administered by the SSMNs in Texas, often serving concurrently as principal.

For many years she taught religion at Our Lady of Victory School, often serving as principal when the regular administrator was absent. Her last assignment was teaching religion to first and second graders at OLV during the 2012-13 school year.

Trudy Miller, a former principal at OLV, said, “She was an excellent mentor to me as a new principal.”



Sister Teresa Honkomp, SSMN

In retirement, the sister took art lessons and created paintings that merited entry in the Texas State Fair.

—Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

Lent begins with a visible symbol of repentance

NTC/Juan Cuajardo



GLEN ROSE — Parishioners filled churches across the diocese, including at St. Rose of Lima Parish in Glen Rose, to receive ashes on Feb. 22. Ash Wednesday begins the 40 days of Lent, the liturgical season of penitential preparation leading up to the celebration of Easter.



SCAN FOR MORE PHOTOS

The graces of liturgy



Annual RCIA Formation Day focuses on liturgy

BEDFORD — The training and formation of those teaching RCIA and RCIA for Children entails multiple aspects, said Jason Whitehead, diocesan director of Evangelization and Catechesis at the annual RCIA Formation Day on Feb. 11.

RCIA instructors and directors from parishes throughout the diocese gathered at St. Michael Church in Bedford for the event, which included talks and workshops in English and Spanish.



“Today is specifically about the liturgical aspect of RCIA,” Whitehead

Deacon Rigoberto Leyva led the Spanish workshops. (NTC/Jayme Donahue)



Dr. Scott Sollom gave the keynote at RCIA Formation Day. (NTC/Jayme Donahue)

said, explaining each year has a unique emphasis. “We’re focusing on the liturgical — specifically for the purpose of concentrating on the reason for it, which is the communication of grace.”

Dr. Scott Sollom, a Franciscan University theology professor, echoed those sentiments during his

keynote speech.

“People need to be encouraged through the liturgy and the grace that’s received through the liturgy. The liturgical rites propel and sustain the process of conversion,” Sollom said.

– Matthew Smith



An image of the late Pope Benedict XVI is seen during the requiem Mass celebrated by Bishop Michael Olson on Jan. 8, 2023 at St. Patrick Cathedral. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



AN EXPANSIVE legacy

Bishop Olson and local faithful reflect on Pope Benedict XVI's impact on the Church

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

“The writings of Pope Benedict XVI will be researched, studied, and read for a long time. I wouldn’t be surprised if he was named a doctor of the Church in the distant future.”

Father John Robert Skeldon, rector of St. Patrick Cathedral, shared his thoughts about the legacy of the German-born pope emeritus during a presentation Jan. 18 in the parish hall.

Citing advanced age and failing health, Pope Benedict XVI became the first Holy Father in almost 600 years to resign from the papacy in February 2013. Living in quiet obscurity, he resided in a monastery on Vatican grounds until his death on Dec. 31 at the age of 95.

The author of 60 books, 1,300 academic articles, three encyclicals, and four apostolic exhortations, the late pope emeritus was considered to have one of the greatest intellectual minds the Church has ever seen.

According to Fr. Skeldon, Pope Benedict sent a powerful message in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (*God is Love*), when he wrote, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or lofty idea but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new

horizon and a decisive direction.”

With those words, the late pope drives home the idea that following God is more than the thoughts or choices a person makes.

“There is this fundamental idea of an encounter which calls for a relationship with God not unlike the human relationships we have in our lives,” Fr. Skeldon explained.

Born in 1927 as Joseph Ratzinger to deeply religious parents living in predominantly Catholic Bavaria, his early life was formative.

“Because he’s going to see in a very personal way the madness of humanity,” Fr. Skeldon said, referring to the rise of Adolph Hitler, the Nazis, and the atrocities against Jews that followed. “A young Joseph Ratzinger saw the evil of Nazism and how people’s rights were chipped away.”

In his autobiography, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927–1977*, then-Cardinal Ratzinger wrote about his early vocation to the priesthood which was delayed when, as a 16-year-old, he was drafted into the Hitler Youth army in 1943. Seminary studies began after World War II ended, and he was ordained in 1951 at the age of 24. The young priest fell in love with teaching theology — the study of God.

Continued on Page 14

From Page 13

“One of the best definitions of theology is ‘faith seeking understanding,’” Fr. Skeldon pointed out. “After witnessing the horrors of Nazi Germany in his own homeland, he tried to make sense of it from the point of view of his faith.”

Through numerous books and articles, Joseph Ratzinger spent most of his life helping people understand their faith in an uncomplicated, digestible way. Elected pope after the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI’s papacy was a brief eight years but left an impact.

“He sought to bring theology, not as a rarified science, but as something that was pastoral and meaningful in people’s lives,” Fr. Skeldon concluded. “His lifetime’s work in scholarship, theology, and ministry shows a man who knows Jesus Christ and wants to share Him with others.”

Jaime Brema came to the lecture wanting to know more about the life and teachings of Pope Benedict.

“Before today, I didn’t know much,” admitted the St. Patrick parishioner. “Now I realize how meaningful he was to the Church.”

Before hearing Fr. Skeldon’s perspective on the life of Pope Benedict XVI, Margie Ferrer’s clearest memory of the late pontiff was his resignation.

“He was a true theologian and that was his greatness,” she said, reflecting on what she learned. “Fr. Skeldon’s talk was very informative.”

North Texas Catholics gathered Jan. 8 in St. Patrick Cathedral to pray for the repose of the soul of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI during a Mass celebrated by Bishop Michael Olson and other diocesan priests. While studying in Rome as a young priest, the bishop recalled meeting Cardinal Ratzinger before he was pope and having several informal conversations with him in St. Peter’s Square.

“I learned a lot from his example of humility and his breadth of knowledge and wisdom,” Bishop Olson told the *North Texas Catholic*. “He would talk to anybody — always asking where you were from and could switch from language to language. He was very open.”

In his homily, the bishop reminded Mass participants of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger’s

legacy as a staunch defender of the faith.

“Pope Benedict XVI’s theological critics and adversaries rightly saw him as one of the main obstacles in their attempt to change the doctrine of the Catholic faith into a form of Gnosticism or new religion that can simultaneously capitulate to Marxism and the hedonism of the sexual revolution and still be called Catholic,” he explained.

As a priest, bishop, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and most fully as pope, the vicar of Christ, Joseph Ratzinger was obligated to resist revisionist theology.

“Because of this, his opponents created the image of him as a ruthless inquisitor and made that illusory figure a target of mockery hoping these attacks against his person might affect his humility, his fidelity to Christ, and his clear teaching of Christ’s Gospel,” the bishop continued. “Their strategy failed.”

Dr. Chris Malloy, University of Dallas theology department chairman, said Cardinal Ratzinger’s views and clarity on Church teaching influenced his career choice.

“Back in the 1980s and ’90s, it prompted me to study Catholic theology because I realized it had real claims in the world and it meant something. It meant life was worth living,” the associate professor said.

While many liberal theologians at the time dissented from the faith, Cardinal Ratzinger defended it.

“And he did so in a calm and reasonable manner,” Malloy observed. “That gave me great confidence the faith is true and life-giving. No one is perfect, but he was extraordinary in so many of his gifts and accomplishments.”

Dr. Daniel Burns, associate professor of politics at the University of Dallas, was among the 50,000 mourners who paid their respects to the German-born late pontiff during his funeral Jan. 5.

“Pope Benedict XVI was an intellectual leader second to none in his generation and the greatest the Church has seen in a very long time,” Burns said.

“He knew he owed the world honest and clear answers to questions raised about the faith by believers and nonbelievers alike,” the associate professor pointed out, noting the theologian always used Christian intellectual tradition to find the answers to questions. “He

IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE PAPACY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

APRIL 19, 2005

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 78, is elected pope and takes the name Benedict XVI.

DEC. 22, 2005

Meeting with top aides at the Vatican, Pope Benedict insists the teaching of the Second Vatican Council must be read in continuity with the Church's tradition.

APRIL 16, 2007

The first of what would be a three-volume work, *Jesus of Nazareth*, by Pope Benedict goes on sale and is an immediate commercial success.

APRIL 2008

Pope Benedict visits Washington, New York, and the United Nations, and meets with victims of clerical sex abuse for the first time.

NOV. 4, 2009

With the apostolic constitution

*"Anglicanorum
coetibus,"*

Pope Benedict establishes personal ordinariates for Anglicans entering into full communion with the Catholic Church.

JULY 15, 2010

With the approval of Pope Benedict, the Vatican releases streamlined procedures for handling accusations of clerical sexual abuse and removing from the priesthood those found guilty.

MAY 1, 2011

Pope Benedict beatifies Pope John Paul II.

FEB. 28, 2013

Pope Benedict, 85, becomes the first pope in almost 600 years to resign; he cited declining strength because of age.

2013-2022

Pope Benedict lives a "monastic" life of prayer and study, and receives visitors in a renovated monastery near the Vatican Gardens. With prompting from Pope Francis, he appears in public for a number of significant Church events at the Vatican.

Information compiled by Our Sunday Visitor.



understood the faith as a precious gift we must always feed and nurture and can never take for granted, especially in a secularizing world."

In November 2009, Nancy Eder and 500 other North Texans traveled to Rome with then Fort Worth Bishop Kevin Vann to mark the 40th anniversary of the diocese

and attend a general audience with Pope Benedict XVI. Two members of the group, the late Monsignor Charles King and the late Sister Francesca Walterscheid, SSMN, were greeted by the Holy Father personally. Sr. Francesca, a native of the heavily German Muenster, Texas, spoke to him in his native language. A general

audience with the pope was part of the arranged schedule and included 800 participants.

"It was an amazing experience," said Eder, remembering the gathering in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall. "Pope Benedict was very kind and gentle. I felt very humbled." 🇺🇸



TCU Catholic students Isabel Pixa, left, Lauren Wahlstrom, and Jacques Muhire at the Texas Rally for Life in Austin. (NTC/Ben Torres)

A MATTER OF life and breath

Pro-life activities emphasize changing hearts, not just laws

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

After almost 50 years of prayer, peaceful protests, and lobbying politicians, pro-life advocates celebrated the U.S. Supreme Court's 5–4 decision last June to overturn the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* precedent that established a constitutional right to abortion. The new ruling eliminated federal protections and gave states the authority to set their own abortion policies.

Overturing *Roe v. Wade* is a significant

victory for the pro-life movement.

“But we’re not done advocating for life,” insisted Terri Schauf, diocesan Respect Life coordinator. “We’re moving forward with hope and healing toward a time when abortion is unthinkable. We need to change hearts and not just the law.”

Speakers at a diocese-sponsored pro-life rally, followed by the Annual Respect Life Mass, voiced a similar message to more than 400 participants who gathered Jan. 22 in the Nolan Catholic High School

gym for the multigenerational event. The afternoon included food trucks, praise and worship music, recitation of the Divine Mercy chaplet, and booths by organizations helping moms and babies in need as well as families grieving the loss of a pregnancy.

Thanks to the Heartbeat Act and other legislation, abortion is illegal in Texas but that does not mean it is not accessible. To terminate a pregnancy, Texans can travel to other states or take the RU-486 abortion pill.



Young worshippers pray during the Respect Life Mass Jan. 22 at Nolan Catholic High School. The event drew more than 350 Catholics from across the Diocese of Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

“So abortion is still happening and there are still women who will need our help afterwards,” Schauf pointed out. “We also have to be there for the families who choose life for their babies.”

In a homily given during the Respect Life Mass, Monsignor E. James Hart called the defense of unborn lives “still the most important moral issue of our time.” Memorial roses and a Book of the Innocents, inscribed with the names of babies lost to abortion in the diocese, were placed in front of the altar.

The diocesan chancellor and moderator of the curia said more than 64 million innocent, helpless babies have been brutally and ruthlessly slain since abortion was legalized in 1973. And despite reversing a Supreme Court decision made 50 years ago, “this injustice and atrocity is still sanctioned by many states and their legislatures. The killing of an innocent child — under any circumstance — is always opposed to the natural, divine, and moral law.”

Msgr. Hart urged his listeners to use every morally right, lawful, and nonviolent means possible to end abortion, remembering that it is an ethical matter that transcends politics.

“As Catholics, we have the right to not only oppose it personally and in the public square, but we have moral obligation to do so in our faith,” he said.

Building up a culture of life and training the next generation of pro-life leaders is the focus of Students for Life of America — an organization dedicated to abolishing abortion.

Students for Life spokesperson Erin Quinn shared startling statistics that underscored the truth and reality of abortion during her keynote address at the rally.

Terminating pregnancies has moved from surgical procedures in brick-and-mortar buildings to college and high school bathrooms where women take pills to perform their own abortions.

“Ninety percent of abortions are chemical and it’s not safe,” she cautioned. “The current president removed restrictions on these pills. It’s great revenue for the drug companies but what they don’t tell you is that these pills are 70 percent more dangerous and are designed for pregnancies 10 weeks and earlier.”

Quinn told the audience the tide is turning in favor of the pro-life cause. Research on the 18- to 34-year-old demographic indicates 75 percent oppose late-term abortion and one in four wants no abortion at all.

“There are hundreds of thousands of young people defending pre-born lives and you are not alone,” the speaker encouraged. “You are needed. Make sure people know the pro-life movement is not stopping. We need those pro-life groups now more than ever.”

Erin Quinn, with Students for Life, was the keynote speaker during the Respect Life Rally at Nolan. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



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Msgr. James Hart celebrated the Annual Respect Life Mass on Jan. 22 at the arena at Nolan Catholic High School. (NTC/Carolina Boelter)

MUCH MORE LIFE!

Go to
NorthTexasCatholic.org
 or scan the QR codes
 below to see:

Video from the Jan. 22
 Annual Respect Life Mass
 and Rally



More photos from the Jan.
 22 Annual Respect Life
 Mass and Rally



A photo gallery from TCU
 Catholics at the Texas
 Rally for Life



From Page 17

Support in the form of scholarships, job opportunities, and maternity housing exists for women facing an unplanned pregnancy.

“But people do not know about these resources that are free, life giving, and life protecting,” Quinn continued, noting that one in four women will attend a church service as they contemplate abortion.

“That is why we need to have our resources displayed openly, widely, and talked about all the time,” she added. “We must embrace these young women who are fearful and don’t know where to turn.”

