

BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH



# NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC

## BUILDING CHRIST'S CHURCH



MAY - JUNE 2024  
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# Secure to the end

When I was a kid, I loved to read — just about anything I could get my hands on — but often mysteries.

After I proceeded from Encyclopedia Brown to Nancy Drew, then Agatha Christie and beyond, more often than not I'd find myself halfway through the book with my mind spinning and my stomach in knots.

I never intended to do it when I began the story, but I'd get to a point where I couldn't help myself. The tension was too great; I'd have to jump ahead to the last page.

Once I knew the novel's resolution, I could resume reading where I'd left off. Secure in the knowledge of the conclusion, I could savor the plot development, characters, and dialogue and not rush through the details to discover who done it.

As Christians, we walk confidently through life with Jesus because we know how the story ends.

Take Holy Week for example. At the conclusion of the Holy Thursday Mass, we see the emptiness of the stripped altar and vacant tabernacle. We feel forlorn, but we don't despair.

On Good Friday, we feel the immense sorrow of the Lord's Passion, but we know Jesus does not remain in the tomb.

On Easter Sunday, the tomb is empty. He is risen. He has conquered sin and death.

In the struggles of daily life, with uncertainties and losses, we don't know what the future holds. Will my family member find a job? Will my neighbor recover from her illness? How will this intractable problem be resolved?

While we're certain to encounter some turmoil in these middle chapters of our lives, we can be at peace. We know our ultimate destination and Who is with us. Jesus has promised, "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (*Matthew 28:30*).

The end of the story is written. He is risen, He loves us, and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

We know the ending, and it is good because He is good.

*Susan Moses*

EDITOR

# From the donkey to the cross

## Palm Sunday.

To recall Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, parishioners pick up palm leaves as they enter Good Shepherd Church in Colleyville on Palm Sunday, March 24.



NTC/Ben Torres

## Chrism Mass.

Bishop Michael Olson mixes balsam into the Sacred Chrism on March 26 at St. Patrick Cathedral in Fort Worth. Chrism is used throughout the diocese for baptism, for confirmation and for holy orders, and in the consecration of churches and altars.



NTC/Juan Guajardo



### Holy Thursday.

At St. Stephen Parish in Weatherford, Father Emmet O'Hara, SAC, washes the feet of parishioners on March 28 in a commemoration of the Last Supper.



### Good Friday.

Joined by Deacons Benjamin Grothouse and Eric Flores, Bishop Michael Olson leads the 39<sup>th</sup> annual Rosary Vigil for Life on Good Friday outside Planned Parenthood in Fort Worth on March 29.



### Good Friday.

Parishioners venerate the cross by kissing the feet of Jesus at Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Fort Worth on March 29.

THERE'S MORE



See more photos from Holy Week by scanning the QR code or visiting [North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.org](http://North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.org).

# A hunger for truth



Young Adult Mass attracts Catholics who focus on living for Christ

**FORT WORTH** — Were you to make a list of what you imagine to be typical Saturday-night activities enjoyed by people under the age of 35, attending a vigil Mass and eating dinner in a parish hall afterward wouldn't even enter into consideration.

However, more than 200 Catholics attended the semiannual Young Adult Mass March 2 at St. Patrick Cathedral in Fort Worth.

During his homily, Father Jonathan Wallis, diocesan vicar general, gave the congregation a piece of advice: if we were to live every day of our lives at least attempting to do God's will, we would be a far greater force for good in the world than we could ever expect. When he spoke again during the meal after Mass, Fr. Wallis underscored

the joy at the core of what it means to be Christian.

The large number and attentiveness of the attendees demonstrate that a growing number of young people are finding in the Church a source of

nourishment which actually satisfies the hunger for meaning, instead of just temporarily masking it with the nutrient-deficient junk of false divinities.

— Walker Price



Attendees exchange the sign of peace at the Young Adult Mass. (NTC/Ben Torres)

## At His service



Father Brett Metzler explores how to return one's gifts to God at Young Catholic Professionals meeting

Father Brett Metzler  
(NTC/Matthew Redden)



**FORT WORTH** — Father Brett Metzler spoke on how to offer one's gifts and talents to God at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Fort Worth on March 21 as part of the Young Catholic Professionals Fort Worth chapter's executive speaker series.

The diocesan vocations director and YCP chaplain shared the importance of stepping away from a busy life so we may give back to God.

"Whatever skills I have acquired, whatever gifts I have been given, I place them at your service," Fr. Metzler said, referencing St. Augustine's famous promise, before acknowledging the challenge in adopting this tenet as one's

*telos*, or ultimate aim.

"Doing God's will is demanding, right? It requires a lot. I mean, Catholic marriage done right is harder than non-Catholic marriage. There are a lot of requirements for being Catholic and that's on purpose."

But even as He requires much from us, it is all done in His providence, so we may rely on Him more, Fr. Metzler affirmed.

"If the foundation [of accepting His will] isn't there, we'll be overwhelmed," he continued. "If it is there, however, and you're grounded in the one thing necessary in your life, then as the Lord keeps giving you more and more, a portion of the cross that may have felt heavier and might have overwhelmed you, won't — because you're tied to Him, and you know that His power is the one that's getting you through that."

"It's not on you to accomplish this responsibility; it's on Him, through you," Fr. Metzler said.

— Christina Benavides

# Healing and reconciliation

Safe Environment Office observes National Child Abuse Prevention month with Mass of Reparation for Victims and Survivors of Abuse



Bishop Michael Olson delivers his homily at the Mass of Reparation on April 6. (NTC/Ben Torres)

**FORT WORTH** — Bishop Michael Olson celebrated the Mass of Reparation for Victims and Survivors of Abuse on April 6 at St. Patrick Cathedral in Fort Worth.

About 100 parishioners, including many safe environment facilitators, attended in person, and more than 300 watched the livestream.

“We are here today to pray for God’s Grace for our own conversion and to make reparation for the sins of the Church’s leaders, ministers, and members who have too easily embraced the stances of disbelief and coercion to silence in the face of those who speak the truth in Christ about the truth of sexual abuse perpetrated in the past by the Church’s leaders, ministers, and members against them and their families,” said the bishop in his homily.

This was the fourth annual Mass of Reparation, which is sponsored by the Office of Safe Environment. The diocesan department seeks to protect children and vulnerable adults and to provide healing and reconciliation to those affected by abuse.

— *Karla Silva*

## An Apostle’s relic



Fraction of St. Jude’s arm leaves Italy for the first time

**MANSFIELD** — Faithful in the Diocese of Fort Worth enjoyed the opportunity to view and venerate a relic of one of the Apostles.

An American tour of a bone fragment from St. Jude’s arm that began in September included stops at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller on April 2, St. Jude Parish in Mansfield on April 3, and St. Michael Parish in Bedford on April 9.

One of the Twelve Apostles, St. Jude was martyred about 65 A.D. in Beirut. Emperor Constantine, in 333 A.D., transferred St. Jude’s remains to St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome where they remained until now.

“A relic of one of the Apostles is something very rare and extraordinary,” said Father Daniel Kelley, pastor of St. Jude Church, of the relic’s appearance at his parish. “As something that most people only have an opportunity to see if they travel to Rome, we consider



A visitor touches the reliquary containing St. Jude’s arm fragment on April 3 at St. Jude Parish in Mansfield. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

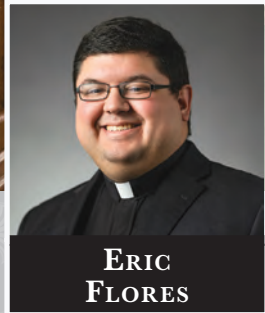
ourselves very blessed to have something so sacred come to our parish.”

Each of the three parishes that hosted the relic celebrated a special Mass in honor of St. Jude and offered hours of veneration.

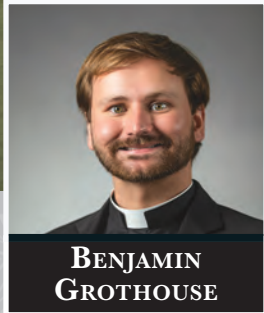
Catholics lined up by the hundreds to see the relic of St. Jude, who is known as the patron saint of impossible causes.

— *Matthew Smith*

# PRIESTLY ORDINATION



**ERIC  
FLORES**



**BENJAMIN  
GROTHOUSE**

**SATURDAY, MAY 18  
10:00 AM  
ST. PATRICK CATHEDRAL**

Through the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the imposition of hands  
**Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, STD, MA**  
will ordain deacons  
**Eric Flores and Benjamin Grothouse**  
to the sacred order of presbyter.

For more information visit [fwdioc.org](http://fwdioc.org)

## ASSIGNMENTS

BY MOST REV. MICHAEL OLSON

### REV. MSGR. JOSEPH PEMBERTON

Previously Pastor of Most Blessed Sacrament Parish in Arlington, will retire effective July 1.

### REV. KARL SCHILKEN

Previously Pastor of St. Bartholomew Parish in Fort Worth, will retire effective July 21.

### REV. MSGR. PUBLIUS XUEREB

Previously Pastor of Holy Redeemer Parish in Aledo, will retire effective July 1.

## IN MEMORIAM

### FATHER DONALD DONAHUGH



Fr. Donald Donahugh

After moving to Fort Worth in 2011, Father Donald Donahugh became a familiar face to parishioners in North Texas. Known for his boundless energy and joyful personality, the former Air Force and hospital chaplain assumed the role of supporting priests and assisted with

the celebration of Mass and the sacraments wherever needed.

“He worked everywhere — Holy Family, St. Bartholomew, St. Peter, St. Andrew, and for the sisters at the OLV [Our Lady of Victory] Center,” said Mary Mulkay, his surviving sister. “He helped a lot of people, but you would do that in 62 years as a priest.”

Fr. Donahugh, 88, passed away March 9. Many grateful people he served filled Holy Family Church in Fort Worth March 13 for a Mass of Christian Burial celebrated by Father Hoa Nguyen.

### FATHER ELISEO HERNÁNDEZ, CORC



Fr. Eliseo Hernández

Father Eliseo Hernández Villareal of the Workers of the Kingdom of Christ (*Operarios del Reino de Cristo*) order and the former pastor of St. Matthew Parish in Arlington died from a car accident on March 1 in Querétaro, Mexico, at 76.

Fr. Hernández was the first in the order to serve at St. Matthew Parish and helped pave the way for future priests. A hard-working and kind man, he emulated simplicity and accessibility in more than 30 years of serving the faithful in various communities around the world.

Parishes in Mexico and the United States alike held commemoration Masses and novenas to pray for the repose of his soul.

Many remembered his dedication to God, administrative leadership, and joy in playing the guitar and accordion.



Read the full obituaries at [NorthTexasCatholic.org](http://NorthTexasCatholic.org).



## Barton leads Cristo Rey

**FORT WORTH** — Dani Ray Barton’s passion for Cristo Rey Fort Worth High School is contagious, and now she’s perfectly positioned to further the unique work-study, college-prep campus in helping students with limited economic means become men and women of faith, purpose, and service.

Last month, Barton was named president of Cristo Rey Fort Worth after serving as interim president for the past year.

In her previous role, she led the Corporate Work-Study program beginning when the campus opened in 2018. But she joined the CRFW team in 2016 to lead the school’s feasibility study, after Bishop Michael Olson contacted the Chicago headquarters because he believed the school would benefit the community.

“There is not a single employee that has been with the organization longer than Dani Ray,” said Stephen O’Neal, chair of the CRFW Board of Directors.

Barton knows CRFW from every facet: the work-study program, fundraising, finances, faculty and staff, and the students in the school, O’Neal said.

Besides her thorough knowledge of the school, Barton stood out as the best candidate because of her passion.

“That passion allows her to go out to work-study partners — current or prospective — or donors — current or prospective — and they can see that and catch it too,” O’Neal said. “Her passion shines through.”

When CRFW opened in 2018, the school had close to 70 students. Next year, they’ll have 275, with plans over the next three years to grow to about 400 students, Barton said.

The Corporate Work-Study program began with 20 companies and now has 70 partners. “Ninety percent of those founding partners are still with us today,” she said.

— Sandra Engelland



Cristo Rey Fort Worth President Dani Ray Barton

# COR JESU

## FAMILY EVENT &

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CONFIGURED  
TO CHRIST  
*the servant*

Isaac McCracken ordained as transitional deacon

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

◀ Isaac McCracken lies prostrate as the bishop and congregation pray the Litany of the Saints during the transitional diaconate ordination on March 19 at St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

“**T**rust God as St. Joseph did.” Bishop Michael Olson spoke these reassuring words to Isaac McCracken moments before ordaining him to the transitional diaconate during a March 19 Mass in St. Maria Goretti Parish on the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

More than 350 family, friends, and clergy witnessed the ceremony that marks a seminarian’s final year of formation before ordination to the priesthood. One of three ranks of clerical ministry in the Church, a deacon can assist at Mass, proclaim the Gospel, deliver homilies, preside at baptisms, bless marriages, and perform rites of Christian burial.

Although they share similar functions and responsibilities as permanent deacons, transitional deacons have the added responsibility of studying for the priesthood.

#### A RIGHTEOUS MAN

Before a man can be ordained a priest configured to Christ, he must first be configured to Christ the servant, Bishop Olson told the congregation during the liturgy.

“The dignity of Eucharist requires a priesthood vibrant with the charity of Christ who came to serve and not be served,” he explained. “The diaconate is the means by which Christ enkindles the charity in the heart of a man He is preparing for priestly ordination.”

Bishop Olson called St. Joseph a righteous man who responded to God’s call to accept Mary into his home with silent listening, meditation, and obedience.

“He sought only God’s will and not his own which is the essential meaning of every priest’s life,” he asserted.

Addressing McCracken, the bishop said St. Joseph is proof there is joy to be found in sacrificial love and service.

“Your ordination tonight, on this solemnity, offers you an example and an intercessor for integrity of life, selfless service, and pure love,” he continued. “Be confident that God our Father will sustain you in your vocation just as He sustained St. Joseph in His unique ministry to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Son of God.”

#### GROWING IN FAITH

The former St. Vincent de Paul parishioner entered St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict, Louisiana, after studying economics for two years at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). He credits UTA’s campus ministry, and the newly ordained priests who celebrated Mass on campus, for inspiring his vocation.

