

BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH



NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC



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A glimpse of heaven

Do you ever wonder what heaven will be like? To see Jesus face to face? To join the Church Triumphant and take a place among the angels and saints in heaven?

It's much too glorious, too sublime for our earthly minds to comprehend, but God drops a foretaste now and then.

Sometimes I hear a hint of eternity when the diverse voices in the pews unite to sing praise to the Lord. A well-rehearsed, harmonious choir is exquisite, but there's also beauty in a heartfelt hymn sung by the congregation.

You can also find a glimpse of God's glory in an awe-inspiring sunrise that appears, transforms the sky, then disappears in a few short minutes.

This month, I had a glimpse of heaven in a place where I didn't expect it: Taste Community Restaurant, a pay-what-you-can-afford restaurant near the hospital district in Fort Worth. (You can find the article on page 30.)

One key to their business model is the volunteers that cook, serve, and clean. I saw a peek of heaven in the joy the volunteers showed in serving.

Among the volunteers are patrons who come to the restaurant out of necessity, but stay to give back, finding a purpose in meeting the needs of others.

At the restaurant's tables, everyone — regardless of their economic and social situation — is treated with dignity and respect as they order a tasty meal. I was reminded of so many verses: Jesus saying, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink"; the poor man Lazarus, spending eternity consoled at the side of Abraham, to name just a couple.

The visit was truly a spiritual experience.

But most significantly, at every Mass we get a taste of heaven as we receive Holy Communion. All ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds are invited to the banquet of eternal life. We are united as one Church by the One Body of Christ.

Can we get any closer to heaven than sharing in the Holy Eucharist?

Taste and see.

Susan Moses

EDITOR



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IN THIS ISSUE

March - April 2024

16 BACK TO SCHOOL
Three St. Mary School alumnae return to teach at their alma mater.

24 A FAITHFUL LOVE
Two couples with a combined 110 years of marriage make love last.

26 SAINT CELEBRATION
The Filipino community celebrates the feast day of a beloved saint.

30 TASTE AND SEE
Pay-what-you-can-afford restaurant fills stomachs and souls.

46 PASSION PROJECT
Ed Proskie meditates on Jesus' passion by creating wood reliefs.

ON THE COVER

The Lamb Victorious, donated by the J.W. Zeissel family, at St. Joseph Church in Rhineland. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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HAVE A STORY IDEA?

Share it with us! Help us make sure your parish community is seen in the NTC online, in print, or on our quickly growing social media accounts. Submit your ideas and briefs to: NTC@fwdioc.org.



36 SIGNS OF LIFE
From lambs to lilies, Catholics decorate churches and homes with Easter symbols of Jesus' resurrection.



12 VATICAN HONORS



20 A LITTLE LENT

Lent begins with ashes



NTC/Ben Torres



NTC/Juan Guajardo

The forty-day season of Lent, a season of prayer, penance, and almsgiving, began with ashes, a symbol of humility, mourning, and mortality. Students from St. Joseph Catholic School in Arlington are pictured above. At left, ashes are prepared for distribution at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church in Lewisville.

A notable donation

 Annual Diocesan Appeal gifts \$475,000 to Catholic Charities Fort Worth

FORT WORTH — It's not every day that a four-foot-long check exchanges hands, and it's not every day that Catholic Charities Fort Worth receives a donation of nearly half a million dollars.

But it is every day that the nonprofit works to lift local families out of poverty. This large gift will support those efforts.

On Feb. 16, Bishop Michael Olson and Clint Weber, president of the Advancement Foundation for the Catholic Diocese of

Fort Worth, presented the oversized check totaling \$475,000 to Michael Iglio, president and CEO of Catholic Charities Fort Worth.

The funds were donated by parishioners of the Diocese of Fort Worth through the Annual Diocesan Appeal, an Advancement Foundation campaign which also benefits small parishes, seminarian education, Catholic schools, permanent deacon formation, and other needs within the



NTC/Juan Guajardo

From left: Michael Iglio, Bishop Michael Olson, and Clint Weber.

diocese. Iglio stated the grant will support two initiatives: Gabriel Project, which provides material, spiritual, and emotional help to women in crisis pregnancies through the baby's

first 18 months; and the Out of Poverty program, which offers research-backed solutions to end poverty and transform lives. This donation allows CCFW to serve more clients in its proven programs, Iglio said.

Views from the Pews

Within a number of days, *NTC* staffers joined students building faith and community, worshippers celebrating a patron's feast day, and Catholic Charities Fort Worth employees honing their mission. With 92 parishes in the diocese, God and His faithful are always active.

St. Vincent Pallotti's Feast Day. At St. Michael Parish in Bedford, several members of the Pallottines celebrated their founder's feast day on Jan. 22 with Bishop Michael Olson. The diocese has 14 Pallottine priests serving 19 parishes.

Middle school rally. Students participated in games, adored the Eucharist, and listened to speakers at Nolan Catholic High School on Jan. 27. The "To the Heights" retreat was designed to help middle school students live out their baptismal call to holiness.

CCFW Convocation. Bishop Olson addressed the employees of Catholic Charities Fort Worth at their convocation on Jan. 31. The nonprofit, with assistance from 82 parish and faith partners, serves the 28 counties of the Diocese of Fort Worth.

THERE'S
MORE



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NTC/Juan Cuajardo



NTC/Juan Cuajardo



NTC/Juan Cuajardo

Community of devotion



Diocese celebrates World Day for Consecrated Life



Sisters from the Lovers of the Holy Cross laugh with clergy. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

FORT WORTH — On a day where the world prays for vocations and for those who have discerned into consecrated life, 50 of the diocese's religious men and women came together for an evening of vespers and fellowship on Feb. 2 at St. Bartholomew Church in Fort Worth.

Mirroring the universal nature of the Church and the diverse population in the diocese, the Liturgy of the Hours was collectively prayed in three languages: English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

During the vesper's homily, Bishop Michael Olson described the importance of the consecrated community, calling their manifestation of compassion "one of the particular graces ... essential to a life of Christian holiness." This compassion is cultivated, he said, in the intense prayer and study of Christ's sacrifice.

Transitioning his homily into Spanish, the bishop discussed how Pope St. John Paul II had established a dedicated day for the Church to celebrate consecrated life: to praise and give thanks to God for the gift of consecrated life, to promote knowing Him and His people, and to celebrate the joy God has given those who have given their lives to evangelization.

— Christina Benavides

New branch on a giving tree



St. Philip the Apostle Parish donates to Eastland parishes

RANGER — St. Philip the Apostle Parish has a reputation of being a generous parish — now that reputation has spread four counties away.

From exceeding the goal of the Annual Diocesan Appeal to raising funds for construction of a new church, St. Philip parishioners give unsparingly to support their parish and community.

Now, their abundant giving is helping other parishes and communities in the diocese. St. Philip parishioners donated \$5,500 to the four parishes served by Father Joseph Pudota, SAC: St. Rita in Ranger; Our Lady of the

Holy Rosary in Cisco; St. Francis Xavier in Eastland; and St. John in Strawn.

Fr. Pudota said the check is "a big amount for small parishes." Many projects and necessities came to mind when told of the donation, and he decided to use the sum to subsidize friendship meals hosted by St. Francis Xavier Church in Eastland and Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish in Cisco.

Fr. Pudota explained friendship meals are held two times each month and welcome everyone. Parish volunteers cook, serve, and clean up after the meals, and



Patsy Davis, Patricia Gonzalez, and Fr. Joseph Pudota, SAC. (courtesy photo)

donations cover the expense of the food.

Patricia Gonzalez, director of stewardship and social outreach at St. Philip the Apostle, said, "We are not pioneers; I know other parishes

have done this, but our parish got behind it.

"A parish that has resources has the responsibility to share those resources with other parishes if and when we can," explained Gonzalez.

JBD Outreach opens food pantries



Perfecto Huerta (right) takes a load of groceries to a waiting car in Decatur. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

DECATUR — On Jan. 18, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Decatur opened a food pantry and distributed food to 13 families

— a total of 54 individuals — and they expect that number to double before next month.

The food pantry is the first project of a new outreach

ministry, started by Father Anto Vijayan Carloose, SAC, at all three of his parishes: St. John the Baptizer in Bridgeport, St. Mary in

Jacksboro, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

They refer to themselves as the JBD Outreach Ministry to emphasize the three parishes in Jacksboro, Bridgeport, and Decatur act as one. The food pantry is no different.

The three parishes worked together to establish the food pantry.

“We are working together; this is one ministry to serve all three parishes,” said Libby Gonzales who heads the ministry at St. Mary. “A lot of the groundwork was done by the ladies in Bridgeport and Decatur. They just took the ball and ran with it.”

St. John the Baptizer was the first to open, giving food on Jan. 5 to 39 individuals.

Fr. Carloose felt compelled to start this ministry when he “saw the need in the community, in the elderly,” he said, projecting the food pantry will become a valuable resource.

— Katie Leonard

Home sweet home



Bishop Michael Olson blesses new rectory at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Fort Worth

From left, Father Benjamin Hembrom, TOR, Bishop Michael Olson, and Father Ignatius Hembrom, TOR. (NTC/Joan Kurkowski-Gillen)

FORT WORTH — The Franciscan friars who shepherd the faith community at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Fort Worth ushered in the new year in a new home.

Bishop Michael Olson blessed the recently constructed rectory on Dec. 23 after celebrating the Saturday Vigil Mass with parishioners.

“I’m happy to be with Father Benjamin [Hembrom, TOR], Father Ignatius [Hembrom, TOR], and all who have gathered here this evening,” the bishop said, welcoming the congregation at the start of the liturgy.

“We are going to bless the new

rectory so the Lord will protect all who live there and to pray for more priests.”

The 4,200-square-foot ranch-style building, located behind the church at 5953 Bowman Roberts Road, was designed with an oratory and three private suites to accommodate the pastor, associate pastor, and a visiting priest. Each bedroom is adjoined by a small sitting room, closet, and bath.

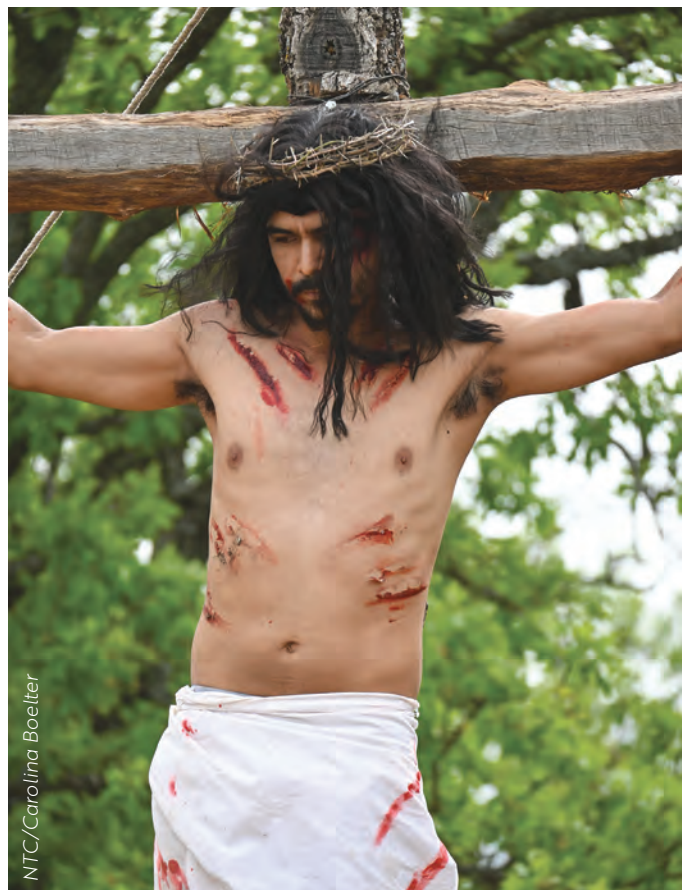
In previous years, priests serving St. Thomas the Apostle Parish lived several miles away from the church. The house was sold in 2022, and the money funded construction of a rectory on church property.

— Joan Kurkowski-Gillen



A play on Passion

Jesus' sacrifice portrayed by Eastland community



NTC/Carolina Boelter

EASTLAND — Members of four parishes in Eastland, Cisco, Ranger, and Strawn will portray Jesus Christ's suffering from 2,000 years ago in their Passion play production on Good Friday, March 29.

The play begins at 3 p.m. at the All Saints Family Activity and Youth Center, 12901 I-20 in Eastland.

Martin Esquivel, a parishioner of St. Francis Xavier Parish in Eastland, has organized the production for five years.

This year, lending support in the organization of the portrayal is Father Joseph Pudota, SAC, current pastor of the cluster parishes of St. Francis Xavier; Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Cisco; St. Rita in Ranger; and St. John in Strawn.

"The Passion play is actually the reenactment of the Passion of Christ," Fr. Pudota said. "It communicates a great message because most of the time when we read, we can imagine. But when we

see with our own eyes, or it's happening right in front of us, we really feel how Jesus suffered. It creates sentiments and moral emotions for what Jesus did for us."

Last year, roughly 150-200 people came to see the play, and 40-50 play roles.

The work to plan and produce the Passion play is no small feat. Esquivel said his committee's work begins months ahead to start seeking volunteers; gathering costumes, props, and supplies; planning stage designs; preparing the location; and getting the word out within the local parishes and to the local communities.

The effort is worth it, Esquivel said. "It's more of a responsibility I have as a Catholic Christian to be able to help present this play to the people so they can reflect on the pain and suffering Jesus Christ endured for our salvation."

— Alice Varela Murray

Alison Collins, DO, joins WholeLife

FORT WORTH — WholeLife Authentic Care provides "an environment where I can practice in accordance with my conscience," Dr. Alison Collins, DO, told the *North Texas Catholic*.

WholeLife Authentic Care has been serving the community since fall 2019, mainly providing pro-life OBGYN services both locally and remotely throughout Texas.

Coming up on its five-year anniversary, a new milestone is being celebrated — the hire of Dr. Collins, the clinic's first full-time family medicine provider, who provides holistic treatment informed by her Catholic faith.

Nicole Havrilla, president and founder of WholeLife Authentic Care, expressed excitement that "for the first time, WholeLife is able to offer

full-time family practice." Living up to their name, WholeLife now "serves the entire community for their whole life — from birth to well into adulthood," Havrilla said.

"People are having their babies with us on the OBGYN side of the practice, getting to meet Dr. Collins, and then choosing to bring their babies to us for well visits," she added.

Dr. Collins described WholeLife's approach to health care as "restorative" and "grounded in respect for all life, recognizing that we are all made in the image and likeness of God."

— Kiki Hayden



NTC/Matthew Redden



Read the full versions of these articles at NorthTexasCatholic.org.

Nothing comparable



The Elect move towards full communion with the Church



Bishop Michael Olson greets candidates in Wichita Falls on Feb. 11. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

WICHITA FALLS — Catechumens and candidates from the Northwest Deanery gathered with Bishop Michael Olson at Our Lady Queen of Peace in Wichita Falls Feb. 11 for the Rite of Election and Continuing Conversion, entering their names into the Book of the Elect and beginning their final phase of conversion.

“The Rite of Election is truly a participation toward full communion in the Catholic Church,” said Father Jonathan Demma, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Wichita Falls. “When I see our catechumens and candidates signing their names to the Book of the Elect, I think about how all of the individual parishes will be coming together to present their candidates as one body in Christ. For them, it will be a firsthand realization of how we truly live our faith in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.”

Lydia Root, a Midwestern State University student, fell in love with Adoration and the Eucharist after encountering her best friend’s Catholicism.

“There’s nothing comparable,” she said. “Going to Mass for the first time was scary because it’s overwhelming. You feel Jesus, and it’s almost too much. But this is it. I’m so excited to enter the Church. I cried the whole Mass today. I’m never going back — it’s just so good.”

— Lisa Moore

Benefiting vocations



Generosity of Wichita Falls community continues for 33 years

WICHITA FALLS — More than 250 people gathered at the Knights of Columbus Council No. 1473 Hall in Wichita Falls on Feb. 17 for the 33rd Annual Father Donlon Vocations Dinner.

This year, the dinner was dedicated to its three most generous organizers and contributors, all of whom died in 2023 — Mike Brown, Tom Ruddy, and Dan Shine.

This event, combined with the Harvest Moon dinner in the fall, is sponsored by the Knights of Columbus Council No. 1473. The council has raised more than \$3.5 million for vocations over the past 33 years.

A past Grand Knight of Council 1473, Tom Grant described Mike Brown as the kind of person who did the work but didn’t want the credit. Brown was the biggest organizer of the event from the beginning, Grant said.

“Luckily, we Knights had a pretty sweet gig



From left, Father Jonathan Demma, Father Joseph Moreno, Father Michael Moloney, and Father Brett Metzler at the vocations dinner Feb. 17 in Wichita Falls. (NTC/Harry Tonemah)

with him. We would show up when he needed us to, but the rest [of the effort] was his,” Knight Tony Smith said.

Family members of Ruddy and Shine helped plan and complete this year’s event.

“This support is absolutely essential,” said Father Brett Metzler, diocesan vocations director. “It is particularly a gift to the Kingdom of God.”

— Jenara Kocks Burgess



Transitional Diaconate Ordination



ISAAC JOSEPH MCCRACKEN

*Tuesday, March 19, 2024, 6:00 P.M.
St. Maria Goretti Catholic Church
1200 S. Davis Drive, Arlington, Texas*

ASSIGNMENTS

BY MOST REV. MICHAEL OLSON

REV. JAMES AMASI, SAC

Previously Parochial Vicar of St. Brendan Parish in Stephenville, has been appointed **Parochial Vicar** of St. Stephen Parish in Weatherford, effective Jan. 15.