Manning one of several booths showcasing pro-life ministries, Tova Anderson, volunteer coordinator for Gabriel Project, said the need to help women dealing with an unplanned pregnancy is greater in a post-Roe world. A parish-based ministry managed by Catholic Charities Fort Worth, Gabriel Project pairs pregnant women in crisis with a mentor who offers encouragement, friendship, and support.

Supplying new parents with material and financial resources is handled by

Catholic Charities caseworkers.

“Moms are coming in looking for help, and we need more volunteers,” explained Anderson, adding that even school-age children can organize a donation drive or write encouraging cards to an expectant mom. “We’re here sharing information about resources and volunteer opportunities, especially for young people.”

Newly energized students from Cristo Rey High School hope to start a pro-life group on campus after hearing about the ways they can support pregnant moms.

“I didn’t really have an opinion about abortion but coming here today changed my perspective,” said Miley Munoz, 14, a freshman and St. Bartholomew parishioner. “Knowing there are resources to help a pregnant teenager who doesn’t have any money is something I like.”

Aidan Strab said attending the rally reaffirmed his faith.

“I’m surrounded by negative influences at my school. If someone asks me a question about abortion I can answer them,” added the Timber Creek High School senior. “Coming to events like this helps me explain our values to other people and spread the Gospel of Jesus.” 🇺🇸

Father Anthony Chandler celebrates Mass at Catholic Charities Fort Worth on Jan. 26. Fr. Chandler, the interim CEO, is on loan from the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Leading with Catholic

By Mary Lou Seewoester

There are always a few non-Catholics among the dozen or so people who attend the 9 a.m. Thursday Mass at Catholic Charities Fort Worth. In fact, it's part of CCFW's culture to welcome both Catholic and non-Catholic clients, employees, and volunteers, while maintaining a vibrant Catholic identity.

"We don't know how many of our staff are Catholic," Josh Audi, CCFW chief financial officer, said. "We don't have that in the database and it's not part of the interview process."

Kasey Whitley, CCFW director of parish social ministry, said, "We're here to welcome and serve all and that is directly related to our Catholic social teaching."

She said the only Catholic requirement for new staff is "an overview of the seven themes of Catholic social teaching ... how we apply them and what that looks like day to day here at Catholic Charities."

"These [themes] are not exclusive to

the Catholic faith," she continued. "Other faiths share similar values and beliefs."

Audi, who is Baptist, said that's how he views working for an agency that is rooted in Catholic social teaching.

"We're here to serve because of our faith," Audi said. "The mission and the focus of Catholic Charities aligns perfectly with my own Christian values."

"When it comes to our social calling to provide service to those in need, to advocate compassion and justice, and to call people of good will to do the same, that transcends the Catholic faith. It's a wider calling in most religions," he added.

Whitley said strengthening Catholic identity is a "top priority" for her team of seven. So, in addition to supporting parish engagement and the Gabriel Project, they offer a calendar of Catholic opportunities for CCFW staff.

For example, in addition to weekly Masses, celebrated by Father Anthony Chandler, interim CEO, the agency now will also have Mass on Holy Days. There

was distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday. A lunch-hour Divine Mercy Chaplet during Lent and an opportunity for staff to offer a spiritual bouquet for clergy in the Diocese of Fort Worth are planned.

"We're trying to give people exposure to the Catholic faith, deepen their understanding and knowledge of it, and celebrate some of our rich traditions," Whitley said.

She added that these Catholic opportunities "are not imposed or mandatory." They are offered "in an inviting way."

Audi concurred, saying, "I literally don't feel any pressure whatsoever" to participate in Catholic opportunities, adding that when he attends Mass, he always approaches the priest for a blessing during Communion.

"It's an open environment where people have a nonthreatening exposure to Catholic faith and traditions," he said. "I can go into [Mass] feeling stressed and overwhelmed or with my mind racing, and I come out feeling refreshed and with new purpose." 🇺🇸



steeped & schooled in faith

Principals, teachers, and parents find unique ways to integrate faith into students' days at diocesan Catholic schools

By Susan Moses

Pour a little chocolate syrup into a glass of cold milk, and the syrup sinks to the bottom in a chocolatey blob. But stir it up, and chocolate milk can no longer be separated into its ingredients. The flavor is present in every sip.

In Catholic schools, teaching the faith is not relegated to a daily religion class that is separate from the rest of education. It's present throughout the day — in opening prayers, the artwork in the halls, and the celebration of Mass, to cite a few examples.

For Catholic Schools Week, the *NTC* checked in with a few diocesan Catholic schools and found some unique ways the faith is passed on to the students, along with examples of students embracing that faith and sharing it with others in their communities.

ALWAYS LISTENING

Holy habits start early in Vince Martinez's kindergarten class at St. George Catholic School in Fort Worth.

"Remember, God is listening," Martinez

tells his 15 students, and the little learners heed the admonition of St. Paul in *Ephesians 6:18*. "Pray at every opportunity in the Spirit."

When the bells of St. George Church next door toll every hour, the students stop, put their hands together in prayer, take a deep breath, and close their eyes as the day's prayer helper lifts up the intentions on his or her heart.

According to Martinez, they most frequently intercede for healing of an ill classmate or family member. Blessing of pets, and animals in general, are persistent requests.

The hourly bells are an opportunity to refocus, to acknowledge the presence of a loving Father, and to instill the habit of frequent prayer.

Martinez said prayer breaks only take a minute but teach the children that "God is always on your side. You can talk to God and pray at any time."

The classroom also has a prayer table, where students can take a respite when negative emotions arise. Seeing them pray on their own gladdens Martinez's heart. "I love it. They make me so proud," the teacher said of his students. He described each class in his five years



of teaching as “amazing.”

If St. Augustine is correct, the class doubles up on prayer time after lunch. The saint is credited with saying “He who sings prays twice,” and the students walk from the lunchroom back to class each day with their hands folded in prayer as they sing a song to the Blessed Virgin Mary on their way through the halls.

This tradition, said Martinez, teaches “Mother Mary is listening too. Don’t be afraid to ask her for help, and learn to love God and Jesus and Mary.”

KIND COMPETITORS

Samantha Newman is an unlikely coach with an unlikely player, but both delight in their first season of basketball at St. Rita Catholic School.

The east Fort Worth school wasn’t going to be able to field a team of fifth- and sixth-grade girls basketball for lack

of a coach.

Newman, the mother of a second-grade student, had never played basketball or coached before, but she’d watched many NBA games years ago when she worked for a trading card company.

“I’ll coach if no one else is going to do it. I’ll give it a shot,” she said, no pun intended.

The team of eight girls includes an unlikely player too. One player has Turner Syndrome, a chromosomal disorder resulting in small stature and hearing loss.

“She is not treated any differently,” said Newman. “She gets the ball passed to her; everyone cheers her on; she shoots or passes; she has a great time.

“She’s part of the team as much as anyone else. It’s never been an issue.

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REVERENT RESPONSE

Ezekiel Melendez bows toward a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as he and his class return from lunch, guided by teacher Vince Martinez on Jan. 30. Kindergarten students at St. George Catholic School practice praying in the classroom and in the halls. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

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I didn't have to address it. I'm proud of these girls."

The kindness on the court is due to an inclusive atmosphere at St. Rita created by a shared faith, Newman surmised. "The school is such a family. Physical, economic, ethnic differences don't mean anything. They are all equal to each other. It's sweet to see how they interact."

The season is short, but Newman hopes the skills she's seen on the court will go with the girls in the future: Pray more often than you practice. Come together as a team. Never give up. Treat others with kindness.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Penmanship, multiplication — these rote lessons are anything but routine at St. Mary Catholic School in Gainesville.

"God is at the front and of foremost importance at our school, and we use every opportunity to tell God's story," said Kim Otto, principal.

For example, when the first-grade students practice penmanship, not only are they painstakingly copying a snippet of a Bible verse, but their teacher reminds them God delights in beauty and order.

Third-grade math is an occasion to observe patterns in multiplication. A jumble of numbers transforms into something with structure and reason, like God creating the universe out of chaos. It serves as a reminder that life is messy and tangled on our own, but when we live our life according to God's plan, our life becomes ordered and meaningful.

Science in each grade provides ample occasions to learn about the beauty of God's creation, Otto said. This year, third graders and up have the opportunity to spend a day at a nearby ranch to observe the wonder of nature on a larger scale.

When it comes to social studies at St. Mary, Caitlin Turbeville merges religion into history for her sixth- through eighth-grade students.

She encourages her students to look for God in the unfolding of history. "Where do we see Him?" she asks. Her purpose is to point to something higher than the actions and events of human-kind as she teaches world, Texas, and



Each class at Holy Trinity Catholic School has a patron saint. At top, Matt Vaughan teaches an eighth-grade religion class at the Grapevine school on Jan. 30. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

American history.

She explains to her students that out of the chaos of revolution, God can bring good, like the birth of the United States. Divine providence works through every event, said Turbeville.

HEART OF A SAINT

The halls of Holy Trinity Catholic

School are filled with saints and future saints.

Each grade has a patron saint who stays with the class as they progress from kindergarten through eighth grade.

Above the doors of each classroom, the saint's name and "pray for us" is written, and an icon or painting of the saint hangs on the wall inside the class.



Throughout the years, the students learn about the life and the virtues of their patron saint, and when the students graduate, they are given a keepsake of that saint, “so they can take that relationship wherever they go,” said Karen Ullman, principal of Holy Trinity.

A devotion to the saints is one of many ways the faith is practiced in the Grapevine school. “Honestly, our Catholic identity is so strong. It’s incredible,” Ullman said.

Last spring, Ullman observed faith in action in the fifth-grade class. After hearing about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the students “told the teacher they had to do something to help,” she recalled.

The students came up with a plan to make thread bracelets, bookmarks, prayer rocks, and buttons encouraging others to pray for Ukraine. The students supplied the ideas, materials, and labor; the administration merely needed to unlock the door and set up a table.

With faculty permission, they came to school for a week at 6:45 a.m. to create the items. The next week they staffed a table at the carpool line, distributing the items and soliciting donations and prayers.

They raised more than \$2,100, which they sent to a school in Poland that took in many Ukrainian refugee children.

“This news story turned into a lesson in compassion and helping others. It was a beautiful effort, and it was totally self-directed and planned,” said Ullman.

Raising financial and prayer support for Ukraine was just one example of students focused on the needs of others, said Ullman. “They are other-centered, community-oriented.”

At these and other diocesan Catholic schools, religion is not merely a class, but lessons of faith are incorporated into education in creative ways. Because at the end of the day, said Turbeville, the St. Mary teacher, “Our purpose is something higher.” 🇺🇸

WINNING MINDSET

Lessons of teamwork and kindness will last long after the buzzer sounds, according to St. Rita Catholic School girls basketball coach Samantha Newman. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

OUT OF
TRAGEDY,
hope

By Susan Moses

A photograph shows a mural by Italian urban artist TVBoy on a wall of the House of Culture in the town of Irpin, Ukraine, on Feb. 1, 2023, during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. (AFP via Getty Images/ Dimitar Dilkoff)



Parishioners affected by war in Ukraine or the Eastland Complex Wildfire relied on faith and community to survive a year of upheaval

St. Sophia Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in The Colony is thousands of miles from the front lines of the fighting in Ukraine, but the hearts of its faithful are close to the war-torn country.

In his flock, Father Pavlo Popov ministers to a broad scope of Catholics. Refugees recently arrived from Ukraine — some living with local family, some with no ties to the area. Immigrants who arrived in Texas decades ago but worry about family who remain in the Eastern European country. Texans proud of their Ukrainian ancestry. Even worshippers whose only link to the parish is an affinity for the country or the Eastern Catholic Rite.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, more people fill the pews of the church. According to Fr. Popov, “People are back in church because they feel this urge to pray. They feel so much in pain; they feel so hurt; so they come to church looking for that healing.”

Anxiety about the uncertain duration of the war and the safety of loved ones and family haunts many parishioners.

Fr. Popov ministers to his congregation by looking back, looking out, and looking up.

The past provides assurance the Ukrainian people will endure. “We are going through some tough times, but it’s not the first. It’s nothing new for Ukraine, for the history of Ukraine, for Ukrainian people,” said the pastor.

Having lived through great famine, genocide, two world wars, and communism, the Ukrainian people are no strangers to hardship. He explained, “We’ve been familiar with persecution and suffering and challenges.”

Liz Moroz Harper, a St. Sophia parishioner and president of the Ukrainian American Society of Texas, agrees that Ukrainians are tenacious and resilient.

“We are a proud people with a love for freedom. We will not give up. I hope [the war] ends soon, but Ukraine will not submit,” said Harper,



Liz Moroz Harper, president of the Ukrainian American Society of Texas, poses at St. Sophia Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in The Colony Feb. 12, 2023. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

whose four grandparents immigrated to the U.S. from Ukraine.

Many in the community, including Fr. Popov and Harper, look out for opportunities to help, given the constraints of living here. At times they work together. For example, the Ukrainian American Society of Texas created an angel tree to provide Christmas gifts to about 15 refugee families who worship at St. Sophia.

Some St. Sophia parishioners sponsor refugees, helping them adjust to their new community by assisting with transportation, language barriers, and other needs.

Fr. Popov has been impressed with the generosity of the community, even those without a personal connection to Ukraine. The parish has collected funds for humanitarian aid in Ukraine, and donors at Holy Cross Parish in The Colony have provided local refugees with food and household items.

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Eastland Fires: A Year Later



March 2022

Father Vijaya Mareedu, SAC, inspects the burnt remains of the Guillen residence. The Guillens were among seven families at St. Francis Xavier Parish in Eastland who lost their homes, vehicles, and belongings in the wildfires that razed Eastland County last year.

NTC/Juan Guajardo



February 2023

Evelyn Guillen, her husband, Juan, and her mother, Maria Antonia Anaya (left), lost their home in the Eastland Complex Fires last year. The Guillens have since rebuilt and are putting finishing touches on their mobile home.

NTC/Juan Guajardo

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The Ukrainian American Society of Texas' focus was the preservation and celebration of Ukrainian heritage and culture when it was formed 40 years ago.

Now, Harper said, the nonprofit's purpose includes fundraising, educating, sustaining awareness of the war, and maintaining a website (uast.org) with vetted organizations that provide humanitarian and defense assistance.

ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Despite the injustice of an unprovoked war and the loss of innocent lives, Fr. Popov delivers a message of hope to his congregation.