Jeff Hedglen, director of UTA’s campus ministry



Bishop Michael Olson lays hands on Isaac McCracken and prays for the gift of the Holy Spirit during the transitional diaconate ordination. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

program, remembers how McCracken served at Mass and in leadership roles with his peers.

“Being part of Isaac’s life while he was at UTA and seeing him grow in faith and then discern the priesthood was a real joy,” said Hedglen, who gave the second reading at the Ordination Mass. “The campus ministry was a place for him to find fellowship with other young people who were also trying to be serious about their faith.”

Given the chance to serve as greeters and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at the UTA Mass also “opened up an opportunity for students to consider a deeper, fuller aspect of ministry,” he suggested.

#### PROMISES AND PRAYER

During the ordination rite, the 26-year-old seminarian made three promises for the first time in his formation: to live a celibate life as a sign of dedication to God and service to others; to respect and obey the bishop and his successors; and to pray faithfully the Liturgy of the Hours.

Demonstrating submission to the will of God, the ordinand then prostrated himself before the altar as the congregation sang the centuries-old Litany of the Saints for the world and on behalf of the man approaching the sacrament of holy orders. The visible act of

Continued on Page 12



Newly ordained Deacon Isaac McCracken smiles after his transitional diaconate ordination Mass. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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prostration symbolizes laying down one’s life for the service of God and His Church.

Following the intercessory prayer, McCracken approached the bishop for the most essential element of the ordination liturgy. With a gesture used by the Apostles in the election of the first deacons for the Church (*Acts 6:6*), Bishop Olson laid hands on McCracken’s head as he invoked the gifts of the Holy Spirit needed for ministry.

The newly ordained received the vestments of the diaconate, the stole and dalmatic, from men instrumental in his vocation journey — Deacon Bruce Corbett and Deacon Normand Etienne.

Wearing the garments of his new office, Deacon McCracken returned to the bishop who handed him the Book of the Gospel with the declaration, “Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you have become. Believe what you read. Teach what you believe and practice what you teach.”

**SUPPORT AND CELEBRATION**

For Gary and Joann McCracken, the Ordination Mass was a time for celebration after witnessing their son’s years of

study and discernment. As a transitional deacon, McCracken will continue his pastoral, liturgical, and educational preparation for the priesthood at Theological College in Washington, D.C., where he is earning a master of divinity degree and a baccalaureate of sacred theology degree.

“It’s surreal that, after all this time in seminary, it’s finally here,” said his mother, describing the final milestone before ordination to the priesthood next year. “We knew he didn’t make this decision lightly, so it was important to be supportive.”

The mother of two boys described her younger son as kind, smart, and honest.

“And he has courage, and it’s important for a priest to have courage especially now,” she added.

Glen McCracken believes his grandson’s skill at learning languages will help his ministry. Fluent in Spanish and conversational in German, the new deacon is

studying Latin, hoping to read the works of Church Fathers in the original text.

“He’s made me very proud,” the grandfather remarked. “I see the way he works with everybody and is so very dedicated.”

**AN INSPIRING LITURGY**

Father Samuel Maul said the ordination of a man preparing for the priesthood “is a great day in the life of Isaac but also in the life of the diocese.”

Taking place on the anniversary of his own ordination to the transitional diaconate, the pastor of St. Maria Goretti Parish hoped the rite would inspire others.

“It’s a liturgy that doesn’t get seen very often, but it’s very impactful. There are a lot of components that spark the imagination,” he said. “Graces are there at every Mass, but there’s something about an ordination that draws people into questioning where God is leading them.” 🇺🇸

**MORE PHOTOS**



See all photos of Deacon Isaac McCracken’s transitional diaconate ordination by scanning the QR code or visiting [NorthTexasCatholic.smugmug.com/ Isaac-McCracken-Transitional-Deacon-Ordination](http://NorthTexasCatholic.smugmug.com/Isaac-McCracken-Transitional-Deacon-Ordination).



Parishioners pray the Rosary outside St. Philip the Apostle Church in Flower Mound on March 30 before the Easter Vigil Mass. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

# WELCOME to the family

Stories of four new Catholics who  
entered the Church at the Easter Vigil

By Lance Murray

Every year on Holy Saturday during the Easter Vigil, hundreds of people in the Diocese of Fort Worth enter the Church, welcomed as new Catholics through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

New Catholics and their sponsors and families gathered for the Easter Vigil to celebrate Christ's resurrection and their entry to the Church.

Among the 1544 who entered the

Church then, here are unique stories of four and how their faith journeys led to the Easter Vigil and joining the Catholic Church.

## GRATITUDE AND JOY

Isabella Arreola is one of 629 catechumens in the diocese who entered the Church on March 30.

A catechumen is an unbaptized person seeking to follow Christ in His Church by preparing for Christian discipleship via baptism, confirmation,

and Holy Communion.

The 21-year-old Denton resident prepared for the sacraments of initiation in her RCIA classes at St. Philip the Apostle Parish in Flower Mound.

Becoming a Catholic at the Easter Vigil holds great meaning for Arreola.

"That makes me feel more grateful and more joyous because every day I sit and I do my prayers, and I just think about this time and trying to be close

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### From Page 13

[with God],” she said. “It makes me feel very grateful that I have this community to fully immerse myself into and be able to finally be at one with Jesus.”

Attending St. Philip has clarified her thoughts on her faith.

“It’s definitely a strange feeling because I had always felt separated from the Church before I started coming to St. Philip. Something was always missing,” Arreola said. “Then I started going [to Mass] and learning a lot about the right way that you’re supposed to have a relationship with God, and a lot of things made a lot more sense to me and established my faith.

“Learning about His Passion and His works — it just makes me feel a lot more grateful.”

Being a catechumen taught her there is more to Easter than she had previously understood.

“Now it means more about redemption than anything else,” the

graduating senior at the University of North Texas said. “I feel because I am getting baptized, it makes me feel like a rebirth.

“It feels like a new beginning, and it makes me feel even closer to God because I have entered into the Church around the same time that He had died for us, so it’s an even more special bonding.”

She is also committed to praying daily, which wasn’t something she would do before.

“I would pray at night, but the way that I have a relationship with God has changed; the way that I view myself has changed,” Arreola said.

### NO LONGER A SPECTATOR

Another catechumen at St. Philip the Apostle, Mollie Reeves felt very excited to “have the Holy Spirit in me” after baptism.

Participating in Mass takes on new meaning because she now receives Holy Communion. She explained, “I will be inside the church instead of a spectator



looking in at Mass. It marks a new chapter in my religious journey that I have been praying about for years,” Reeves said.

Easter holds more significant meaning to her than it had in the past.

“Before I became a catechumen, I believed Easter was a holy day due to a somewhat religious upbringing, but I did not understand the depth and importance of it,” Reeves said. “Now I understand it is one of the holiest days ... and the best opportunity to honor and remember the death and resurrection of Christ.

“I also did not mourn on Good Friday and did not understand the reason for it. Now, I honor Christ the whole week of Easter and celebrate His resurrection,” she said.

### HUMBLED YET INSPIRED

One of 915 candidates in the diocese,



◀ Mollie Reeves receives a candle from her sponsor, Pat Bianco, during the Easter Vigil Mass at St. Philip the Apostle Church in Flower Mound on March 30. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



◀ Father Raymond McDaniel baptizes Isabella Arreola during the Easter Vigil Mass at St. Philip the Apostle Church in Flower Mound on March 30. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Blake Rogers attended RCIA classes at St. Michael Parish in Bedford.

A candidate is a baptized person from another Christian community who wants to become Catholic.

“This journey is a very meaningful time for me because I come from a different Christian denomination but stayed away from the Church for many years,” Rogers said. “Before I returned, I felt very lost and like something in my life was missing.”

Marriage helped change that for Rogers, however.

“When I met my wife Theresa, who is Catholic, she felt the call to return to the Church as well, so we began our journey back together,” he said. “As I continued this journey, I have found a true family in the faith as well as what the true meaning of worship looks like.”

His previous impression of Easter has changed.

“Before coming back to the faith, Easter seemed like a very commercialized holiday. It was an excuse to have a cookout and spend money on frivolous things. Kids receiving oversized Easter

baskets and chasing down eggs in a field,” he recalled.

“Now I see it as a preparation for the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” Rogers said. “Truly showing to the world He is the true Son of God and inspiring His disciples to go out and make new disciples of men, culminating in St. Peter becoming the first pope of the Catholic Church and establishing the first institution of worship in the Catholic faith.

“A time of celebration, as well,” he continued, “for welcoming new members into the Catholic faith.”

Rogers called his preparation for the Easter Vigil humbling yet inspiring.

“My preparations for entering the Church included partaking in the RCIA program, which has been a humbling and eye-opening experience actually. Sitting down with the knowledgeable RCIA team and reading through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Holy Bible,” Rogers said.

“It opened my eyes to the true nature and fullest love of the Catholic Church and her humbling faith.”

### SPONSORED BY HER SON

A fellow candidate, Denise Wilson, 64, said her journey has a bit of a backstory.

“I married a Catholic,” the Denton resident said. “But I was baptized Baptist, and I’ve always been in the Baptist Church.”

Her sons, she said, are cradle Catholics.

“That was one thing that [my husband] John and I, when we first started dating and talking about getting married, decided — our children would be raised in the Catholic faith,” Wilson said. “So, we did that.”

Wilson said she felt kind of lost and floundered after her divorce.

“I just felt this kind of void in my life. That I needed something different, something else. So, that was the point in time when I really searched for what I needed,” Wilson shared.

“Even though I was still going to Church every Sunday, for the most part, I decided that fully becoming Catholic and going through confirmation would be, I think, the last point of fulfilling my life,” Wilson continued.

That’s when Wilson decided to enroll in RCIA at St. Philip the Apostle and begin the process of becoming a Catholic.

Her youngest son, Scott, attends St. Philip with her and was her sponsor at the Easter Vigil.

“He’s very excited,” Wilson said. 🇺🇸

Monsignor Publius Xuereb, Monsignor Joseph Pemberton, and Father Karl Schilken retire as pastors, but

# PRIESTHOOD IS FOREVER

By Susan Moses

**A**s three diocesan priests approach retirement, Bishop Michael Olson reflected, “Each of these priests has influenced many to live the Catholic faith through their fruitful priestly ministry during their many years in the Diocese of Fort Worth.

“Monsignor Publius Xuereb is the last active diocesan priest ordained in 1968 to serve in the Diocese of Dallas-Fort Worth prior to the establishment of the Diocese of Fort Worth in 1969.

“Monsignor Joseph Pemberton and Father Karl Schilken retire as the last active priests ordained by Bishop John Cassata, the founding bishop of Fort Worth.

“Priesthood is forever, and while no man ever retires from being a priest, these men retire from the burdens of administration that they have faithfully discharged for many years. We pray for them during this transition in their lives and thank them for their service.”

## **MONSIGNOR PUBLIUS XUEREB**

Call it a coincidence, call it God’s providence, or call it a miracle, but a

chance encounter changed the life trajectory of young Father Publius Xuereb and impacted the newly established Diocese of Fort Worth.

The priest was visiting his brother in Dallas in 1969 when he met Fort Worth Bishop Cassata, who suggested Fr. Xuereb move to Fort Worth.

Ordained in his native Malta in 1968, Monsignor Publius Xuereb has served the Diocese of Fort Worth under all four bishops, with assignments as pastor or assistant pastor at 11 parishes.

He said he still feels indebted to the parishioners from an early assignment, Our Lady Queen of Peace in Wichita Falls, who were patient with him while he learned English.

When he retires June 30, the priest will leave a lasting legacy at Holy Redeemer Parish in Aledo.

When he became shepherd of the Aledo parish in 2009, construction had just been completed on the church. The pastor designed stained-glass windows featuring the sacraments and native plants, as well as two large statues of the Holy Family. An accomplished artist, Msgr.





Monsignor Publius Xuereb celebrates Mass on April 10 at Holy Redeemer Church in Aledo. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Xuereb likes to paint and to repair and refurbish damaged religious statues.

He also began a monthly Mass of Healing on the first Sunday of each month, which offers Adoration, Benediction, and anointing of the sick. About 250 attend each month, dedicating prayer for the unity of the family, those with special needs, those who are ill and their caregivers, and vocations.

But his biggest impact on the parish, said Deacon Steve Dixon, is the “tight community” at Holy Redeemer. “A big part of that is him.”

“He’s one of the most caring, compassionate priests — no, men — I’ve ever met,” said Dcn. Dixon. “He has a genuine love for his parishioners, and he is very well loved in return.”

The mutual love is evident at the end of every Mass, when a throng of parishioners line up to greet their pastor, who is known for his sense of humor and

booming laugh.

A highlight in his 56 years of priesthood came in 2012, when the Holy Redeemer pastor received the papal honor of monsignor from Pope Benedict XVI for his service to the Church. The announcement came on the anniversary of his mother’s death.

“I know my mother had something to do with it. The timing could not have been better,” he told the *North Texas Catholic* at the time.

He credits his parents with teaching him about the importance of hard work, faith, and serving God.

He remembers that as a young boy, he knelt on “cold, hard marble” at Mass and listened to his mother whisper the *Anima Christi* prayer after Communion. More than seventy-five years later, he still prays the *Anima Christi* after Communion. “The prayer that I heard her pray will be forever in my heart and

keeps me united with my mother.”

Deacon Scott France called Msgr. Xuereb a “beautiful man and friend, a father figure to me.”

The pastor, who turns 82 this year, will always be considered family and will be dearly missed, added Dcn. France. “Bishop [Michael Olson] blessed us by letting us keep him until this age.”

Early in Msgr. Xuereb’s retirement, he will probably visit family in Malta and take a cruise, said Dcn. Dixon. Growing up on an island nation, Msgr. Xuereb has always loved the ocean.

However, the deacon expects Msgr. Xuereb will return to Fort Worth to celebrate Mass and provide sacramental ministry. With the administrative tasks of being a pastor behind him, “He’ll be free to do what he was called to do — be a priest,” said Dcn. Dixon.