REV. CLAUDIUS STEPHEN MNDOLWA, SAC

Previously Parochial Vicar of St. Martin de Porres Parish in Prosper, has been appointed **Parochial Vicar** of St. Brendan Parish in Stephenville; St. Mary Parish in Dublin; Sacred Heart Parish in Comanche; and Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in De Leon, effective Jan. 15.

REV. JOHN PAUL POLISHETTI, SAC

Previously Parochial Vicar of St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington, has been **recalled** by his religious order, effective Jan. 17.

VERY REV. KYLE WALTERSCHEID

Has been appointed **Vicar Forane** of the Northwest Deanery, without prejudice to his current assignment as Pastor of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Wichita Falls, effective Aug. 9, 2023.

DEACON TERRY TIMMONS

Has been appointed deacon of **Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish** in Penelope, without prejudice to his current assignment at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Abbott, effective Jan. 24.

SISTER INES MATIDE DIAZ MENESES, SSMN

Has been appointed to **Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry** at St. Jude Parish in Mansfield, effective Jan. 24.

IN MEMORIAM

Sister Angela of the Cross, OCD, born Dolores Amelia Emenhiser, died Dec. 20, 2023, at the Carmelite monastery in Arlington.

Born Jan. 13, 1932, in Vinita, Okla., she attended Sacred Heart Academy. She joined the Discalced Carmelite Order in 1950.



Sister Angela of the Cross, OCD

Sister Stephanie Schroeder, OSB, a native of Windthorst, died Dec. 7, 2023, at St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Born Sept. 25, 1932, she entered the order in 1951.



Sister Stephanie Schroeder, OSB



Marie Barks, a choir member from Our Mother of Mercy Parish in Fort Worth, prays during the 38th annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diocesan Memorial Mass on Jan. 20 at Good Shepherd Parish. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

An Entreaty for Equality

By Brenda Raney

On Saturday, Jan. 20, congregants slowly entered the sanctuary for 5 p.m. Mass at Good Shepherd Church in Colleyville.

This was more than just a Saturday Vigil Mass — this was the Mass of Peace and Justice to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This was a labor of love that volunteers from parishes throughout the diocese have organized for 38 years. Good Shepherd hosted this year’s Mass, but it rotates to other parishes annually.

Committee Chair Marian Sims said the Peace and Justice Mass “helps expose others to what the African American culture has to offer. And it is a reminder of what Dr. King stood for ... his message that all people should be treated equally and fairly. It is a message that is still good today.”

The tribute included a diocese-wide student essay contest and a reception after Mass so parishioners could meet

and socialize with church members and guests. Essay contest winners were also recognized at the reception.

Bishop Michael Olson, who was the celebrant, invited the Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski, Archbishop of St. Louis, as the guest homilist. The archbishop’s homily recalled similarities between the prophets in the Bible and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“Like the prophets of old, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did not accept a failed status quo. Inspired by the Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus, King, from the depths of his being, was able to draw from a reservoir of strength that impelled him to preach, inspire, and enliven people of all races and creeds to name racism for what it is — a sin against God in the dignity of each of His created sons and daughters.”

It was a memorable Mass for many who attended. Congregants walked out of the church speaking of feeling “uplifted” and “inspired,” and enjoying the

“freshness” of the music.

The Mass was the culmination of a lot of hard work. The St. Anne Altar Society members from Our Mother of Mercy Parish in Fort Worth decorated the sanctuary; a framed picture of King stood next to the altar; the choir had kente cloth shawls on their black robes; and members of the Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver, a traditionally African American service organization, were present and served as readers and members of the choir.

However, one person who wasn’t on the committee worked just as hard to prepare for the day. Sitting quietly in her white dress and veil, just steps from the altar, Sofia Boettcher sat with her family until it was time for her to make her first holy Communion.

Her mother, Staci, was delighted at this unique Mass experience. “I thought this was great,” she said. “This is a memory Sofia will carry with her for the rest of her life.” 🇺🇸

An honor from the VATICAN

Pope Francis bestows Benemerenti Medals for exceptional service on 15 diocesan laypersons

By Susan Moses

On behalf of Pope Francis, Bishop Michael Olson bestowed the Benemerenti Medal on 15 Catholic faithful who have provided exceptional service to the Diocese of Fort Worth at a Mass Feb. 10 at St. Patrick Cathedral.

Bishop Olson stated the honorees “have witnessed and served as His disciples, bringing about the good news of Christ through their lives and service to others, because of the grace of their baptism.”

The honorees represent many avenues of service — in education, health care, government, law, caring for the poor, the unborn, and their parents — and Bishop Olson added, “Many people throughout the Diocese of Fort Worth and beyond would qualify for this, but those who are honored today are representative, in a sense, of so many others who are faithful as well to their vocation as members of the laity to spread the good news.”

THE 15 HONOREES ARE:

Michael Brown of Wichita Falls. A Knight of Columbus for over 40 years, he initiated and oversaw the annual Father Donlon Vocations Dinner, which has raised more than \$3.5 million to help fund the

formation of priests. The medal for Brown, who died July 21, 2023, has been given posthumously to his family.

Joyce Brown Thomas of Fort Worth. At Our Mother of Mercy Parish, she has served as a sacristan, extraordinary minister of holy Communion, reader, and officer of the St. Anne’s Altar Society. She is a core member of the diocesan Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Annual Memorial Mass and has provided local, state, and national leadership within the National Conference of Catholic Women.

John Crumley of Fort Worth. An attorney, he has assisted the bishop in developing new policies regarding safe environment for minors, just employment practices, and new norms and practices for ethical conduct of the clergy and lay employees. The parishioner at St. Patrick Cathedral has served as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion and a reader. He is also active with the Knights of Columbus, the Serra Club, and the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

Nancy Eder of Fort Worth. For more than 25 years, this nurse has committed to giving ongoing medical care for priests and seminarians and helped create and implement COVID-19 protocols throughout



Deacon Tacho Perez smiles as he and Bishop Michael Olson exchange the sign of peace during Mass on Feb. 11 at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Wichita Falls. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

the diocese. A Holy Family parishioner, she served as the school nurse consultant for the diocese for more than two decades.

Jim Goldsworthy of Gainesville. He was honored for years of generous stewardship of St. Mary Parish and School on leadership councils, as basketball coach, and as a fundraiser. He served the city of Gainesville for 16 years as vice mayor and mayor, providing courageous leadership in replacing a monument to the Confederacy with one dedicated to civic unity and patriotism.

LaDorne Hart of Keller. A parishioner of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, she provided unwavering support to her husband, Monsignor E. James Hart, through his conversion and appointment as diocesan chancellor and moderator of the

curia. By facilitating his work as a priest and leader, her joyful sacrifices allowed his ministry to bear an abundance of fruit in the life of the Church within the diocese.

Deacon James Novak of Seymour. Since his ordination in 1995, he has served as a permanent deacon at Seymour's Sacred Heart Parish and St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Megargel. Responsibilities include formation of diocesan seminarians, enculturation of several foreign priests, and collaboration with other local Protestant communities in the Seymour area to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of indigent and itinerant poor.

Rilda Novak of Seymour. At Sacred Heart Parish, she has served in

Continued on Page 14



Benemerenti Medals (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Benemerenti Medal recipient Tessy Ross is congratulated by Bishop Michael Olson during Mass on Feb. 10 at St. Patrick Cathedral. Thirteen of the 15 honorees received their medals during the special liturgy celebrated by Bishop Olson and attended by several of their family members and guests. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

From Page 13

ministry for the bereaved, mentored young couples preparing for the sacrament of matrimony, prepared and repaired vestments, and served as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion. A nurse, she served on the board of directors for the local hospital for more than 20 years.

Pat Pelletier of Arlington. The St. Patrick parishioner, in addition to her committed life as a wife of a disabled veteran and mother of five children, has dedicated herself to pro-life ministry. She and her late husband, Chuck, founded a crisis pregnancy center in 1984 that has saved the lives of over 10,000 babies throughout its history. Assisting women in crisis pregnancies is work

she continues to do with her son James Pelletier.

Deacon Tacho Perez of Wichita Falls. At 93 years old, he still serves the Hispanic population in Wichita Falls, including newly arrived immigrants as well as longtime citizens. At Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, the permanent deacon assists at Mass, consoles the bereaved, conducts funerals, visits the sick, and brings the homebound holy Communion.

Bill Quinn of Arlington. An active parishioner at Most Blessed Sacrament, the accountant serves as a valuable advisor to the diocese, Catholic Charities Fort Worth, and the Advancement Foundation of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth by recommending

MORE
PHOTOS



See all honorees' photos by scanning the QR code or visiting NorthTexasCatholic.smugmug.com/Benemerenti-Award-Ceremony.

investments, screening companies, and avoiding investment with companies who do not align with Catholic teaching.

Doreen Quinn of Arlington. A teacher by training, she and her husband, Bill, have been strong advocates and supporters of Catholic education. They were founding members of the Fort Worth chapter of Legatus. A parishioner of Most Blessed Sacrament, she has provided invaluable assistance to couples in their preparation for the sacrament of matrimony and served as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion.

Bill Ross of Fort Worth. The St. Andrew parishioner has promoted vocations as a member of the Serra Club and by organizing the annual diocesan Vocation Awareness Program, which assists young men and women in discerning a vocation to priesthood or religious life. He is an active member in the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre and has assisted in the planning and organization of regional conferences of the Order.

Tessy Ross of Fort Worth. She has fostered Catholic education as a St. Andrew Catholic School junior high school teacher and in the diocesan Catholic Schools Office. She holds active membership in the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre and has planned and organized regional conferences of the Order and large diocesan celebrations, such as the ordination and installation of two bishops and the celebration of the diocese's 40th and 50th anniversaries.

Sandra Townsend of Fort Worth. For 43 years, the St. Andrew parishioner has demonstrated joyful service and dedication to the faith in teaching pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students at St. Andrew Catholic School, as well as

A Gift That Pays You Income



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How it works

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building community among teachers and staff.

In addition to the medal, recipients received a framed certificate of commendation from the Holy See, written in Latin.

The award dates to the late 1700s, when Pope Pius VI bestowed it on papal soldiers. In 1925, Pope Pius XI expanded the granting of the medal to include individuals in civil, military, laity, and clergy positions as a recognition

of exceptional service to the Catholic Church.

In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI honored 10 individuals in the Diocese of Fort Worth with the Benemerenti Medal.

Bishop Olson stated, "The Benemerenti Medal unites us more closely with the communion of the whole Catholic Church. ... They are given out with due reflection and significance. I'm very grateful we have this many people who we honor and have been judged worthy to receive this honor of the Holy See." 🇺🇸



THEY TEACH WHERE THEY were taught

Three teachers follow their path back to where it began
at Gainesville's St. Mary Catholic School

By Brenda Raney
Photos by Juan Guajardo

It has been said home is where the heart is, and for Rae Ann Gerken, Jacqueline Jones, and Christin Snider, “home” is how they describe St. Mary Catholic School in Gainesville.

Each walked a distinct path to their teaching jobs at St. Mary, but their first steps along that path were as students in the classrooms where they now educate a new generation.

Not surprisingly, similarities abound. All have familial connections to the school. Each values her role in giving students a faith-based education. They all believe they were academically and spiritually prepared

for life after St. Mary, and as moms, they chose the school for their children.

As Gerken pointed out, “It says something about the caliber of education when you are willing to come back and put your children in the same school.”

For Gerken, who for the last 10 years has taught junior high math and science, the path to teaching at St. Mary took a more circuitous route than her colleagues.

She graduated from Gainesville High School and went on to study chemistry at Texas A&M University. She wasn't sure she wanted to teach but received a minor in education to give herself options. As it turned out, education became her first job, and she taught chemistry at high schools in Conroe and Georgetown.

She also married and had three daughters. Being a mom was her dedicated and chosen career while the girls were small.

In 2004, when her husband accepted a coaching job, she restarted her chemistry teaching career at Gainesville High School: the beginning of a full-circle twist that ultimately led to an offer to teach at St. Mary.

According to Gerken, “I didn't realize how fulfilling it would be to teach at the elementary school where I attended. It was God's way of bringing me back home ... to my roots and to my family.”

Her dad, brother, and daughters who are now adults all graduated from St. Mary.

Family ties were also the lure for Jones to teach at St. Mary. Her paternal

◀ (L-R) Rae Ann Gerken, Principal Kim Otto, Jacqueline Jones, and Christin Snider pose for a photo at St. Mary Catholic School in Gainesville Jan. 22.

grandparents, father, and brother attended the school, and she currently has two sons at St. Mary, with a daughter on the horizon for next year.

St. Mary was always part of Jones' life plan. "I even told my parents when I went into education that I was meant to be where I can teach about God and my faith," she reflected.

She never wavered from that vision. There were no openings for teachers at St. Mary when Jones graduated from the University of North Texas, so she worked in the area as a substitute teacher until there was an opportunity to apply for a full-time job at St. Mary. She was hired in 2009.

Jones views her role as a kindergarten teacher as a calling, emphasizing how she loves "teaching my students how to read and about religion. And carrying those lessons on religion throughout the day."

She doesn't shy away from sharing with her students her experiences when she was a St. Mary student. In fact, Jones created a picture book that lets the youngsters see her as a student in the school. She also points out some of the changes that have been made in the years since she and many of their parents walked the halls of the school.

"A lot of the students I have taught over the years have parents who went to school here with me," she said.

This sense of community and continuity led to her decision to enroll her children in St. Mary.

"I love this school. It has been my home since I was a little girl," Jones shared.

Like her colleagues, Snider's role as a teacher at St. Mary comes with family ties.

"St. Mary has always been special to my family. My granddad was in the last high school graduating

class [after which, St. Mary offered education through eighth grade.] He sent his kids here and almost all of his grandkids attended school here," she said. "It is my home, my comfort zone. When I went to college to become a teacher, this was the only place I imagined teaching."

After graduation, Snider waited a year for an opening at St. Mary. In that year, Snider had her first son, so the career break gave her a chance to stay at home with him. She started teaching at St. Mary in 2017 and today has two sons in the school along with five nieces and nephews.

She is passionate about maintaining the school's standards as a teacher.

"When I was a student here, I felt like there were always high expectations. It is still that way. We expect a lot from our students, and we try to push them to be the best they can be and to help them get to that level."

About her choice to teach at St. Mary, she said, "I always knew I wanted to give back to the community that gave me so much as a kid, and I really wanted to raise my children here so they would be raised with those same values."

Gerken, Jones, and Snider are part of a team of teachers that Principal Kim Otto depends on to educate the 146 students at St. Mary.

An experienced educator, Otto accepted the position five years ago with a focus in balancing the school's beloved traditions with innovative ideas to help the school flourish in preparing students for the future.

Her staff's loyalty to the school, established in 1891, keeps Otto undaunted and confident in her team.

"We work like a family here," she said. "And we are all committed to doing what's best for our students." 🇺🇸



Kindergarten teacher Jacqueline Jones leads an activity for her students.



Second grade teacher Christin Snider leads a lesson.



Junior high math and science teacher Rae Ann Gerken helps a student during a lesson on genetics.

Schooled in SUCCESS

Cristo Rey alumna says Catholic high school magnified her passion and purpose

By Sandra Engelland

For Rennata Sandoval, the road from a small town in Jalisco, Mexico, to Boston College was paved by Cristo Rey Fort Worth High School.

Sandoval and her family moved from Mexico to California in 2019, where her freshman year in public high school, was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the Sandovals moved to Fort Worth the following year, they learned about Cristo Rey High School from Sandoval's cousin, who had applied.

After Sandoval was admitted among a handful of sophomores, she found her teachers were "way more attentive" than those in her previous school. "Even though it was virtual, it was a great experience," Sandoval said.

She soon started the work portion of Cristo Rey's unique work-study model at the Fort Worth Botanic Garden in customer service.

At school, she learned the value of using a planner to keep track of daily homework and going to office hours whenever she needed help, two habits that would prove exceptionally fruitful in college.

Her senior year working at GM Financial inspired her to look at a

potential career in marketing or human resources.

"It builds confidence that you can do this job and helps you know what you might want to do in life," Sandoval said.

THE COLLEGE DECISION

Meanwhile, she was unsure about where she wanted to go to college. As a first-generation college student, she didn't know what kind of university she wanted to attend and knew she would need financial help.

She applied to QuestBridge, a program that matches high-achieving students from low-income families with colleges that provide scholarships and financial aid.

Sandoval's top pick was Boston College due to Cristo Rey teacher Chris Rauchet, who graduated from the university in 2022 and taught Sandoval's AP chemistry class.

She was thrilled when she matched with Boston College, a liberal arts Jesuit school with an enrollment of about 9,500, but she was also nervous about going a long way from home and her familiar community.

Her Cristo Rey teachers and other mentors told her, "You're going to find your own group," and it came true.

She found friends with whom she can

explore the region and loves the historic area, the ocean, and all there is to do.

Sandoval is currently majoring in English and is interested in going back to GM Financial to work in marketing, HR, or for a nonprofit.

Whatever she does, she wants to return to Cristo Rey regularly and encourage younger students. "I just want to give back to my community," she said.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Chemistry teacher Rauchet said that Cristo Rey sets students up for success.

"Cristo Rey has a rigorous college prep program and a unique work program that exposes students to professional work life," he said. "We have a very significant structure in place to promote the success of our students."