He references the Apostles, saints, and martyrs, who experienced great hardships which advanced their personal holiness and expanded the Church.

God can work through terrible situations, he said, and His care can be observed in the support of the international community, in tales of unlikely survival on the battlefield, and in signs that Russia is weakening.

"Focus on Christ, focus on God, and just [remember] the challenges of life shape us, to make us better, to make us stronger," he said. "Keep your eyes on eternity."

Ultimately, Christians must look to the cross for hope, where they see the sorrow of Jesus' crucifixion followed by the joy of His resurrection.

Fr. Popov said, "There is no victory if there is no struggle. So it's inevitable. We don't like it. We don't want for it. We don't wish for it. And once again, God's will prevails. And we hope after this God has His own plan, and in due time we will know. There's going to be good even out of this evil situation. So there's no question about it."

FROM THE ASHES

On March 17, 2022, wildfires raged through the dry grasses and dense brush of Eastland County, destroying more than 54,000 acres, including most of the town of Carbon, where 86 homes were razed, including those of seven families belonging to St. Francis Xavier Parish in Eastland.

Winds surpassing 35 mph pushed the fire so quickly that individuals only had time to grab their keys or their purse, leaving medications, documents, animals, and family treasures behind.

Two young men, Ernesto and Jesus Perales, suffered burns as they escaped.

The next morning, Father Vijaya Mareedu, SAC, then pastor of St. Francis Xavier, accompanied some of the survivors as they returned to survey the damage. And on March 20, Bishop Michael Olson celebrated Mass at St. Francis Xavier, staying to pray with the

seven families and the Perales brothers.

Although their homes and possessions were ashes, the families were resolute: they would start over and rebuild in Carbon.

In the weeks that followed, the parish provided lunch for the families after each Sunday Mass. Fr. Mareedu explained, "Not only just for the meal, but for coming together. There is a lot of sorrow, which they may not be sharing, but that has built up."

For Evelyn Guillen, who was at work at Ranger College when the fire consumed the home she shared with her parents and brothers, the Sunday lunches were more than a meal. In coming together each week, "God says, 'No, you are not alone. You have me and you have all of these people too,'" she remembered.

Guillen said she also experienced love and support from the greater community. Donations of practical necessities and financial assistance totaling \$230,984 came from the diocese and beyond. The funds were disbursed to the seven families who lost their homes and another parishioner who lost outlying structures for his livestock.

Fr. Mareedu recalls gratefully the presence and support of Bishop Olson and the generosity of donors in the diocese, the Knights of Columbus, and Catholic Charities Fort Worth.

TESTED TOGETHER

Before the disaster, the families knew each other, but now "the bond is stronger between all of us," according to Guillen.

Not only did they share a common catastrophe, but each Sunday the families still meet to help each other repair and renovate the used mobile homes they have purchased and placed on their properties. Two families are building more permanent structures with community assistance.

The hands-on labor of rebuilding lives and homes keeps the families busy, but Guillen reflected on how disaster has changed her life. She thanks God for the safety of her family, and she has a greater appreciation that everything she has is a gift from God.

She said, "We're going to remember the bad moments of course, but we are going to embrace all the love that we have received and just keep moving forward with our lives in the presence of God."

Fr. Mareedu has spent much time with the families, recently blessing each one in their homes.

The priest said, "I see God's hand very much present in the community because this situation has brought all of them together. And with this pain, there is strength that is built up in the community. God is very much showing us a way to stay together, work together, and be committed." 🇺🇸



Before entering the fullness of the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil Mass, candidates and catechumens undergo a lengthy process to ensure they are ready to live as Catholic disciples of Jesus. At right, Father Jason Allan baptizes a catechumen during the 2022 Easter Vigil Mass at Immaculate Conception Church in Denton.

JOINING THE WORLD'S BIGGEST FAMILY

A look at the long journey of those entering
the Catholic Church

By Mary Lou Seewoester

Every year, the Diocese of Fort Worth welcomes hundreds of new Catholics into the Church family during the Saturday night Easter Vigil Mass. This year, the diocese will welcome 297 candidates and 452 catechumens who have spent a year or more preparing for this night through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

"They're being invited into the biggest family on the planet," said Tammy Sandoval, director of faith formation at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine. "The Easter Vigil is my favorite Mass because of all of these graces being poured out in the sacraments of initiation."

Preparing candidates (non-Catholics who were baptized in another religion) and catechumens (those who have not been baptized) to receive the sacraments of initiation begins long before the Easter Vigil.

Sandoval said her RCIA team of eight meets during the summer to plan for the following year, determine who will teach which lessons, and make course improvements based on surveys from the previous year. At St. Francis, as in most parishes, deacons and priests also teach various lessons. The two-hour weekly meetings include a lesson, small group

discussion, and question/answer time.

"We ask them, 'What do you think about this? What doesn't make sense? Let's talk about what makes no sense at all,'" Sandoval said. "We're reminded when we teach how beautiful the liturgy is and why everything has a purpose and meaning."

Robin Harris, director of faith formation at St. Michael Parish in Bedford, said the RCIA curriculum is "intentional and systematic."

"It's not just a set of topics," she said. "We tie it to the liturgy. We open up Scripture and open up [Church] Tradition."

"If you approach the RCIA as just a topic ... then you have completely lost the ability to help draw somebody into the loving God in His Church," she added.

St. Michael's 16 volunteers and staff work with various aspects of formation, from teaching a full lesson to breaking open the Word with catechumens during the dismissal at Sunday Masses.

"The most important thing about the RCIA is that it is rooted in sacred Scripture, sacred Tradition, and tied to the Holy Mass," Harris explained.

Bryan Whitt, a St. Michael RCIA

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team member, is a new Catholic who journeyed through RCIA last year.

“Last year, I was being led,” Whitt said. “This year, I led a ‘Breaking Open the Word’ session and helped facilitate small group discussion.”

Whitt’s journey to the Easter Vigil began in 2004 when he joined the coaching staff at University of Texas at Dallas as a tennis coach and over the years became friends with other coaches there who are Catholic. After a probing lunchtime conversation about Catholicism, the baseball coach, Shane Shewmake, took him across the street to a Catholic bookstore for a copy of *Why We’re Catholic* by Trent Horn. Whitt finished reading it before returning to work the next day. He found St. Michael’s RCIA; Shewmake became his sponsor; and his entire work team came to the Easter Vigil.

He said RCIA was “a consistent source of information and in-depth knowledge ... we had deacons and priests coming in

to teach and bringing up subjects I never thought about.

“It wasn’t just sign up and get a T-shirt,” he added. “There is a whole process and I’m glad there was.”

FOUR PHASES

Diocesan Director of Evangelization and Catechesis Jason Whitehead said the RCIA process includes an “intentional pattern” of four phases that come directly from the Holy See.

“Each of those periods are unique and distinct unto themselves,” he said.

During the initial phase, Evangelization and Pre-catechumenate, the goal is to introduce people to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“After one becomes an intentional disciple — a follower of Jesus on purpose — then one is equipped and disposed to receive catechesis” during the second and longest phase — the Catechumenate, Whitehead explained.

On completing the catechetical phase, participants are prepared for the “internal

reflection” needed during Purification and Enlightenment, which takes place during Lent. Whitehead noted that the entire congregation parallels the RCIA journey because parishioners also seek purification during Lent, and they renew their baptismal promises at Easter.

“The Easter Vigil is the transition from Purification to Mystagogy, which means walking in the mysteries or walking in the sacraments,” Whitehead said. “It’s all about formation in the context of now living out the supernatural life you have, in light of the sanctifying grace you received from the sacraments.”

Along with weekly lessons, diocesan RCIA teams also strive to develop supportive relationships with each candidate and catechumen.

“We learn the art of accompaniment,” Sandoval said. “The Church asks us to be humble and allow ourselves to be touched by everyone with compassion and respect. We are all working together to deepen our faith.

“They are journeying to make a

Mauro Parroni signs the Book of the Elect as his mother looks on during a Rite of Sending at St. Michael Church in Bedford Feb. 18, 2023. Parroni is a catechumen who will be baptized during the Easter Vigil later this year. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

decision about going deeper with Christ,” Sandoval added, “and we are on this catechetical journey ourselves, going deeper.”

WALKING WITH SOULS

Samantha Wall, parishioner of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Keller, credits God’s guidance, her sponsor, and her parish RCIA team for strengthening her spiritual journey. She said the team profoundly deepened her understanding of Mary and the Rosary.

“You can pray those prayers that you say over and over, and your mind can go to Christ or to the Trinity,” she said. “Your mind can be elevated to God.”

Wall had been an atheist for about 10 years, beginning in her teens, until she realized “this can’t be all there is.”

“Somehow, I ran into the fact that God was real, and that Jesus was Christ. So, if Christ is real and Christianity is real, I should probably find a church,” she recalled.

She said the team answered any and all questions, but most importantly, “they told the truth in a kind and loving manner.”

“They didn’t try to water it down to make it nice to hear. They said, ‘This is the Catholic faith. If you can accept these things about the Church, then you can be Catholic. If you cannot, then hold off until you are 100 percent sure.’”

Wall, who came into the Church two years ago, is now on her parish RCIA team and serves as a sponsor. She said RCIA needs more sponsors because “the one-on-one [attention] is so important. It’s not just about getting answers. It’s also about developing a relationship.”

Whitehead observed that some people make sacrifices to become Catholic because they have strong ties to another religion.

“Sometimes people are leaving a former life behind and that can be exceedingly difficult, especially if they come from an anti-Catholic past. So, their need for spiritual, emotional, and human support only increases. This is where the catechists, sponsors, godparents, RCIA directors, and priests are key.”

Whitehead knows from personal experience that the road to becoming Catholic can be “rocky.” In 2003, he quietly resigned from Baptist ministry after studying the works of the Church Fathers and realizing that “the version of Christianity I’d been living knows no place in the early Church. The disciples of the disciples were as Catholic as anything.”

“Liturgy and catechesis are essential, but we also have to keep in mind that we are dealing with souls, and attention must be given to whatever pain and struggles they are experiencing in this journey,” he added. 🇺🇸



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Love, revere, and honor Him above all others

St. Francis of Assisi extols the Most Holy Eucharist

By Sean Wright

EDITOR'S NOTE:

To celebrate the U.S. Bishop's National Eucharistic Revival, a three-year initiative running until Pentecost 2025, we bring you a new series of columns focused on the Most Blessed Sacrament, the Source and Summit of our faith, so that you, too, can grow in a deeper encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist.

As one of his final acts, St. Francis of Assisi sent a letter to members of his Order of Friars Minor, his beloved “little brothers,” containing sound advice and a beautiful reverence to the Blessed Sacrament. Although he was plagued by pain and would, eventually, lose his sight, Francis is typically described by his contemporaries as being “joyful” to the end, always grateful for the gift of Holy Communion.

Thomas of Celano, a Franciscan friar, knew Francis and wrote his biography at the prompting of Pope Gregory IX, who canonized Francis only two years following his death. Of the saint, Friar Thomas wrote, “Francis burned with a love that came from his whole being for the sacrament of the Lord’s body.” That love, as well as Francis’

poetic skill, can be seen in some excerpts taken from a letter, written circa 1220, which Francis wrote to his “little brothers” and the Franciscan sisters led by his friend, St. Clare.

Also note that the saint never uses the word “Eucharist” to describe the Most Blessed Sacrament; rather he refers to it in a concrete and explicit way: “the most Holy Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”



“In the name of the Most High Trinity and Holy Unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

To all my reverend and dearly beloved brothers, to the General Minister of the Order of Friars Minor, its lord, and the



NTC/Maria Diaz

other general ministers who will come after him, and to the ministers, custodians, humble priests of this same brotherhood in Christ, and to all simple and obedient brothers, from the first to the last: I, Brother Francis, a worthless and weak man, your very little servant sends you greetings in Him who has redeemed and washed us in His Most Precious Blood. When you hear His name, the name of the Son of the Most High, our Lord Jesus Christ; He who is blessed forever, adore Him with fear and reverence, prostrate on the ground!

Listen, sons of the Lord and my brothers, pay attention to my words. Incline the ear of your heart and obey the voice of the Son of God. Observe His commands with your whole heart and fulfill His counsels with a perfect mind ...

Wherefore, and with all the love of which I am capable, I implore all my brothers and sisters to show all possible reverence and honor to the Most Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ ... I also beg in the Lord all my brothers who are priests, or who will be, or who wish to be priests of the Most High that

whenever they celebrate Mass, they offer the true Sacrifice of the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ with purity and reverence; that they offer it with a holy and unblemished intention, and not for any worldly reason or fear or love of anyone, as if they were pleasing people.

Let all their will, as much as grace will help, be directed to God; desiring thereby to please only the Most High Lord Himself; for He Himself says: 'Do this in memory of me.' If anyone acts differently, he becomes Judas the traitor and guilty of disgracing the Body and Blood of the Lord ...

Listen, my brothers: If the Blessed Virgin is so honored, because she carried Him in her most holy womb; if John the Baptist trembled and did not dare to touch the holy head of God; if the tomb in which He lay for some time is held in veneration, how holy and just must he be who touches with his hands, receives in his heart and mouth, and offers to others the One who has conquered death.

May He, whom the angels longed to gaze upon, be glorified. See your dignity, my priest brothers, and be

holy because He is holy. The Lord God has honored you above all others because of this ministry; for your part, love, revere, and honor Him above all others. It would be a great misery and a miserable weakness if, when you have Him present in this way, you are concerned with anything else in the whole world.

Let everyone be struck with fear; let the whole world tremble; and let the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest! O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity!

O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that for our salvation He hides Himself under an ordinary piece of bread! Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before Him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him! Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!"

Your humble servant,
Francis



Father Ronaldo Mercado, who loves providing confession to parishioners, says the graces of the sacrament "help us to live and lead a good Catholic life."



confession

SACRAMENT OF HEALING

By Jerry Circelli



on

NTC photo illustration/Juan Guajardo

In our lifelong struggle against sin, the sacrament of reconciliation imparts to us God's mercy, peace, and graces

In preparation for celebrating the resurrection of Christ, Catholics around the world observe Lent — a 40-day season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. During this time, the faithful abstain from luxuries and seek a sincere inner conversion of their hearts to follow Christ. The sacrament of reconciliation is central to the Lenten season, which began on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 22, and continues to the Easter Vigil on Saturday, April 8. The time offers Catholics the opportunity to renew their relationship with God and receive His forgiving graces.