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Monsignor Joseph Pemberton gives his homily at Most Blessed Sacrament in Arlington on April 7. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

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## MONSIGNOR JOSEPH PEMBERTON

Monsignor Joseph Pemberton joked he's leaving a "well-oiled machine" to the next pastor of Most Blessed Sacrament in Arlington. He quickly deflected any credit however, saying he followed Monsignor Joseph Scantlin, "a tremendous community builder, so I stepped into a wonderful

community."

The advice he leaves for the next pastor is secondhand, he acknowledges, something he was told by the late Monsignor Joseph Schumacher when he replaced him at St. Michael Parish in Bedford — "just show the people that you love them."

"That's a key element to being a good pastor, to help enable the people to know not only am I here to serve you, but I love

you. You're my family while I'm here," Msgr. Pemberton said.

That practice has enabled Msgr. Pemberton to say each of his 12 parish assignments "has been a blessing. They've all been a very positive experience, and they've helped me to grow in my priesthood."

Growing up in Fort Worth, Msgr. Pemberton attended St. Rita Catholic School, St. George Catholic School, and Nolan Catholic High School. He was ordained April 29, 1977, at St. Rita Parish in Fort Worth with great and lasting support from his family.

In his 47 years as a diocesan priest, Msgr. Pemberton has noted many changes: the growth of the Hispanic community; an influx of people moving to Texas from the Northeast and California; and the empowerment of the laity.

All three trends are evident at Most Blessed Sacrament, which is home to about 1,700 families, "a mixture of young and old, all kinds of nationalities and cultures. It's very much of a United Nations parish," Msgr. Pemberton said.

At the Arlington church where he's been pastor since 2016, parishioners live their baptismal call to follow Christ and make Him present in the world, generously giving their resources, gifts, and time to serve God and the parish, he said. Involvement of laity in ministries and programs is essential for a parish to thrive, he added.

"My main role as your pastor is to bring you closer to Jesus. And if I have done that by helping you live out your baptismal call and know your gifts, then I've done what God has asked me to do ... to bring the community closer to Jesus," he said.



Monsignor Joseph Pemberton celebrates Mass at Most Blessed Sacrament in Arlington on April 7. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

Msgr. Pemberton is a healthy, active 75, but “I know in my heart that now is the time,” he said of retirement. He plans to be a supply priest, providing sacramental ministry in parishes when their priest is on vacation or ill.

With more freedom in his schedule, he will travel, read, enjoy music, and “really focus on my spiritual life,” spending more time in prayer and attending retreats. He knows he may have decades of life ahead of him, but “I want to be spiritually ready, whenever that moment comes, to meet my Lord.”

He has kept his priestly life nourished and strong through a devotion to the Eucharist and the practice of a daily Rosary.

“I ask our Lord every day to help me fall in love with You. Not just to love You, but to be in love with You as You are in love with me. So my love for the Eucharist, my devotion to the Eucharist

— it’s very key to any priest,” he said.

Mary has been a powerful intercessor, he said. “Not a day goes by that I don’t say the Rosary. I do it because I believe that Mary is the mother of God; she’s also our mother, but she’s a special mother to priests because the priest is *in persona Christi*, another Christ.”

Retirement will shift his daily responsibilities but not his love for God and His people. “There is nothing I would rather do in my life than be a priest. I know it’s my calling, and I absolutely love being a priest,” said Msgr. Pemberton.

#### FATHER KARL SCHILKEN

When Father Karl Schilken retires in July, he is planning to head west, but he will not ride off into the sunset. The pastor of St. Bartholomew Church in Fort Worth will move to a favorite vacation spot: Taos, New Mexico.

There, the priest of 44 years will

continue to serve the Church and the less fortunate. The local parish priest in Taos doesn’t speak Spanish, so Fr. Schilken plans to celebrate a Mass in Spanish each weekend, as well as provide sacramental ministry in Spanish as needed.

Fr. Schilken learned Spanish early in his seminary years at the direction of Bishop Cassata. He explained, “I actually really learned Spanish. I can think in Spanish; I can preach without notes in Spanish. ... I am fortunate that I’m able to do that.”

The priest will also devote time to teaching adults how to read — “there’s a tremendous level of illiteracy” — and to helping people earn their GEDs.

If requested, added the canon lawyer, he will help the Diocese of Santa Fe by writing cases for the marriage tribunal and by celebrating Masses at neighboring

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Father Karl Schilken distributes Holy Communion during a Spanish Mass at St. Bartholomew Church in Fort Worth on April 7. (NTC/Ben Torres)

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parishes.

Sounds like a busy retirement, but Fr. Schilken looks forward to stepping back from the daily responsibilities of shepherding a large parish. “My attitude is I want to quit while they say, ‘I wish he had stayed longer,’” he said with a laugh.

Turning more serious, he added, “Priests need a chance to retire and to have a different stage of life. ... There are some things that need to happen to you between the ages of 70 and 85 as far as growing in maturity and slowing down — having age and wisdom affect your religious life and your spiritual life.”

Ordained March 29, 1980, at St. William Parish in Montague, Fr. Schilken has served at a dozen parishes, as well as assignments to the tribunal and as vicar general and moderator of the curia for three years.

Looking back, he appreciates the priesthood for the opportunity to administer the

sacraments, mentioning Holy Communion, baptisms, and weddings. In fact, he’s done every baptism during his seven years as pastor of St. Bartholomew.

Plus, he said, “I enjoy preaching, and I enjoy celebrating Mass.”

But the “quiet, private” sacrament of reconciliation can’t be overlooked. “Probably, in many ways, the most important thing that I do as a priest is to hear confessions. I have a lot of people that come to me for confession,” he said.

Administering the sacraments gives priests a unique role in the Church, he explained, but “my call to holiness is the same as yours because of baptism. Because ultimately and profoundly, baptism is our call to Christian mission, and it’s also our call to holiness. And that I share with everyone.”

A vocation, whether to the priesthood or married life, is challenging, he said. “I have not found priesthood to be particularly easy. ... All my married friends will tell you that marriage is not easy. If you’re living

[your vocation] authentically, there’s going to be some great moments in it. There’s going to be, sometimes, some very difficult times too.”

In the last decade, Fr. Schilken has observed selfishness growing in society, especially since the pandemic. He noted our culture has become “so self-centered it is just absolutely astonishing. No concern for the common good.”

However, he added, “This is yet another opportunity for us to live and profess the faith.”

He said the next pastor of St. Bartholomew will find a “very good staff,” including Sister Teresa Rodriguez, who is a tremendous help with the vibrant Hispanic community, and a congregation who will accept the new shepherd with “generosity of heart.”

He hopes he leaves his congregation with “a profound understanding of our commitment to the poor and the most forgotten in society,” a segment of the population he will continue to serve. 🇺🇸

# Millions of beads, countless prayers

Ruth Billen has made  
and given away 50,226  
rosaries



NTC/Thomas Otto

By Jenara Kocks Burgess

In the late 1950s when Ruth Billen was a teenager, her father Henry Veith went on a pilgrimage to a holy site where the Blessed Virgin Mary, nearly a century prior to his arrival, had appeared 18 times to a young Bernadette Soubirous in a small town in Lourdes, France. Upon Veith's return, he gifted an array of souvenirs and presents to the family, but only to his daughter did he gift a rosary.

"Dad didn't talk much, but I always wondered why I was the only one he bought a rosary for," Billen reminisced. "I didn't question it then, but now it's clear to me that it was in God's plan."

At some point, that first rosary broke, but she believed she could fix it.

"I said I can do that. I can make one myself," she said.

Now 88, Billen has made 50,226 rosaries and 3,166 scapulars, all of which she has given away.

The longtime parishioner of Sacred Heart in Wichita Falls said she always

enjoyed making rosaries with beads and chain rather than the knotted-string kind.

She bought her supplies from Our Lady's Rosary Makers based in Louisville, Kentucky, and would return the completed rosaries to them, where they would be shipped to priests and missions around the world.

In their 1997 newsletter, the nonprofit published a photo of Father Raymond Nuliola of Talasari, India, with 20 young boys fanned around him, each holding a rosary she'd created.

Billen has given the rosaries to various people in her community, including local and visiting priests to share with faithful in other counties or countries.

Teaching others how to make them has helped create some of her most memorable experiences.

Billen recalled the hardest babysitting job she had in her youth. A naughty six-year-old was mean and consistently found herself in trouble at school.

"But somehow, she changed when she saw the rosary beads," Billen said with a soft chuckle. "She let me teach her how

to make rosaries. And there was no more bossing me around.

"I told her people would pray on the rosaries, and she was so glad," Billen said.

When the girl asked for her own rosary, Billen asked her mother for permission, since her family wasn't Catholic. Her mother said yes, and the girl soon had a crystal rosary in hand. After that, bedtime was no longer a problem as it had been before.

"She wanted to go to bed early and pray the Rosary," Billen said.

Rosary making is the activity that has brought her the most joy over the years, Billen said.

"Oh, I couldn't wait to make them. All the other housework would have to pretty well go," she said laughing. Even as a teen and young adult, making the prayer beads was her favorite pastime.

Although she can no longer see well enough to make rosaries due to macular degeneration of her eyes, Billen hopes people will read about her devotion to the art of rosary making and inspire others to continue the small ministry in her stead. 🇺🇸

# MORE THAN JUST A wedding

The benefit of preparing for the sacrament of matrimony  
can last a lifetime

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

**L**indsey Moeller always knew when the time came, she would marry in a Catholic Church. Raised in a devout family, the 23-year-old watched older cousins wed in the faith, “and I wanted that, too.”

So when Moeller became engaged to River Bailey, “the first thing we did was call St. Patrick Cathedral to see what dates were available,” she recalled. “It’s a popular place to marry and so beautiful.”

The Colleyville native and her fiancé are part of a declining number of couples choosing a traditional church ceremony. According to Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Catholic marriages decreased 69 percent between 1969 and 2019. Other denominations are experiencing a similar decline as the influence of religion in society fades.

Instead of a church setting, many couples today are opting to wed in secular venues that reflect their personal tastes and preferences like beach resorts, gardens, and high-end hotels.

Moeller and her betrothed, a convert to the faith, believe marrying in the Church makes the commitment more meaningful.

“The most important part of our

wedding day is the Mass because that’s when we promise before God to love each other for the rest of our lives, make a family together, and stand by each other through everything,” observed Moeller, a pediatric speech pathologist.

Of course, there’s a legal aspect to marriage that involves the state of Texas.

“But the state doesn’t care what happens to us or our marriage,” she pointed out. “The Catholic Church does.”

The St. Patrick parishioners recently attended a diocesan Pre-Cana class with other couples as part of their marriage preparation.

“It was a whole day just talking about our relationship, what we hope for our marriage, and any fears we have,” Moeller said. “It shows the people in our Catholic community and the priest who is mentoring us really care about our marriage. It feels genuine.”

## UNDERSTANDING THE SACRAMENT

A timeline of nine to 12 months is required to complete formal marriage preparation in most parishes. In the Diocese of Fort Worth, the process includes a group Pre-Cana class; meetings with a sponsor couple trained and assigned by the parish to discuss

issues that arise in a marital relationship; a natural family planning course; and canonical paperwork.

Marriage is an unbreakable bond in the Catholic Church, and preparing for it helps a couple learn the religious, spiritual, and theological aspects of the sacrament. Catholics sometimes question marrying in the Church because they feel the preparation process is unnecessary and time consuming.

“A lot of that is solved with good pastoral counseling and solid Catholic teaching,” Father Jonathan Demma countered.

The pastor at Sacred Heart Parish in Wichita Falls meets with every engaged couple at the start of their marriage preparation.

“I want them to understand why they are having their wedding in the Church, the nature of the sacrament, and the reason for formation,” he said.

Fr. Demma breaks the ice by asking, “Who will administer the sacrament?” When they answer, “the priest,” he explains a man and woman administer the rite to each other — not the priest.

“And that is different from the other sacraments,” he continued. “I am there to witness, but the couple confer the sacrament to each other.”

The significance of the wedding band



River Bailey and Lindsey Moeller pose inside St. Patrick Cathedral where they plan to be married. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

is another topic discussed. “Receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity,” are the words spoken during the ceremony.

“Your wedding ring is not your own. You’re wearing a sign of the other person’s commitment to you and vice versa,” Fr. Demma emphasized. “It’s a sign of the other person’s love and fidelity and not just a symbol to the secular world that I’m unavailable. That surprises people.”

Another conversation with the bride and groom is scheduled after the pre-wedding requirements are complete.

“I’ll hear from one or the other how they didn’t want to do the preparation and didn’t know why they had to,” he explained. “Now they understand the importance of preparing for the sacrament and are glad they went through the process because they learned so much.”

#### WHY MARRY AT THE ALTAR

During the ceremony, the Church wants a couple to “understand what you

say and mean it,” Fr. Demma said. That’s why personalizing vows is not allowed. No one, not even a priest, can change the wording of the marriage rite. Only the Vatican has that authority.

“In Catholic marriage, people don’t write their own vows to avoid ambiguity. Consent is what makes the marriage,” explained Chris Vaughan, former diocesan director of Marriage and Family Life. “The priest or deacon has to make sure the couple, and everyone witnessing the marriage, know what they are consenting to.”

Marrying outdoors or in a secular venue is another issue that often arises with brides and grooms.

“Catholics are obliged to get married in the Church — not a civil ceremony — because we go to the Lord asking Him to bless the union,” Vaughan stressed. “The beautiful thing about our faith is you don’t have to climb a mountain or go on some long journey to find Him. We know He’s present in the Eucharist in every Catholic parish. Marriages, blessed by

the Church, are only allowed in places of worship.”

People will say they feel God’s presence the most in nature.

“In the beauty of creation, we can see God. That’s true,” the seasoned catechist agreed. “But we don’t have to search for Him. We can just go to the Church.”

Vaughan recommends the newly engaged begin their journey to the altar by calling the parish before booking a reception venue or anything else.

Early contact with the parish can avoid problems with choosing a wedding date.

“Spring weddings are wonderful unless you pick a day a year from now and find out it’s Holy Saturday,” Vaughan said. “Weddings, in general, are not allowed on that day.”

Weddings during Lent are also rare.

“They’re usually done for a pastoral reason, and it’s a more subdued affair,” he explained. “Penitential readings are

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Rob Smat and Kate McBride secured a dispensation from the Diocese of San Diego to be married outside by Deacon Paul Pesqueira early in the pandemic. (Courtesy/Sage Justice )

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used, and you can't bring decorations to the church."

### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Rob Smat and Kate McBride began planning a church wedding as soon as they became engaged in 2019.

The pair met at the Caruso Catholic Center at the University of Southern California, and attending Mass together became an important part of their courtship.

"We try to live the Gospel and what it means to be Roman Catholic," said Smat, who grew up in Fort Worth's Holy Family Parish. "Having a Catholic wedding with a Mass was important to us."

But celebrating the religious rite other newlyweds take for granted became a challenge for the young filmmaker and his California-born fiancée. In 2020, the United States was battling COVID-19, one of the deadliest worldwide pandemics in history. To control the quick-spreading infection rate, states across the country enforced social distancing guidelines and shuttered hair salons, fitness centers,

schools, and places of worship.

Californians faced some of the most rigid stay-at-home orders. Two weeks before the August 1, 2020, wedding date, a sudden surge of COVID cases in San Diego County dashed the couple's hope of exchanging vows in the bride's childhood parish, Mary, Star of the Sea Catholic Church in La Jolla.

"They shut the churches down," recalled Smat, who recounted how COVID impacted the wedding industry and his own nuptials in *The Wedding March*, his recently published book. "We would have married inside the church with just the priest and the two of us present, but [the state] wouldn't let us do it."

With few options available, help came from a deacon they met at USC who later guided their marriage preparation. After securing a dispensation from the diocese, Deacon Paul Pesqueira officiated the wedding ceremony at an outdoor site

a block away from the church. Forty-six immediate family members, who were checked for fevers before the liturgy, witnessed the marriage.

Although the newlyweds were lucky to marry at a time when so many other wedding ceremonies were postponed,


"we did feel a sense of disappointment that we weren't able to marry inside the church that meant so much to us," the author admitted. "Ultimately, we were blessed to have a wedding at all in the summer of 2020, and that joy outweighed our matrimonial subtractions."

Smat urged other couples to recognize the value of preparing for a

church ceremony.

"You go through the hurdles, obstacles, and paperwork to do other things like buying a house," he added. "Why not put that same effort into the spiritual union with your spouse?" 🇺🇸

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Want to learn more about marriage? Scan the QR code or visit

[FwDioc.org/marriage-family-life](http://FwDioc.org/marriage-family-life)



# A Dominican Deacon

Deacon Titus Mary Sanchez, OP, St. Andrew Catholic School alum, ordained into the transitional diaconate

By Lisa Moore

Deacon Titus Mary Sanchez, OP, recalls growing up being more preoccupied with Sunday football games than the events of Mass at St. Andrew Church in Fort Worth. But while attending Southern Methodist University, the young man, then known as Adam Sanchez, began feeling called to preach the Gospel.

At a FOCUS Catholic trip in Alaska, he met a Dominican friar whose piety and masculinity embodied his own personal aspirations as a man and potential priest.

“[Father] was humble, firm, and confident in the truths that our faith is founded upon,” he recalled. “He was willing to take on unforeseen sacrifices for the sake of [these students]. He was this authentic, confident, masculine preacher of the Gospel who was devoted to the sacraments.”

At the end of the trip, the Dominican friar invited him to consider consecrated life, not knowing holy orders were already in his heart. Sanchez made his decision to enter the Dominican Friars of the Province of Saint Joseph soon after a weekend visit.

Now, seven years later, he and six fellow brothers were ordained into the transitional diaconate March 16 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. They are preparing for ordination to the priesthood June 5, 2025.

At his ordination, Dcn. Sanchez found himself pondering *John 12:26a*: “If anyone serves me, He must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be



Deacon Titus Mary Sanchez, OP, stands between his parents, Michael Sanchez and Candice Baker, and brothers Alex and Nolan. (Courtesy Photo)

also.” In Greek, the word “servant” is the same word as “deacon,” he explained.

Christ’s deeper meaning then became apparent at that moment: “I looked upon the Lord on the cross in the processional crucifix. It was Jesus speaking from the cross, saying, ‘Where I am, there will my servant be.’” He realized, “Oh, you mean there, too.”

Dcn. Sanchez has, in fact, given himself totally over. “I decided that pursuing the priesthood was worth my life,” he said. “I’ve received a great, great gift from God and St. Dominic. I get to do this. I have vowed myself to be totally dedicated to teaching the Gospel so that people may believe and have eternal life and be saved.”

Michael Sanchez, Dcn. Sanchez’s father, loves to see his son speaking,

especially with children back home at St. Andrew Catholic School. “He’s filled with the Holy Spirit. He just lights a fire.”

Dcn. Sanchez has already seen God working through him teaching RCIA, noting that “the output doesn’t compute: The gap between what I’m causing and the conversion is the grace of God.”

Through sacraments and Scripture, Dcn. Sanchez looks forward to completely becoming an instrument of God.

“The words of Christ are like arrows in the hands of a warrior,” he explained. “They strike at the heart and cut where the archer wants them to cut. I pray and hope and ask God every day that He make me like an arrow in the hands of a mighty warrior. I pray every day that God use me and prepare me well to fly true and that He send me forth.” 🇺🇸

# WALK of FAITH

Pilgrims sacrifice time and comfort  
to receive God's grace

By Susan Moses

**N**ew destinations, new sights, and new experiences — but it's not a vacation.

It's a pilgrimage.

Father Mel Bessellieu, parochial vicar of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine, has led several pilgrimages to the Holy Land and religious shrines in the U.S. and abroad.

He explained the difference between a vacation and a pilgrimage in simple terms. "A vacation is all about you. You expect to receive a nice hotel room, nice food, and all of that. But on a pilgrimage, it's more about giving to God — your heart, your mind, your soul. And let Him fill you with the graces that come," he said.

A pilgrim journey has helped many diocesan Catholics in their walk of faith.

Olivia Olvera, the youth and family ministry director of St. Mary Parish in Graham, has experienced graces from making pilgrimages, including her trip to World Youth Day in Spain in 2011, where she first encountered "the big vision of the universal Church."

She wants others to have a similar opportunity, so she's organized parishioners from four local parishes to travel together to the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis on July 17-21.

The National Eucharistic Congress, last held in 1941, expects tens of thousands of Catholics from across the country to gather

for Masses, Adoration, workshops, and a revival each evening centered around Christ's true presence in the Holy Eucharist.

The Department of Evangelization and Catechesis for the diocese is offering discounted tickets to the Congress.

When Olvera decided to go, she invited the adult faith formation group at St. Mary to join her. Twenty-six accepted, including some who have never traveled outside of Texas.

Olvera has big expectations, which will include a stop en route at the Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine in Oklahoma City.

She said, "All of us centered around the Eucharist is what gives life to the Church.

"I know that God transforms hearts, so I really do hope all of those who are going will encounter Him, that we are headed to encounter Him in the Eucharist. I do hope we all see the fruits of that, so we are able to carry it back to our community," she continued.

## PROVEN PRACTICE

The act of pilgrimage is ancient. Fourth-century accounts depict Christians traveling to sacred places to worship and venerate relics.

The desire to draw close to God through a physical journey is innate to the human condition, said Jason Whitehead, director of evangelization and catechesis for the diocese.

Because a person is both body and spirit,



and not a disembodied soul, the “extra physicality of worship and pilgrimage very much fits within that frame,” he explained.

“We as Catholics know that we are supposed to unify, unite ourselves to Christ. And that’s not a mere mental act, but something we actually physically participate in,” he said.

United with Christ, we may experience redemptive suffering as pilgrims, he said. Pilgrimages are “painful, very often,” recalled Whitehead, who experienced long days of 14-mile walks and cramped accommodations as he accompanied 240 teenagers to World Youth Day in Poland in 2016.

“It challenges you to remain prayerful,” he said.

## THE WAY

Many consider the ultimate pilgrimage to be the ancient El Camino de Santiago, the Way of St. James. For more than 1,000 years, pilgrims have begun at various locations in Spain, Italy, Portugal, France, or beyond and walked to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain, where the bones of the Apostle James are entombed.

Among the 442,073 pilgrims who arrived at the cathedral in 2023 was Beth Kwansy, a parishioner of St. Jerome Parish in Bowie and a board member of Catholic Charities Fort Worth. She walked 188 miles from Porto, Portugal, to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela last June with her brother.

The 15-day journey was a chance to savor solitude, “unplug from the internet and work,” and devote time to her relationship with her brother and her faith.

Upon reaching their destination, Mass at the cathedral and seeing St. James’ tomb was “pretty spectacular,” she recalled, and said the pilgrimage gave her “a renewed sense of peace.”

## A CLOSER WALK

Although a pilgrimage often calls to mind a long journey, “a pilgrimage isn’t always about the walking,” said Whitehead.

Instead, “it’s about the sacrifice one undergoes for the sake of [worship], because ultimately that’s what growth and holiness always boils down to. Pilgrimage, regardless of whether you’re on foot, bus, plane, whatever — if you go with a proper open heart, the Lord will find you.”

Two chief benefits result, he said. First, the soul expands, enabling the pilgrim to receive the second benefit: “actual grace, which even further moves the soul to being more widely disposed to the reception of sanctifying grace in the sacraments.”

Fr. Bessellieu said having a priest available on a pilgrimage to celebrate the sacraments — Mass at a holy site, reconciliation, and anointing the sick — “galvanizes [the pilgrim’s] faith just a little bit more.

“Every time we go to those places, people are just overwhelmed, and their faith is renewed. People have come up to me in tears saying, ‘Thank you, Father, for bringing us to these places, because it’s a place where you can touch God in a special way, and He can touch you back.’”

One more difference between a vacation and a pilgrimage is in the preparation. When planning a trip, vacationers often ready themselves with Yelp reviews, recommendations from friends, and guidebooks.

Before a pilgrimage, Whitehead recommends prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Fr. Bessellieu advised, “Don’t come with expectations. Just come with an open heart and an open mind to see God wants to do for you.” 🇺🇸

# STICKING with service

When Sister Camella Menotti, SSMN, retired from teaching, she carved out a ministry from walking sticks, gardens, and computers

By Sandra Engelland

Sister Camella Menotti, SSMN, greets her visitor with a smile in the foyer of the Our Lady of Victory Center.

She carries one of her handmade, distinctive walking sticks, stained mahogany and tipped in sturdy rubber as she escorts her visitor past the computer room she maintains.

Out the back door, they go into the spacious yard. Sr. Camella leans on her walking stick a bit as she navigates the pavers next to the blossoming white and pink pear and peach trees under her care.

Her destination is a red brick building that used to house the facility's laundry but now is used for grounds maintenance and, at one end, Sr. Camella's small woodworking shop.

She points out the donated compound miter saw and drill press, along with smaller power tools padlocked in a tall cabinet she crafted herself. Other supplies are neatly arranged in wooden boxes she made.

On the other side of the small room, long branches in various stages of completion lean against the wall and a workbench. Some are bare, gathered like a bouquet in a box. Some have been sanded, while others are stained and awaiting varnish.

Sr. Camella began making walking

sticks in 2016 while helping prune a row of crepe myrtles along the fence of the property.

"We started cutting branches, and I thought, 'They're too pretty to throw away,'" she said.

Since then, she's crafted more than 200. Some are long and straight, and others are thick and offer slight curves to fit a hand. Each one has a special seal of a stylized Christ and cross, the symbol of Sr. Camella's order, the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur.

"This is my ministry, working on walking sticks," she said.

Many of them she gives away to those who have trouble walking. Others are sold for \$15 to \$50, with the proceeds benefiting the order.

She's made so many that she ran out of materials from the grounds, and friends and former pupils bring her branches from their own yards.

## NEVER GETTING AROUND TO RETIREMENT

One of the recipients of Sr. Camella's walking sticks is Father John Shanahan, TOR, parochial vicar at St. Andrew Parish and the SSMN chaplain.

When Sr. Camella heard Fr. Shanahan was going hiking in New Mexico four years ago, she gave him one of her walking sticks.

Fr. Shanahan has since used his

walking stick while hiking all over the Rockies. More recently, when he began having knee problems, she made him a cane.

"Sr. Camella is very generous," Fr. Shanahan said. "She also gave me one for a friend who suffers from Parkinson's disease and lives in New York."

Some of her walking sticks have gone to doctors and nurses where she goes for her weekly cancer treatment, a regular part of her life since she was diagnosed with multiple myeloma 16 years ago.

This was a rough winter for Sr. Camella, fighting COVID and hospitalized twice with RSV. But spring has sprung, and along with it, renewed energy to get back to work.

At 93, she continues to work whenever she feels up to it.

"The word 'retirement' is not in our vocabulary," she joked.

Beyond walking sticks, she's in the process of refinishing some 50 wooden chairs used at the center, and she paints the outdoor benches a bright red when they need a new coat.

## ROOTS IN SOUTH TEXAN RANCHING AND RODEO

The daughter of a grocer/rancher in the South Texas town of Dickinson, Sr. Camella, the second of six children, has always worked hard, and she's always



Sister Camella Menotti, SSMN, walks in the backyard of the SSMN Western Region convent on March 6, where she finds fallen branches from crepe myrtle to use for her walking sticks. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

been good with her hands. Whether it was working wood, working cattle and horses, or working in the family store, she stayed busy.

The family had a rodeo arena on their ranch and held rodeos, with Sr. Camella and some of her siblings keeping time.

Sr. Camella was a barrel racer and a rodeo queen, representing her hometown of Dickinson. She even met Roy Rogers and Dale Evans when she rode in the Grand Entry at the Houston Fat Stock Show.

She was named runner-up for Houston Rodeo Queen in 1950, with

Kathryn Grant, the future wife of Bing Crosby, winning the title.

Meanwhile, she began to help the Catholic school in Dickinson. After working at the school for two years after high school graduation, Sr. Camella surprised her family by her decision to join the order in 1952.

She credits the kindness and encouragement from the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur in Dickinson.

“They saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself,” she said.

She didn’t stop riding horses after entering the order, finding time over the

years to ride the horses of friends and students.

A number of years ago, she was a nominee for the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Fort Worth.