Sandoval's story is emblematic of the Cristo Rey experience, said Dani Ray Barton, Cristo Rey's interim president.

This year, the school has 230 students, but plans are in place to grow the student body to 375-400 students, Barton said.

Cristo Rey Fort Worth opened in 2018, graduating its first seniors in 2022.

Part of a 38-school network that gives students of limited economic means the opportunity for a Catholic college prep education, Cristo Rey offers an innovative

work-study program.

While most schools start with interested community members who initiate a feasibility study, the Fort Worth campus started when Bishop Michael Olson contacted the Chicago headquarters because he believed it would benefit the community.

Barton came on board after the initial contact to help with the feasibility study.

When the school opened, it was housed in the former Our Mother of Mercy School building in the Terrell Heights neighborhood. In 2019, it moved into its current campus in south Fort Worth.

The school started with about 20 corporate-work program partners and now has 70, with plans to add another 15 to 20 partners next year.

Partners include businesses like Alcon and Bank of America, health care organizations like Texas Health Resources and Cook Children's, and nonprofits like Meals on Wheels of Tarrant County and several schools in the Fort Worth diocese.

Companies get involved because they want to help students, Barton said, but they soon see real benefits as they develop "a future talent pipeline."

Partners pay the school for work performed by students and the funds go towards students' tuition. This year's students will earn \$2 million to help pay for their Cristo Rey education, Barton said.

Each student spends five days a month (one day a week plus one Friday a month) working at the same business for the entire school year.

DEVELOPING GRIT

Barton said Cristo Rey students live by the school's core values: GRIT, which stands for Grace, Responsibility, Integrity, and Tenacity.

Students are expected to arrive at school early and stay late on days they go to work and to manage their homework, work schedule, and extracurricular activities.



Cristo Rey Fort Worth alum Rennata Sandoval, who now attends Boston College, visits with her former Cristo Rey teacher Chris Rauchet, who is a Boston College alum, on Jan. 8 at the school in Fort Worth. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

Planners help students learn to manage their time.

"It's one of our first gifts to our students," Barton said. "We can't expect students to know how to do something if they don't put it into practice."

The school is not just focused on getting students into college; they want to help their students get through college.

"We're making an eight-year commitment to our students," she said.

They recently established a college

support team to assist recent graduates like Sandoval because 97 percent of their students are the first in their family to attend college.

Students are encouraged to come back during breaks and meet with faculty.

Sandoval said, "There are people here who want to help you."

Leaving school with multiple internships helps Cristo Rey students stand out, she said, and Catholic education "gives you a bigger passion and purpose." ✨

PINT-SIZED ashes

The sacrifice of Ash Wednesday and Lent
through the eyes of a child

By Michelle McDaniel

The mysteries and meaning of Lent can be challenging to comprehend for even the most pious adult. For young children learning about this important Catholic season, teachers must adopt a thoughtful and intentional approach to conveying these concepts in age-appropriate ways.

In Mary Pilkington's pre-K through first-grade classrooms at St. Martin de Porres Catholic School in Prosper, she begins her Ash Wednesday lessons at least a week before the day so that by the time it arrives, the children are aware of what is happening and more engaged.

Explaining advanced topics, such as the death and rising of Christ and the meaning of His sacrifices, holds both challenges and opportunities for a teacher. Every new grade level results in a jump in understanding, and meeting each child where they are requires patience and repetition.

One child told Pilkington he was afraid of the ashes, motioning to his forehead. After asking him why, she realized his only conception of ashes was from a fire, and he thought it would burn him. Similarly, many children have unexpected preconceived notions she must identify and address before she can adequately explain this liturgical season.

With these younger ages, she explains mainly through visuals and stories.

"The youngest ones are best at explaining orally," she explained. "That's how I know they understand it. I can ask them what the color of Lent is. The first graders can draw pictures, label, and share their thoughts with a partner or the class."

She also involves their parents to help the children determine what would be good to give up or do for Lent. While many of the children initially make the classic joke that they'll give up broccoli or something similar, they discuss the meaning of sacrifice together, and each chooses something meaningful to them.

As a class, they attend weekly Thursday Mass and participate in Stations of the Cross and the Rosary, which Pilkington explains beforehand.

According to Pilkington, children have an easier time grasping some of the concepts taught in her class than adults do.

"The kids just accept everything as you tell them," Pilkington said. "When you tell them God loves them, they believe it. When you tell an adult

that, they have trouble. The little ones are so excited about new things. Sometimes, adults forget the wonder. The kids are so excited about all the brand-new things."

Teaching one grade level older, Debbie Heid works as a second-grade religion teacher at St. Joseph Catholic School in Arlington.

She also strives to reinforce the ideas behind Ash

MORE
PHOTOS



See all Ash Wednesday photos by scanning the QR code or visiting NorthTexasCatholic.smugmug.com/Ash-Wednesday-at-St-Joseph-Parish.



Students from St. Joseph Catholic School pray during Ash Wednesday Mass on Feb. 14 at St. Joseph Parish in Arlington. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Wednesday and Lent through repetition. Every day, her classroom participates in one Lent-focused activity and a nightly homework assignment.

This is the age that her students will receive the sacraments of reconciliation and holy Communion, so she believes they start to grasp more and understand the gravity of Jesus' sacrifices a bit better. It's also exciting for them to receive the ashes in the line at Mass, just like they know they'll soon receive the Eucharist.

Like Pilkington, Heid works to create visual reminders of the season. She decorates the classroom in purple and puts out a crown of thorns made from toothpicks. Each time the students do a good deed, they get to remove one "thorn" from the crown to show how their actions help Christ. Weekly Mass and Adoration also reinforce the messages she teaches in the classroom.

"I try to stress that Lent is about change. It is not a temporary thing that we do; it is something that we are going to try to continue," she said. "If you've done your Lent right, you come out closer to God. I see some of these kids really come out of Lent as better people, and that is my reward — that I see that they are really concentrating, working,

and trying to do their best."

One thing she's found especially helpful with this age group is showing them actual photos of the locations found in the biblical stories she tells. These photos show them Jesus was, in fact, a real person who indeed suffered — not simply a storybook character.

Heid feels this age group takes the lessons exceptionally well. She leads the students through guided meditations throughout Lent, through which many students begin to feel closer to God.

"That's the beauty of second graders — they want to know God," she said. "They really, really do. I believe that all of these little things we do in the classroom help them start to feel closer to God."

For Heid and Pilkington, the lessons they teach extend beyond the season of Lent. They hope students will take



Kyra Otaro fixes Jesus' crown of thorns in Debbie Heid's second-grade classroom at St. Joseph Catholic School in Arlington on Feb. 14. The crown model is used throughout Lent by her students, who get to remove a thorn (represented by toothpicks) for each good deed they do during the liturgical season. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

the skills and experiences taught in the classroom through prayer and continue to share Christ's light even after Easter.

"They're impressionable at this age, and they just get it. They're bringing themselves closer to God. They remind me how special this is and how beautiful the faith is," Heid said. 🌟

Above and Beyond

New superintendent Dr. Melissa Kasmeier challenges schools to build lifelong disciples



Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Dr. Melissa Kasmeier, Ed.D. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

By Susan Moses

Melissa Kasmeier, Ed.D., has plans beyond the accomplishments of her 12 years' experience in Catholic education, and she wants the students enrolled in the 17 diocesan Catholic schools to plan beyond also.

Beyond today. Beyond themselves. Beyond this life.

Kasmeier views Catholic education from a kaleidoscope of perspectives: a parent of Catholic school students, a principal, assistant superintendent, and chief operating officer. Now she's added another angle — she was recently promoted to superintendent of diocesan Catholic schools.

"It's helpful," she said, describing being able to view the school system as a parent, educator, and administrator. "I've been grateful to look at the larger picture and see the different pieces of [Catholic education] and how it all works together to achieve the outcome and the goal we're looking for."

The goal goes well beyond graduation. "Excellent academics are a given," she explained, "but being able to help form disciples of Christ" is the outcome she measures.

She explained, "We want to help them see the world through the lens of the Catholic

worldview, help them live their life by the Gospel values, and think beyond themselves. How do we help form them so they're responding to God's call in this life and beyond?"

Kasmeier came to St. Andrew Catholic School as assistant principal in 2012 after working in the public school system for 17 years as a teacher and principal.

Seven years ago, Kasmeier began working in diocesan school administration, frequently serving dual roles (this school year she's also interim principal of Holy Family Catholic School) and earning a doctorate from Texas Wesleyan University along the way.

As a school administrator, she has worked with faculty, families, and diocesan leadership to improve services to students with learning differences, to provide direction in opening the schools safely during the COVID-19 pandemic, to increase faculty training and development, and to coordinate a strong traditional Catholic curriculum across the schools.

Bishop Michael Olson praised

Kasmeier for her management, saying, "Melissa is an excellent listener. She is faithful, attentive, and compassionate. She is also decisive in leadership among the principals and faculty. She also never forgets her parental perspective as a Catholic mother who has seen the benefits of Catholic education in her own family."

Moving forward, Kasmeier intends to continue to develop partnerships between the schools and the families, parishes, and pastors who support the students. Developing virtuous, faithful people requires everyone, the top administrator said.

Other objectives include increasing the number of lives impacted by education by increasing tuition assistance so more families will have access to a Catholic education.

She said, "We want to be able to affect and impact as many as we can to build up God's Kingdom here, which is how we affect change in the world. The only way to do that is to get more kids in. That helps us, hopefully, have more vocations to the religious life and to help with the formation of our children to be who God's called them to be." 🇺🇸



Amy Snyder (center, front row, in black) with her Refugee School Impact Program staff at Catholic Charities Fort Worth on Jan. 31. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Bridging the Gap

By Mary Lou Seewoester

When teachers and staff at Cesar Chavez Elementary School in Fort Worth welcomed 32 refugees last September, they also welcomed Catholic Charities Fort Worth’s Refugee Student Impact Program.

“We were new to working with refugees,” Principal Monica Ordaz said. “We didn’t know what their needs were.”

She said the program not only helped teachers understand the unique needs of refugees but also assisted with the crucial work of communicating with students’ families. “I don’t think we could have had a partnership with these families if it weren’t for our partnership with the Refugee Student Impact Program,” she said.

Amy Snyder, refugee education program manager, said the program last year served 305 students at 10 campuses in Tarrant County and is on track to exceed that number in 2024. The program’s staff of 12 focuses on tutoring, counseling, and crisis intervention to help refugee children succeed in school.

“Most of our students are either

unschooled or have interrupted formal education,” Snyder explained. “[They’re] unable to read in their own language and have had little exposure to books or classroom supplies.”

So CCFW tutors and classroom teachers take on the double duty of teaching both English and literacy skills. In 2023 they helped 236 students learn to read and speak English, Snyder said.

Ordaz noted that today, all refugee kindergartners on her campus are reading, and students in other grade levels are growing as well. “Sometimes the growth is so fast that they are right on par with the other students,” she added.

The Refugee Student Impact Program also provides individual and group therapy for students struggling with the effects of trauma. Counselors supported 51 children last year with the help of specially trained translators.

“We can’t even imagine as Americans what they have gone through,” Snyder said. “Every single one of these children has experienced trauma in one way or another, whether they experienced violence themselves or witnessed it.”

Additionally, crisis intervention helped 102 students in 2023 with issues such as transportation, attendance, behavior, and peer problems including bullying, explained refugee education supervisor Miranda New. She said refugees can become targets because their culture, language, dress, and food preferences are different.

Despite the challenges, New said the students are “powerfully hopeful and determined. With just a little from us they thrive ... and they’ll make huge contributions to our country and our society.”

The Refugee Student Impact Program also helps parents understand and negotiate the American public school system and serves as a continuing resource for classroom teachers.

“As a school community our eyes have been opened to possibilities,” Ordaz said. “We’ve embraced the challenge of welcoming a new group of students ... and we couldn’t have done it without the Refugee Student Impact Program.” 🇺🇸

Volunteer, contribute to, or learn more about Catholic Charities Fort Worth by visiting catholiccharitiesfortworth.org





Rick and Mary Hutchings pose for a photo together in Sacred Heart Parish in Wichita Falls. (NTC/Bertha Salazar)

ETERNAL VALENTINES

Two couples share how God brought them together

By Jenara Kocks Burgess

Marriage is a symbol of God's love for His people where two come together to love one another in an inseparable bond.

In this tale of two marriages, the couples witnessed God's many blessings in both good and difficult times.

CONVERSION OF HEART

Rick and Mary Hutchings have been members of Sacred Heart Parish in Wichita Falls for 59 years. The couple will celebrate 60 years of marriage this year.

When they met, Mary worked at a local hospital and was a member of the women's city basketball team. Her coach,

a member of the U.S. Air Force, took the team to practice at the Sheppard Air Force Base gym.

"As our team was leaving practice one evening, a carload of airmen followed us when we stopped at a drive-in restaurant," Mary said.

Before long, Mary and Rick met and found themselves in deep conversation. Their relationship took off. "I found out quickly Rick was special," Mary said.

"Mary had a nice family life, which I did not," Rick added. "She was sure what she wanted in a husband and family. I didn't have that growing up but knew that was what I wanted too."

Mary was raised Catholic. Rick said he knew the Church was a big part of her

life, but when they first met, he didn't care much for it.

"Because of her faith, I joined the Catholic Church, which is something I have never regretted. You have to have faith in God to get through [hardships]," he said.

Mary said Rick was baptized on base in February before they married in April. They met with her parish priest in Megargel as well as with the priest at Sheppard Air Force Base for some premarriage counseling.

"It was brief and scary, but helpful," Mary said. "We were only 20 years old."

They were married at Mary's childhood parish, St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Megargel, on April 18, 1964.



Ted and Vicki Neeb embrace in front of St. Mary Parish in Windthorst. (NTC/Bertha Salazar)

TOGETHER IN THE CHURCH

Ted and Vicki Neeb were married on June 8, 1974, at St. Mary Parish in Windthorst where they both attended Mass as they grew up. They continue to attend together today.

Ted said as they dated, he was attracted to Vicki's very kind and caring personality.

"We shared the same life dreams, became best friends, fell in love, and both wanted a family together in the future," Ted said. "She was definitely the soulmate I was praying to meet and became my everything."

Vicki said she was impressed by how kind and loving Ted was. "Family was very important to him and still is to this day. I always noticed him holding his little sister in church and thought, 'What a great big brother he is,'" she said.

The Neebs have four children and 10 grandchildren. Ted attributes putting his love for his wife and his family first as a reason the couple has stayed married for a long time.

"Anytime we went on vacation, we took our children and then grandchildren along," Ted shared.

He advised new parents: "Don't just try to get away from your kids all the time when you are on vacation. Take them with you and make memories. They grow up and leave the nest soon enough."

Vicki said moving to New Mexico for Tim's job just a year into their marriage helped them grow closer as a couple. "During our time there, we just had the two of us and our newborn son, Scott. We became everything to each other — family, partner, best friend, supporter. It really strengthened our marriage," she said.

Vicki also added that support from God, their parents, and families helped them make it through their tough early years.

"Marriage is a sacrament that is just as important as the other sacraments. Loving and caring for your spouse is truly a blessing that will return its favors a hundredfold. Never take each other for granted," Ted said. 🇺🇸

The Hutchings have three children and seven adult grandchildren. Two of their granddaughters are planning weddings this year.

"We tried our best to always attend Mass as a family before the children left home," Mary shared. "It made the life we had structured, and the obligation helped our prayer life. Mass was always important, even on vacations."

She believes it is important to have a strong faith in marriage that you demonstrate in your daily life.

"Your children will go by your example, and keeping the close togetherness, even doing menial tasks, especially in later years, is very important," she advised. "God has blessed us with a love stronger than in the beginning, and our church and faith have played an important role."

Rick recalled, too, that his faith in God played a big role in the 20 years he worked at the Sheppard Air Force Base as a flight line mechanic on the night shift.

"There was a lot of pressure in that job. I prayed for the Lord to get me out," he shared. "He did, and I then went to work for Sacred Heart [Parish] for almost 15 years as their business manager."

Both Mary and Rick agree that they do not think a marriage without God can last.

"Faith and love will get you through [challenges and obstacles] — it isn't always smooth sailing. Learn to care about each other. Put the other first and keep a partnership, giving grace whenever necessary. Listen to each other and show your love every day. And always forgive each other," Mary said. "Jesus gave us a wonderful example."



Blessed Child of God

Celebrating Señor Santo Niño de Cebú within
the diocesan Filipino Catholic community

By Christina Benavides

Radiating warmth, welcome, and a window into a vibrant culture, the growing Filipino community at St. Michael Parish in Bedford hosted a bright feast day celebration for Señor Santo Niño de Cebú on Jan. 20.

The joyful evening began with a long indoor procession through the parish halls. Dancers bedecked in traditional costume led the procession with a lifted altar bearing the image of Santo Niño, and smiling local *Hermana Mayores* (organizers of the local prayer group) followed close behind, leading the Rosary.

Later, as families entered the church, parishioners placed personal statues and images of Santo Niño on a small table before the altar to be blessed during the Mass. Throughout the Mass, a choir, dressed in red, sang hymns in Tagalog.

The Filipino community, which began “like a mustard seed,” is growing at St. Michael where the love for God is motivating the faithful, said parish pastor Father Vijaya Raju Mareedu, SAC.

During the Holy Mass, which he concelebrated with Father Philip Neri Lastimoso, OCist., Fr. Mareedu spoke in his homily of the cultural significance Santo Niño holds for the Filipino community. The devotion, he said, is “particularly dear to the

Filipinos for this is the first image that set foot on Philippine soil and is the concrete historical icon that marks the beginning of Christianity in the Philippines.