To better understand the sacrament of reconciliation, the *North Texas Catholic* reached out to parish priests, a high school chaplain, lay ministers, theologians, and a noted author. Their insights put the sacrament in historical perspective and can help Catholics better prepare for the spiritual healing and peace it brings to those who receive it.

RECONCILIATION ROOTED IN THE GOSPELS

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

"Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:21-23).

One of the most prevalent myths about the sacrament of reconciliation is that it was "invented" by the Catholic Church and has no Biblical basis.

But the Gospel reading above reveals

Christ explicitly giving the Apostles the power to forgive and withhold forgiveness of sins, the core of confession, explained Jason Whitehead, M.A., director of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Fort Worth.

"Jesus bound together His ministry of forgiving sins with the power of the Holy Spirit and His mission given Him by the Father," Whitehead said. "In other words, the power given to the disciples is a continuation of Christ's mission of forgiveness."

Father Jack McKone, pastor of St. John the Apostle Parish in North Richland Hills, further explained that teachings about reconciliation and forgiveness can be found throughout the Gospels.

"We hear in the Gospels that Jesus makes the Church itself the sacrament of reconciliation," Fr. McKone said. "What the Church binds and loosens will be bound and loosed in heaven as well. The keys were given to the Church.

"Reconciliation is really the nature of what the Church is about and what Christ's mission itself was about. Christ came to reconcile us to one another and to the Father.

"It's all through the Gospels — sin divides; love and reconciliation unite.

"We refer to the Church sometimes as the 'reconciling community,'" Fr. McKone said, "because sins are forgiven through the Church."

He added, "The Church is comprised of sinners. We have a perfect head of the Church in Jesus Christ, but each of the living stones that make up the Church is full of fissures, cracks, and chips. So, we're all in need of healing. We are to be healers while we're still sick with sin. We're in the process of being healed ourselves, even as we seek to help others."

Fr. McKone went on to reference Christ's teachings as told through the Gospels:

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift

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◀ Confessionals allow either face-to-face or anonymous confessions, which are done behind a screen or grille. Both forms are valid and permitted. (NTC photo illustration/Juan Guajardo)

Steps to Making a Good Confession

+ PREPARE

Take some time before going to confession to do an examination of conscience, taking stock of the times you've missed the mark in your thoughts, words, and actions.

+ GREET THE PRIEST

When you enter the confessional, begin by making the Sign of the Cross and saying, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It's been [however many days, months, or years] since my last confession."

+ LIST YOUR SINS

Mention your venial and mortal sins. When you're done, conclude by saying, "I'm sorry for these and all my sins."

+ LISTEN TO THE PRIEST

The priest will sometimes offer some guidance on how to avoid sins in the future. He'll then give you a penance, which could be a work of mercy, a prayer, or an act of charity.

+ ACT OF CONTRITION

Pray the Act of Contrition. The text of this prayer is oftentimes available in the confessional.

+ RECEIVE ABSOLUTION

The priest will extend his hands and pronounce the words of absolution. Make the Sign of the Cross and respond with "Amen." Afterward, you may depart and fulfill your penance.

SOURCE: U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison (Matthew 5:23-25).

"What's interesting," Fr. McKone said, "is that He does not say, 'if you have offended your brother;' He just says, 'if your brother has anything against you.'"

"Whether your brother is right or wrong in believing that you're guilty, we are to be the initiators of reconciliation, whether we have deliberately offended or not. We're not to wait to be convicted of an offense. We are to be proactive in seeking reconciliation."

A GOOD CONFESSION CLEANSSES THE SOUL

If you are wondering how often you should go to confession, local parish priests have some answers.

Fr. McKone explained the precept of the Church requires the faithful to go to confession at least once per year. Of course, that's the bare minimum.

"That's like saying we should bathe once a year," Fr. McKone said. "My recommendation of once a month is pretty healthy. If you can't do once a month, at least every Lent and Advent. But every month or two is much better."

Father Ronaldo Mercado, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Arlington, made the same analogy.

"As our mortal bodies want to get rid of filthiness or

uncleanliness through bodily washing or taking a bath, our soul — the Spirit that makes our body alive — should also receive frequent cleansing," Fr. Mercado said. "We often focus on our bodies alone. We fail to check regularly the spirit that makes this body alive."

The priest said while original sin is washed away at the sacrament of baptism, human nature has weaknesses that allow sin to creep back into our souls.

"Maintaining the life of God in us, which we call 'grace,' is very hard because of the many temptations around us. We fall to sin. In order to regain this grace, we need to participate in the reception of the sacraments," Fr. Mercado said. "It helps us to live and lead a good Catholic life."

Father Samuel Maul, parochial vicar at St. John the Apostle, made two contrasting comparisons related to the sacrament of reconciliation.

"People tend to think of the sacrament," Fr. Maul said, "as if it were a trip to the laundromat — I come in with my dirty laundry (sins), I put them in the machine (confession), I pay with quarters (penance), and then I'm free to go about my business. This analogy fails on a number of levels. What I often tell people is that going to the sacrament of reconciliation is more akin to us climbing the hill of Golgotha and having a meeting with Jesus on the cross, a meeting which is meant to never end. ... When we climb up to be back with Him, He welcomes us back with His open arms and provides us His protection and every need."

Fr. Mercado, Fr. McKone, and Whitehead all stressed the importance of preparing for reconciliation through a serious examination of conscience. Many of our local parishes



Father Jack McKone, pastor of St. John the Apostle in North Richland Hills, encourages the faithful to avail themselves of the sacrament of reconciliation because “we’re all in need of healing.” (NTC photo illustration/Juan Guajardo)

have pamphlets available that serve as guidelines for this introspective look. Numerous other sources, including the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic bookstores, and many Catholic websites also have aids.

Whitehead said a good examination of conscience helps the faithful recall sins that might have been pushed to the recesses of someone’s mind. In this examination, people should allow enough time in prayer to properly reflect and ask God to help them uncover their shortcomings.

The primary resource for the examination of conscience was etched in stone by God Himself in the Ten Commandments:

The tablets were made by God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets (Exodus 32:16).

Sins fall into two categories. The most serious, grave sins — mortal sins — separate people from God and His sanctifying graces.

Less severe offenses against God are termed venial sins. They injure, but do not sever, a person’s relationship with God.

Fr. McKone stressed mortal sins must be confessed to a priest in the confessional within the sacrament of reconciliation.

The priest also explained that sincere participation in Catholic Mass is an opportunity for the faithful to be forgiven of some sins.

“We start every Mass with the Rite of Penance, recognizing our common sinfulness,” said the priest. “As we enter into the sacrament of the Mass in a sincere manner, and not in a state of mortal sin, by participation we receive forgiveness,” Fr. McKone said.

“Sins are forgiven in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is Christ. It is perfect. No imperfections can exist within it.

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If we enter into the sacrifice of the Mass in a sincere manner and not in a state of mortal sin, we, by our participation in the Mass, receive forgiveness.”

This should not be confused with the sacrament of reconciliation, he said, which contains its own special graces and benefits of which we should avail ourselves.

“However, because the Eucharist is perfect, receiving the Eucharist and being part of the sacrifice of the Mass itself relieves us of [venial] sin,” he said.

THE PRIEST AS CONFESSOR

Just as Christ entrusted His Apostles to forgive sins, priests are entrusted in the same way, explained Nikki Leafgreen, principal of St. George Catholic School in Fort Worth.

“Confessing your sins to a priest is an important part of the sacrament,” Leafgreen said. “Saying our sins out loud to the person of Christ, in the priest, helps cleanse our soul of sins that are harming us, and which we might desire to keep hidden. The priest has the opportunity to be the Good Shepherd, to care for the people by listening and showing the mercy and charity of God.”

Michelle Ebambi, RCIA coordinator at St. Joseph Parish in Arlington, quoted St. John Chrysostom, an early doctor of the Church and archbishop of Constantinople who wrote this in 387 A.D.:

Priests have received a power which God has given neither to angels nor to archangels. It was said to them: “Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose, shall be loosed.” Temporal rulers have indeed the power of binding; but they can only bind the body. Priests, in contrast, can bind with a bond which pertains to the soul itself and transcends the very heavens.

Another saint deeply involved in the sacrament of reconciliation was Padre Pio. It is estimated that the priest heard approximately 5 million confessions during his lifetime.

EWTN host and author Michael O’Neill, known in Catholic circles as “The Miracle

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Are You Avoiding Confession?

It’s OK to feel intimidated or nervous about going to confession. But try to remember these things:

✚ It doesn’t matter if it’s been a long time (or a short time) — God is still happy you’re there.

✚ Our God is a God of mercy. God wants to forgive us.

✚ God, not the priest present in the confessional, is the one actually absolving your sins.

✚ Priests are bound by canon law not to reveal, under any circumstance, anything heard in confession. This is known as the “seal of the confessional.”

SOURCE: STEPHEN SPIEWAK/HALLOW.COM

NTC photo illustration/Juan Guajardo and Jillian Brearley





Father Maurice Moon, chaplain of Nolan Catholic High School, hears student confessions several times a week. (NTC photo illustration/Juan Guajardo)

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Hunter,” told the *North Texas Catholic* that Padre Pio had the gift of reading souls.

“Perhaps a hidden or forgotten sin of the penitent would be revealed to him and sometimes he would, quite directly or forcefully, remind them of it so they might repent of it,” O’Neill said.

The Miracle Hunter added, “The sacrament of confession is a tremendous gift that all the faithful should take advantage of because it is a chance to start anew.”

Sometimes we ourselves may consider it to be something of a minor miracle in our own lives when God gives us the strength and inspiration to overcome the inertia, fear, or embarrassment that may hold us back from going to confession.

But miracle or not, taking advantage of this refreshing and renewing sacrament is nothing to fear when we think of it as God’s “tribunal of mercy,” as Jesus was said to call it in the Divine Mercy visions received by St. Faustina.

Fr. McKone also emphasized the faithful have nothing to fear and everything to gain by reconciling with Christ through a priest.

He explained that in the language of the Church, the priest acts *in persona Christi* — Latin for “in the person of Christ” — to the penitent.

“The priest, in effect, represents both Christ, the head of the Church, and the body of Christ — the Church herself,” he said. “When we confess our sins, we are confessing to the harm we have done to that body.”

Just as laity must confess their sins to a priest, so it is for pastors themselves.

“You would think one of the fringe benefits to being a priest is that you can hear your own confession. But nope, sorry, I have to go to another priest who represents the body of Christ to me, just like every other Catholic,” Fr. McKone said.

While laity receive graces and forgiveness through the sacrament of reconciliation, priests also feel God’s love through

their responsibility in administering the sacrament.

“It humbles me as person,” said Fr. Mercado.

“It makes me think how I should guide and help people entrusted to me by the bishop and God to pastorally and fatherly minister to them. Being the channel of God’s healing mercy and forgiveness, I am able to see people’s willingness to be better Christians and better people of God. It also helps me devote more time to pray for the people of God.

“People live life, sometimes rough, and I can assist them through prayer, through words of encouragement, and by being an example of witnessing the love and mercy of God in my life as a priest,” Fr. Mercado concluded.

Fr. McKone expressed similar humility. He said hearing confessions makes him aware of timely, spiritual struggles of people. This, in turn, helps him formulate homilies to address common struggles of the faithful and share how the Gospel

relates to them.

Fr. Maul, who was ordained in 2021, said that “besides the Eucharist itself, hearing confessions is my favorite part of being a priest. I get a front row seat to the process of God’s mercy and how intimately He loves each and every one of us. The encouragement I give to others as they face their sins and the reality of God’s mercy is frequently fodder for my own prayer life.”

Father Maurice Moon, chaplain at Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth, expressed the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation to his ministry.

“My whole being is wrapped up in helping souls get to heaven,” Fr. Moon said, “so when people come to confession, they are like the prodigal son who wants to be reconciled to the Father. I feel very blessed and graced to be in that moment to offer that healing forgiveness from God through my priesthood.”

A PROMISING SIGN FOR THE FUTURE

At Nolan, Fr. Moon has the unique opportunity to administer the sacrament of reconciliation to young Catholics. His experiences are promising for the present and future body of Christ’s Church.

Fr. Moon offers confession to Nolan students every Monday and Wednesday during their lunch periods and all day the first Friday of the month while they attend Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

The chaplain said on the first Fridays, about 15 students are lined up outside his office at any given time, waiting for their turn to confess their sins. Over the course of six hours, Fr. Moon said he sees as many as 100 students.

On Mondays and Wednesdays during lunch hour, it is common to see 25 students each day coming to the priest’s office for confession.

“It’s great to see so many students wanting to go to confession,” Fr. Moon said.

“It’s inspiring to see young

people care about Jesus, their relationship with Him, and to receive forgiveness.

“Students are learning the importance of making a good confession. They’re going to confession regularly to grow in their faith life and to have that intimacy with God.

“Going often is helpful to our spiritual well-being,” the chaplain continued. “We receive a lot of graces. Even if we don’t have any mortal sins to confess, it’s good to confess venial sins, so we can help to overcome sinful life and receive the graces to help us get better at loving God and loving others.

“We encourage students to take advantage of the opportunities to receive those graces and to get their souls right with God. It’s a great way to receive God’s mercy.”

Over his past five years serving at Nolan, Fr. Moon said he has increased days and times that confession would be regularly available.

“Also, students know that whenever my door is open, they can come in and talk,” Fr. Moon said.

At the parishes, Fr. McKone said the COVID era presented special challenges as people isolated themselves, Masses were canceled, and activities halted.

He said, “We’re just now figuring out what some of the isolation and solo-living is causing. And we have a lot of rebuilding to do in our communities and our parishes.”

He expressed his wish to the faithful going forward:

“If you’ve been away — and a lot of people have been away the last three years because of the pandemic — don’t be afraid to approach the sacrament. You’re talking to a priest who himself has temptations and sin in his life. We all try to be welcoming and receiving of the penitent.

“The easiest thing to do that not many take advantage of is to make an appointment and talk to a priest in his office. You can meet with us in a relaxed environment. We’re here to help.” 🇺🇸

In Memoriam

EDITOR’S NOTE: We extend a warm thank-you to the Circelli family for making it possible to bring this centerpiece to light. During its creation, Jerry Circelli, a longtime award-winning correspondent for the *North Texas Catholic*, unexpectedly died.