### USING HER ‘CAPABLE’ HANDS TO BLESS OTHERS

Sister Louise Smith, the archivist at the OLV Center, was a young novitiate in Dickinson when Sr. Camella joined the order.

Right from the start, Sr. Camella made a positive impression. “She was so capable,” Sr. Louise said.

Sr. Camella taught and served as principal in Dickinson for 12 years. She also taught in Houston, Beaumont, and Hollister, California.

She thought she’d retire from education when she moved to Fort Worth at age 65, but she ended up teaching in the diocese at Holy Name, St. Andrew, St. Mary, and Our Lady of Victory.

For many of those years, she taught computers, and she’s still one of two resident experts at the OLV Center, teaching skills to sisters.

Sr. Camella was an early adopter and remembers getting Radio Shack computers for the Dickinson school in 1983, courtesy of the local Knights of Columbus.

Computers, woodworking, and helping tend plants still fill Sr. Camella’s days.

She doesn’t let cancer, diabetes, or age keep her from doing whatever her hands find to do.

She does so much despite her health challenges, Sr. Louise said. She may take frequent rest, but she always returns to the work that has shaped her life. She also has plenty of ideas she wants to share with others.

Sr. Camella doesn’t allow illness or age define her, saying simply, “I’m myself. I say what I think.” 🇺🇸



# Veteran's day

With more than 30 years' experience working with young people, Jeff Hedglen awarded Outstanding Veteran in Campus Ministry

By Christina Benavides

**T**he secret to helping people establish a life of faith is found in a three-tiered wedding cake. Metaphorically, of course. Jeff Hedglen developed the sweet philosophy in 30-plus years of experience in youth ministry in all corners of the diocese, and he applies it every day as

campus minister for University of Texas at Arlington's Catholic Community.

The cake's first and biggest tier, he explained, is the most important when considering evangelization: providing welcome and a sense of finding "home" in the Church.

◀ Jeff Hedglen, front and center, is surrounded by a small sampling of the men and women impacted by his ministry. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

“When somebody walks into the Newman Center [at UTA], my hope is that they have a positive experience of Church — that they’re welcomed, that there’s food, that there’s friendly people; they make connections; they enjoy their experience just coming into our building, coming to Mass — whatever, however they connect with us initially,” Hedglen said.

Providing all who walk through the center’s doors with sincerity, patience, and an engaging and positive experience of the Church will help visitors stick around and encounter the second tier of the cake, he continued.

“By sticking around, they will have the opportunity to encounter Jesus through the sacraments, their friendships, a small group, a retreat, stopping by the center’s chapel,” he said. “And if they encounter Jesus, then they will want to put down roots in their Catholic faith.”

Encountering Jesus propels the desire to go deeper into one’s faith, he said, emphasizing the joy found at the top tier of the hypothetical confection.

“That recipe, from junior high youth all the way into campus and young adult ministry, is key,” Hedglen said. “It’s key at a parish too.”

Recent UTA graduate Dylan Benson, one who benefited from Hedglen’s welcome, was full of questions concerning the faith after being raised in the Church of Christ denomination.

“I was kind of in a weird, noncommittal evangelical space when I began reading about Catholicism,” Benson said. “And then, one day, I just randomly reached out to Jeff on the internet.”

He asked the campus minister to talk about the faith, and Hedglen, “without ever meeting me before, just showed up to a coffee shop and answered all my questions in a very peaceful way. It was a very good conversation and really opened a lot of doors to the faith. And a few months later, I showed up to the Newman Center and got integrated with the community

there.”

Benson completed the rites for conversion and entered the Church on May 5, 2021. He now works with Catholic Charities Dallas, after being connected by Hedglen.

“Jeff was the starting point, you know?” Benson shared.

Longevity in working as a youth minister has resulted in a wealth of relationships, Hedglen asserted. When he first began working for the diocese in 1986 as a youth minister at Fort Worth’s St. Bartholomew Parish, he was a “21-year-old kid with a beard and a mullet working with 50- to 60-year-olds in our diocesan meetings,” he joked. “Now I’m the 50- or 60-year-old around young kids with mullets, which is hilarious. All that’s come back full circle.”

Hedglen’s work helping people around the diocese encounter Jesus also included organizing youth conferences, programs like Theology on Tap, the long-running Camp Fort Worth program, as well as writing a regular column in the *NTC*.

The parochial vicar of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller, Father Austin Hoodenpyle, recalled meeting Hedglen the summer before his junior year of high school at Camp Fort Worth.

“I went in part because I was just interested in the camp, and once I got there and participated, I kept coming back,” he said.

The camp experience was formative for his spiritual life and helped him develop concern for the poor and cultivate a deeper understanding of taking up one’s cross and following the Lord.

“Jeff was kind of the architect of that camp, and he was the one who was present and leading and running it,” Fr. Hoodenpyle said. “We talk about judging by the fruits [of our labor], and a lot of times, we don’t get to see the fruits of our ministry. But Jeff has persevered for so long in the various ministries which he’s been a part of that you can start to see it.”

His tenure as a campus minister at UTA began in 2012 after 25 years at St. Bartholomew.

Hedglen believes the number of relationships he’s built while serving in many roles is immense, but having “switched to having only one hat” in 2018, he has enjoyed devoting a wholehearted focus on campus ministry at UTA.

For nearly every semester since he started working with the campus Catholic Center, someone has been confirmed or come into the Church.

“Being able to be part of somebody’s conversion and journey to full communion in the Church — it’s just exciting,” Hedglen said. Giving people who are searching an opportunity to ask questions is one of the most important reasons to have a campus ministry at a secular college campus.

Another is to help students express and deepen their faith with guidance. The youth ministry veteran has mastered adaptability as “every set of students is different. But I know that if a student is passionate about something, their passion is going to bring other people with them ... when it’s my idea, and I’m pushing my idea, it doesn’t always go well because it’s not from the students, and this is a student-led, student-run ministry.”

By respecting that and employing flexibility, he’s also personally benefited.

“Since coming to UTA, two things have blossomed in my personal spiritual life. One is my devotion to the Mass itself as a whole single form of prayer. Second is my relationship with the Rosary, which has blossomed because of student-led interest in praying the Rosary on campus,” he said.

For his role in helping youths encounter Jesus in his years of ministry, Hedglen was awarded the Outstanding Veteran in Campus Ministry award by Newman Ministry, a national nonprofit designed to connect students to a faith community, on April 11 at Dallas’ Granada Theater. 🇺🇸

# BUILDING H





# HIS CHURCH



Diocese builds new churches, renovates sanctuaries to accommodate a growing Catholic population

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

**D**esigned to lift the minds and hearts of the faithful toward God, a Catholic church uses both architecture and religious art to convey the richness of faith and belief that Christ is truly present during the Mass. In a visible and tangible way, the building proclaims the Gospel to the outside world and is a sacred space where worshippers find solace, inspiration, and connection to the divine.

When the faith community at St. Mark broke ground for a church in April 2022, longtime member Margaret Stein never doubted the completed project would enhance the life and ministry of the parish.

“Catholic churches are all beautiful, and I knew this one would be too,” said the 28-year-old, who will be one of the first brides to marry in the new church after its April 13 dedication. She described the dark wood tone of the pews and altar wall, coupled with a cathedral-like blue ceiling, as majestic.

“It makes the wedding extra special,” the bride-to-be gushed. “I’ve grown up in St. Mark’s and always dreamed of getting married there.”

## THE CHALLENGE OF GROWTH

Building a stand-alone church for the 29-year-old St. Mark Parish community is just one of many projects helping the Diocese of Fort Worth meet the demands of a burgeoning Catholic population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the DFW Metroplex saw the largest population increase in the country between 2022 and 2023 with Collin, Denton, and Tarrant counties posting significant residential gains.

“The diocese is one of the fastest — if not the fastest — growing dioceses in the country,” observed Tom Ross, diocesan director of construction and facilities. “In my department, we are currently running 40 projects that are either renovations or new builds along with continual maintenance needs.”

In addition to St. Mark, parishioners at Sacred Heart in Comanche walked through the doors of a new church in February, and Arlington’s St. Vincent de Paul Parish is undergoing a major renovation to make the sanctuary more inviting to prayer and the celebration of the sacraments.

Continued on Page 34

Parishioners, priests, deacons, and faithful from across the diocese joined the community of St. Mark Church in Argyle as Bishop Michael Olson dedicated their new church building and altar on April 13. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Bishop Olson sprinkles holy water on the church and the people of Sacred Heart Parish in Comanche during the dedication Mass. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

**From Page 33**

At St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller, a \$15 million capital campaign is currently underway to fund an Adoration oratory, Family Life Center, and covered walkway.

Nearby, St. Philip the Apostle Parish moved to Flower Mound and a new church in 2022, and the Blessed Imelda Convent was built for the Dominican Sisters on the grounds of Nolan Catholic High School the same year.

Responding to the rapid growth of Catholics moving to the far North Fort Worth area, Bishop Michael Olson announced the formation of St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish in August 2022. The planning process to build a permanent

structure at the Roanoke site off US Highway 170 has begun, Ross said.

“Currently they have two temporary buildings, but the parish is attracting people to the point we have to rent a local school to hold services,” he pointed out. “The portable buildings are not large enough.”

St. Teresa of Calcutta is the 92<sup>nd</sup> parish in the Diocese of Fort Worth, which was established in 1969 and encompasses 23,950 square miles, 28 counties, and 17 schools.

“With all the growth that has come to Texas, our parishes have become very diverse,” said the construction specialist, noting some communities, founded by Czech or German immigrants, now include many

Hispanic families. “Each community brings a personality to the parish, and that changes the way we respond to those needs.”

Rising construction and land costs, as the diocese tries to accommodate both rural and urban parishes, is a continuing challenge. Between August 2020 and August 2021, the price of nonresidential building materials rose by more than 20 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

“Even though prices went up, we continued to build,” said Ross, who explained the cost of some materials doubled since the COVID pandemic. “The market is bearing those increases so costs are not going to come down, and that’s a problem for us.”

**THERE'S MORE!**



Find the video, photo gallery, and full article about Sacred Heart in Comanche by scanning the QR code or visiting [NorthTexasCatholic.org/news/from-a-building-to-a-church](https://NorthTexasCatholic.org/news/from-a-building-to-a-church).



▲ Altar servers at Sacred Heart Parish in Comanche are eager to process into the new church Feb. 26. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



▼ Jorge Camejo (left) and Michael Gutierrez of New Holland Church Furniture assemble a pew inside St. Vincent de Paul Church in Arlington on April 5. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

## WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

When the price of a new church for Sacred Heart Parish in Comanche grew from \$1.5 million to \$4 million during 15 years of planning and fundraising, neighboring rural parishes stepped in to help.

“It was a team effort of all four

parishes — Sacred Heart, St. Mary in Dublin, St. Brendan in Stephenville, and Our Lady of Guadalupe in De Leon,” explained David De Jong, chairman of the building committee. “Even some non-Catholics supported this project. If it wasn’t for the support we received, this

never would have happened.”

Additional funds came from the Knights of Columbus Council #10816, an anonymous \$100,000 donation, and a \$1 million grant from the All Things Possible campaign. Remaining costs were covered by a diocesan loan.

Bishop Michael Olson dedicated the new larger church with donated pews, statues, and tabernacle on February 26, 2024.

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“It’s a metal structure made to look unlike a metal building,” Ross said, recalling the stone columns and 3.5-foot-high limestone wainscoting that surrounds the church’s exterior. “The construction method was altered to accommodate the size of the building and what the economy can bear in a particular area.”

Before the new church was built, the predominantly Hispanic congregation experienced divided worship. Half the people at Sunday Mass were in the sanctuary with the priest. Others sat in an adjoining room and viewed the liturgy through a window.

“We’re all together now instead of being separated in two buildings,” enthused Martina Sierra, director of religious education. “People are really enjoying it. The church has been full since we opened.”

The early stages of construction concerned some parishioners.

“But it turned out better than what people expected,” she continued. “It’s beautiful with plenty of room.”

Ushers at Sacred Heart are greeting people Deacon Tommy Diaz hasn’t seen in a long time. Sunday Mass attendance is up by one-third.

“The church seats about 400, and we’re almost at capacity,” he observed. “The new church has really made a difference. The feedback is all positive.”

Dcn. Diaz, who grew up in Sacred Heart, said the parish boasts 250 families of mostly modest means. The tight-knit community centered its fundraising efforts around bake sales and fellowship dinners.

“We’re very grateful for the help we received,” Dcn. Diaz said. “The design of the church, with a new altar and tabernacle, really enhances worship.”

## CREATING A MORE SACRED SPACE

Reviving the worship space to make it more reverent is the purpose behind a \$3.2-million renovation project for St. Vincent de Paul Church in Arlington. Work began in July 2023 and is targeted for completion by the May 7 dedication date.

Completed in 1984, the church lacked the warmth and aesthetics that invite

reflection and lift spirits.

“It was built in the 70s-era, auditorium style,” said Wendy Perez, remembering the drab green fabric wall and white drywall that served as the sanctuary’s backdrop. “The idea is to move toward a more traditional look to bring out the rich beauty of our Catholic faith.”

White and beige stone blankets the wall behind the altar, which now features niches for a tabernacle and statues. Using similar stone and dark wood, a local craftsman created a matching altar, ambo, and baptismal font. Parishioners also will appreciate new seating, lighting, and HVAC system. The old pews were donated to several rural parishes — St. John Vianney in Cleburne, St. Mary in Graham, and Sacred Heart in Comanche.

The church’s footprint is unchanged, but new pews provide seating for about 1,180 people, a 10 percent increase.

“All the work was done in the interior, except for the cupola which was added to bring more light,” Perez explained.

Lined with windows, the eight-sided dome adds architectural interest to the outside of the church.

“The narthex was very dark before,” she continued. “The cupola brings natural light and makes the environment more welcoming.”

Original blueprints for St. Vincent de Paul Church reflected the minimalist, modernistic style of the late 1970s. Designed for a dual purpose, the church was intended to serve as a worship space and meeting room.

“The idea was to rent it out for large group meetings but that never happened,” Matthew Crocker, parish facility manager, explained. “But because it wasn’t always going to be a sacred space, the tabernacle wasn’t kept inside the church.”