“The image of Santo Niño,” Fr. Mareedu continued, “is a clear expression of our belief in the God made man. This devotion is very much in line with the Lord’s exultation in the Gospel, ‘Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.’ (*Mark 10:15*) The image of Santo Niño conveys to us the important lesson of becoming childlike in order to enter God’s kingdom ... God is still calling people in the modern times just as God called people in the biblical times.”

A testament to the power of the celebrated saint, the budding community of Filipino Catholics is flourishing at St. Michael.

June Jovero recalled when she first approached Fr. Mareedu about organizing a group, he told her to “just start; even if you have one or two people there, people will come once you get everything started,” she recalled.

Whereas she initially worried if even one or two would join her in her devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help in weekly prayer, she is now joined by upwards of 60 families who have joined her to pray the Rosary.

“With the support of Fr. Vijaya, and all the priests here at St. Michael’s, we were able to really pull everyone together. And that’s

Gabrielle Lavedan carries the image of Señor Santo Niño. (NTC/Scott Wagner)



An array of Filipino dancers pose at the Señor Santo Niño Feast Day festival held at St. Michael Parish in Bedford on Jan. 20. (NTC/Scott Wagner)

because of our devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help,” Jovero said.

And while the group has seen tremendous growth since its start, Jovero stated that its members have now grown ambitious with its success in bringing together people to foster their faith and nurture their culture.

“We said, ‘Hey, you know what? Let’s make it fun,’” she said. Their focus now is to “continue with our devotion and keep in touch with our culture and bring in the younger generation.”

“We feel like our kids are staying away from the Church, so we want to bring them back,” Jovero continued. “We want them to be in touch with their culture. We want them to see that, and also to remind all the generations, that, hey, we have this. We’re continuing with our devotions from the Philippines to here.”

This is how, along with dentists and doctors, a small group of teenagers became some of the principal dancers of the cheerful Señor Santo Niño Festival

which was held after the Holy Mass.

The partnership, Jovero said, is something the group treasures. “We have the older generation, and we have the younger generation. They all danced in this cultural show.”

Along with their budding dance group is a choir that Jovero hopes will one day sing at a Sunday Mass. Until then, she looks forward to the community’s continued growth. “If we can increase our devotion, and if we can get all Filipinos together, we achieve what we’re here for.”

Outside of Bedford, other Filipino Catholic communities within the diocese are growing. A parishioner of St. Francis of Assisi in Grapevine, Buddy Del Mar, described how he’s helped several prayer groups get started in their devotion in the area.

A prayer group is made up of twelve families, he said, and two families per month hold the responsibility of keeping the image of Señor Santo Niño and organizing the prayer services. “Then,

the following month,” Del Mar said, “the image will go to another family’s place where they’ll hold the novena.”

The groups continued to grow so big that more and more have formed, Del Mar said. Families “join us in our prayer group, and then they said, ‘We would like to have another group,’ and I said, ‘Okay, if you can gather three or four families that will accept the image [of Santo Niño], I will go home to the Philippines and then I’ll bring the image back here.’”

Now, he’s in touch with more than twenty prayer groups in the area. What keeps them growing, he said, are the miracles and stories of God’s works in their lives.

“It’s a miracle. That’s Jesus. That’s God,” Del Mar said. “He can do things that we wouldn’t know. He does it mysteriously, and it’s just like, me also, it happens to me, but it’s like, whether you believe it or not, there are so many people that are being touched by [the presence of Christ].” 🇵🇭



An extraordinary minister of holy Communion blesses a child at the Igbo Mass on Jan. 28 at St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Together at last

Monthly Igbo Masses bring joy to Nigerian community

By Christina Benavides

In an intimate setting at St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington, the local Igbo community celebrated Mass in their native language on Jan. 28.

The Igbo language is commonly spoken in southeast Nigeria as well as in parts of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea.

The Mass, which began back in November, is held at 3 p.m. on the last Saturday of every month at St. Maria Goretti and features a dedicated community and a choir.

Father Samuel Maul, pastor of St. Maria Goretti, described the beauty of seeing a community of “people who are not only bound together by ethnicity, nationality, or language, but by Christ,

to come together to celebrate our redemption.”

The choir, he added, works very hard and is committed to regular practice.

“Their singing is extremely beautiful and reverent. They make an effort to not only gather around the altar but to gather after Mass for fellowship, which is something to be admired, and, I believe, duplicated,” Fr. Maul said.

Father Willie Onuh, a retired priest living in the diocese, is the principal celebrant of the Igbo Mass.

In his homily, Fr. Onuh descended from the pulpit to walk the aisles of the church and speak directly to the flock. He mentioned only three phrases in English throughout the duration of the Mass: “Spoke from the heart,” “conviction,” and “Catholic — the center of life.”

Sir George Ezigbo, whom Fr. Maul credited as being “instrumental in the starting of this Mass,” explained his gratitude for Fr. Onuh’s wonderful homily to the *North Texas Catholic*.

“It reminded us to have a stronger faith in our family where the father, the mother are staying together and bringing children up in the fear of the Lord,” Sir Ezigbo said.

He explained that one of the greatest benefits of having the Mass entirely celebrated in Igbo was that it allowed his elders who do not understand English, and those of many other families, to understand the Word of God.

“When they go to English Mass, they don’t hear anything of what is going on,” Sir Ezigbo said. “But now, you see our old parents who are with us, living with



The choir at the Igbo Nigerian Mass sings during the Mass on Jan. 28 at St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

us here. They are so happy, and they're enjoying it, and they can hear the priest, the sermons, the liturgy — everything."

Providing his family with the opportunity to listen to the homily in their native language is incredible, he said. His parents have often told him, "When you're in your last 25 years of your life, Mass is more important to you than food."

Treasured, too, is the opportunity to share the joy in their language and culture with their children. Now, the younger generations "are able to learn our local language. ... They were born here, so they never asked anybody to speak Igbo. So now that they're coming to this Mass, you see them jumping up and singing; oh, they're trying to learn the language of their parents and grandparents. So the [Mass] is God-sent actually," Sir Ezigbo shared.

He hopes that moving forward, the community may see their plans for a

weekly Mass come to fruition. Until then, he shares his gratitude to Bishop Michael Olson "who granted us the opportunity to do this," and for other Igbo families "to come together and worship our God. ... I would love them to be part of the community. We need to be our brothers' keeper, coming from 7,000 miles away. We need to come together, help ourselves, help our community, build a strong community, and be accountable for it."

Sir Ezigbo stated that the impetus for establishing this Mass was because "we had wanted to continue worshiping our God in our language—that's what we were doing even before we came over here.

"It's been about 200 years since our fathers and great-grandfathers brought us hope as Catholics," he continued. "When we came over to the United States, we were looking for a place where we can celebrate our Mass in our own language."

The Igbo Mass had a record attendance of 300 in November, with a small dip in December and January as many traveled to Nigeria for the holidays.

The Mass is a "wonderful opportunity," Sir Ezigbo said, "for us to come together and catch up with the rest of our brothers in the United States."

Longtime St. Maria Goretti parishioner and usher for the Igbo Mass Paul Enuke commented on the blessing that this Mass holds for the community.

"As a Catholic person, there is an uplifting feeling that comes from hearing Mass in a different language," Enuke observed. More beauty, he said, can be found in the blessing that the Igbo people from the surrounding area enjoy as they see their parents and grandparents attend a Mass they understand at least once a month.

"This Mass is a gift," Enuke said with a bright smile. 🇳🇮

Everybody eats

Taste Community Restaurant's pay-what-you-can-afford model fills stomachs and souls in a hungry world, with the help of volunteers

By Susan Moses

At first glance, Taste Community Restaurant appears like any other trendy restaurant on nearby Magnolia Avenue in Fort Worth; a welcoming staff, inviting atmosphere, delicious food — it's all there.

But something important is missing: the prices on the menu.

And that's not an oversight — it's the reason for the restaurant's existence.

The restaurant, registered as a nonprofit, operates on a "pay what you can afford" model, and about 75% of its patrons receive a free or subsidized meal.

But it's not just any meal. For four years running, Taste Community Project has made Yelp's Top 100 Places to Eat in Texas.

To keep the doors open, the restaurant relies on fundraising, customers who pay extra, and more than 1,000 volunteers known as Taste Buds, who serve customers, assist with food preparation, wash dishes, and even grow herbs and vegetables in the garden behind the restaurant.

Diane Nguyen, a parishioner at Christ the King in Fort Worth, began volunteering in November 2017, a month before the restaurant welcomed its first customer. Her tasks have run the gamut between assembling tables and chairs in preparation for the opening to running the drink station.

Now, she works at least two shifts each week, often at the sink.

"If Jesus can wash feet, I can wash dishes," she said.

A refugee who resettled in the U.S., Nguyen remembers the hardship of economic insecurity. She said, "Fort Worth has helped my family, so I want to give back to help the community."

God's hand has been evident in the restaurant right from the beginning, explained Nguyen. She started volunteering at the restaurant shortly after she was laid off from work. "I stumbled across this, and that's what God wanted me to do, to work for Him."

She soon found accounting work again, but she continues to serve, accumulating more than 2,400 hours. She counts many Taste Buds among her friends.

Working at Taste Community Restaurant "is a great feeling. I just love it because [every] family deserves the respect, the dignity of being served a meal. And that's priceless," Nguyen said.

THE VISION

Founder Jeff Williams said God asked him to start Taste Project.

Soup kitchens, nutrition assistance programs, and food pantries are vital to feeding the hungry, but Williams' dream was to create a place where everyone could eat together.

Williams explained, "That's what

we're called to do. A lot of times people, especially if they're in a situation where they're receiving [social] services on a regular basis, it can be refreshing for them to realize that there's someone who cares, and they're going to be treated exactly the same way as someone else who might be paying for their meal."

His wife and most loyal volunteer, Julie Williams, added, "Knowing that God called us to do this is important. There's plenty of runway for Him to work. ... We get to see not only our faith grow, but the faith of some of our volunteers."

After six years in operation, the restaurant exceeds its original mission.

The kitchen serves more than 1,000 meals each week, prepared with the help of chefs in its culinary job training program, and sometimes using ingredients from the community garden behind the building, located at 1200 S. Main St.

On Mondays, when the restaurant is closed, community agencies offer financial coaching, nutrition counseling, and health assessments. The nonprofit also added a Christian pastor to "embrace more of the ministry side of the calling," said Jeff Williams.

He said, "I would've thought that going into this, that the biggest impact that we would have as an organization would be on the people who came in to eat. After six years, I think the biggest impact that we actually have is in getting people moving — from receiving to giving."



Volunteer Allison Snyder, a Holy Family in Fort Worth parishioner, serves customers at Taste Community Restaurant on Feb. 2. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

“People come here to eat because they need a meal, and they might be coming here two, three times a week, but then they’ll start participating and volunteering and becoming part of giving back,” he continued.

The founder’s next God-given dream will soon be realized: plans are underway for the nonprofit to partner with the City of Arlington to open a second pay-what-you-can restaurant on North Cooper Street.

GRACE FILLED

Like a bee buzzing from flower to flower, Donna Heim, who attends St. Ann Parish in Burleson, flits in nonstop motion between tables, the drink station, and the register on her three-hour volunteer shift.

Heim’s six years at Taste have stretched her, she admitted, especially when serving someone who is “higher than a kite” or significantly malodorous, but “that is so beautiful here because there is no preferential treatment. [God’s] taught me to go beyond where I was comfortable.”

Three years ago, her husband, Rick, began volunteering. A master gardener, he has used his expertise to build the garden beds and serves as lead gardener for the community garden, which serves to feed



Certified master gardener Richard Heim volunteers at Taste Community Restaurant on Feb. 2. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

and to educate locals.

Rick said his eyes have been opened to the “great needs” of a significant portion of the population, pointing out that the restaurant is located in the ZIP code with the lowest life expectancy in Texas.

Donna offers to pray with customers when she can sense fear, grief, or hopelessness.

“There’s so many people just so

hungry for someone to see them and ask and care,” she said.

The retired educator added, “I experience Jesus here every time. I love being able to serve people. I love the people I work with. God is in the midst all the time, every day — even on a hard, crazy day or when we have a difficult customer. There’s always a lot of grace in this place.” 🇺🇸

tradition

WITH A TWIST

The observance of Lent in the Maronite Catholic Church

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

When Father Peter Raad recalls growing up in Beirut, Lebanon, his favorite memories center around faith, family, and the liturgies that prepared him for Easter.

“There were a lot of beautiful processions,” explained the priest who was ordained for the Maronite Catholic Church last May at Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Lewisville. “On Hosanna [Palm] Sunday, we dressed in white — our Sunday best — and every child carried a big candle decorated with ribbons. We would walk with the priests and deacons along the streets and the bells would ring.”

The blessed palms people received were often weaved into wreaths to hang on the front door.

“It marked the start of what we call Great Week [Holy Week], because it’s the greatest week that ever happened,” he added.

The Maronite Church Fr. Raad serves is an Eastern Catholic Church in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. It takes its name from St. Maron, a Syrian hermit who lived in the fourth century. Certain prayers in the Maronite liturgy are said in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus Christ.

Maronites affirm the teachings of Roman Catholicism and recognize the Pope as head of the Church but have their own liturgy, spiritual heritage, and ecclesiastical structure.

Some Lenten practices highlight those differences. For Maronites, the “Entrance into Great Lent” starts on Cana Sunday with the Gospel reading of Jesus turning water into wine at the Wedding Feast at Cana (*John 2:1–11*). The biblical story is a reminder that Lent is a time for transformation and change through prayer, penance, and abstinence.

“In our Maronite spirituality, there is not a disconnect between the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and the Resurrection,” Fr. Raad explained. “It’s Mary who brought Jesus into the world and she takes Him to the wedding to introduce Him to the world again.”

Mary witnesses her son’s first miracle — an event that also foreshadows His passion and death.

“Wine is red like blood,” said the associate pastor at Our Lady of Lebanon. “Right there Jesus predicts His bleeding on the cross and His crucifixion. He shows us what’s ordinary in life will become extraordinary.”

The blessing and distribution of ashes is a Latin or western rite adopted by the Maronites.

“But we observe Ash Monday [following Cana Sunday] instead of Ash Wednesday because there are two feast days we celebrate during Lent — St. Joseph on March 19 and the Annunciation on March 25. On those days we don’t fast,” Raad continued.

Maronites fast and abstain from meat on Ash Monday and Good Friday, and they abstain from meat on all Fridays. Many Maronites will not eat food or drink from midnight until noon except for water and medicine each day during Lent. Until the 1920s when the practice was largely discontinued, they also abstained from oil, wine, eggs, milk, and cheese.

Too many people look at abstaining and fasting during Lent from a “Woe is me, I’m a sinner” mindset, said the priest, a long-time engineering professor at Southern Methodist University. He encourages parishioners to look at Lent as an opportunity for change.

“We’re walking with Jesus, and we want to focus less and less on earthly things and more and more on the spiritual,”

he advised. “As St. Paul would say, we’re moving our gaze from downward to upward — from an earthly to a heavenly perspective.”

In the Maronite lectionary, the Sunday Gospel passages throughout Lent focus on the healing and forgiving powers of Jesus — a reminder that Lent is a time to transform one’s life, just as the water was changed to wine at the Wedding Feast at Cana.

“Increase your prayer life and spirituality by reading the Gospels and other books,” Fr. Raad recommended. “Increase your attention to the amazing work of the Lord God coming into our life and dying for us.”

SEE MORE
PHOTOS!



See the Ash Monday gallery by scanning the QR code or visiting North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.com.



▲ Father Assaad ElBasha reads a blessing as he prepares ash for distribution during an Ash Monday Mass at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church in Lewisville on Feb. 12. (NTC/Ben Torres)

▶ Eliana Yamouni closes her eyes as she receives ash during an Ash Monday Mass at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church on Feb. 12. (NTC/Ben Torres)

Maronites observe Passion Week with intense experiences of sublime music and ritual. On Good Friday, two ceremonies are customary. The first is the “Signing of the Chalice,” also called the “Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified.” It is a celebration of the Divine Liturgy with no Words of Institution because on Good Friday, the only sacrifice is the sacrifice of Christ. During the ceremony, the priest invokes the Holy Spirit to descend upon the chalice placed at the altar and make it the Blood of Christ to be given during the communion with hosts consecrated the night before on

Holy Thursday.

It is followed by a second, dramatic ritual.

“There is a beautiful service of the burial of our Lord where they take a model of the crucified Jesus down off the cross and place Him on a shroud — a large blanket,” Fr. Raad said.

Four men lift the shrouded figure and begin a procession so people can walk under it as a sign of blessing. They also bring red roses to throw on top of the body.

“At the close of the ceremony, the priest lays the figure of Jesus in the replica

of a tomb and uses a cardboard cover, resembling stone, to close it,” he added.

On Easter Sunday the flowers left on the body are taken back to recognize the new life won by Christ’s Resurrection.

Fr. Raad likes to use the Lenten season to remind people God is loving and merciful.

“People sometimes think they’ll never be forgiven,” he said. “But God did not die to convict us. He died to save us and rose to take us home. Ask for His forgiveness. We’re never too sinful and it’s never too late.” 🇺🇸

ONE HOLY

Blessing of oils and priestly vow renewal at
Chrism Mass underscore unity of Catholic Church

By Matthew Smith

Tuesday of Holy Week marks the date of the annual diocesan Chrism Mass, which includes the act of priests within the diocese renewing their vows.