However, even with weeks of research and interviewing, Jerry finished this story several weeks before deadline and shortly before he died peacefully on Jan. 21, 2023. At their own initiative, his family sent the finished work to us for publication, adding that Jerry felt so strongly about the subject that they felt compelled to turn it in as planned, for the benefit of our readers.

Please join us in praying for the repose of the soul of Jerry Circelli. To read the obituary, please scan the QR code below.



JERRY CIRCELLI
1954-2023



Unlock the Gospel

Volunteers bring Christ to inmates of Bridgeport Correctional Center

By Susan Moses

Most would call them inmates, prisoners, or convicts, but Raul Soto calls them “brothers.”

The offenders at Bridgeport Correctional Center are brothers, Soto

explained, because “I try to put myself in their shoes. We’ve all done dumb things.”

Soto coordinates a team of about 25 local Catholics who share their faith and their time with inmates at the Bridgeport Correctional Center.

◀ Raul Soto, at right, with some members of the prison ministry team and Fr. Anto Carlose, SAC, at St. John the Baptizer Church in Bridgeport. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

The prison ministry team from the tri-parish community of St. John the Baptizer in Bridgeport, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Decatur, and St. Mary in Jacksboro leads spiritual activities at the prison Monday through Friday, including Bible studies and RCIA in English and Spanish.

But the week's high point is Wednesday evening.

Inmates pray the Rosary while Father Richard Collins hears confessions. Afterward, Fr. Collins celebrates a bilingual Mass with about 45 men and a few parish volunteers, including Joanne Chase, who plays the guitar and sings with Soto.

AN INVITATION

Chase and Soto were invited to help about two years ago by longtime prison ministry volunteer Howard Biel.

"I didn't feel qualified," said Chase, who explained she "never found it easy to share her faith, and I was never any good at it."

Her previous parish ministry experience included music ministry and serving as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.

Now, she leads a *lectio divina* group at the prison, guiding the men through a deliberate reflection on a Scripture passage.

"I still feel like I don't know enough," she continued. "But I let the Holy Spirit work. I'm just planting seeds."

The men who attend are eager to learn and grow deeper in their faith, she observed. "There's a lot of hope. I see men who want to change; they want to be there [in Bible study]."

It's not uncommon for the offenders to ask the grandmother of 16 what she is doing there. She responds, "I'm just a sinner like you, trying to get to heaven. We are all sinners; we all make mistakes."

"They are like children," said Chase, a parishioner at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. "They just want to know they are loved; that they are cared for. We

let them know that God loves them, and we love them too. We'll be there for them. We'll be someone who cares.

"Everyone needs to know they are special. Whatever they've done, they can come back to God," she continued.

Soto explained that many of the inmates never have visitors, because of physical distance or strained family relationships. He brings the Gospel message to them with a side of hugs, and some inmates tell him they haven't been hugged in years.

"Well, get ready," he warns. "It won't be the last time."

AT THE MARGINS

Catholic prison ministry at the high-security Bridgeport Unit, which can hold up to 520 men, is unique among the prisons in the diocese.

Fr. Collins, the sacramental minister for prisons in the Diocese of Fort Worth, regularly visits Bridgeport and two other state prisons in the diocese, plus the Tarrant County jail and a federal prison in Fort Worth.

He said the dedication and commitment of the Bridgeport prison volunteers, the size of the team, and good working relationships with the prison's warden and chaplain allow the volunteers to offer a broad variety of programs.

The volunteers' efforts are not in vain. In his 10 years in prison ministry, Fr. Collins has seen that "Jesus has the power to change lives."

Not only does the prison ministry benefit the participating offenders, but it aids the state and society, according to Fr. Collins.

"The reality is the majority of these men will be released back in the community," said Fr. Collins, who said regular access to the sacraments and faith-building activities can be a major positive influence and change the behavior of the offenders, leading to a calmer atmosphere at the prison.

However, state prisons are generally

located in rural areas, with few parishioners to volunteer to visit and lead classes.

This fact weighs heavy on Soto's heart. "There are thousands of men, and some women, who we do not reach," he said. "There's a huge need to spread God's love."

This April, the Bridgeport prison ministry team will share the Gospel at the Allred Unit in Iowa Park. They will hold a three-day retreat for 50 of the more than 3,000 inmates at the prison near Wichita Falls.

Volunteers offered the first Kolbe Prison Ministries retreat in the diocese at the Bridgeport Correctional Center in 2018, and they have continued to conduct the retreats there each November and March.

Even volunteers who don't live near the facilities can prepare handouts for lessons, write letters of encouragement to retreat participants, and support the ministry with prayer, said Fr. Collins. Funds donated to the Annual Diocesan Appeal help pay for Bibles, rosaries, and other expenses for prison ministry.

LEAST OF THESE

The team of prison ministry volunteers from the tri-parish community comprises men and women of various ages and backgrounds, but they have a common passion to serve the least of these.

"It's a direct commandment from Our Lord," said Soto, a parishioner at St. John the Baptizer. "It's in Scripture. The Lord commands us to help the forgotten, the marginalized — whether they are homeless, whether they are hungry. In this case, when they are in prison. We're being Christ to others."

Both Soto and Chase say the service has blessed their lives.

Chase said her prison visits bring her "a peace, a joy that comes only from God."

Soto said, "We live in the greatest country on earth. God provides, and we have so many blessings. We're asked to share that with others." 🇺🇸



Gifted and Giving

When everything you have is a gift, the reasonable response is to give it away.

Ronny and Nikki Sullivan, parishioners at St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington, give their time, their faith, their wisdom, and their love to each other, their family, and their parish, all in service to God.

As sponsors for engaged couples, they share advice based on their nearly 20-year marriage. Nikki tells them, “You’re not planning a wedding; you’re planning a lifelong commitment with one another. Focus on the rest of your life.”

Her words reflect similar thoughts expressed by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (*On Love in the Family*).

The pope writes, “The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual, or merely the outward sign of a commitment. The sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses, since their mutual belonging is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship between Christ and the Church” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 72).

The Sullivans shared with the *North Texas Catholic* some of their thoughts on faith and family.

STRONG START:

Ronny and Nikki met at a birthday party in June 2002 and felt an instant connection. Three months later they were engaged. Nikki said, “I feel like God made him just for me.”

MARRIED:

June 7, 2003, at St. Maria Goretti Parish.

TURN IT OFF, TALK IT UP:

The couple has always prioritized intentionally communicating with each other every day.

Even when they had three sons under the age of 5, they squeezed in a daily conversation of at least 15 minutes.

“You have to take that time, together,” said Ronny.

“Even when we are flat exhausted and can’t take it anymore,” said Nikki.

During together time, they turn off all the electronic devices and concentrate on each other.

Now that their four sons are older,

◀ Ronny and Nikki Sullivan, of St. Maria Goretti Parish, with their sons Nathan, Taylor, Ryan, and Adam on Feb. 3. (NTC/Ben Torres)

it's easier to have a dinner date or a weekend getaway, they said.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER:

They have sponsored five engaged couples, because “along the way, we’ve learned those little bits of wisdom that have helped us out,” said Ronny.

Nikki explained, “We feel like all the blessings that we have directly come from God. They are gifts that are given. It’s almost like they are borrowed — ‘Here, I’m giving you this gift. Now what are you going to do with it?’ Our marriage is definitely a gift that God gave us.”

Nikki said they emphasize to the engaged couples that God must be at the center of the marriage.

MASS MOVEMENT:

“We are at Church every Sunday. That is not negotiable,” said Nikki.

The children serve as hospitality ministers or altar servers, and Ronny and Nikki are both Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

Ronny said, “There’s nothing more beautiful than giving that gift to the rest of the community.”

Nikki added, “It’s food for my soul. I definitely appreciate being a vessel to serve Christ,” and she gratefully remembered being able to bring the Body of Christ to her father when he was hospitalized.

SEE HOW WE GROW:

The house is filled with Catholic art, which Nikki thinks “helps plant that seed” with their children.

Ronny said, “We try to role model. They see how we grow in our faith” — through books, apps, podcasts, television, and movies — and the couple shares highlights with their sons.

“I’m hoping that’s their sense of normal,” Nikki added. “They see us do

it, making God a priority, not just in the center of our marriage but in the center of our family.”

BETTER TOGETHER:

“It’s life. It’s not always going to be hunky-dory,” said Ronny. “You’re going to have tragedies; you’re going to have hard times. It’s better to weather those storms together.”

“Remember you are stronger together than apart, alone,” said Nikki.

ROCK OF AGES:

Getting through life’s ups and downs is possible, said Ronny, because they are “grounded in knowing that God is always there for us. Obviously, there are times it’s easier to recognize that than others, but we’re centered on that fact, even in bad times. We know He still has us. That’s made all the difference for us.”

“There have been times in my life I don’t know why He gave me this cross to bear, I really don’t understand it, but I have to remind myself during those low moments, ‘Be still and know that I am God,’” said Nikki, referring to *Psalms* 46.

BEAR ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS:

“The gift is that we’re there to remind each other, to help each other through those times when you’re not able to hear the voice of God or you feel kind of lost,” said Ronny.

“We rely a lot on prayer,” said Nikki, who advises their sponsor couples that praying out loud together may feel odd at first, but in time becomes comfortable.

MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN:

Nikki said, “There is nothing more amazing than being married to your best friend.” 🇺🇸

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

To Report Misconduct:

If you or someone you know is a victim of sexual misconduct by anyone who serves the Church, including clergy:

- ▶ Call the Victim Assistance Hotline at 817-602-5119.
- ▶ Call the Director of Safe Environment at 817-945-9334 and leave a message.
- ▶ Call the Chancellor of the diocese at 817-945-9315.

To Report Abuse or Suspected Abuse:

If you suspect abuse of a child, elder, or vulnerable adult, or abuse has been disclosed to you:

- ▶ If someone is in immediate danger call 911.
- ▶ Call the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (CPS) at 800-252-5400.
- ▶ Immediately report the alleged abuse to your supervisor, priest, or principal and submit the Confidential Notice of Concern with CPS report information, contact information on all concerned, description of abuse, dates if known, and how you learned of the abuse.

For more information about our abuse prevention policies and programs, visit fwdioc.org/safe-environment



Reflections: The “Hyper-Reality” of the Passion

I have always been fascinated by the tendency of the world to mirror itself. Rivers flow across and through landscapes, branching, separating, and coming together similar to the veins that carry our blood. The unfathomably gigantic galaxies that swirl across the even more unfathomable universe spin and fall into themselves like the smallest whirlpools. As a droplet of water touches and consumes other droplets, it grows, just as we attain strength and nourishment from food.

Philosophers have observed this “peculiarity” for centuries, concluding that since there is intelligibility and pattern inherent in all things, logic must be the foundational principle gluing our reality together. You may have heard this principle referred to as the “Logos.” It (or should I say, He) also goes by another name with which you are probably more familiar: Jesus Christ.

When we celebrated Christmas not too long ago, we heard the story of how this Logos, this divine intelligence, became present and knowable to us in the most intimate way possible: by taking on our nature and walking the ground He created. And now, the Church flows toward the season of Lent and its culmination in the crux of our faith, the heart-wrenching story of how we (in the symptomatic arrogance of Adam’s fall), raged against, tortured, then killed Him. Should it then surprise us that, while Christ the Logos was on Earth, His saving death on the cross would, like the rivers and veins, galaxies and whirlpools, constitute the ultimate reflection of our existence in this broken world?



Walker Price

We kneel and sweat blood at Gethsemane each time we learn of hardships to come. We beg God to let the cup pass from us, to let it happen to Someone Else, the poor long-suffering beggar who already has enough heaped upon him that it’s a wonder he hasn’t collapsed yet.

We are judged and sentenced to cruel and unusual punishment in the eyes and mouths of others. We hear (sometimes audibly), the premonitory cracking of the whip outside on our lawns when we open our eyes each morning, sometimes rolling back under our blankets with a pitiful whimper in our hearts; yet we know we must feel that lash, looking our torturer in the eyes and perhaps seeing a little more than we’d like of ourselves before we do so, or succumb to a far worse fate.

Then, a turning point. Someone whose name we may never know, though they wear the garb of the enemy, gives us a crown of thorns. Wearing this diadem, even as it digs into the skin of our foreheads, we make one last real examination of ourselves and say, “I *will* carry this.”

Yet this is not the end. There’s a hill we have to climb.

Constantly tripping over ourselves, staggering under the weight of our flesh, it’s inevitable that we’ll fall. How could we not? But amongst the thousands of snarling masks lining our road, there are, to our well-founded disbelief, some who wear none. In fact, they shattered theirs as soon as they realized they wore one. They’ll carry us for a while, wipe the dust, sweat, and blood caked on our faces, but

they’re already carrying themselves, which is burden enough, so we must approach the summit alone.

As the nails are driven in, we may despair, cry out to God, imploring why He has abandoned us. Yet this is when we are at our most human and, consequently, when He most loves us. A small, quiet voice within our aching heads whispers words of comfort and approval: we fought the good fight, we finished the race. And even as our eyes grow wide in bewilderment, we are forced to shut them from the light now flooding them. And besides, we won’t be needing them anymore.

Let this Lent be a time to reflect on this mystical union between ourselves and the Passion which Christ endured. When the Church instructs us to more closely unite our spirits with His, She is merely hinting at an underlying truth which has always been there. ✚

Walker Price earned his degree in English from UT Arlington. He attended St. Andrew Catholic School and Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth.



Go with God



NTC/Juan Guajardo

HE IS: Father Jonathan Demma, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Wichita Falls. He also served as parochial vicar of St. John the Apostle Parish in North Richland Hills.

A JOURNEY: Fr. Demma studied engineering at Texas A&M University, but he left his junior year to join the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in New York. He lived in radical poverty as a Franciscan brother for nine years, doing outreach to the homeless and itinerant preaching.

But “My heart longed to say Mass, and to hear confessions, and to baptize babies,” and he entered seminary in 2013 to become a diocesan priest.

ORDAINED: May 19, 2018, at St. Patrick Cathedral.

HOME AGAIN: Fr. Demma is “thrilled” to be assigned to Sacred Heart Parish, where he spent his pastoral year in 2015. “It’s incredible to come back to the people who helped form me to become a priest.”

HEART OF THE PARISH: Fr. Demma has found parishioners appreciative, welcoming, cooperative, and receptive to change and growth. “The biggest challenge is to keep up with their generosity.”