One of the key

Father Philip Brembah, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Parish, looks at the church’s new baptismal font with parishioner John Anton, who built the altar and ambo. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



elements in the renovation is relocating the tabernacle to the main sanctuary.

“We were one of the churches that didn’t have that,” said Crocker. “The tabernacle was kept in the 24-hour Adoration chapel.”

Another change is the placement of a crucifix behind the altar to replace a wooden cross that hung on an adjoining wall with a chiseled image of Christ.

Desiring a sanctuary that resembled other Catholic churches, more than 575 families contributed to the renovation project.

“People are excited about the new look,” noted Crocker. “I think they will be overwhelmed when they step inside. It feels like a Catholic Church should. It feels like home.”

Improving and maintaining the church building for today’s members and keeping it beautiful for the next generation of families was the impetus behind the renovation project, according to Father Philip Brembah, pastor.

“It reminds us of the presence of Christ who is the builder and cornerstone,” he said. “Without Him, we can do nothing. He uses us as His instruments to continue building His Church here on Earth.”

Conversations about improving the church environment began when Fr. Brembah arrived at St. Vincent de Paul in 2017.

“A church should be a welcoming place where everyone can have a special encounter with the Lord,” the pastor expressed. “The doors are always open to anyone who wants to experience the joy of being with Him.” 🇺🇸

Incense rises from the altar during its dedication at St. Mark Church. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



# Divine dedication

After nearly 30 years, St. Mark Parish consecrates a beautiful worship space

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

**L**ucia Correia stepped into St. Mark Church for the first time, and her eyes immediately looked upward to the lofty, Marian blue ceiling with its dusting of stars. Beneath the heavenly image,

stained-glass windows illuminated the images of saints and, nearby, striking rose windows symbolized the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist, and confirmation.

“It reminds me of the churches in

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Bishop Michael Olson anoints the altar with holy chrism at the dedication of St. Mark Church in Argyle on April 13. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

**From Page 37**

Portugal,” the longtime parishioner said wistfully. A native of the country’s Azores region, she moved to Texas 15 years ago.

“It’s beautiful,” Correia exclaimed. “I’m feeling very proud right now and a little emotional.”

Inspiring. Amazing. Reverent. Those are some of the words parishioners used to describe the recently completed St. Mark Church dedicated by Bishop Michael Olson April 13 in Argyle. The mission-style structure, featuring two bell towers and a dome dedicated to the Holy Spirit, is the faith community’s first church building in its almost 30-year history.

“You’ve been on a long journey, but it’s just the beginning,” the bishop assured parishioners who filled the pews for the dedication Mass he concelebrated with Vicar General Father Jonathan Wallis, pastor Father George Pullambrayil, and diocesan priests. “We thank God for the gift He has given us. May this Church

stand as a testimony to the unconditional love of God.”

The new church is the culmination of years of discussion and planning, according to Sue Tenny, a member of the building committee.

“It feels like 30 years of wandering in the desert until we got here,” the parishioner said. “This is our first true worship space that isn’t a multipurpose building.”


The entire parish, coming together to achieve a common goal, helped the capital campaign and construction process succeed. When it came to choosing a design, a traditional look that captured the church architecture from previous centuries was chosen. “This didn’t come easily,” she continued. “People put in a lot of ideas.”

Tenny credits Fr. Pullambrayil’s vision for creating the beauty of European churches “without putting in more than is needed of the right art and architecture.”

The 34,000-square-foot church, with a cruciform floor plan, cost \$31 million to build and seats 1,885 worshippers. Statues, the marble baptismal font, and mosaic Stations of the Cross were crafted in Florence, Italy. Above the altar, a commanding wall mural depicts Christ with His Apostles. The lower left side of the artwork shows figures from the Old Testament with saints on the right.

“We love it. It’s beautiful and so incredibly holy,” enthused Ryan Kagay who came to the dedication with his

**MORE PHOTOS!**



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St. Mark window (NTC/  
Rodger Mallison)

wife, Elizabeth, and four of his six children. The couple looks forward to seeing their daughter, Grace, make her first Communion at the altar this May.

“Anywhere you celebrate the Eucharist is holy, but God gave us physical senses so we can hear, touch, and see,” he said, referring to the church’s aesthetics. “It helps me connect to the holiness of this place even more.”

During the dedication rite, Bishop Olson sprinkled holy water on the congregation, the walls, and the altar, which contains a relic of St. Mark.


With the words, “May the Lord by His power sanctify this altar and this house, which by our ministry we anoint so that, as visible signs, they may express the mystery of Christ and the Church,” the bishop anointed the altar with holy chrism, setting it apart for sacred use. The walls of the church were also anointed with the Sign of the Cross.

Incense, burned in a brazier on top of the altar, symbolized prayers rising to God. When incensation was complete, the altar was dressed in a white cloth by St. Mark parishioners Kim Harbert, Joy Medley, and Tammy Miller before lit candles and flowers were placed in the sanctuary for the first time.

“Faith has brought us to this building, not simply our values. Faith tells us that Christ will transform this building to become a Church,” Bishop Olson said in his homily. “Today, by God’s grace alone, given through our prayers and through the anointing with chrism, does this table become an altar and this building become a church.”

Dan Kulle witnessed St. Mark Parish grow from a mission community with 400 families in the 1990s to 2,700 families today. The father of seven describes his fellow parishioners as welcoming, loving, and supportive.

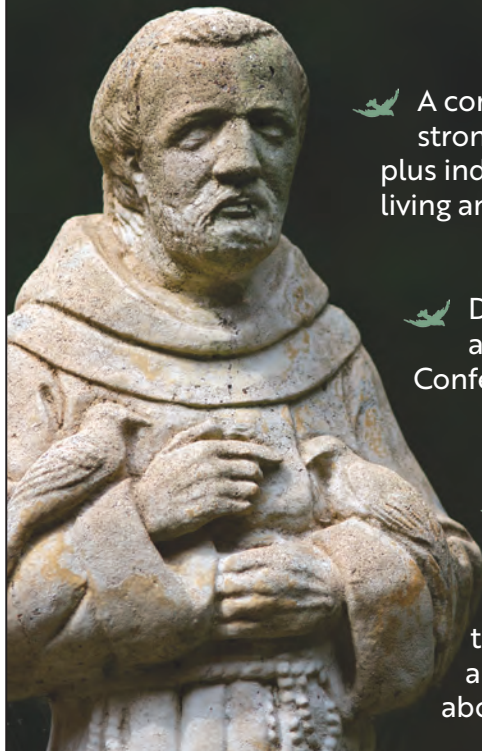
“With the new church building, we knew it was important to keep that presence,” he said, noting St. Mark is known as a parish with a smile. “We’re the Body of Christ, and we’re here for each other.” 🍷



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# NAVIGATORS of dreams and goals

Catholic Charities' Education Navigation program guides, aids, and supports college students to reach success

By Mary Lou Seewoester

**M**akenzie Fox was used to jumping hurdles for the Decatur High School track team and as a North Central Texas College (NCTC) athlete. But she discovered that the hurdles in life can be more challenging than the 300-meter events she easily won in high school.

When she changed her course of study to radiology, she had to work full time to pay for school because she no longer had an athletic scholarship. Her living situation became unstable, and the hurdles to finishing school grew higher.

"A year ago, I was just hopping around, staying wherever I could stay. ... I was basically living out of my car," she recalled.

A full-time job and 32 hours of clinical practice at Medical City Decatur gave her a 60- to 70-hour workweek, which left little time for sleep or study. If she found time to study, then she also had to find Wi-Fi — either at a coffee shop or at work after her shift. And the car she drove 50 miles from Decatur to NCTC in Gainesville needed new brakes and, later, new tires.

On her own since 19, the now 22-year-old was running out of money and

motivation when she found Education Navigation, a Catholic Charities Fort Worth program that helps low-income college students overcome nonacademic barriers to succeeding in school. The program requires coaching twice a month with an on-campus client navigator to help students set and achieve short- and long-term goals as well as improve budgeting, time management, and study skills.

Fox said when she first met with Client Navigator Lisa Wilke last fall, "she sat me down, and we made lists of my goals and what I really needed to focus on."

Strategic financial assistance allowed Fox to reduce her work hours and focus on studying. Then, coaching with Wilke and quarterly skills workshops helped her improve time management and budgeting. Fox said at first, she was "skeptical" about mentoring, "but it ended up helping me so much more than I thought it would."

"There were so many times I wanted to just drop out," Fox recalled. "But that wasn't an option, and Lisa made sure it was not an option for me."

Today, Fox has stable housing with a family member, has made the NCTC Chancellor's List with a 4.0 GPA, and will graduate this semester with an associate of applied science in radiologic technology.

Education Navigation combines strategic financial assistance with long-term coaching and mentoring to support students academically, financially, and emotionally so they can overcome obstacles to completing college. The program began in 2015 with one navigator at NCTC in Graham. Today it operates at eight community colleges and three four-year universities. Last year, 121 Education Navigation students graduated, and this year, more than 100 students are expected to graduate.

One of those students is Kristopher Spraggins, who recently accepted a position as a registered nurse at UNC Health Wayne in Goldsboro, North Carolina. But two years ago, as an Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) student at Vernon College in Wichita Falls, his future was uncertain, and his stress was high.

"My bank account was drained dry," Spraggins said. "I literally didn't know how I was going to pay for nursing school."

He said he woke up every morning worrying about how to pay his bills because his part-time job as an emergency department tech at United Regional Hospital in Wichita Falls didn't cover his full-time load of college classes.

That changed when he met Melody





◀ Kristopher Spraggins stands before the emergency department at the United Regional Hospital in Wichita Falls where he worked part time as an ER nurse tech. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



◀ Makenzie Fox poses in front of the health science center at North Central Texas College in Gainesville on March 25. (NTC/Thomas Otto)

Sanchez, his Education Navigation client navigator. Along with financial assistance, Sanchez provided coaching in financial planning and in dealing with stress.

“I could actually focus on school, instead of focusing on the finances for school,” Spraggins said. “And Melody was always there to listen and help any time I needed to vent. She helped me talk through it and then would say, ‘Let’s look on the bright side. What can we do to help you be better prepared next time?’”

Spraggins explained that ADN courses are so strenuous that his cohort of 42 students was down to 20 by the final semester. But the skills and tools he acquired through

Education Navigation made him resilient.

“They helped me realize I can overcome more than I ever thought I could,” he added. “Melody genuinely helped me become a better person ... I wish there were a million of her.”

Khanezia Hill can also attest to the rigors of nursing school. An excellent student in high school and in previous college classes, the study demands of ADN classes at NCTC surprised and overwhelmed her.

Additionally, the single mother of a pre-schooler commutes 60 miles from her home in Bonham to NCTC and 65 miles to Medical City in Lewisville for clinical practice.

“Balancing my time was a big concern,” Hill said.

Like Fox and Spraggins, she found support with Education Navigation, which first helped with the cost of books. Then, with Wilke, her navigator, Hill learned to balance her time as well as her budget, and she overcame being overwhelmed with the amount of work and study needed for academic success. Wilke also guided her in applying for NCTC scholarships, grants, and student loans.

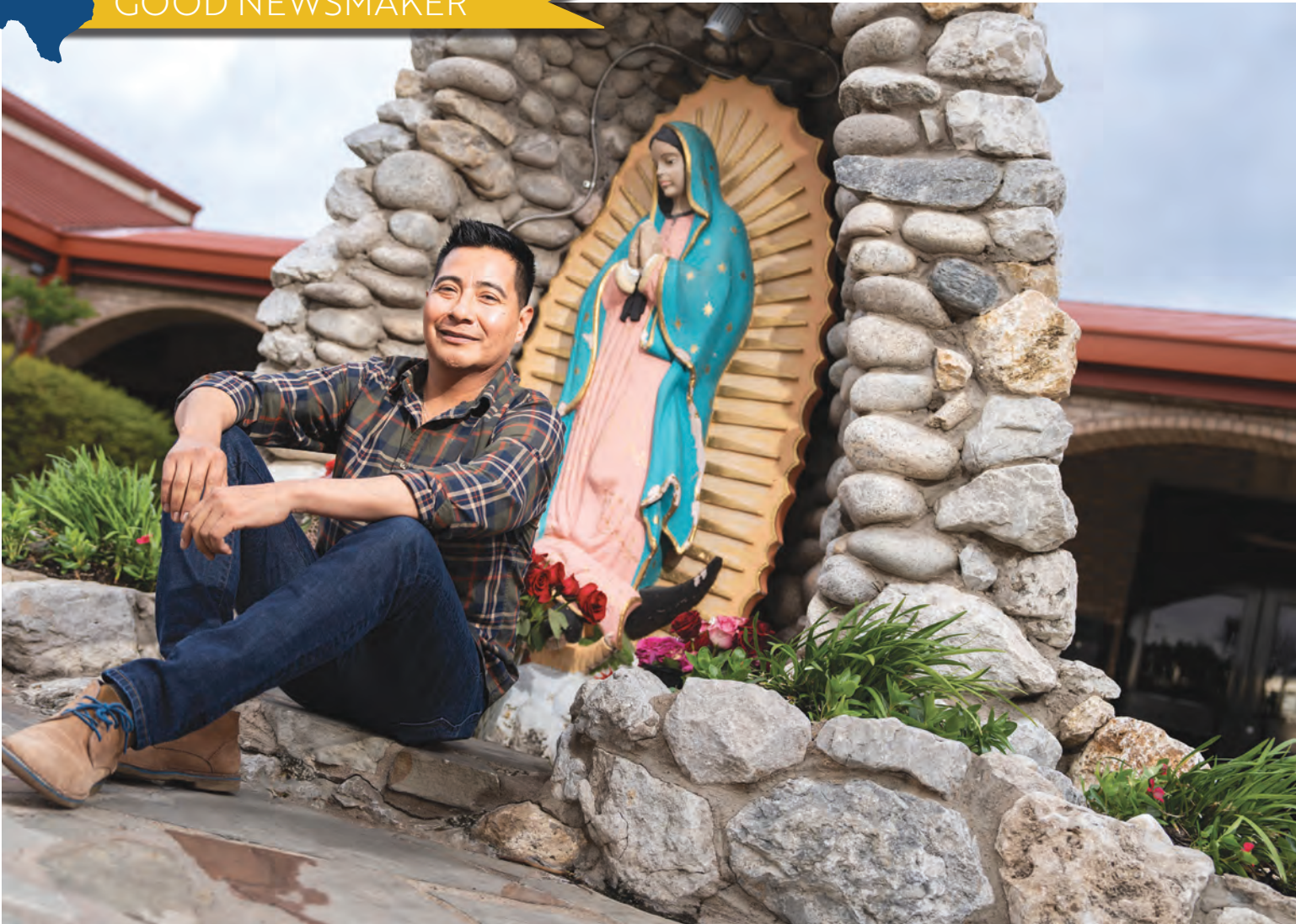
“Lisa helps me navigate anything and everything and helps me figure out my next steps,” she said. “She’s always there saying, ‘What can I do to help? Let’s try to figure this out.’”