Other dioceses throughout the world will do the same on or near that day.

It's a Mass many Catholics never experience, or in some cases are unaware of, but also one that's essential to the faith and a wonderful underscore of the unity of the Catholic Church.

"I think it's a beautiful way that the Catholic Church extends the reach of the bishops into all the parishes, and people, of their dioceses," said Andrea Woolums, DRE of Argyle's St. Mark Parish. "It exemplifies the bishop's role as shepherd of the diocese in that way."

During the Chrism Mass, Bishop Michael Olson will bless the sacramental oils to be used throughout the diocese in the coming year. The oils, once blessed, will be distributed to the individual parishes.

The blessed oils — oil of the catechumens, oil of the sick, and chrism oil — play an essential role in bestowing grace in sacramental rites. The use of oils for anointing dates to ancient times.

The oil of catechumens is used to anoint those being baptized and lends strength to renounce sin to those being baptized.

The oil of the sick represents Christ's accompaniment to persons sick or dying.

Linked to sanctification, the chrism oil is used for baptism, confirmation, and holy orders to impart an indelible sacramental character. The bishop also pours chrism oil on the altar and walls when dedicating a new church.

In holy orders, the chrism oil is used to consecrate the hands of priests, making them Christ's hands in the world, and to anoint the head of the bishop.

"Three oils for different purposes," said Father Thu Nguyen, diocesan director of Liturgy and Worship. "All three oils are the same, extra virgin olive oil, but for the chrism we add balsam, the fragrance, into that."

MUCH PREPARATION

The Chrism Mass is an endeavor exacting and labor intensive, with much of the preparation falling upon Fr. Nguyen's shoulders.

"When it comes to liturgy and worship, the Chrism Mass is one of the major celebrations of the Church in preparing for the liturgical year," Fr. Nguyen said.



"My role is to prepare the whole liturgy and find liturgical ministers to serve in that Mass."

That's not all.

"The oils involved are not just a few gallons but a whole lot, because we have to distribute them to 92 parishes," Fr. Nguyen said. "So, one of the first responsibilities for me involves preparing the oil stock. I just sent a letter to all the priests to get the oil amount requests for their parish for the year so I know how much oil to buy to be consecrated and blessed during the Chrism Mass."

Boxes and other supplies must be secured as well to ensure the oils are ready for distribution to the individual priests immediately following the Chrism Mass.

"Those are the major things," Fr. Nguyen said. "Also, liturgical ministers have to be found to carry the oils to



Bishop Olson breathes into the sacred chrism to symbolize the Holy Spirit at the Chrism Mass on April 4, 2023, at St. Patrick Cathedral. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

present to [Bishop Olson]. Then music has to be prepared as well as worship aids and programs.”

BEGIN ANEW

Once Bishop Olson consecrates and blesses the new oils, oil left from the previous liturgical year can no longer be used.

Which raises the question of what becomes of the old oil.

“The old oil is not to be destroyed or thrown away,” Fr. Nguyen said. “Parishes usually have oil left over from the previous year. With that, they can burn it during the Easter Vigil fire, which is recommended. Or they can bury it.”

VOWS RENEWED

Following the blessing of the oils, priests in attendance will stand to renew

their ordination vows, thus recommitting themselves to serving God and His people.

“I think that’s so cool,” Woolums said. “That’s something so wonderful and important, but probably something a lot of people don’t know about. I think it’s something more people need to know about and definitely something worth experiencing.”

St. Mark Coordinator of Sacramental Preparation Joy Medley agreed.

“I think so many people aren’t aware that priests renew their vows during the Chrism Mass,” Medley said. “That’s beautiful and, in and of itself, worth seeing. Most of us didn’t get to see our parish priest get ordained so, to see them renew their vows, that would be a gift.”

Woolums and Medley joined Fr. Nguyen in calling the importance of both the blessing of the oils and renewal of

priestly vows as examples, both concrete and symbolic, of the unity of the Church.

“It’s amazing when you think that this is happening not only within our diocese and with our priests but also everywhere else all over the world throughout the Church,” Woolums said.

Although the Chrism Mass is less known, overshadowed perhaps by Holy Week activities, the celebration is important and worth attending, Fr. Nguyen said.

“The Mass tends to be mostly priests, religious, and their family members,” Fr. Nguyen said. “Sometimes high school or confirmation students. But the Mass is open to the public. They’re welcome, and encouraged to take part.”

The Chrism Mass will be held at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, March 26 at St. Patrick Cathedral. 📍



SIGNS OF LIFE

From lambs to lilies, Catholics decorate their churches and homes with symbols of Jesus' Resurrection at Easter

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

What's the first image that comes to mind when someone mentions Easter? For many, it's the popular Easter bunny — especially ones molded in chocolate, wrapped in cellophane, and displayed on a store shelf.

Introduced to America by German immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania in the 1700s, the idea of an Easter Bunny leaving treats and colorful eggs for children started with Eostre, the Teutonic goddess of fertility often pictured cradling a rabbit or hare. It's believed missionaries, evangelizing in Europe, used a rabbit's easy ability to produce new life, along with its emergence from an underground burrow in the spring, to explain the Resurrection and make the transition to Christianity easier for new converts.

Easter is rich in traditions and

symbols rooted in pagan, Jewish, and Christian history. Having evolved over the centuries, religious symbols celebrating Christ's victory over death convey concepts concerning man's relationship to the sacred and divine.

"They're important to our faith because they connect us with something physical — something we've already experienced — to the transcendent," said Chris Vaughan, diocesan director of marriage and family life.

Catholic symbols help deepen faith and shape prayer by bridging the material and spiritual worlds.

"When you look at a crucifix, it's not really Jesus hanging on the cross, but it causes your mind to contemplate His suffering before the Resurrection," he explained. "The Paschal candle reminds us that Christ is the light of the world."

Continued on Page 38



From Page 37

THE LAMB OF GOD

While the commercial celebration of Easter centers around chicks (especially the colorful, marshmallow Peeps), bunnies, and dyeing eggs, the most strongly

Christian symbol of Easter is the lamb.

In the Old Testament account of the Exodus, the Israelites painted doorposts with the blood of an unblemished lamb so the Angel of Death would recognize the sacrifice and “pass over” the home, sparing their firstborn children.

Today, Jews commemorate their Exodus from slavery in Egypt during Passover — one of the most celebrated holidays in Judaism.

The Last Supper for Jesus and His disciples was a Passover Seder

where He used elements

of the meal — unleavened bread and

wine — to foretell

His impending

suffering and death. For

Christians, the Passover is symbolic of Jesus delivering those who trust in Him from the slavery of sin.

“In the Gospel, John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God (*John 1:29*). Why does he do that?” Vaughan asked rhetorically. “Jesus is unblemished, without sin, and He’s sacrificed. The lamb symbolizes Jesus’ death on Good Friday.”

Butter, cakes, and candy, fashioned from lamb molds, fill homes during the Easter season.

Another decor element is the fragrant potted lily, but the addition of the spring-time flower is more than just aesthetic.

“Their blooms are shaped like a trumpet. In the Jewish faith, people are called to worship by blowing the Shofar — a ram’s horn,” Vaughan pointed out. “So the trumpet is a sign of worship and when Christ returns, which is what we anticipate with the Resurrection, the angels will blow trumpets.”

With a nod to Easter’s roots in Passover, lamb is often served at Easter meals, as the main dish or as cake or butter in the shape of a lamb, which symbolizes Jesus’ death on Good Friday.





Bunnies are among the many symbols of new life seen around Easter. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Lilies also represent purity, which is why saints who die as virgin martyrs are often pictured holding the flower.

When it comes to passing on the faith, what parents do is as important as what they say, the seasoned catechist urged.

Including symbols in liturgical celebrations and feast days, like arranging a vase of roses for Our Lady of Guadalupe or leaving out shoes on St. Nicholas Day, will instill memories in impressionable young minds.

“When children grow up, they remember those things,” Vaughan, a father of six, continued.

“If they stray from the faith, it’s those celebrations that will serve as an anchor to bring them back.”

CELEBRATING BEYOND EASTER SUNDAY

Maria Morrow uses a similar logic in raising her seven children.

The author of “A Busy Parent’s Guide to a Meaningful Lent” encourages a love of the Catholic faith by incorporating liturgical celebrations into family life.

“It will be difficult for them to leave the faith if they’ve had a lot of positive experiences,” reasoned the busy mom who embraces many traditional customs like Easter baskets, dyeing Easter eggs, and baking a lamb cake for the holiday.

But for the Morrow clan, the celebration extends beyond Easter Sunday. While the secular world quickly begins planning for the next holiday, the theologian makes a concerted effort to make all 50 days of Eastertide special for her brood. The decorations stay up, and Morrow indulges her youngsters with discounted Easter chocolate, family gatherings, and outdoor activities.

The University of Notre Dame graduate and her husband live simply but consider Easter a time for a little extravagance.

“It’s the one season of the year when I buy fresh flowers,” Morrow explained. “When one bouquet wilts, I buy another.”

In addition to the lily, other springtime blossoms are steeped in symbolism. Daffodils represent hope and resilience; purple tulips

Continued on Page 40



A symbol of Jesus' Resurrection and triumph over death, the Paschal candle is prominent during the Easter season. Here, Father Jason Allan celebrates Easter Sunday Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Pilot Point on April 9, 2023. (NTC/Ben Torres)

From Page 39

express faith; and the iris is a sign of Christ's Passion and Resurrection.

"I feel flowers present the season of Easter in a very vivid way," she emphasized. "The Easter season is a good time to get everyone out to see the cherry blossoms and local parks where flowers are coming out."

Walks in nature can lead to discussions about the symbolism butterflies or the dogwood tree bring to Easter.

Just as butterflies emerge from a chrysalis, Jesus emerges from the tomb three days after the crucifixion.

According to legend, the dogwood tree provided the wood used to build the cross on which Jesus died. Cursed because of its role in the crucifixion, the tree would never grow large branches again, but its flowers were blessed with white petals that form the shape of a cross.

Morrow advises families to make the home brighter and more cheerful during the Easter season. Appreciating the increased sunlight that follows the spring equinox is another recommendation.

"Make sure you're talking to your kids and reminding them it's still Easter," she suggested. "Even the smallest practices that focus on the Resurrection, and the idea we've been saved, can bring joy to the family and pay off for the future of our children."

BEAUTIFUL EGGS AND NEW LIFE

As Easter approaches, Sharon Kapavik Perkins keeps a bowl of beautifully embellished eggs in the foyer of her Aubrey, Texas, home.

Designed using wax and dyes to create intricate folk patterns, the collection of Czech Easter eggs, known as *kraslice*, are a nod to both her faith and heritage.

Rich in meaning and symbolism, the elaborate eggs are an art form found in many Eastern European countries. In Ukraine, the eggs are called *pysanky* and





Ornately painted eggs are an Easter tradition in many cultures and families. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

in Poland, *pisanki*. Techniques and styles differ from region to region.

“The egg symbolizes new life, and I became so intrigued by the beauty and design of these eggs, they became standard Easter decor for me,” explained the former diocesan employee who was introduced to *kraslice* during a vacation to

Czechoslovakia in 1986.

Her first acquisition was a goose egg, featuring the images of Saints Cyril and Methodius, given to her by a Czech relative during the trip.

“They are considered the fathers of Catholicism in Czechoslovakia, and their feast day is a national holiday,” she explained.

For Perkins, handcrafted eggs, wreaths made with palms, and signs declaring “He is Risen” allow her to emphasize the Christian significance of the Easter season. You won’t find pastel bunnies on her fireplace mantle.

“It’s another way to resist the commercialization and secularization of Easter that I see all around me,” she observed. “For me, using religious symbols is a form

of evangelization — a public witness.”

Coloring Easter eggs with her young grandson last year provided an opportunity to impart the family’s faith heritage and explain the true meaning behind the custom.

In Christianity, the hard-boiled Easter egg represents the Resurrection of Christ. Breaking the eggshell is the opening of the tomb, the egg white is Jesus’ burial shroud, and the yolk symbolizes Jesus — the source of life.

“Symbols are the best teaching tools, especially for young children,” Perkins asserted, remembering how her mother would light a blessed candle and burn a sacramental palm as a storm approached. “Those are the things that stick in your imagination as a young child, and you never forget them.”

Continued on Page 42



Annette Baker prepares the bread *paska* each Easter, a tradition which reflects her Czech and Hungarian heritage. The soft, round loaf represents Jesus, the Bread of Life, and the braid on top symbolizes His Crown of Thorns.

(top two photos by NTC/Juan Guajardo; bottom photo courtesy/Jim Baker)



From Page 41

THE SYMBOLISM OF EASTER FOOD

The aroma of *paska* dough, wafting from the oven on Holy Saturday, stirs memories of childhood Easters for Annette Baker.

Enriched with egg yolks, butter, and raisins, the sweet bread is a recipe passed down through generations of Eastern European families who came to America from Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Traditionally made to celebrate Easter, the soft, round loaves represent Jesus Christ — the Bread of Life — and are often embellished with crosses or other religious symbols.

“Every Holy Saturday, my mother would bake and cook, and she always made *paska*,” said the cradle Catholic of Czech and Hungarian heritage. “She would decorate the top with a braid of dough to represent the Crown of Thorns and sometimes put three crosses in the center.”

The delicately flavored bread was one of the most important foods prepared for the “Blessing of the Easter Basket” — a centuries-old Catholic ritual for families of Eastern European origin.

Along with ham, pickled eggs, butter, salt, and sausage, the *paska* was placed in a basket, covered with the family’s best linen (symbolizing Christ’s burial cloth) then carried to the church for a blessing on Holy Saturday.

Other items placed in the basket for the first Easter meal might include a special Easter cheese called *cirak* or *hrudka* (signifying the moderation Christians should have at all times); horseradish, pepper, oil, and vinegar (a reminder of the Passion of Christ and the bitter herbs of the Passover); and wine





Children scramble to find eggs after celebrating Easter Sunday Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Pilot Point on April 9, 2023. (NTC/Ben Torres)

(representing the Blood of the Lord).

Salt symbolizes a Christian's commitment to follow Christ's words, "You are the salt of the earth" (*Matthew 5:13*).

"We always kept the blessed salt in a special shaker and used it for Sunday meals and other occasions," Baker remembered. "It wouldn't be Easter without my mother's *paska* recipe. It's a reminder of the importance of family."

Another bread strongly linked to Easter is the hot cross bun. Traditionally eaten every Good Friday in Ireland, England, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, the dough is prepared with spices some believe were used to embalm Jesus before He was buried.

In the 12th century, an English monk began decorating his freshly baked buns with a cross on Good Friday to signify the crucifixion. The custom gained traction, and over the years, fruits were included in the batter

to represent health and prosperity. In some recipes, orange peel is added to reflect the bitterness of Jesus' time on the cross.

BE INTENTIONAL

Whether it's cooking special foods, decorating eggs, or buying Easter lilies, Chris Vaughan suggests celebrating the Resurrection in a studied, purposeful way. Using religious symbols in the home can focus prayer and help children understand difficult theological concepts.

"If we're going to hand down our faith, we have to do things with intention. Kids see intention," said the experienced catechist. "They can see where our priorities are."

Americans go all out inviting guests to a big party and barbecue for the Fourth of July because it's important.

"We should show that same enthusiasm for religious feasts," Vaughan opined. "What we do is as important as what we say." 🇺🇸



To listen is to love

Nurse, counselor, and psychologist dedicates her God-given talents to protect and heal God's children

By Susan Moses

Dr. Kim Robinson thought she was retiring to a sleepy little community in Denton County, but God had other plans.

Within her first year, the Denton Record-Chronicle ran four front-page articles on local human trafficking incidents,

which grabbed the attention of the psychologist who has two decades of experience counseling sexual abuse victims.

“So I began researching, just how bad is this? That’s when I put together a program to teach the public about why DFW is such a center of human trafficking,” she said.

Once again, in the face of a large problem, Robinson takes action.

TO LISTEN AND TO HEAL

Robinson’s career has taken many twists and turns, but it revolves around a single purpose, to bring comfort and healing to those who are suffering.

Her core principle derived from a ruptured appendix and subsequent blood poisoning when she was 16, and doctors warned her parents that she might not live.

She recalled, “It helped me appreciate life in general and how we deal with very scary situations,” adding that her faith helped her overcome the crisis.

Robinson began a career in nursing and worked with kidney dialysis and transplant patients, a population facing the reality of death. While assisting with the physical aspects of their disease and treatment, she became fascinated by the psychological aspects.

Robinson returned to school and became a licensed professional counselor and earned a doctorate in psychology at the University of Houston. She has worked with patients with brain injuries in Houston, taught at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls and Queen Mary University of London, and practiced trauma-related patient care.

However, her work in mental health clinics at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls and the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth drew her attention to sexual abuse.

She treated enlisted men and women for post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health concerns, but she “noticed there was an incredible number of young people who disclosed their sexual abuse” to her. Many joined the military to escape an abusive home environment.

When she saw a bulletin announcement about volunteering with the diocese’s Safe Environment Program, she jumped at the opportunity.

She said, “I wanted to cast my net a little wider, influence a greater number of people, and talk about prevention, detection, and what you need to do once you suspect something. It’s a very difficult topic for a lot of people to talk about.”

Robinson was in the first group trained to be facilitators in 2018, and

she has since led about 80 sessions, training almost 1,500 volunteers, employees, and clergy.