EXPERIENCE PAYS: He said his background in engineering and business helps

him delegate construction projects, so he can focus on his priestly ministry. His years as a Franciscan brother taught him how to pray, preach, and connect with others.

SACRAMENTAL PRIESTHOOD: Fr. Demma’s favorite part of his day is celebrating Mass, followed closely by the joys of baptism and reconciliation.

“There’s something about washing away original sin and becoming, forever, a child of God in that moment that always strikes me when I’m pouring the water and saying the words.

“Right up there is confessions, particularly when you have someone who has been carrying something, been away, for so long ... They walk out with a freedom that they can’t get anywhere else ... All you’re giving them is what Christ has given you.”

THE CALL: “It’s worth it. It’s not an easy life to choose, but it is rewarding in ways a successful career can’t be.”

CHARGED: In addition to parish ministry, Fr. Demma shares in chaplain duties at Midwestern State University and United Regional Hospital in Wichita Falls.

Some days are filled with appointments and sick calls. “When you think about what it is that you’re really doing: forgiveness of sin, salvation of souls, bringing Christ to His children — that’s a good

way to wear yourself out.”

AND RECHARGED: Fr. Demma appreciates the outdoors — hiking, camping, “just enjoying God’s creation and praying.” He also enjoys reading spiritual books, carpentry, and tinkering with electronics.

PERSEVERE IN PRAYER: “Be flexible but diligent in your prayer, making sure you’re praying throughout the day, in and through all things. Recognize sometimes you just have to shut the door, shut everything down, and block out everything but Christ in that moment so you can be prepared for what’s coming next.”

PRIESTLY PRESENCE: “Just being present means more to the people in the community than we’ll ever know. It’s not because of who we are, but who we represent. This part of their life is important to the Church; it’s important to Christ. Just simply showing up can go a long way.”

KNOW THIS: Fr. Demma wants his parishioners to know “God loves them unconditionally. And no matter where they may find themselves, or no matter what’s been written into their past. The only thing that defines us is how we grow to love God and what we do with our future. There is hope there, when we live it with His grace. Always.” 🇺🇸

Weakness is strength

Becoming a priest is daunting, and incredible responsibility is laid upon your shoulders. You are shepherding souls, numerous souls! This might cause someone to avoid considering the vocation to follow Jesus Christ as a priest. It did for the saints.

St. Cyprian first hid when he found out the bishop wanted to ordain him. St. Athanasius also fled to escape priesthood. St. Francis remained a deacon because he felt a deep sense of unworthiness. It's understandable, then, that many young men find the priesthood too difficult to even consider.

My wise spiritual director during seminary, Father Mel Blanchette, PSS, gave me an important article to read that helped me, and many others, in discerning the priesthood. The article was titled, "*Are You Weak Enough to be a Priest?*" by Father Michael Buckley, SJ.

He points out that we Americans like to connect aptitude with a potential career: "Joe makes straight A's, is well-spoken, pays great attention to details; therefore, he will be a great lawyer."

This type of thinking is often transferred to priesthood: "John is prayerful, intellectually acute, is loved by many, gives great speeches and has a hard work ethic — therefore, he will be an amazing priest." But for Fr. Buckley, such thinking is disastrous.

What makes a good priest is not his

strengths but his weaknesses!

"For because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted... For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning... He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward since He Himself is beset with weakness" (*Hebrews 2:18; 4:15; 5:2*).



Fr. Maurice Moon

The reality is Jesus took on the weakness of human flesh, experiencing fear (*Mark 14:33*) and sadness over a friend's death (*John 11:35*). Like us, Jesus experienced tiredness (*John 4:6*) and even helplessness (*Matthew 27:46*).

During seminary, a man might often question his calling because of his own weaknesses. But Fr. Buckley warns, "[We] can secularize our lives into an amalgam of desires and talents and feel our weakness as a threat to our priesthood, as indicative that we should rethink what was previously resolved, as symptomatic that we were never genuinely called, that we do not have the resources to complete what we once thought was our destiny and which once spoke to our generosity and fidelity."

Didn't Moses have a speech impediment (*Exodus 4:10*)? Didn't Jeremiah think himself too young (*Jeremiah 1:7*)? Didn't Peter deny our Lord three times (*Luke 22:61*)? These

men, to name just a few, were anointed by God and understood well their weaknesses.

Fr. Buckley points out that it is his weakness that allows him to relate to the weaknesses of others: "Weakness relates us profoundly with other people. It allows us to feel with them the human condition, the human struggle and darkness and anguish that call out for salvation."

And it is a man's weakness that allows him to relate to God: "Thus it is the liability of Christ to suffer, His ability to be broken and shed that makes His priesthood effective and His Eucharist possible. How paradoxical this mystery is! The strength of our priesthood lies precisely in the weakness that seems to threaten it. The sensitivity and openness to discouragement and suffering are constitutive of the mystery of the priesthood itself."

We should do all we can to encourage the good men in our parishes and families to consider the priesthood. Perhaps God will use and augment the strengths we see in them to be good priests. However, it won't be their strengths that will make them good priests someday, but their weaknesses. Young man, are you weak enough to be a priest? 🇺🇸

Ordained to the priesthood in 2018, Father Maurice Moon serves as Chaplain at Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth and as Vocations Liaison with the Vocations Office.

Common gestures enhance reverence, unity

To an outsider looking in – and sometimes even to Catholics ourselves – the gestures associated with the Mass can be a bit puzzling. Standing. Sitting. Kneeling. Genuflecting. Bowing.

In this installment of “Understanding the Mystery,” Father Thu Nguyen explains the meaning behind the gestures, when they’re performed, and why they’re important to the faithful celebration of the Mass.



Fr. Thu Nguyen

WHAT IS THE MEANING BEHIND THE MAIN GESTURES IN THE LITURGY (STANDING, KNEELING, SITTING)?

Father Nguyen: Let’s look at those three main gestures. They’re described in the *Roman Missal*, paragraph 42: “The gestures and posture of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers, as well as those of the people, ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered.”

That’s why you and I have the common postures. You can say, “Well, I like piety, so I’m going to kneel at this time” while the rest of the assembly is standing. But standing also has meaning.

So, let’s go back to [Pope Francis’] document *Desiderio desideravi*, paragraph 53. He writes, “Every gesture and every word contains a precise action that is always new because it meets with an

always new movement in our own lives. I will explain what I mean with a simple example. We kneel to ask pardon, to bend our pride, to hand over to God our tears, to beg His intervention, to thank Him for a gift received. It is always the same gesture which, in essence, declares our own being small in the presence of God.”

That’s why, at the Eucharistic Prayer, every one of us kneels. The priest celebrating, he genuflects. He bows after the Consecration because he’s not only acknowledging the presence of God changing from bread to Body, wine to Blood, but also acknowledging the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The third genuflection, when he breaks the Body and places it into the chalice of precious Blood, symbolizes the union of the Body and Blood, the Resurrection of our Lord.

He genuflects; that means he’s adoring. So, the kneeling gesture is important.

WHY AND WHEN DO WE STAND DURING MASS?

Father Nguyen: Standing is a sign of respect and honor to God, the celebrant, and the sacred elements in the liturgy. From the earliest days of the Church, this posture has been understood as the stance of those who have risen with Christ and seek the things that are above.

Our standing shows full reverence in prayer before God, not out of pride but in humble gratitude, acknowledging the salvific things God has done in creating and

redeeming each one of us. The posture of standing acknowledges the wonderful gift through baptism of sharing in the life of God. Standing also is appropriate for hearing and receiving the words and deeds of the Lord during the proclamation of the Gospel.

The USCCB has chosen standing as the posture for the reception of Communion.

WHEN DO WE SIT AND WHY?

Father Nguyen: The faithful should sit, on the other hand, during the readings before the Gospel, the responsorial psalm, the homily, and during the preparation of the gifts at the offertory; and, if appropriate, they may sit or kneel during the period of sacred silence after Communion.

Sitting is the posture of listening and meditation especially during the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. When sitting, the faithful should strive to assume a seated posture as anticipative and attentive rather than merely a posture at rest (slouching or leaning back, for example).

For the sake of uniformity, reverence, and communal unity in gestures and bodily postures during the one and same celebration, the faithful should follow the teachings and instructions of each conference of their country, their bishops, and especially according to what is laid down in the *Roman Missal*. ✚

Father Thu Nguyen serves as pastor at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Fort Worth and Diocesan Director of Liturgy and Worship.



ESCUELAS MÁS seguras

Oficiales de la policía son un componente importante de la seguridad mejorada en los planteles escolares de la Diócesis de Fort Worth

Por Sandra Engelland

Las escuelas de la Diócesis de Fort Worth aumentaron en gran medida la seguridad de sus planteles al agregar en el otoño oficiales de la policía que trabajan fuera de sus horas laborables regulares.

“Después de la tragedia de Uvalde todas las escuelas comenzaron a reevaluar su enfoque y a buscar qué medidas se podían tomar para proteger mejor a nuestros niños”, dijo Mike Short, el Director de Seguridad de la Diócesis.

En la Escuela Primaria Robb 19 niños y dos maestros perdieron la vida el 24 de mayo de 2022, luego de que un hombre de 18 años armado ingresara a la escuela y se atrincherara en un salón de clases de cuarto grado.

Cuando Short, el Superintendente Brinton Smith y otros administradores diocesanos analizaron qué acciones se podían tomar para mejorar la seguridad en las escuelas, la respuesta fue clara.

Smith dijo: “La mejor forma de seguridad es que los estudiantes tengan un oficial de la policía en el campus en caso de que suceda algo. Por mucho que apreciemos la seguridad técnica, como las cámaras y los controles de acceso de las puertas, no hay nada mejor que tener un oficial de la policía en el plantel”.

Los nuevos Oficiales de Recursos

Escolares (SRO, por sus siglas en inglés) están contratados por First Responder Protective Services y provienen de los departamentos de la policía cercanos a cada escuela, dijo Short. Se asignan oficiales específicos a cada escuela para que los estudiantes, las familias y el personal se familiaricen con ellos y para que los oficiales conozcan la comunidad del campus al que están asignados.

“El programa de los Oficiales de Recursos Escolares está diseñado para fomentar la confianza en los oficiales de la policía, para que ellos actúen como elemento disuasorio y brinden una respuesta rápida en caso de que algo suceda. Están en la escuela para garantizar la seguridad de los estudiantes y del personal”, explicó Short.

Los oficiales de seguridad comenzaron a aparecer en los planteles escolares diocesanos a fines de agosto del año pasado. Las familias y los miembros del personal han brindado un gran apoyo a la nueva iniciativa, según Short.

Joe Trausch, gerente sénior de desarrollo comercial de First Responder Protective Services, dijo que los oficiales de la policía están contentos de brindar seguridad a las escuelas “porque creen que es muy importante”.

Los comentarios que se han recibido tanto de los funcionarios escolares como de los oficiales han sido

abrumadoramente positivos, comentó Trausch.

“Nuestros oficiales disfrutaban su trabajo porque las escuelas los aprecian y los apoyan”, apuntó Trausch. “Se necesita mucha gente para poner en marcha un proyecto como éste y estamos muy complacidos y emocionados de ayudar a la Diócesis de Fort Worth a implementarlo”.

Short dijo que estos oficiales de la policía están ayudando también a educar a los miembros de la comunidad escolar sobre los problemas de salud mental y sobre lo que deben observar en las redes sociales para proteger mejor las escuelas.

Además, los oficiales capacitan al personal docente de la escuela sobre los protocolos de respuesta estándar. Su enfoque comprende cinco respuestas diferentes: el bloqueo, lo que significa que hay un intruso o un peligro inmediato que requiere cerrar con llave las puertas del salón de clases; asegurar el edificio de un peligro exterior; la evacuación en caso de un incendio; buscar refugio ante la posibilidad de un tornado; y permanecer en las aulas cuando exista un problema menos grave, como un derrame de líquido en el pasillo que requiera limpieza.

FINANCIADO POR LOS FIELES

Si bien los oficiales de recursos escolares han sido un elemento fijo en las



Un oficial de la policía vigila mientras los estudiantes de la Escuela de St. Peter the Apostle pasan en fila. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

escuelas secundarias públicas por muchos años y actualmente se ven a menudo en los planteles escolares de la primaria e intermedia, y se financian con los impuestos pagados por los contribuyentes. Sin embargo, las escuelas privadas deben aportar sus propios fondos.

Los administradores escolares y de seguridad diocesanos estiman que el nuevo programa de oficiales de recursos escolares, junto con la mejora de la seguridad de los edificios en varias escuelas más viejas, costará este año unos \$2 millones.

La Fundación de Avance, una organización sin fines de lucro independiente de la Diócesis, puede recaudar fondos para necesidades específicas dentro de la Diócesis de Fort Worth.

Renée Underwood, la Directora de Desarrollo de la Fundación de Avance, dijo que todos los fondos recaudados se utilizan para el propósito que solicita el donante.

“Cuando nos contactaron por primera vez sobre la seguridad de las escuelas, supimos que necesitarían alrededor de

\$2 millones para el primer año”, dijo Underwood. “Ésa es una subvención importante que se necesita. Todo lo que podemos hacer es a través de la corresponsabilidad y generosidad de católicos buenos y fieles”.

Los funcionarios escolares enviaron correos electrónicos y cartas a las familias y feligreses y publicaron en las redes sociales diocesanas sobre las mejoras de seguridad. La Fundación de Avance recibe donaciones para la seguridad escolar casi a diario, dijo Underwood.

Los donantes pueden contribuir a través de la página de Seguridad de las Escuelas Católicas en [AdvancementFoundation.org](https://www.advancementfoundation.org) o enviar una donación por correo. Todos las donaciones son deducibles de impuestos.

MEDIDAS DE PROTECCIÓN ADICIONALES

Además de los oficiales de recursos escolares, Smith dijo que el personal escolar y de seguridad diocesano está trabajando en varias modificaciones de los edificios para hacer que las escuelas sean más seguras. Por ejemplo, añadir

vestíbulos seguros donde un visitante sea identificado por cámara y audio antes de que se abra una puerta y los visitantes sean admitidos al área de la oficina.

Se quiere también que las escuelas tengan una cantidad adecuada de cámaras y controles de acceso.

Short señaló que los planteles escolares diocesanos más viejos necesitarán varias modificaciones para mejorar la seguridad.