Hill expects to graduate this semester and is ready to embrace her future as a registered nurse. 🇹🇽

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Volunteer, contribute to, or learn more about Catholic Charities Fort Worth by visiting [catholiccharitiesfortworth.org](https://catholiccharitiesfortworth.org)





# ‘God is with me’

Luis Miguel Urrutia strives to help others develop their love for God

By Christina Benavides

When he was just 11 years old, a young Luis Miguel Urrutia served as a lector for the first time in his hometown parish in rural Michoacán, Mexico.

“I completely butchered it,” Urrutia

recalled, laughing as he remembered the rush of nerves he’d felt. “But all of that quickly faded away because of a sense that was very deeply embedded in me — an understanding that despite the bullying and the cutting jokes that I’d received for my childhood lisp, I’d prayed to God that He would help me.

“I think that feeling was so big that He heard me because I felt Him hold on to me then, and He’s never let go,” he continued.

God’s presence has continued to bolster him and feed his passion for sharing the faith, no matter where he is. A parishioner of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Fort Worth of eight years, Urrutia

◀ Luis Miguel Urrutia, the departing coordinator of *Pastoral Juvenil*, an apostolate of the Diocese of Fort Worth, is seen at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Fort Worth on April 10. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

now serves in his parish community and beyond. Along with his continued role as a lector, he sings in the choir, teaches quinceañera dance classes, visits hospitals with the parochial vicar to sing to sick children, and strives to help young adults across the diocese form a strong connection with God.

“Spiritual formation, organization, and the will to do something — this is how God has equipped me,” he said.

Those traits have helped him as the coordinator of *Pastoral Juvenil*, a diocesan youth community that invites all the parish Hispanic young adult groups together for fellowship and prayer on a larger scale. Urrutia entered the volunteer position four years ago and endeavored to grow the group by sharing his devotion to the faith, hoping to inspire others to form a strength in connection with God.

“Sometimes, young immigrants like me or native-born *chavos* [kids] find difficulty feeling a sense of welcome, feeling like they can’t adapt or become a part of something. We always discuss this in our *Pastoral* meetings — our intention is to help everyone feel like part of the community, feel part of the Church,” Urrutia expressed.

Under Urrutia’s coordination, the community has grown from two church youth groups coming together to seven participating parishes engaging in regular fellowship, averaging nearly 200 participants per activity, stated Deacon Rigoberta Leyva, the director of the diocese’s Hispanic ministry and supervisor of the *Pastoral Juvenil* Council.

“I wanted to make sure that there existed a venue, an opportunity for others to encounter Jesus, but in their own way, as that encounter can be incredibly personal,” Urrutia said. “I’ve had the opportunity to meet Him, yes, but I don’t expect them to encounter Him just as I did. Instead, I

strive to provide [young adults] with the chance to open up and have the support to put their faith into action in their lives and in whatever country they may reside.”

Being a part of this ministry and volunteering in this way helps him feel closer to God and others.

“Every time I volunteer, I do so because the desire comes naturally to me; it’s not transactional in any way... I’ll say to God, ‘I donate my time to You, the best of me to You,’” explained Urrutia, who works in the industrial HVAC business.

He draws from lessons of faith his parents and family instilled in him as a child to assist others in forming an authentic connection and love for God. The *Pastoral’s* annual Rosary for Peace stemmed from his personal devotion to Mary, which his mother helped foster in him.

“My mother would tell me when I was young that if I behaved badly, the Virgin Mary would cry. So I would try my best to not upset this lady. Being so young, I didn’t understand that she was speaking about Our Lady of Fatima; regardless, I didn’t want her to cry because of me,” he shared.

The simplicity of this story about Mary drove home in him a sense of reverence, love, and pride for Jesus’ mother, said Urrutia. He made a point to organize the Rosary for Peace outside so the young adults, too, could see and develop that sense of pride and love for Mary and her child.

“It’s a beautiful event where we can express our faith outdoors, proclaim our love for Blessed Mary, and ask for her intercession in praying for world peace,” he said. “This will be our fourth year to hold this event.”

Urrutia worked to better reach contemporary young adults. “Today’s youth is very visual,” he suggested. “They need movement and lights and something that will bring them in ... and they come and

speak on depression, lapses in faith, a sense of desolation, and more.”

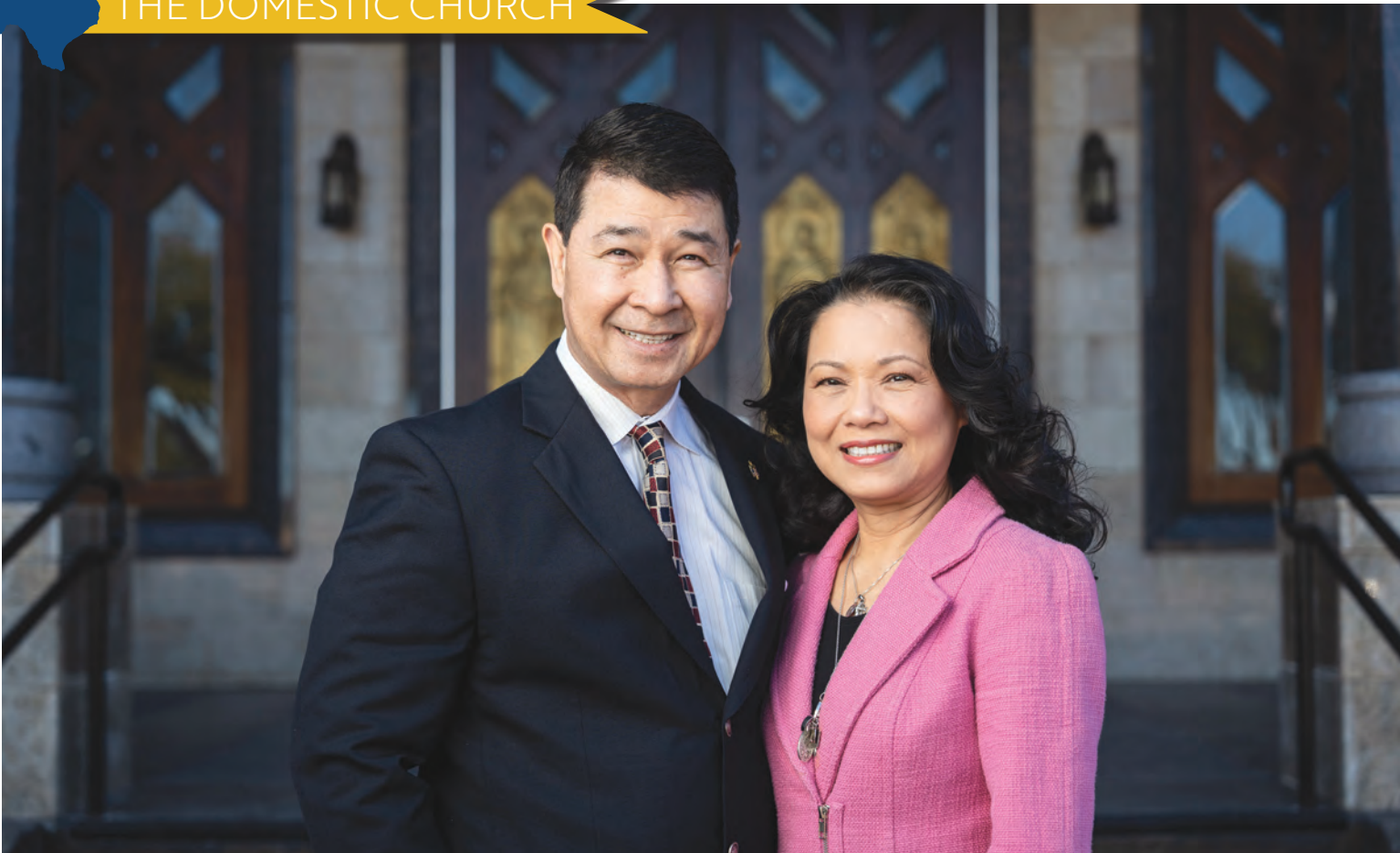
He described the group’s Easter retreat, where in the reenactment of Christ’s Passion, Urrutia directed the soldiers to appear representing different vices and sins he has seen many struggle with in today’s culture: envy, indifference, materialism, and more.

“It was a simple idea, but it carried a heavy impact for our retreatants,” he said. “It’s a special type of moment. I hope that every youth in the *Pastoral* has experienced an encounter with Jesus during one of our events. This is why I treasure the existence of this program and why I’ve poured so much of myself into this ministry: so any young adult can feel just as available and excited to grow in their faith as they may be to attend a dance or a weekend drinking with friends.”

Moving forward, as he eases out of the *Pastoral’s* coordinating position, Urrutia hopes to continue working with his close friend, Friar Feliciano Torres Castro, OFM Cap., the parochial vicar of Our Lady of Guadalupe, to serve the faith communities in the diocese.

“God has been with me every step of the way. I have so much to be grateful for,” Urrutia expressed. “I may not have been the best coordinator, worker at my job, singer, dance instructor, or even the best lector. I know I’m not the best in anything, but if there is one thing I can say with complete confidence: I have done the best that I can possibly do — because God is with me, and that is everything.”

To honor Urrutia’s devotion and service to the youth ministry, Dcn. Leyva and the *Pastoral* held a celebratory Mass and dinner for him on April 13 at the Diocesan Formation Center. The group’s council will convene in the next month to discern its next coordinator. 📍



# CARRYING THEIR CROSSES TOGETHER

By Christina Benavides

In his apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia (On Love in the Family)*, Pope Francis wrote, “Spouses are consecrated and, by means of a special grace, build up the Body of Christ and form a domestic church.”

A couple firmly grounded in their faith and bound together by God’s love, Thang and Theresa Nguyen are witnesses and participants of the power of a domestic church and the grace of the mystical body of Christ.

## HOW THEY MET

After moving from Jefferson, Missouri, to Fort Worth in the early 1980s, Thang began studying at the University of Texas at Arlington and became a parishioner of the nearby St.

Matthew Parish. There, he saw a “pretty girl” in the Vietnamese choir. He promptly joined the choir, along with his then-roommate Thu Nguyen, who was later ordained into the priesthood and is now the pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Fort Worth.

About ten years later, Thang and Theresa married on November 7, 1992.

## FAMILY OF FAITH

For a year before their wedding, Theresa lived with her future in-laws, learning family traditions, and easing into the role of a daughter-in-law. Theresa saw “how Thang’s parents were so devout; it would give me goose bumps because they’re so holy, and they instilled and passed that down to him, and he then passed it down to our children.”

Her parents and her in-laws’ strength

of faith made its mark on how the couple raised their four children: Christian, 30; Victoria, 29; Andrew, 26; and Michael, who passed away at 21 after being hit by a drunk driver.

“Three are on Earth; hopefully one is in heaven,” Theresa said.

## WEEKENDS AT CHURCH

Around Michael’s birth in 1999, the family of six became active in the newly established Vietnamese Martyrs Parish in Arlington.

The Nguyens belong to many groups, including the Serra Club, the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Legion of the Sacred Heart.

Their kids also participated in the choir, youth groups, and the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement, which their daughter Victoria now leads.

◀ Thang and Theresa Nguyen are parishioners of Vietnamese Martyrs Church in Arlington. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

## A KEY TO PRAYER

Having a set time for eating together, praying together, and going to confession together is very important, the couple said.

“At nighttime, we had a set time, and our children would kneel in front of our family altar. They did that every night until they moved out of the house. We prayed together exactly at 8:30 p.m., right before bed. We taught them all the prayers that they should know in Vietnamese,” Theresa shared.

“Families pray together; families stay together,” Thang added.

## A TRADITION TO PROCESS

In a tradition established since their eldest’s birth, the Nguyen family has participated in a procession honoring Our Lady of Fatima, either at their parish or in Missouri or Karen, Texas, “to give her thanks for all the things that we’d received,” Theresa shared.

## CALLED TO THE DIACONATE

“You don’t know how He’s calling you. He’s always calling us to follow Him, to pick up the cross. You decide to pick up a small cross, or a big cross to follow after Him, and we decide to continue or to drop it. ... Each of us has our own decisions to make,” said Thang.

“It’s not that easy of a decision too,” Theresa added. “Right after Thang entered the formation, that’s when Michael passed away, and [we thought] should we continue? It was a sad time, and we didn’t know what to do. But his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2022 really secured his determination to follow God.”

## A BIT ABOUT MICHAEL

Theresa shared, “All of our children were very active in their faith, and the youngest was especially the most

active with the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement here at the parish. He was a great musician.”

Michael led praise and worship in the University Catholic Community at UTA every Wednesday. He was killed two months before his expected graduation from the university in October 2021.

## THE MYSTICAL BODY

Everything is in God’s timing, Theresa affirmed. “I truly believe that my faith can be strong in that [belief]. The providence that we’ve seen with our eyes — even with the death of Michael — our family has stayed very strong. And not only that. We have a priest, our pastor here, and the whole congregation, the parishioners, the outpouring of their love for us and the support — we saw them go above and beyond. We feel so loved by those around us. When Michael passed away, I think that’s how we were able to move forward.”

At Michael’s funeral Mass, they felt grateful for pews filled with people ready to share their condolences, their love, and prayers for the repose of his soul.

“I do not know where they all came from,” Thang quietly pondered. “We hadn’t planned on it; we hadn’t invited anyone, but they all showed up.”

That’s the strength of being Catholic, Theresa said. “We live to show the people around us this is one God that gives us hope. Dying is not the end.”