Sandra Schrader-Farry, director of Safe Environment, appreciates Robinson’s commitment and expertise, saying Robinson “has made a significant impact within our program and our parishes by raising awareness about the warning signs and symptoms of abuse. Her dedication to providing safe environment sessions and training her fellow facilitators is invaluable. Kim’s deep faith and professionalism in caring for her church and community make her an exceptional facilitator and a wonderful role model.”

RETIREMENT WORKS

Since her failed retirement to Denton County, Robinson continues to lead two Safe Environment sessions each month at her home parish of St. Mark in Argyle, and she volunteers to travel to other locations when needed.

She’s shared the human trafficking program she created with diocesan, community, and university audiences, and plans are underway to introduce the material to diocesan Catholic schools.

“The estimated 750,000 traffickers of the world have access to all of our homes through the internet,” she said, “so what we can do as responsible parents is to make sure and put as many filters and monitoring systems in place so that we are able to detect it early, educate our kids about it in age-appropriate ways, and then know what to do if we figure out something has happened.”

Human trafficking, she added, is the fastest growing illegal enterprise in the world.

“The trauma of some human trafficking victims is every bit as bad as the prisoners of war,” stated the psychologist, who has worked with both types of victims.

Another group of people

Robinson has worked to comfort and heal includes individuals and families suffering reproductive loss.

She has co-founded a support group, “Healing the Silent Grief of Reproductive Loss,” that meets at St. Mark Parish. Robinson has a daughter, but for years she suffered from infertility during a time when the emotional heartache was not discussed.

“I was an infertility case, and so we include infertility in the reproductive loss,” along with miscarriage, stillbirth, and neonatal death, she said. “For anyone who’s ever been given the message from their doctor that you are not likely to ever have children, [infertility] is a reproductive loss as well. And there’s a grief that goes along with that.”

SOURCE OF STRENGTH

Carrying other’s burdens can weigh heavily on the counselor.

She explained, “My faith is my moral compass, because when you hear some of the stories I’ve heard, you hear some of the harshest cruelty humans can inflict on other humans, and you need faith to get through that. It also helps me to be humble enough to recognize that I can’t do this by myself. I do need guidance. And I do believe through prayer that God has given me tools that even I didn’t know I had.”

The Gospel stories of Jesus healing also bolster Robinson.

She said, “I see myself as both a healer and a teacher, in much the same way that Jesus was a healer and a teacher. I certainly don’t take any credit for miracles, but I know I have made a difference in people’s lives through His grace.

“But like Jesus, I teach with stories; Jesus taught with parables. I truly believe my work is a true calling from God, and my faith is manifested through my work.” 🇺🇸



HEART of Passion

Ed Proskie creates wood carvings of Jesus to work through his pain

By Lance Murray

Good Shepherd parishioner Ed Proskie of Euless lives in constant pain, the result of multiple health issues that limit his ability to travel, move, exercise, even simply take a walk.

At the age of 69, he has retired twice in his life, first from a career in the U.S. military and later from a second career as an insurance fraud investigator.

But he has rediscovered a hobby he first took up in the 1970s, a purpose that allows him to use his hands and express his passion for Christ.

“I decided to pick up relief wood

carving again, and I felt a calling,” Proskie shared. “Just a calling to do something religious related.”

SHARING THE PASSION

“I have multiple medical conditions that restrict me from traveling, doing any sports. I can’t golf; I haven’t been able to go for decades,” Proskie said. “It’s primarily my back — I’ve had 12 back surgeries and have hardware installed there.”

He has long dealt with the chronic pain, but recently, his legs have started to trouble him as well.

“I had to get an artificial knee on my

right leg a few years ago. And now my left leg,” he said. Proskie, who walks with a cane, said his ankle has also become problematic.

His pain, he said, gives him a strong connection to his faith.

“I have a very strong religious passion for Jesus’ suffering. I think I developed that because of my own personal suffering, and I have learned to thank God and thank Jesus for my suffering,” he shared.

His passion is a part of his daily life.

“I put my sufferings at the foot of the cross along with Jesus Christ’s suffering that He went through,” Proskie said.

“I pray every day for that, you know,

◀ Ed Proskie displays his artwork in his shop. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

thanking Jesus for His salvation of us by giving up His own life for us. I just feel a very strong connection to Christ's Passion."

This passion led to his carving subjects.

Proskie feels "a calling to study the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and I've read books on that. That's why I picked some of the patterns for carvings: Jesus, during His Passion; during His time of suffering; pictures of His suffering face carrying the cross."

WORKING IN WOOD

Like carving in stone, a wood relief carves figures or patterns in a flat panel of wood. The figures project slightly from the background instead of standing freely.

"I guess it was back in 1977 that I first developed an interest in wood relief, and I carved only a small number of animals," Proskie recalled. "I have one plaque, one of my first ones, hanging in my bathroom — [the plaque reads] Bath 15 cents — it was a very first-level or beginner's level of carving I just did on my own."

The amateur wood carver went online and looked for examples he could carve that were not trademarked.

"I would print the picture and then I would take a piece of tracing paper and trace it to a wooden plaque and then carve the plaque from there," he said.

After the first few, Proskie put away his tools and didn't make any more wood relief carvings until he retired.

HEALING WOUNDS

Proskie joined the U.S. Army in 1977 after being commissioned a second lieutenant following graduation from Eastern Michigan University and completing its ROTC training.

"I served for 20 years on active duty as a military policeman and for a good amount of that 20 years, I was in CID, which is a Criminal Investigations

Division," the veteran said. The unit is known to investigate felony crimes by members of the U.S. Army and their families in cases including homicide, theft, or sexual assault.

While deployed in Europe during the Cold War, the former military policeman served in Germany where he was an executive officer and aide-de-camp to a high-ranking General, Gordon R. Sullivan, who died earlier this year.

"I saw a lot of very bad things when I was in CID, primarily murder scenes," Proskie said. Like most investigators, he was most affected by crimes involving children.

After his military retirement, he began a 20-year career as an insurance fraud investigator for three different insurance companies, investigating homeowner, auto, and workers' compensation claims that were possibly fraudulent.

As a child, he was physically and emotionally abused by his father, whom he said also abused his mother.

"I was brought up in a very, very strict household," he confided. "A Catholic household, we went to church every Sunday, but between the things in CID and the beatings that I underwent [as a boy], I've suffered from PTSD from that. I'm under medical care for that."

After his mother died, Proskie brought his father from Arizona to live in Euless with him and his wife, Bridget, near the end of his father's life. His faith strong, he forgave his father before his death.

Now twice retired, Proskie plans to continue the relief carving. He hopes to find a way for his work to benefit others or his parish in Colleyville.

"I thought of possibly donating them to various fundraisers the church has throughout the year," he said. "I am not interested in making any money."

For the artist, the reward for carving religious images is the tranquility and calm it brings, like a prayer. 🇺🇸

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



To delight in Lent

NTC/Juan Guajardo

“Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.” We understand the season of Lent to be about repentance, change, and growth in holiness, but what does this look like? What does it mean in our own lives?

According to our Lord, the answer has a lot to do with becoming like children. This kind of conversion is so important to Jesus that He says without it, heaven is unattainable. What does it mean to become like a child?

G.K. Chesterton, in “Orthodoxy,” writes that children rejoice in monotony. They love to see things happen again and again. They have an overabundance of life that rejoices in the ordinary around them. He says perhaps this same vital, excited energy flows through God’s divine life as He makes the sun rise and fall day after day, without fail. “It is possible that God says every morning, ‘Do it again’ to the sun; and every evening, ‘Do it again’ to the moon.”

C.S. Lewis also picks up on this theme of childlike joy. He says that on earth things are often upside down from how they are in heaven. On earth, work, anxiety, and stress consume most of our time and attention, where joy is at best a sidelined occasional experience. Not



Fr. Brett Metzler

so in heaven. Anxiety is gone. Suffering has ended. Playful noise fills the streets. “Joy is the serious business of heaven,” he writes in “Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer.”

In the spirit of joyful repetition, Peter Kreeft, in “The Sea Within,” describes the ocean and its almost “divine-like” grandeur, writing if each wave could talk on behalf of God, they would repeat with each crash on the beach the simple but profound declaration of God to mankind: “I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you.”

To be childlike requires a different lens through which we engage the ordinary and monotonous. It requires joyful hope, humor, a deep sense that the love of God pumping through our veins and reflected in the oceans weighs heavier than the passing sufferings of this life. It requires a deep conviction that even the most failed and sinful life can be redeemed. This is only possible if the fundamental disposition of one’s life is dependence. Dependence on a good God and on His powerful providence.

Often, we engage Lent through a different lens — the lens of a need for self-perfection, a sense of needing to “get better,” to overcome vice and become perfect. To be clear, virtue and overcoming sin are necessary for repentance. But what drives this process? Is it my own

need to be perfect and faultless? Or am I drawn to this by a deep conviction that God actually delights in me, and that my conversion is less of me working hard and more of me letting God?

No, the goal of Lent is not primarily about “getting better,” but to grow more deeply in love with Jesus Christ and to become ever more aware of His love for you.

This Lent, let us foster repentant hearts, desirous of conversion, not simply because of hurt pride at having sinned, but because of a deep love for Jesus Christ against whom we have sinned. For when we recognize God’s goodness, His childlike joy, His intimate and particular concern for our lives, and most especially His desire to forgive and restore us, then Lent and repentance change tone in our hearts.

This Lent is not merely about “getting better.” It is about drawing more deeply into the Lord who delights in me. As *Proverbs* tells us, “Before the mountains had been shaped ... I was beside Him, like a master workman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing before Him always, rejoicing in His inhabited word, and delighting in the sons of men.” 🇺🇸

Father Brett Metzler serves as Chaplain at Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth and as the Vocations Director for the diocese.

Marvel in Christ

NTC/Juan Guajardo

HE IS: Father Joseph Keating, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Muenster and former pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Abbott and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Penelope.

EARLY DAYS: Fr. Keating was born in Germany while his father served in the U.S. Air Force, then he and his two brothers grew up in San Angelo.

THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND: Fr. Keating studied marketing and business at Texas Tech University, where he earned a bachelor's and master's degree. His involvement there in campus ministry helped him grow in faith and begin discerning the call to the priesthood.

After graduation, he worked in management for Walgreens for a year, then joined St. Mark Parish in Argyle as a youth minister.

"I really loved parish life. That ended up being a large part of my discernment. I saw the need for grace, saw the need for the availability of the sacraments. I saw the need to work with families and not just the kids. And that's what drew me into the priesthood."

BACK TO SCHOOL: He entered seminary in 2009. After two years of pre-theology studies, he studied at Rome's Pontifical North American College for four years.

MUSIC MAN: From children's choir to seventh-grade clarinet to the Goin' Band from Raiderland, music "was a source of good friendships and structure" from youth through young adulthood.

When he entered seminary, he joined the seminary choir and was selected as a cantor, culminating in chanting the Gospel in Latin in St. Peter's Square on Easter Sunday, 2016.

SOUVENIRS FROM ITALY: Fr. Keating said seminary in Rome gave him exposure to rich and diverse traditions of the Church, familiarity with governance of the Church, high-quality formation, and friendships with priests across the country.

ORDAINED: May 2, 2016, at St. Patrick Cathedral.

BEST THINGS ABOUT BEING A PRIEST: "Seeing people grow in their faithfulness, celebrating the Eucharist, getting to preach, and administering God's mercy in confession."

The grace of confession is especially precious. He said, "I've benefited so much in my own faith by experiencing God's mercy through His ministers. And I want to be that for others."

MOTIVATION: "What's most encouraging as a priest is the faithfulness of the parishioners."

NOT JUST FOR LENT: Fr. Keating recommends Catholics "practice self-denial in some way, even all throughout the year. We're so used to consuming, consuming, consuming — we need a little bit of self-denial."

"It breaks our habit of being enslaved to the worldly things that keep us away from God."

HOBBIES: Fr. Keating enjoys hunting and cooking, especially Italian or French food.

FAITHFUL TOGETHER: Fr. Keating said being a faithful person — a practicing Catholic, a good spouse, a good son, a good employee — "an integrated person who is trustworthy and keeps his or her commitments" takes discipline.

"What helps with discipline is community. It feeds back on itself. It's a lot harder to practice discipline when you're the only one doing it, but your brothers and sisters help you to stay disciplined and faithful."

ON FIRE: Fr. Keating borrowed the analogy of the burning bush to describe Christian life. "On fire with God's presence but not consumed. God works through me, but He doesn't make me stop being me. He takes the good things He created in me and uses them for His purposes, and through that, He's also redeeming the sinful parts of me." 🇺🇸

Seven functions of laity

In his last column, Father Thu Nguyen, pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Fort Worth and diocesan director of liturgy and worship, explained that lay ministers are called to assist with the celebration of Mass.

In this column, he goes deeper into the responsibilities of some of those special roles.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS TOPIC FOR THE COLUMN?

Fr. Nguyen: In visiting parishes around the diocese to celebrate Mass and to conduct liturgical workshops, a lot of different practices by lay liturgical ministers have surfaced, and many of them are not conformed to the guidelines of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* as well as the USCCB guidelines.

Ecclesial ministers have a privilege to serve according to the function of their role, but they must undergo training to

maintain the sacredness of the celebration.

REMINDE US HOW THE LAITY SERVE IN THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY MASS.

Fr. Nguyen: We commonly see seven special functions performed by laity designated in the *GIRM*: reader, altar server, sacristan, cantors and musicians, extraordinary ministers of holy Communion, hospitality ministers, and ornamentors of the Church.



Fr. Thu Nguyen

WHAT IS AN “ORNAMENTOR OF THE CHURCH”?

Fr. Nguyen: We use that terminology because in the sanctuary, we give prominence to the altar, the ambo, and the presider’s chair. When people are decorating for a specific church season, we need to emphasize those three elements. We want to make them more visible and beautiful, not detract from them or direct attention to a beautiful flower arrangement that diminishes the

essential elements of the sanctuary.

People have good intentions, but they might not know the primary priority when they decorate.

Ornamentation should be noble and simple and real. We don’t use artificial flowers, because the Mass is a sacrificial offering — the sacrifice of Christ for us, and our sacrificial offering too. A real flower being sacrificed to decorate the church adds to the meaning.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SACRISTAN AND AN ACOLYTE?

Fr. Nguyen: There’s a little bit of overlap. The sacristan is the person who prepares elements used for the celebration of Mass, like the paten, chalice, washing bowl, and all that. They also make certain a lectionary is in place for the readers and a songbook and *Roman Missal* at the presider’s location.

The sacristan also tends the clergy’s vestments according to the appropriate

◀ Altar server Helene Long helps at the candlelight Rorate Mass, at St. Philip the Apostle Church, Dec. 9, 2023. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

color for the liturgical season.

A sacristan also oversees other liturgical ministers, especially the extraordinary ministers of holy Communion. If a fall or spill occurs, the sacristan is the person who responds immediately.

An acolyte can do those tasks, but also prepares the altar and assists in many ways near the sanctuary, including purifying the vessels according to *GIRM* guidelines. In the Diocese of Fort Worth, men in formation for the permanent diaconate or priesthood are instituted as acolytes by Bishop Michael Olson.

The acolyte assists the priest and the deacon, if present.

IS A LECTOR THE SAME AS A READER?

Fr. Nguyen: Like an acolyte, the bishop institutes men in formation as lectors.

A reader is very important — I call them proclaimers because they proclaim the Word of God to the assembly during the Liturgy of the Word. God speaks to His people through the reader. They must be prepared; they must speak with clarity and have good pronunciation and communication skills. They must study the Word before they begin.

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF GREETERS AND USHERS?

Fr. Nguyen: Prior to Pope St. Paul VI's 1972 *motu proprio* which expanded the role of laity in the celebration of Mass, a man who began priestly formation served as a porter, a minor order. He was responsible for receiving people and guarding the church door and the people inside.

Greeters and ushers flow from this role, but

the terminology I prefer is ministers of hospitality. Why? Because of Abraham's story, how he received the messengers from God and provided hospitality to them.

Hospitality ministers need training on all the functions — greeting the people, directing people to be seated, collecting money, and helping create a safe environment. This ministry affects other ministries and it's very complex.

WHAT ARE SOME GUIDELINES FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION?

Fr. Nguyen: The ministry of the Eucharist is reserved for bishops, priests, and deacons — they are the ordinary ministers of holy Communion.

An extraordinary minister of holy Communion can be commissioned by the pastor if there are not sufficient ordinary ministers.

The extraordinary ministers of holy Communion only approach the altar after the priest has received the precious Blood. When they come up to assist the priest, they are given Communion. They don't take the chalice or ciborium; it is handed to them.

When they are distributing Communion, the formula is, "The Body of Christ" or "The Blood of Christ." Nothing more. That's the reality.

All of Fr. Nguyen's columns are available at NorthTexasCatholic.org/understanding-the-mystery. 🇺🇸

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



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INSPIRADA

por la educación católica

Ex-alumna de Cristo Rey dice que la escuela secundaria católica le dio una mayor pasión y propósito en la vida

Por Sandra Engelland

La jornada de Rennata Sandoval desde un pequeño pueblo de Jalisco, México, hasta Boston College fue forjada gracias principalmente a la educación que recibió de la escuela católica Cristo Rey Fort Worth High School.

Rennata y su familia se mudaron de México a California en el 2019. Sandoval asistió a una escuela secundaria pública en su primer año en los Estados Unidos y debido a la pandemia de COVID-19, su año escolar se vio interrumpido.

Al mudarse a Fort Worth el año siguiente, la familia Sandoval supo de la escuela secundaria Cristo Rey gracias a la prima de Rennata, que acababa de presentar su solicitud a dicha institución.