“Estamos trabajando con la Fundación de Avance para crear un fondo especial de seguridad, que incluya no sólo los fondos para el programa de Oficiales de Recursos Escolares”.

Short dijo que la Diócesis está trabajando también para expandir el programa Guardian Ministry, que proporciona voluntarios seleccionados y capacitados para la seguridad de las parroquias, de manera que se incluyan además los eventos escolares, especialmente los juegos en Nolan Catholic High School.

“Esperamos poder expandir este programa a otras escuelas”, añadió. “Así serían más ojos y oídos, y ayuda adicional para los oficiales de seguridad”. 🇺🇸

Este retrato oficial del Papa Benedicto XVI es de Igor Babailov, que recibió el encargo de pintarlo en el 2006. Lo terminó oficialmente en el 2007. (OSV News photo/courtesy Igor Babailov)



PRIORIZANDO LA VERDAD Y la razón

El profundo legado del Papa Benedicto XVI

Por Violeta Rocha

Juan Rendón, el Director de Formación Diaconal de la Diócesis de Fort Worth, al recordar sus años como estudiante en la Universidad de Dallas, recuerda también como uno de sus teólogos favoritos al Papa Benedicto XVI, que en ese entonces era el Cardenal Joseph Ratzinger.

Desde ser su lectura predilecta así como una fuente de referencia para profundizar en su fe, el Papa Benedicto “siempre buscó el rostro de Jesús”. Éste es el “legado maravilloso” que Rendón señala que deja el Papa Benedicto XVI, tras su fallecimiento el 31 de diciembre de 2022.

“A través de sus obras he aprendido del Papa Benedicto XVI su profunda simpleza y humildad”, dijo. “Eso es algo que admiro de él, la fe como algo concreto, firme, y algo que no simplemente se hace a ciegas, sino que nuestra fe está anclada en Jesús”, agregó. Rendón señaló además que “Nos enseñó a que en la formación de la fe, hemos siempre de partir de la voluntad, estudiarla y no tener miedo. Hay que dejarse seducir por la belleza y el misterio de la fe y utilizar la razón, la inteligencia y el cerebro que Dios nos da dado para hacer el esfuerzo máximo por querer conocer profundamente la fe”.

Joseph Ratzinger, que más tarde se convertiría en el Papa Benedicto XVI, escribió 60 libros, 1,300 artículos

académicos, tres encíclicas y cuatro exhortaciones apostólicas sobre virtualmente cada aspecto de la fe y enseñanza de la Iglesia.

“Me remonto al 1998, cuando como estudiante de primer año de Teología en la Universidad de Dallas, se nos asignó la lectura requerida. Tuve así mi primera experiencia de conocer el pensamiento de quien era en aquel entonces el Cardenal Joseph Ratzinger al leer su *Introducción al cristianismo*, una de sus obras más clásicas o la más difundida”, recordó Rendón.

Rendón cuenta la anécdota que estaba dando una de sus clases de teología en un colegio católico en el 2005, año en que Ratzinger fue elegido Papa, y una de sus alumnas reconoció la imagen del Cardenal Joseph Ratzinger, diciéndole, “Sr. Rendón, el Papa es el que usted tiene en su taza de café”. Rendón recuerda con cariño que “los estudiantes hicieron esa conexión de que yo tenía al Cardenal Ratzinger como mi teólogo favorito y que ahora era Papa”, apuntó sobre ese entonces.

De igual manera se sintió muy bendecido al recibir de manos de los candidatos de RICA (Iniciación Cristiana para Adultos), la recién publicada obra *Jesús de Nazaret*, al notar por su forma de hablar que Joseph Ratzinger era uno de sus favoritos. Le dieron “uno de los regalos más bellos que me han podido dar”, señaló.

Durante su pontificado el Papa

Benedicto XVI habló siempre como un pastor preocupado por el cuidado de las almas y le hablaba a los jóvenes de una forma simple y cercana al igual que sus encíclicas y mensajes apostólicos. “Hizo lo que muy pocos pensaron que podía hacer: comunicar el mensaje de Jesucristo en un lenguaje simple”, dijo Rendón.

“Pasó de ser ‘El inentendible’, como algunos le llamaban, a ser el más entendible, claro y conciso”, continuó diciendo.

El Papa Benedicto XVI nació en Alemania y fue reclutado en contra de su voluntad por las fuerzas militares nazis para los jóvenes, pero como lo narra en su biografía, en cuanto pudo salirse de ahí, Ratzinger regresó a continuar sus estudios para el sacerdocio, explica Rendón.

“Todo lo que experimentó en su vida, el sufrimiento, la guerra, diferentes regímenes totalitarios y después como docente y profesor de teología en varias universidades; y pasar por todos los cambios que sucedieron en las décadas del cincuenta, sesenta y setenta, lo moldearon para verdaderamente dejarnos un legado teológico que vale oro”, Rendón afirmó.

Toda su teología y toda su esperanza giran alrededor de buscar la contemplación de Su divino rostro, “Señor, quiero ver Tu rostro”. Esto es a lo que nos invita Joseph Ratzinger;

CONTINÚA EN LA PÁGINA 56



Un retrato del difunto Papa Benedicto XVI en la Catedral de San Patricio durante una Misa por el descanso de su alma el 8 de enero de 2023. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

DE LA PÁGINA 55

hay que sumergirse en este misterio de Dios hombre, El Dios que se hace hombre para salvarnos, para redimirnos y llevarnos de regreso a la casa del Padre, explicó Rendón. Enfatiza las enseñanzas del Papa Benedicto para el entendimiento de la liturgia, pero aún más importante, para sumergirse en el espíritu de la liturgia.

Benedicto XVI fue el arquitecto del actual *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*, así como de su Compendio. San Juan Pablo II tomó la iniciativa y dio el empuje para “esta obra majestuosa y fascinante de la cual nos hemos beneficiado inmensamente y continuaremos beneficiándonos por mucho tiempo”, afirmó Rendón.

Expresó al inicio de su pontificado que él era “un humilde siervo en la viña del Señor. Humilde y no digno. Así es como Papa Benedicto siempre se vio y vio toda su enseñanza. Quiso siempre dar su magisterio a la Iglesia para el servicio

de la Iglesia; no para engrandecerse, sino simplemente para ponerlo al servicio de los hermanos y hermanas. Era callado, firme y serio. No hacía referencia a sí mismo”.

Como Papá Emérito, tras su retiro en el 2013, “tuvo corazón de místico, y siempre estaba en profunda oración”, resalta Rendón. Destacó además la primera tesis de Joseph Ratzinger que trataba sobre San Agustín. “Pueblo y Casa de Dios en la doctrina de San Agustín, sobre la Iglesia” Publicó una segunda basada en San Buenaventura, “El itinerante del Alma, su unión con Dios”.

De ahí, su fusión de estas dos espiritualidades monásticas y mendicantes.

“Él estaba feliz con su vida dedicada al estudio y los libros, pero cuando fue llamado a ser Pastor y ser sucesor de Pedro, respondió al llamado”, concluyó Rendón.

En su funeral llevado a cabo el 5 de enero el Papa Francisco lo describió como el “fiel amigo del Esposo” y oro para “que su gozo sea perfecto al oír definitivamente

y para siempre”, la voz del Señor.

“Queremos decir juntos ‘Padre, en tus manos encomendamos su espíritu’”, dijo el Papa Francisco en su homilía. “Queremos como comunidad eclesial seguir sus huellas y confiar a nuestro hermano en las manos del Padre. Que estas manos de misericordia encuentren su lámpara encendida con el aceite del Evangelio que él esparció y dio testimonio durante toda su vida”, continuó diciendo.

El joven Católico Daniel Fernández participó de la Misa del 8 de enero, oficiada por el Obispo Michael Olson, por el eterno descanso del Pontífice en la Catedral de San Patricio en de Fort Worth. El Obispo destacó la obediencia, el sacrificio y las enseñanzas del Papa Benedicto XVI.

“Sé que el Papa Benedicto quería retirarse y dedicar tiempo a sus libros siendo Cardenal, pero no lo hizo porque vio cómo el Papa Juan Pablo II estaba sufriendo con la enfermedad del Parkinson”, dijo Fernández. “Él nos animó a no tener miedo. Cuando



Más de 300 personas asistieron a la Misa ofrecida por el Obispo Olson para el descanso del alma del Papa Benedicto XVI. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

abrimos nuestros corazones a Dios, nunca perdemos nada”.

El Obispo Olson recuerda que mientras estudiaba en Roma y siendo un joven sacerdote se encontró con el Cardenal Ratzinger antes de que fuera nombrado Papa. Sostuvo varias conversaciones informales con él en la Plaza de San Pedro.

“Aprendí mucho de su ejemplo de humildad y su amplio conocimiento y sabiduría”, comentó el Obispo Olson a *North Texas Catholic*. “Él hablaba con todos — siempre preguntaba de dónde eras, y podía cambiar de un idioma a otro. Él era bastante abierto”.

El Obispo Olson recordó a los participantes de la Misa durante su homilía que el legado del Cardenal Joseph Ratzinger fue ser un firme defensor de la fe católica.

“Críticos teológicos y adversarios del Papa Benedicto XVI lo vieron ciertamente como un gran obstáculo en su intento por cambiar la doctrina de la fe católica en una forma de Gnosticismo o nueva

religión que puede simultáneamente capitular el Marxismo y el hedonismo de la revolución sexual y aún llamarse católico”, explicó.

Como sacerdote, obispo, Cabeza de la Congregación de la Doctrina de la Fe y más plenamente como Papa, el Vicario de Cristo, Joseph Ratzinger fue obligado a resistir la teología revisionista.

“A causa de esto, sus oponentes crearon una imagen de él como inquisidor despiadado e hicieron esa figura ilusoria un blanco de burlas. Esperaban que estos actos en contra de su persona pudieran afectar su humildad, su fidelidad a Cristo y su clara enseñanza del Evangelio de Cristo”, continuó el Obispo. No obstante, “su estrategia falló”.

Tereso Ortiz, fundador de la Casa Guanajuato, organización sin fines de lucro que ha atendido por casi tres décadas a conciudadanos mexicanos que residen en el Metroplex, viajó, junto a su esposa, Ramona Gómez de Ortiz, a su natal Guanajuato, durante la única visita del Papa Benedicto XVI a las tierras aztecas

en el 2012. “La visita del Pontífice fue a Guanajuato, que se encuentra en medio del corazón de México. Se celebró en un terreno inmenso lleno de gente muy ordenada que esperaban ver y escuchar al Papa Benedicto XVI”, recordó Ortiz con mucha emoción por “haberlo podido ver muy cerquita, al menos en momentos.

“Quedé impresionado de los miles de personas que asistimos y de que tuviéramos la bendición de apreciar de una forma muy organizada su caluroso saludo”, comentó enfatizando que fue “un acercamiento muy formal y real con el Papa”.

“Esta visita del Papa Benedicto a México en que tuvimos la oportunidad de participar, me deja la lección de que a veces deseamos ver a Jesús y que se aparezca con barba semejante a como nos lo presentan en las imágenes bíblicas. Y no nos damos cuenta de que lo tenemos todos los días frente a nosotros en nuestro prójimo. Eso precisamente nos enseñó el Papa Benedicto XVI ese día, son actos de fe y, si quieres ver a Dios cerca, te tienes que alimentar de Él y para eso es la Eucaristía. Tener al Papa cerca es tener cerca al representante de Jesús en la tierra”.

“La Celebración Eucarística fue al pie del Cerro del Cubilete, en Silao, Guanajuato. Tuvimos un escenario preciosísimo mientras veíamos la estatua de Cristo Rey y celebramos la Eucaristía junto al Papa”, dijo aseverando que siempre narra el bello momento a sus hijos y nietos sobre ese 25 de marzo del 2012, sobre todo, porque a menos de un año se anunciaría a Benedicto XVI como Papa Emérito, luego de su renuncia el 11 de febrero del 2013.

El Papa dejó dos importantes primicias en esa visita, apunta Ortiz. La primera fue la bendición del Templo Expiatorio en León, Guanajuato, cuya construcción tomó 100 años. La segunda fue su visita a la Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Luz, donde dio la bendición a una pequeña plaza, detalla Ortiz. 🇲🇽

EL REZO HABITUAL DE LA Liturgia de las Horas

Santifica el día con oración para una “Cuaresma maravillosa”

Por Violeta Rocha

La oración nos lleva a la cercanía con Dios. La Iglesia nos regala la Liturgia de las Horas como una gran forma de honrar a Dios. Durante el tiempo de Cuaresma nos preparamos por cuarenta días para celebrar el Triduo Pascual. Por eso, éste el tiempo perfecto para conocer, aprender y practicar la Liturgia de las Horas para encontrar una conversión plena y reflexionar sobre “la misericordia y el amor de Dios”.

Así lo explica Jesús Segura, 21, quien cursa el cuarto año de preparación sacerdotal para la Diócesis de Fort Worth.

“Lo más hermoso de la Liturgia de las Horas es que se reza por los demás, no sólo por las intenciones personales”, señala el seminarista, que estudia en St. Joseph Seminary College en Luisiana.

La Liturgia de las Horas, conocida también como Oficio Divino, comprende cinco horas canónicas. Se rezan por la mañana, al medio día, por la tarde y nuevamente por la noche. Se dividen en cuatro tomos según las

cuatro temporadas del calendario litúrgico: Tiempo ordinario (2); Adviento y Navidad; Cuaresma y Tiempo Pascual.

La estructura es de cuatro semanas y cada día de la semana tiene diferentes salmos y lecturas de la Sagrada Escritura, reflexiones de Obispos y Padres de la Iglesia, y de los santos. Se rezan intenciones que ayudan a reflexionar sobre el tiempo del calendario correspondiente, explica Segura, originario de Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato. Rezar de esta forma “me ayuda a entrar en la presencia del Señor, dejando de lado las cosas que me puedan robar de la paz o distraer de Su presencia”, añadió el seminarista. Reconoció además que antes de entrar al seminario desconocía del llamado de la Iglesia para rezar estas oraciones y “poco a poco El Señor me ha dado la gracia de saber que estoy uniendo mi corazón al corazón de la Iglesia, hasta ser parte de Su ser, especialmente para nosotros que estamos preparándonos para el sacerdocio”.

Segura invita a todos los fieles a rezarlas también para conseguir

“una mejor dirección espiritual, al unirnos al Cuerpo Místico de Jesucristo, junto a los fieles de todo el mundo, con los ángeles y los santos para adorar al Señor, darle gracias, pedirle ayuda y ofrecer cada día nuestro ser para Él”, dijo el seminarista que creció siendo feligrés de la Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes de Mineral Wells.