Rennata fue admitida a Cristo Rey junto a un puñado de estudiantes de segundo año. Descubrió enseguida que sus profesores eran “mucho más atentos” que los de su escuela anterior. “Aunque la enseñanza era virtual en esos momentos, fue muy buena experiencia para mí”, señaló Rennata.

Ella comenzó al poco tiempo a trabajar en servicio al cliente en el Jardín Botánico de Fort Worth como parte del programa excelente de estudio y trabajo que caracteriza a Cristo Rey.

La escuela le brindó la oportunidad de aprender a apreciar el valor que tiene

utilizar un planificador para anotar y darle seguimiento a sus tareas diarias. Aprendió, además, a acudir a la oficina cada vez que necesitaba ayuda. Estos dos hábitos le resultarían excepcionalmente útiles en la universidad.

Su trabajo en GM Financial durante su último año en Cristo Rey la inspiró a considerar una posible carrera en marketing o recursos humanos.

“Le da a uno confianza de que puedes hacer ese trabajo y te ayuda a saber qué es lo que deseas hacer en la vida”, afirmó Rennata.

SU DECISIÓN RESPECTO A LA UNIVERSIDAD

Mientras cursaba sus estudios en Cristo Rey, Rennata no estaba segura a qué universidad quería ir. Ella era la primera persona de su familia que iba a estudiar en la universidad. Desconocía a qué tipo de universidad deseaba asistir, pero sabía que necesitaría asistencia económica.

Decidió entonces presentar su solicitud a QuestBridge, que es un programa que vincula a estudiantes de alto rendimiento académico que provienen de familias de bajos ingresos con universidades que ofrecen becas y asistencia económica.

La universidad preferida de Rennata era Boston College debido a que su maestro de Química AP, Chris Rauchet, se graduó en el 2022 de esa institución

universitaria.

Se emocionó mucho al ser admitida a Boston College, una escuela jesuita de artes liberales con alrededor de 9,500 estudiantes matriculados. No obstante, ella estaba también nerviosa porque tendría que alejarse mucho de su hogar y de su comunidad.

Los maestros de Cristo Rey y otros mentores la animaron y le dijeron: “No te preocupes, vas a encontrar tu propio grupo”. Y asimismo pasó.

Encontró un grupo de amigos con quienes puede explorar la ciudad. Le encanta la zona histórica de Boston, el mar y todo lo que hay para hacer en esa región.

Rennata escogió especializarse en inglés y está interesada en volver a GM Financial para trabajar en marketing o, tal vez, en recursos humanos. Ha pensado también en trabajar para una organización sin fines de lucro.

Haga lo que haga, quiere regresar a Cristo Rey con regularidad y animar a los estudiantes más jóvenes. “Sólo quiero contribuir a mi comunidad de la forma que pueda”, agregó.

PREPARAR A LOS ESTUDIANTES PARA TENER ÉXITO

El profesor de química Rauchet afirmó que Cristo Rey prepara a los estudiantes para tener éxito.

“Cristo Rey tiene un riguroso programa de preparación universitaria



◀ Rennata Sandoval visita a su profesor de química Chris Rauchet en la escuela de Cristo Rey en Fort Worth el 8 de enero. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

y un programa de trabajo excelente que expone a los estudiantes a la vida laboral profesional”, explicó. “Contamos con una estructura fundamental, cuyo fin es promover el éxito de nuestros estudiantes”.

La historia de Rennata encarna la esencia de la experiencia de Cristo Rey, según dijera Dani Ray Barton, el Presidente Interino de Cristo Rey High School.

La escuela tiene este año doscientos treinta estudiantes, pero existen planes de aumentar su capacidad y tener de 375 a 400 estudiantes, señaló Barton.

Cristo Rey Fort Worth abrió sus puertas en el 2018 y graduó su primera clase en el 2022. La escuela forma parte de una red de treinta y ocho escuelas, que brinda a los estudiantes de recursos económicos limitados la oportunidad de una educación católica de excelente preparación para la universidad. Cristo Rey ofrece un programa innovador de estudio y trabajo.

Si bien la mayoría de las escuelas de Cristo Rey comienzan por la iniciativa de miembros de la comunidad interesados que

realizan un estudio de viabilidad, el campus de Fort Worth fue distinto. La idea fue iniciada por el Reverendísimo Obispo Michael Olson, que se puso en contacto con la sede de Cristo Rey de Chicago porque creía que este tipo de escuela beneficiaría grandemente a la comunidad local.

La escuela contó en sus inicios con veinte socios del programa de trabajo corporativo. Hay en la actualidad setenta (70) socios y tiene planes de agregar unos quince a veinte socios el próximo año.

Entre los socios corporativos se encuentran empresas como Alcon y Bank of America; organizaciones de cuidado de la salud como Texas Health Resources y Cook Children’s; y organizaciones sin fines de lucro como Meals on Wheels del Condado de Tarrant y varias de las escuelas de la Diócesis de Fort Worth.

Las empresas se involucran al principio porque quieren ayudar a los estudiantes, afirmó Barton, pero pronto ven beneficios adicionales a medida que desarrollan “una fuente de talentos futuro” para sus mismas empresas. Los socios corporativos pagan a la escuela por el trabajo que realizan

los estudiantes y los fondos se destinan al pago de la matrícula de los estudiantes. Los estudiantes de este año ganarán \$2 millones para ayudar a pagar su educación en Cristo Rey, según Barton explicó.

Cada estudiante trabaja cinco días al mes (es decir, un día cada semana más un viernes al mes) en la misma empresa durante todo el año escolar.

DESAROLLAR “GRIT”

Barton señala que los estudiantes de Cristo Rey siguen en el diario vivir los valores fundamentales de la escuela: GRIT, siglas que significan en inglés Gracia, Responsabilidad, Integridad y Tenacidad.

Se espera que los estudiantes lleguen temprano a la escuela y se queden hasta tarde los días que van a trabajar. Además, tienen que cumplir con sus tareas académicas, sus horarios de trabajo y las actividades extracurriculares.

Cristo Rey Fort Worth no se enfoca sólo en que los estudiantes ingresen a la universidad; sino que, además, quieren ayudar a que los estudiantes terminen sus estudios en la universidad.

“Nosotros hacemos un compromiso de ocho años con nuestros estudiantes”, enfatizó.

Se acaba de establecer un equipo de apoyo universitario para ayudar a los recién graduados de la escuela, como Rennata. El noventa y siete por ciento de sus estudiantes son los primeros en su familia en asistir a la universidad.

Se anima a los estudiantes a que visiten la escuela durante los recesos de la universidad para reunirse con los profesores.

Rennata dijo firmemente: “Aquí hay personas que quieren ayudarte”.

“Los estudiantes graduados de Cristo Rey Fort Worth cuentan con múltiples oportunidades de practicas profesionales y esto los ayuda a destacarse; y la educación católica ‘te da una mayor pasión y propósito en la vida’”. 🇺🇸

El Tiempo PASCUAL

Explorando los símbolos y tradiciones
de la Cuaresma y la Pascua

Por Karla Silva

¿Te has preguntado alguna vez el por qué al entrar a la iglesia durante el tiempo de la Cuaresma y la Pascua ves que varias cosas son diferentes? Como, por ejemplo, las imágenes del altar están cubiertas con un manto púrpura; no se hace el canto del Aleluya ni del Gloria por varias semanas; y repentinamente, el color que predomina es el blanco. Todos éstos son símbolos y tradiciones esenciales durante este importante tiempo litúrgico de la Iglesia.

En este artículo el Diácono Humberto Serrano de la Parroquia de St. Thomas the Apostle en Fort Worth y el Diácono Sergio Vera de la Parroquia de St. Matthew en Arlington nos explican el significado y la importancia de cada uno de estos símbolos y tradiciones.

“La Pascua, como dice el *Catecismo*

de la Iglesia Católica (CC #1168), no es simplemente una fiesta entre otras: es la ‘Fiesta de las fiestas’, la ‘Solemnidad de las solemnidades’. Es la fiesta más importante de la Iglesia Católica en la que celebramos que Cristo ha vencido la muerte. La Pascua es tiempo de gozo, alegría y exultación porque Cristo ha resucitado”, comparte el Diácono Vera.

El Tiempo Pascual, que se inicia el Domingo de Resurrección, dura cincuenta días y concluye el Domingo de la Fiesta de Pentecostés. “Durante varias semanas el color que predomina es el blanco, que simboliza la nueva vida y la alegría en Cristo resucitado. Muchas iglesias se adornan de flores blancas simbolizando un nuevo día y despertar. Las flores simbolizan el renacer de una nueva primavera y el sol naciente, pues Cristo Resucitado es el Sol que nace de lo

alto”, describe el Diácono Serrano.

El Diácono Vera explica cómo esta celebración, de raíces judías, se transformó con la llegada, muerte y resurrección de Jesús. “En esta fiesta recordamos que en el Antiguo Testamento se mataba a un cordero macho y sin ningún hueso quebrantado. En el Nuevo Testamento, en la Pascua cristiana, Jesús es ese cordero libre de pecado y sin ningún hueso quebrantado. La Pascua judía iba acompañada de panes sin levadura; en la Pascua cristiana Jesús es el Pan de Vida, en quien no hay impureza alguna. En la Pascua judía los creyentes fueron salvados al pintar los dinteles de las puertas de sus casas con la sangre del cordero; en la Pascua cristiana somos salvados por el Cuerpo y la Sangre de Cristo”, añade el Diácono Vera.

El Diácono Serrano comenta que,



Una feligrés sostiene dos velas al celebrarse la ceremonia de la luz durante la Vigilia Pascual en la Parroquia de St. Peter the Apostle en Fort Worth el 16 de Abril de 2022. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

durante la Vigilia Pascual, la cual tiene lugar la noche del Sábado de Gloria, la Iglesia vigila y celebra la Resurrección de Cristo. Se utilizan muchos símbolos, pero hay uno de ellos que se destaca: el Cirio Pascual. “El Cirio Pascual es una vela blanca de cera en la cual están grabadas las letras griegas Alfa y Omega, que significan que Dios es el principio y el fin. El Cirio Pascual lleva grabado también los numerales del año en curso. El fuego del Cirio Pascual es fuego que renueva la fe y representa la luz de Cristo resucitado y vencedor de las sombras y las tinieblas”, afirma el Diácono Vera.

El Diácono Serrano, por su parte, añade que algo muy significativo que ocurre durante la Vigilia Pascual es

cuando la iglesia está totalmente a oscuras y los fieles entran en procesión con sus velas y las encienden con el fuego del Cirio Pascual; lo que simboliza que, mediante nuestro bautismo, todos estamos llamados a ser la luz del mundo.

Durante la Vigilia Pascual se hacen varias lecturas del Antiguo Testamento y del Nuevo Testamento que relatan los hechos principales de la historia de la Salvación. Además, se vuelve a cantar el Aleluya y el Gloria para celebrar que Jesús ha resucitado. En esta importante celebración tiene lugar la Liturgia Bautismal y la Confirmación de los catecúmenos adultos. Los bautizados hacen la renovación de las promesas bautismales, según explica el Diácono

Serrano. “Los bautismos se realizan con el fin de incorporar a Jesucristo en la vida de los bautizados. El agua simboliza la vida y es un medio de purificación”, expresa el Diácono Vera. “Además, durante la Vigilia Pascual se realiza la aspersion de agua bendita al pueblo de Dios, para recordarnos que somos agua viva”, añade el Diácono Serrano.

Otra tradición que se acostumbra a hacer en algunas parroquias es la veneración de la imagen de Cristo Resucitado, explica el Diácono Vera. El Diácono Serrano señala que es muy importante que cuando esto se realiza la gente sepa distinguir entre lo que

CONTINÚA EN LA PÁGINA 56

La cruz está decorada con elementos de la Pasión y la Pascua durante la Celebración Eucarística de Jueves Santo en la Parroquia de St. Ann en Burseson el 14 de abril de 2022. (NTC/Ben Torres)

DE LA PÁGINA 55

significa adorar y lo que significa venerar. “Cuando nosotros adoramos algo o a alguien lo vemos como si fuera Dios, es como ponerlo en el lugar de Dios. Cuando nosotros veneramos se trata de mostrar respeto y honor por algo o alguien. Nosotros adoramos solamente a Dios y veneramos a las imágenes y a los Santos”, explica el Diácono Serrano.

Ambos diáconos afirman que la Fiesta de la Pascua es una fiesta de tal magnitud que un solo día no es suficiente para celebrarla. Esto da paso a lo que se conoce como la Octava de Pascua, que comprende los ocho días que siguen al Domingo de Resurrección. Durante estos ocho días de júbilo, que se consideran como un solo día, se canta de nuevo en las Misas el Aleluya y el Gloria, y se celebra el Domingo de Pascua, según explica el Diácono Serrano. El Diácono Vera añade que estos días son de pura alegría y no hay cabida para la tristeza, ya que Jesús ha resucitado y ésa es la razón y fundamento de nuestra fe. “Él ha vencido la muerte y eso nos abre a todos nosotros las puertas del cielo”, agrega el Diácono Serrano.

Nos preguntamos, ¿cuál es la mejor manera de prepararnos para vivir el tiempo de Pascua? “Los cuarenta días antes de la Pascua, que comienzan el Miércoles de Ceniza, es lo que conocemos como el tiempo de Cuaresma. Es un tiempo de penitencia y debe llevarnos a un cambio, una conversión, y a un acercamiento más íntimo a Jesús”, explica el Diácono Serrano.

En el tiempo de Cuaresma vemos



diferentes símbolos. Entre ellos, el color púrpura que simboliza la penitencia y el luto, y las imágenes se cubren con mantos del mismo color. Durante este tiempo se omite el canto del Aleluya y el Gloria. En las iglesias las flores se sustituyen por piedras, lo que simboliza que nosotros seguimos el camino de Jesús en el desierto. Serrano agrega que lo más importante de la Cuaresma no es sólo dejar o abstenerse de un mal hábito únicamente por los cuarenta días que dura, sino tener como meta dejar ese mal hábito por completo para poder así acercarnos más a Jesús y tener una mejor relación con Él.

El Diácono Vera destaca que la Cuaresma nos debe de acercar más a

Jesús porque nos recuerda su sacrificio por toda la humanidad.

La Pascua nos debe llevar a un gozo profundo porque Jesús ha resucitado y, por consiguiente, nos trae la salvación. Él nos trae una nueva vida. “Si nosotros no vivimos la Cuaresma correctamente y no logramos un cambio, será muy difícil vivir una buena Pascua”, dijo el diácono.

“Tener conocimiento de estos símbolos y tradiciones es de suma importancia, ya que nuestra fe se hace realidad a través de lo que vemos, oímos y vivimos. Cuando sabemos el significado de lo que vemos, le damos la importancia que se merece y nos lleva a interiorizar el tiempo litúrgico que estamos viviendo”, concluye el Diácono Vera. ✝



Los participantes del Retiro de Año Nuevo oran el 27 de enero en la Parroquia de St. Mary of the Assumption en Fort Worth. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

Comienzo del año con un propósito renovado

Por Karla Silva

Ciento cuarenta jóvenes adultos asistieron al Retiro de Año Nuevo que se llevó a cabo el 27 de enero en la Parroquia de St. Mary of the Assumption en Fort Worth.

“Regresé a mi casa llena de paz y con la certeza del camino que debo seguir”, expresó Diana Cabrera, tras asistir al retiro. Las palabras del Evangelio de Juan, “He sido Yo quien los eligió a ustedes para que vayan y den fruto”, resuenan en su mente y corazón.

El retiro fue organizado por la Pastoral Juvenil Hispana de la Diócesis de Fort Worth y tuvo el propósito de alentar a los jóvenes a empezar el nuevo año de una manera diferente y tomados de la mano de Dios.

“Sin duda, este retiro reunió a muchos jóvenes de varias parroquias de la Diócesis con el fin de empezar el año de una manera diferente. Esperamos que los jóvenes que no pertenecen a un grupo de

su parroquia se animen a unirse y sigan su camino de la mano de Dios”, comentó Luis Miguel Urrutia, el Coordinador de la Pastoral Juvenil Diocesana. Muchos de los jóvenes que asistieron señalaron que los temas, las dinámicas, los cantos de alabanza y la Misa les ayudaron a lograr el objetivo principal del retiro, dijo Urrutia.

Jóvenes que activamente están involucrados en diferentes parroquias de la Diócesis dirigieron las charlas sobre los tres temas discutidos.

José Fernando Salazar, un feligrés de la Parroquia de Immaculate Heart of Mary de Fort Worth, explicó que el objetivo del primer tema, titulado ¿Hacia dónde vas?, fue alentar a los jóvenes a tener un verdadero encuentro con Jesús. Se trata de animar a los jóvenes a que no sean sólo espectadores, sino a ser verdaderos participantes de Su vida.

El segundo tema discutido, Sé auténtico, fue presentado por Itzhel Saldes, que también asiste y sirve en la Parroquia de Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Saldes señaló que su mensaje se centraba en la importancia de ser uno mismo y no pretender ser alguien más. Hizo hincapié en que lo que somos y lo que hacemos tiene más importancia que poseer cosas materiales, ya que cada uno de nosotros es único y Dios nos creó de manera especial.

El tercer tema presentado, Un mirar diferente, fue presentado por Luis Borges, feligrés de la Parroquia de St. Matthew de Arlington. Borges expresó que el objetivo de su charla era enseñar a los jóvenes a ver el mundo a través de la mirada compasiva de Jesús, especialmente hacia las personas marginadas y hacia las personas que los rodean.

“Nos sentimos muy contentos de que jóvenes que sirven actualmente en la Diócesis compartieran estos temas, ya que se hizo notar el profundo impacto que su discusión tuvo en los asistentes. Es muy gratificante ver como jóvenes pueden evangelizar a otros jóvenes”, expresó Urrutia. ✝



Confiados en el amor de Dios

Por Christina Benavides

El Papa Francisco escribió en su exhortación apostólica *Amoris Laetitia*, “La pareja que ama y genera la vida es la verdadera «escultura» viviente — no aquella de piedra u oro que el Decálogo prohíbe — capaz de manifestar al Dios creador y salvador”.

Fernando y Claudia González son una pareja que tienen una fe muy profunda y llevan casados veintiún años. Comparten cada día el amor y la realidad de Dios con sus cuatro hijos: Kevin, 18 años, Karen, 15 años, Jesús, 10 años, y Emmanuel, 8 años.

Los esposos González son feligreses de la Parroquia de Our Lady of Guadalupe y la Parroquia de St. Peter the Apostle de Fort Worth. Comparten con la comunidad las experiencias vividas de su familia y matrimonio, y su vivencia de

cómo cultivar con orgullo su identidad de católicos.

CÓMO SE CONOCIERON: Pese a que se criaron en la misma área y calle en México, no fue hasta que los dos asistieron a un retiro de jóvenes de preparación para la Pascua en su parroquia que se hicieron amigos. Claudia afirmó que ese retiro, “fue donde compartimos más y tuvimos la oportunidad de platicar de nuestros gustos similares,” incluyó el amor y la devoción de ambos a la Misa.

“Ahí la conocí y nos enamoramos”, dijo Fernando.

Fueron novios por cinco años antes de casarse.

ACTIVOS EN LA FE: Una vez casados, se mudaron a Fort Worth. Aún cuando sus hijos eran chiquitos, ellos encontraban

siempre oportunidades para involucrarse en su parroquia. Fernando relata que la familia descubrió el grupo de Movimiento Familiar Cristiano Católico al poco tiempo de integrarse a la Parroquia de Our Lady of Guadalupe.

“Estuvimos en ese grupo cerca de tres años. Las reuniones incluían a toda la familia. Los niños hacían una cosa y nosotros los adultos discutíamos diversos temas entre las familias”, explicó Fernando.

Desde entonces, siguieron activos en la vida de fe de la parroquia, participando en todo lo que podían. Fue así como conocieron al Grupo Carismático.

La participación en este grupo, donde llevan doce años como miembros, los ayudó a aprender más acerca de la fe a través del estudio de la catequesis. Aprendieron “no sólo a vivir la fe, sino

◀ Fernando y Claudia González posan en la Parroquia de St. Peter the Apostle en Fort Worth con tres de sus cuatro hijos el 3 de diciembre. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

también a compartirla con los demás”.

La familia González está también muy involucrada desde hace seis años en el programa de catequesis de la Parroquia de St. Peter the Apostle.

APRECIO POR LA VIDA: Luego de tener su tercer hijo, Claudia relató que ella estaba lista para operarse para evitar tener más hijos. Sin embargo, según fueron aprendiendo más sobre la fe y la Teología del Cuerpo en el grupo Carismático, Fernando le explicó a su esposa que él respetaba su cuerpo, pero que era también pro-vida.

“Él me hizo ver a mí como mujer que me iba a apoyar y que, si los dos íbamos a vivir nuestra fe, también podíamos aprender más de nuestra fe y de nuestro cuerpo. Entonces, gracias a eso, ya tenemos diez años de cuidarnos así ... Yo lo admiro porque gracias a que él me apoya en eso, podemos darle el Sí a Dios”, ella dijo.

Claudia también describió la fortaleza demostrada por su esposo en buscar otras opciones para prevenir los embarazos, ya que “en ese momento no lo veía y hasta me peleé con él ... Gracias a los esfuerzos de mi esposo, somos una feliz familia de cuatro hijos”.

REBOSANTES DE FE: Claudia afirmó que “Gracias a Dios y a mi esposo, entendí que nuestro cuerpo lo tenemos que cuidar porque nosotros reflejamos lo que somos”.

“Si nosotros damos a nuestros hijos alegría, nuestros hijos van a tener alegría. Si nosotros enseñamos la fe a nuestros hijos, aunque no la tengamos, nuestros hijos van a tener fe. Y si nosotros no les damos esos cimientos, especialmente de la manera que está el mundo actual, menos la van a tener”.

SENTIR ORGULLO DE

NUESTRA FE: Ellos tienen sus dos hijos más pequeños matriculados en la escuela pública, y ven que hay muchos retos y obstáculos en los tiempos

modernos que sus niños enfrentan y batallan con respecto a su fe.

Las actividades y distracciones constantes que se encuentran en el mundo secular pueden obstruir fácilmente la presencia de Dios en sus hijos, observó Fernando. En la casa, ellos siembran y enfatizan también los valores del orden y el respeto tanto como pueden.

“Si no lo hiciéramos así, nuestros hijos podrían perderse”, señaló Fernando.

“Por la tecnología, muy fácil podrían dejar su fe y podrían no dar importancia a orar en casa. Por eso, nosotros enfatizamos y les decimos lo importante que es que, si alguien les habla de Dios, no les dé vergüenza. Yo les digo, ‘A ustedes nunca les debe dar vergüenza hablar de Jesús ni hablar de Dios’. Y cuando les pregunten si eres católico, digan siempre ‘claro que soy católico’”.

FRUTOS LOGRADOS MEDIANTE

EL ESFUERZO: Kevin se graduó de la escuela preparatoria Cristo Rey Fort Worth el año pasado y fue reconocido por la profundidad de su fe.

Cuando vio el reconocimiento, Claudia se sintió, “muy engrandecida ... porque, si mi hijo tiene a Dios en su vida, nada le va a faltar. Sé que va a caer y a tener tentaciones, pero nada le va a faltar porque Dios estará con él”.

Su hija Karen es estudiante de primer año de la escuela preparatoria Cristo Rey Fort Worth.

CONSEJOS PARA LOS MARIDOS:

“Ora por tu esposa. Es lo más grande que puedes hacer por tu pareja”, dijo Fernando.

CONSEJOS PARA LOS PADRES:

Fernando aconseja que los padres den siempre ejemplo de la vivencia de su fe. “Las clases de catequesis son para rellenar los huequitos, no son para evangelizar a los niños. Los niños se evangelizan en casa”, afirmó Fernando. 🇺🇸

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.

Para más información sobre nuestros programas de prevención de abuso, visite fwdioc.org/safe-environment



Ayuda con DEDICACIÓN

Caridades Católicas Fort Worth provee ayuda apremiante a los hispanos

Por Violeta Rocha

Caridades Católicas Fort Worth realiza su misión día a día con entusiasmo y determinación. Por eso, los que buscan ayuda pueden contar con fácil acceso a servicios de bajo costo tan esenciales como el cuidado dental, ayuda para concluir los procesos migratorios que tanto anhelan; recibir asistencia para salir de complicaciones económicas que impactan la calidad de vida; o hallar una luz en momentos tan vulnerables como el embarazo. Caridades Católicas proporciona apasionadamente estos servicios “para todas las personas”, sin importar su lugar de origen, religión, idioma, ni estatus migratorio.

“Nuestro enfoque es ayudar a todas las personas”, afirmó Michael Reilly, Director de Empresas de Servicio Social, que comprenden servicios de migración, transporte y una clínica dental.

Reilly, que cuenta con una vasta experiencia de cuarenta años de asesoría legal en procesos migratorios a bajo costo, señala que recientemente se añadió el servicio de Defensa de Deportación a los existentes servicios de trámite de tarjetas de residencia, visas de trabajo y de la anhelada ciudadanía estadounidense. El Servicio de Transporte proporciona servicio para acudir a citas médicas, al trabajo o para hacer compras de alimentos. El precio del transporte varía y comienza desde \$2.50 dentro del área del Metroplex, como Grapevine. Los servicios de

transporte cubren también ciudades más lejanas como Saginaw. Se hicieron más de cincuenta y ocho mil viajes en el año 2023. Se cuenta con recepcionistas bilingües que se mantienen en constante comunicación con el chofer, en caso de que éste no hable español.

La Clínica Dental, que comenzó sus servicios en el 2013, tiene dos dentistas y “se mantiene ocupada y sigue creciendo”, según Reilly, que celebra muy complacido la reciente contratación en la clínica de una dentista que es bilingüe. Señala que esto “es enorme, pues provee mucha más comodidad a los pacientes de habla hispana que representan gran parte de los cerca de trescientos pacientes que se atienden mensualmente en la clínica”. Dijo también que la calidad del servicio es siempre el mismo con ambos dentistas, ya que los asistentes dentales bilingües “ayudan grandemente” a comunicarse con los pacientes.

“No hay nada más gratificante que saber que estamos haciendo una diferencia al ayudar a las personas necesitadas. Amo cada una de las tres fases de nuestro grupo,” añadió, y destacó que el personal que provee los servicios de migración, transporte y clínica dental, “está completamente comprometido a servir bien y ayudar a todos”. Agregó que, “ver las personas muy satisfechas de recibir nuestros servicios es simplemente gratificante”.

En cuanto a recibir apoyo gratuito en medio de la incertidumbre, el Proyecto Gabriel ayuda



Foto de arriba: Un higienista dental de la Clínica Dental de CCFW brinda atención a un cliente el 24 de enero. (NTC/ Juan Guajardo)



Michael Reilly, Director Sénior de Operaciones y Empresas Sociales, posa para una foto el 24 de enero en Caridades Católicas de Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

a las madres durante su embarazo e incluso hasta doce meses después del nacimiento de su bebé. El Proyecto cuenta con cuatro miembros bilingües en su personal, y doce de las ochenta y cuatro voluntarias conocidas como ‘ángeles’, hablan español. Todos se aseguran de que las necesidades de las madres sean atendidas, señala Kasey Whitley, Directora del Proyecto Gabriel.

“Les pido, por favor, que busquen ayuda. No queremos que las madres pasen por esto solas”, así invita Whitley a todas las madres que “se sienten que les falta apoyo y que carecen de los recursos necesarios para dar la bienvenida a su bebé a este mundo”.

Whitley, que lleva catorce años trabajando en Caridades Católicas Fort Worth y desde

el 2019 como Directora del Proyecto Gabriel, asegura que ve reflejado el ejemplo de Nuestra Madre Santísima en el pasaje Bíblico de la Visitación del Ángel Gabriel en cada madre que afirma “su elección de vida”. “Nuestros ‘ángeles’ pueden presentarse ante nuestras madres con alegría y las pueden asistir durante ese especial y vulnerable tiempo del embarazo”, señaló. Explica que, a pesar de que la mayoría de las madres eligen tener y criar a sus hijos, ellos trabajan también con las agencias de adopción, si así lo desea la madre. Esta opción es una “hermosa elección”, dijo.

A la hora de pasar por una mala situación económica y pedir ayuda, “la cultura hispana es muy fuerte y

CONTINÚA EN LA PÁGINA 62



Connie Beck, Directora del Programa del Proyecto Gabriel; Andrea Guerrero, Administradora de Casos del Proyecto Gabriel; y Diana Granados, Administradora de Casos del Proyecto Gabriel, posan en el Armario Gabriel en CCFW el 24 de enero. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Guillermo Gómez, abogado del Departamento de Servicios de Inmigración de Caridades Católicas habla con una cliente el 24 de enero en las oficinas de Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

DE LA PÁGINA 61

autosuficiente”, señaló Cindy Casey, Directora de Servicios a Clientes y Estrategias de Caridades Católicas Fort Worth. Agregó que “aunque éstas son cualidades buenas, pueden inhibirlos a veces de pedir ayuda”. A esto se añade que muchos de ellos no saben inglés y

piensan además que, si no tienen la documentación legal necesaria, eso los descalifica para recibir ayuda. “Ése no es el caso en Caridades Católicas; nosotros proporcionamos servicio sin importar nada”, enfatizó Casey.

“Los programas que Caridades Católicas provee para evadir la pobreza incluyen asistencia y capacitación

financiera y asesoría emocional que los encamine a la estabilidad económica. Los casos a largo plazo pueden durar hasta cinco años. En la actualidad, menos del veinte por ciento de los que reciben estos servicios son de origen hispano, mientras que otros programas como Working Families Services, (Servicios a Familias que Trabajan), que duran de seis a doce meses, tienen un treinta y tres por ciento de hispanos que lo aprovechan exitosamente”, explicó Casey.

“Las parroquias son clave. Cada vez trabajan más y más con nosotros para asegurarse de que llevemos asesoría y guía a la gente de su comunidad”, agregó. Además, Cindy resaltó el ejemplo de la Parroquia de St. Francis Xavier en Eastland, en la que se implementó el programa Working Families Services en busca de ayuda para aliviar los desastres que dejó el terrible incendio del 2022, que afectó a decenas de familias, principalmente dentro de la comunidad cercana de Carbon, que es predominantemente hispana.

Según ella afirma, “todo se basa en “crear confianza”, y resaltó la importancia de compartir, de la manera más precisa posible, la información personal como los ingresos y gastos para lograr resultados reales. “Somos las manos y los pies de Cristo en la comunidad. Estamos para ayudar; no juzgamos, les ayudamos a llegar a donde quieren llegar”, dijo Casey. Al mismo tiempo, exhortó firmemente a todos a que “Confíen en nosotros, los animo a que nos busquen y se beneficien de los programas”. Explicó que al solicitar ayuda no hay ninguna obligación de concluir ningún programa.

Alyse Chung, Directora de Comunicaciones de Caridades Católicas Fort Worth, declara que el mayor reto es crear consciencia de todos los servicios que están disponibles, por lo que, además de trabajar y colaborar mano a mano con los Ministerios Sociales Parroquiales “en todos los veintiocho condados de la Diócesis de Fort Worth”. Chung invita y anima a las personas que necesitan ayuda a entrar a la página web, www.CatholicCharitiesFortWorth.org, la cual se encuentra actualmente en varios idiomas, incluido el español. 🇺🇸



La obra de la Pasión de Jesús en Eastland presentada en el 2023. (NTC/Carolina Boelter)

UNA OBRA DE LA PASIÓN

La comunidad de Eastland presenta una obra sobre la pasión de Jesús

Por Alice Murray

Feligreses de las parroquias de Eastland, Cisco, Ranger y Strawn presentan una obra el Viernes Santo 29 de marzo sobre la Pasión de Jesús.

La obra comienza a las 3:00 pm en el Centro Juvenil y de Actividades Familiares de la Parroquia de All Saints, ubicada en 12901 I-20 en Eastland.

Martín Esquivel, miembro de la Parroquia de St. Francis Xavier de Eastland, ha dirigido la producción de la obra los últimos cinco años.

Padre Joseph Pudota, SAC, el párroco a cargo de las parroquias agrupadas de St. Francis Xavier, Our Lady of The Holy Rosary de Cisco, St. Rita de Ranger y St. John de Strawn, brinda cada año el apoyo necesario para realizar la obra sobre la pasión de Jesús.

“Esta obra es en realidad la recreación

de la Pasión de Jesús”, dijo Padre Pudota. “Comunica un gran mensaje ya que la mayoría de las veces, cuando la leemos sólo podemos imaginarla. Sin embargo, cuando la vemos con nuestros propios ojos o sucede frente a nosotros, sentimos de una manera más realista y personal cómo sufrió Jesús. Crea sentimientos y emociones que nos hacen pensar sobre el gran sacrificio que Jesús hizo por nosotros”.

“El año pasado entre ciento cincuenta y doscientas personas vinieron a ver la obra”, añadió Padre Pudota.

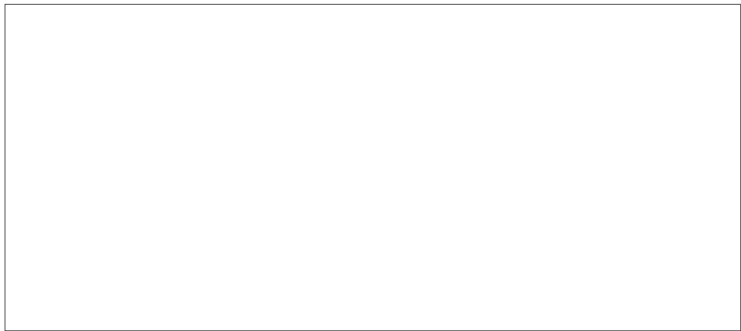
La planificación y producción de la obra de la Pasión no es una tarea fácil. Esquivel apunta que el trabajo de su comité comienza muchos meses antes de la presentación, ya que conlleva buscar voluntarios y encontrar los disfraces, accesorios y suministros que se necesitan. Además, hay que planificar los diseños del escenario, preparar el lugar donde se

presentará, y anunciar y promover la obra en las parroquias y comunidades locales.

El elenco de la obra incluye entre cuarenta y cincuenta personas para cubrir los diversos papeles. Incluso, hay personas que desempeñan más de un papel en la obra.

Esquivel señala que organizar la producción tiene gran importancia y un significado muy profundo para él.

“Siento que se trata verdaderamente de la responsabilidad que tengo como cristiano católico, ya que al presentar esta obra puedo ayudar a la gente a reflexionar sobre el dolor y sufrimiento que Jesucristo soportó por la salvación de todos nosotros”, explicó Esquivel. “Cuando las personas se reúnen para presenciar el sufrimiento de Jesús, se convierten también en partícipes de la obra. Uno puede notar las reacciones del público y las diversas emociones que la recreación de la pasión de Jesús suscita en ellos”. 🇺🇸



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