El Padre Fernando Preciado, párroco de la Parroquia de St. Frances Cabrini de Granbury y Santa Rosa de Lima de Glen Rose, apunta que para él como sacerdote la Liturgia de las Horas “es uno de los momentos importantes del día para orar por la santificación del pueblo de Dios, después de la Eucaristía”.

Se invita al pueblo de Dios a rezar juntos con los sacerdotes y utilizar el libro “Liturgia de las Horas Para el Pueblo de Dios”, que comprende los Laudes, las Vísperas y las Completas, explica el Padre Preciado.

“Iniciar nuestro día con oración, darle gracias a Dios por la tarde y por la noche antes de dormir por lo que recibimos es importante”, enfatizó el Padre



Una joven lee la Liturgia de las Horas en Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House en Lake Dallas. (NTC)



Preciado.

“Si todos aprendiéramos lo maravillosa que es la Oración de la Liturgia de las Horas, nuestra vida sería completamente distinta”, añadió señalando que no tiene que ser una hora completa de oración, sino que el nombre se le da porque se reza en horas específicas, y que, además, uno se puede

aprovechar de la tecnología, siguiendo a sacerdotes o comunidades religiosas que rezan la Liturgia de las Horas a través de plataformas digitales. “Se crea un proceso de conversión, de encuentro con Dios y esa oración metódica de Laudes, Vísperas y Completas se convierten en un momento de interiorización con Dios y por Dios”, dijo destacando el oportuno

comienzo de la Cuaresma para crear este maravilloso hábito de oración.

“Es una de las mejores formas para tener una Cuaresma maravillosa, porque es participar de este encuentro de oración con Cristo”, dijo. El Padre Preciado recomienda que al menos recemos los Laudes y las Vísperas.

“Así como hablamos de la Eucaristía como símbolo sagrado de nuestra fe y ayudamos a la gente a entender el misterio de la fe, es también importante invitar a la gente a aprender a orar,” prosiguió diciendo el sacerdote.

“Mediante la Liturgia de las Horas nos comunicamos con Dios que nos habla; y si lo hacemos en comunidad o en familia, aún mejor, porque es santificación del pueblo y qué mejor manera que santificar nuestra familia y nuestros hijos con este rezo común que nos da la Iglesia”. 🇺🇸

Jóvenes con nuevos propósitos



Briana Ruiz (tercera desde la derecha) ora con sus compañeros de la Parroquia de San Pedro Apóstol durante el retiro de la pastoral juvenil el 21 de enero de 2023 en la Parroquia de San Juan Apóstol en North Richland Hills. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Jóvenes adultos se unen a una danza tradicional mexicana durante el retiro. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Luis Miguel Urrutia, maestro de ceremonias del evento, dirige a los participantes en una actividad durante el retiro. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Utilizando el tema “Un Joven con un Nuevo Propósito,” los líderes de la Pastoral Juvenil Hispana de la Diócesis de Fort Worth organizaron su primer retiro del año el 21 de enero de 2023. Celebrado en la Parroquia de San Juan Apóstol en North Richland Hills, el retiro contó con oradores dinámicos, como el Padre Jose Feliciano Torres, OFM Cap;

cantos de alabanza dirigidos por el cantante y compositor Miguel Aquino, divertidas dinámicas, tiempo de reflexión y Misa. Más de 150 jóvenes adultos de varias parroquias de la Diócesis participaron en el evento de un día. Para obtener más información sobre los próximos eventos para adultos jóvenes, visite fwdioc.org/pastoral-juvenil-hispana-es. 🇺🇸

Tres Obispos medievales (y un Papa del siglo XX) demuestran su amor por Jesús Eucaristía

Por Sean M. Wright

Maurice de Sully fue un Obispo muy enérgico de París. Concibió y comenzó la construcción de la hermosa Catedral de Notre Dame. El Papa Alejandro III vino a París para colocar su primera piedra en el 1163.

El Obispo Maurice no podía casi tragar durante su última enfermedad en el 1196 y por eso no pudo recibir el Santo Viático. Como alternativa, hizo llevar a su dormitorio un copón que contenía el Santísimo Sacramento para que el Señor estuviera cerca de él y meditaba sobre el amor de su Salvador mientras se preparaba para su encuentro final con Él.

Hacia el 1175 dos respetados teólogos de la Universidad de París, Peter Comestor y Peter the Chanter, coincidieron en lo que se consideró como una novedad litúrgica: que la transubstanciación del pan en el Santísimo Cuerpo de Jesús no se produce en la Misa hasta después de que el sacerdote haya pronunciado la palabras de consagración sobre el cáliz, cuando el vino se convierte en la Preciosísima Sangre de Nuestro Señor.

Ahora, teorizar que esto pudiera ser cierto no está mal. Como escribe el teólogo E. Edward Zinke:

“El fin de la teología es determinar y expresar mediante el uso de la razón iluminada por la fe el sentido y la trascendencia del conocimiento sobrenatural de Dios dado en la Escritura para reconstruir de manera racional y humana la

verdad que Dios ha tenido a bien dar en las Escrituras”.

Sin embargo, las reflexiones y suposiciones teológicas siempre deben ser presentadas a la Iglesia para decidir cuál es la verdad. Por ejemplo, Orígenes de Alejandría, el gran teólogo de los años 200, hizo varias suposiciones erróneas, sobre todo, acerca de la salvación universal. Sin embargo, Orígenes, que era muy humilde, nunca insistió que sus deducciones fueran correctas hasta que hubiera puesto sus teorías a disposición de la Iglesia y la Iglesia tomara una decisión al respecto.

Eudes de Sully (1197-1208), que fue el sucesor de Maurice de Sully como Obispo de París, actuó para poner fin a la creciente aceptación de este error. Convocó un sínodo local y ordenó a sus sacerdotes, después de pronunciar las palabras de la consagración, que levantaran la Sagrada Hostia sobre sus cabezas para que todos pudieran verla y adorarla. La Elevación de la Preciosísima Sangre se haría unas décadas más tarde.

Otro de los instructores en París, Stephen Langton de Inglaterra, fue posteriormente nombrado Cardenal-Arzbispo de Canterbury y Primado de Inglaterra (1207-1228). Convocó un Sínodo provincial en el 1214 en el que también instruyó a sus sacerdotes, como protesta práctica contra la enseñanza de los dos teólogos, que “la Sagrada Hostia debe ser elevada inmediatamente después de las palabras de la Consagración para que pueda ser vista por todos.”

En el 1907 San Pío X (1903-1914), “el Papa de la Sagrada Eucaristía”, concedió una indulgencia parcial “a todos los fieles que, mirando con fe, devoción y amor a la Sagrada Hostia en el momento de la Elevación, dijieran al mismo tiempo las palabras ‘Señor mío y Dios mío’”. La indulgencia plenaria podía ser ganada una vez por semana por aquellos fieles que, habiendo asistido a Misa diariamente, también recibieran la Sagrada Comunión. La misma indulgencia parcial se podía obtener también mirando devotamente al Santísimo Sacramento, siempre que estuviera solemnemente expuesto y se dijieran las palabras antedichas.

El amor de San Pío X por Jesús en la Eucaristía no se quedó ahí. En su decreto *Quam Singulari* animó a todos los fieles en estado de gracia a recibir la Sagrada Comunión con más frecuencia, incluso diariamente. En este tiempo los católicos estaban acostumbrados a recibir la Comunión solamente una vez al año. Pío X alentó la práctica del acercamiento diario a la Comunión con el debido entendimiento de que la Eucaristía es el “antídoto por el cual podemos ser liberados de las faltas diarias y preservados de los pecados mortales”. ✝

Sean M. Wright, MA, es un guionista de televisión que ha sido nominado al Emmy y maestro de catequistas de la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles.





Santa Maria della Quercia, Nuestra Señora del roble.

NUESTRA SEÑORA de la Vid

Una lección para la Cuaresma

Por Margaret Rose Realy

Cuando pensamos en el santuario durante la Cuaresma, recordamos un entorno deliberadamente austero y estéril: se quita la ornamentación y se remueven o se cubren las estatuas en algunas parroquias. No se colocan flores en el altar y el santuario está desprovisto de cualquier color, excepto el púrpura

penitencial.

Las únicas plantas permitidas durante esta temporada de la iglesia son las verdes, como la hiedra y los helechos, y plantas secas, como el pasto, y las llamadas “immortelles”, las plantas perennes, un grupo de plantas que mantienen su belleza después de la “muerte”. De las plantas que se pueden usar durante la Cuaresma, la hiedra, es decir la vid, se conecta de manera particular con el significado de este

tiempo litúrgico: nos recuerda que debemos aferrarnos a Dios. Simboliza la fidelidad del amor, el triunfo y la esperanza.

La Santísima Virgen María mostró siempre estos sentimientos a través de su firmeza al cooperar fielmente con el plan de Dios.

Hay una leyenda del siglo XV que nos relata sobre la fidelidad de un caballero a Nuestra Madre Santísima y cómo Nuestra Señora de la Vid lo protegió. Cuenta la leyenda que este caballero cristiano de Viterbo, Italia, estaba solo e indefenso cuando sus enemigos lo asaltaron. Había oído de los milagros asociados con una pintura de Nuestra Señora que estaba adherida a un árbol por la hiedra en un bosque cercano, por lo que huyó y acudió a la imagen de María en busca de su protección. El caballero contó luego que rodeó con sus brazos el tronco del árbol y se aferró con la esperanza de que Ella lo iba a ocultar de sus perseguidores. La gloriosa María le concedió que permaneciera oculto entre los tallos de la vid.

Ésa no fue la única historia atribuida a esta pintura de María del que data del 1417. El gran azulejo pintado con la imagen de Nuestra Santísima Madre sosteniendo a su divino Hijo en sus brazos fue encargado por Mastro Baptist Magnano Luzzante y fue adherido a un roble en su propiedad cerca de un camino traicionero. Se esperaba que Nuestra Señora protegiera a la gente del pueblo cuando viajaran por esas tierras. La vid siguió creciendo al pasar de los años y formó un tabernáculo natural, pues sus zarcillos empujaron la hiedra hacia arriba y alrededor del poderoso roble.

Cuenta la historia que, a medida que pasaron los años, el azulejo pintado con la imagen de María se lo llevaron en tres ocasiones para guardarlo en un lugar más seguro. Sin embargo, cada vez el azulejo con la pintura de María Madre volvía a encontrarse milagrosamente de nuevo en el árbol a la mañana siguiente.

En el 1467 la peste llegó a la

región. Se registró que unas 30,000 personas huyeron hacia la imagen de la Santísima Madre y se arrodillaron bajo el roble mientras oraban que ella los liberara de la enfermedad.

A los pocos días la plaga cesó milagrosamente y la gente del pueblo, encabezada por su Obispo, volvió al roble para mostrar su agradecimiento por la intercesión de Nuestra Señora.

Leemos acerca de “aferrarse como la vid” en el Libro del Eclesiástico (Sirácida): “Yo, como una vid, hice germinar la gracia, y mis flores son un fruto de gloria y de riqueza” (*Si 24,17*). Aquí, la acción de aferrarse está relacionada con la búsqueda de la sabiduría y la promesa de cimentarse en el Espíritu Santo. En los textos antiguos, según notas de la Nueva Biblia Católica, Edición Revisada, el texto continúa, “No dejen de buscar su fuerza en el Señor; permanezcan unidos a él, para que Él los fortalezca” (*Si 24,23*).

La hiedra es una planta que se fija a casi cualquier estructura. Por esta tendencia a buscar y aferrarse firmemente a algo, la hiedra es un símbolo de esperanza y fidelidad en el amor. Una hiedra siempre busca ser sostenida.

¡Qué hermoso recordatorio mientras viajamos a través de la Cuaresma! Qué, como María (al igual que San José y todos los santos), nos aferremos a Dios con constancia y esperanza.

Al encontrar los puntos de apoyo de la fe, extendiendo los zarcillos de la esperanza como una vid contra una pared, anclados y seguros en la presencia de la oposición, nuestras vidas florecen con gracia. Entremos en una Cuaresma fructífera buscando todo el apoyo espiritual que necesitamos. ✨

Margaret Rose Realy es una oblata benedictina y autora de *A Garden Catechism: 100 Plants in Christian Tradition and How to Grow Them* (*El Catecismo del jardín: 100 plantas en la tradición cristiana y cómo cultivarlas*). OSV, 2022.

AMBIENTE SEGURO

Para Reportar Mala Conducta Sexual:

Si usted o alguien que usted conoce es víctima de abuso sexual por parte de cualquiera que sirve a la Iglesia, puede:

- ▶ Llamar a la Línea Directa de Asistencia a Víctimas: (817) 602-5119.
- ▶ Llamar el Director Diocesano de Ambiente Seguro: (817) 945-9334 y dejar un mensaje.
- ▶ Llamar al Canciller de la Diócesis: (817) 945-9315.

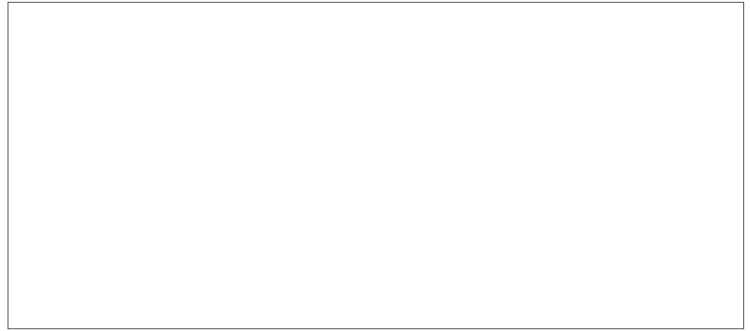
Para Reportar Abuso o si Sospecha de Abuso:

Si usted sospecha de abuso de un niño, anciano, o adulto vulnerable, o si abuso ha sido revelado a usted,

- ▶ Si alguien está en peligro inmediato, llame al 911
- ▶ Llame al Departamento de Servicios para la Familia y de Protección (DFPS) de Texas al (800) 252-5400.
- ▶ Reporte inmediatamente el presunto abuso a su supervisor, sacerdote o director, y presente el Aviso Confidencial de Preocupación con la información requerida por DFPS.

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