## DEALING WITH GRIEF

“Even today, we still think about Michael. But that’s the good thing about being Catholic. We know we will see him again. We just know because that has been taught — we will be resurrected, our body and soul together, and we can’t wait,” Theresa said. 🇺🇸

# 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](http://fwdioc.org/safe-environment)



# Knowing Mary in the Rosary



By the time I was 30, I think I had prayed a full Rosary maybe 10 times. Outside of Mass, my life of prayer (when I prayed) focused on reading and meditating on the Scriptures, praise and worship music, intercessory prayer, and times of silence. Somehow, the Rosary never made it into my repertoire.

I liked the idea of meditating on the mysteries of the life of Jesus, but I found the rote nature and repetitiveness of the prayers unappealing. Plus, I wasn't sure how the first few beads worked, and there weren't yet newfangled websites and apps to help figure it out.

At some point, I started hearing stories of friends who used to be like me, good Catholics who didn't pray the Rosary, who now prayed the Rosary and were finding much spiritual fruit. Because I trusted these people, I started "dabbling" in this ancient spiritual practice.

Around this time, I started noticing that many of the young Catholics I worked with loved to pray the Rosary, and as the leader of these ministries, I was compelled to pray along. In addition, priests during the sacrament of reconciliation would encourage me to consider praying the Rosary more often.

Suffice it to say that over the last

15-20 years, the Rosary has become more and more a part of my life of prayer, but more than that, my understanding of the role of Mary in my life has blossomed.



Jeff Hedglen

Inviting Mary to pray for me, now and at the hour of my death, has opened so much of what she has to teach me about the life of faith:

Her "fiat" in the Gospel of Luke has taught me how to deeply surrender to the will of God (*Luke 1:38*). Equally impactful, her statement to the waiters at

the Wedding at Cana where Jesus turns water into wine revealed to me the most important thing to know about prayer: "Do whatever He tells you" (*John 2:5*).

These lessons and the many times I have recited the Rosary have impacted me deeply. Especially when it comes to Mary's role in my life of prayer.

Many non-Catholics think we pray to Mary in the same way we pray to God, but this is nowhere near the truth. The reality is that Mary is our best intercessor — she is not the one answering our prayers. Rather, and more profoundly, she's next to us when we are praying, and she is praying along with us.

Whenever we ask God for something, there are three possible answers: *yes*, *no*, and *not right now*.

Here is how I see Mary interacting with me in these situations: When the

answer is *yes*, she is high-fiving me in celebration. When the answer is *no*, she holds me and reminds me this answer is ultimately for my good. When the answer is *not right now*, she sits and waits alongside me for the perfect will of her Son to come to pass in my life.

Whatever the outcome of my prayer request, Mary has my back. She loves me because her Son loves me. She journeyed with Him in life, through His suffering and death, and is with Him in heaven, and now she is walking this same path with me.

Because Mary was with Jesus for His whole earthly life, she knows Him much more intimately than we could ever imagine, so it makes sense that drawing close to her through the communion of the saints will only bring about the deepest desire of her heart: for us to love Jesus — as much as she does.

As we begin this long stretch of Ordinary Time, I encourage you to pick up a rosary from time to time and invite Mary to pray along with you, one bead, one mystery, one decade, one prayer at a time. 🇺🇸

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Jeff Hedglen is the campus minister for the University Catholic Community at the University of Texas in Arlington.

# The gift of celibacy

NTC/Juan Guajardo

As I finish my first year of being on faculty at St. Joseph Seminary College, I have gained a lot of insight about the particular struggles of this generation of young people in discerning a vocation. I offer some words of reflection about one struggle, namely celibacy, that might help those discerning a religious vocation or those who help foster vocations in the Church.

Seminarians, or any young person, can struggle with the thought of being celibate for their entire lives as a priest or in religious life. Even when I was in seminary, the thought of missing a wife, a lifelong companion, and children seemed extraordinarily difficult. The desire for marriage and family is good; it is natural; it is from God. But not all are called to the married state.

Jesus Christ talks about this when He says, “[A]nd there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it” (*Matthew 19:12*).

St. Paul also speaks about those who remain unmarried. “Now to the unmarried and the widows, I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (*1 Corinthians 7:8-9*).



Fr. Maurice Moon

He says he wished all were like him by practicing celibacy (*7:7*), but he recognizes not everyone has this gift. He also speaks about marriage as a concession (*7:6*), a vocation for those who do not have the gift of being celibate.

Why does St. Paul want people to be unmarried? Because it is a gift from God to have an undivided heart. “An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided” (*1 Corinthians 7:32-33*).

The heart of an unmarried person belongs entirely to serving the Lord, thinking of nothing but to please the Lord. The married man is bound to think of his wife, his children, and the world. His heart is divided.

Since the first century, numerous saints have received the gift of celibacy. They have imitated Christ and St. Paul by serving the Lord with an undivided heart. Their celibacy was a powerful sign to the world of the eschatological reality, the “End Times”: “At the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven” (*Matthew 22:30*). Celibacy tells others that we are made for something more than this world: we are made for eternity with God.

Celibacy is difficult, but is not the Lord’s grace sufficient (*2 Corinthians 12:9*)? Is He not the one who gives us the gift to lay down our lives for others? Will He abandon us after we have made Him our portion and cup (*Psalms 16:5*)?

One practical way for someone to find out if he or she has the gift of celibacy is by joining the seminary or religious community. For example, St. Thomas More, Lord High Chancellor of England, wanted to be a monk. After joining the monastery, he eventually realized he did not have the gift of celibacy and left the monastery saying, “Better a chaste husband than a licentious priest.” He married soon after.

It may seem extraordinarily difficult for young people to discern celibacy, but they are not alone! No saint found it to be easy! They had to rely on the daily bread of God’s grace, and they received a hundredfold in this life and in the next for accepting this gift. I pray more people consider giving the Lord the firstfruits of their hearts by first considering a religious vocation — to find out if they have the beautiful gift of celibacy. 🇺🇸

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Father Maurice Moon serves as Director of Collegian Seminarian Formation and is on the formation faculty at St. Joseph Seminary College.

# An Enduring Call

NTC/Juan Guajardo

**HE IS:** Father Ariel Muñoz Sanchez, CORC, pastor of St. Matthew Parish in Arlington.

**A MOTHER'S DEVOTION:** Raised in the countryside of Querétaro, Mexico, Fr. Muñoz and his mother walked upwards of an hour to Mass at the nearest church. "My mother was very close with those at church and with the priests of the parish. Although we lived in the country, my mother always went to church."

He remembers seeing visiting priests and seminarians arrive at his house and be welcomed and invited to dinner. "From there, the idea of wanting to become a priest like them began to take root."

**A RENEWED CALL:** When he was 12, Fr. Muñoz and his mother emigrated to Texas. They were very far from town, but as often as they could, they would go to church. Fr. Muñoz would also teach catechesis to the area children.

His uncle, meanwhile, entered the *Confraternidad Sacerdotal de Operarios de Cristo* (CORC) seminary and was sent to Spain to study theology. "When he sent us a picture of himself wearing his vestments, that feeling I'd had as a kid began to grow tremendously. I wanted to, at that moment, take flight and enter the seminary straight away, but to get there, I

had to go through a process still. I needed to finish my education."

**DETERMINED FOR SEMINARY:**

Taking his uncle's advice, he put off joining CORC since seminarians paid monthly fees. "Since we were poor, logically, we had to think about these things."

He instead joined the Missionaries of Christ the Redeemer seminary, where he remained for about six years, finishing his schooling before returning to the secular world.

He worked a year as a farmer in the U.S. then returned to Mexico. His uncle, now a CORC priest, invited him to meet the community. "There, I met a vocational promoter who immediately began to tell me, 'Órale, you have to become a priest — you have to.'"

He entered the CORC's major seminary in September 1989.

**ORDAINED:** September 26, 1997, at St. Phillip Neri Cathedral of Querétaro.

**COMMITTED TO HIS VOCATION:**

"Of course, there are many ups and downs, I would be lying if I told you it was always wonderful, but it's incredible to see how God works through you, how people place their trust in priests to receive the sacraments, and how many come to request advice ... I would become a priest

again, yes, because there are so many people who need us."

**ADVICE FOR PARENTS:** "Keep educating your children in the faith. Don't be reckless with your children's faith, for it is the greatest gift that you could give them."

**BEAUTY OF RECONCILIATION:** Fr. Muñoz loves the Eucharist more than all but also enjoys days when hearing confessions.

"Although it is a bit tiring, it's also incredible seeing how many people believe in the sacrament of reconciliation and come to confess themselves to receive God's mercy via a priest who will help absolve them of their sins."

**HOBBIES:** Puzzles and old westerns on YouTube because they remind him of growing up in the country.

**BENEFITS OF THE FAITH:** "If one has a good relationship with God, you'll make good choices, and you will have the fortitude to battle against whatever obstacle you might encounter in your life.

"But if you don't walk with God, you won't have internalized virtues that will help you — virtues like patience, charity, and prudence; virtues that you need to put into practice every day." 🇺🇸





NTC/Juan Guajardo

El Obispo Michael Olson recibe la llave para entrar a la nueva Iglesia de Sacred Heart en Comanche antes de la dedicación del edificio el 24 de febrero.

# una ocasión de GRAN GOZO

Hermosa transformación de un edificio a una iglesia

Por Susan Moses

Los bancos y el sagrario adentro estaban vacíos, mientras que afuera casi 400 personas esperaban para entrar finalmente por las puertas del edificio. ¿Cuánto tiempo hizo falta para celebrar la dedicación de una nueva iglesia para la Parroquia de Sacred Heart de Comanche, dos horas o 15 años? Se puede decir que ambos.

El Obispo Michael Olson celebró el 24 de febrero la Misa de dedicación de la tan esperada iglesia.

Fue concelebrada por el Padre Matthew Sanka, SAC, párroco de Sacred Heart; el Padre Claudius Mndolwa, SAC, vicario parroquial; y el Padre James Amasi, SAC, el párroco anterior.

La liturgia comenzó afuera y, una vez que el arquitecto y el director del proyecto de construcción entregaron las llaves al Obispo Olson, el clero y los fieles entraron a la iglesia cantando en procesión.

Durante su homilía en inglés y español el Obispo Olson indicó que “éste es un día de gran alegría... comenzamos esta celebración en un edificio, pero mientras

pronunciamos estas palabras, este edificio, a través de la gracia de Dios y mediante la misericordia y el amor plenamente revelados en el Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, se convierte en iglesia”.

La liturgia continuó con el rezo de las Letanías de los Santos y la oración de dedicación de la iglesia. El Obispo Olson procedió con la unción del altar y las paredes de la iglesia con el Santo Crisma, con lo que se designó para siempre el altar y la iglesia para uso sagrado.

CONTINÚA EN LA PÁGINA 50



Los feligreses reciben la Eucaristía durante la misa de dedicación de la nueva iglesia de Sacred Heart en Comanche. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

## DE LA PÁGINA 49

El altar estaba cubierto con finos manteles y flores. El rito de dedicación concluyó con el encendido de las velas y las luces de la iglesia como símbolo de que Cristo es la Luz para todas las naciones y que Su luz brilla a través de Su Iglesia.

### ESPACIO COMÚN DE ADORACIÓN

La iglesia original de Sacred Heart fue inaugurada en el 1964 y tenía capacidad para unas ciento veinte personas. Según la comunidad parroquial creció, otros tantos de personas se reunían los domingos en el salón parroquial para escuchar la Misa a través de los altavoces; más algunos de los fieles presentes veían la Misa por una pequeña ventana que daba al santuario.

“Los que estaban sentados en un lado del salón miraban por la ventana mientras participaban de la liturgia o escuchaban la Palabra de Dios. Eso siempre fue un desafío; en muchas ocasiones, teníamos

algunas familias que tenían que dividirse entre los dos lados”, dijo el Padre Sanka. “Esta nueva iglesia nos unirá y nos proporcionará un espacio común de adoración para todos a la vez”.

“Este nuevo espacio de adoración contribuirá a que aumente la asistencia y la participación de los feligreses de esta comunidad”, señaló el Diácono Tommy Díaz, que de niño iba a Sacred Heart.

### PROYECTO DE GRUPO

La congregación de Sacred Heart se compone de unas doscientas cincuenta familias de medios modestos, según informara el Diácono Díaz. La parroquia celebró varios eventos de recaudación de fondos, incluidas ventas de pasteles y cenas, pero a medida que pasaron los años, el costo estimado inicial de \$1.5 millones aumentó a aproximadamente \$4 millones, lo que puso esta meta fuera del alcance de la comunidad parroquial.

Las otras tres parroquias del grupo, la

Parroquia de St. Brendan de Stephenville, la Parroquia de St. Mary de Dublín y la Parroquia de Our Lady of Guadalupe en De León, aportaron también fondos, además de la Diócesis, Advancement Foundation y un donante anónimo.

El Concilio 10816 de los Caballeros de Colón Concilio dedicó por varios años la mayoría de sus actividades de recaudación de dinero al fondo de construcción de la nueva iglesia. Advancement Foundation aportó \$1 millón del dinero recogido en su campaña anual de apelación All Things Possible.

Se recibió una muy generosa donación anónima de \$100,000 de una persona que supo de la necesidad que tenía la parroquia y lo quiso hacer con todo su corazón y expresó, “este regalo es para nuestros compañeros católicos rurales que disfrutarán de esta parroquia por muchos años”.

La Diócesis le otorgó un préstamo a la parroquia por el resto de la cantidad de



Los feligreses rezan durante la Misa de dedicación de la nueva Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón en Comanche. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

fondos que se necesitaban para los gastos de construcción. El Diácono Díaz, que lleva trece años asignado a Sacred Heart, comentó: “Hemos tenido mucho apoyo de otras parroquias. Nos han ayudado muchísimo. No hubiéramos podido hacerlo solos y ellos continúan todavía apoyándonos. Todos juntos lo lograremos y completaremos”.

David De Jong, que es el presidente del comité de construcción, afirmó: “El futuro es brillante para Sacred Heart de Comanche, pero el trabajo no se ha terminado. Tenemos una gran deuda debido a la construcción de nuestro nuevo santuario y seguimos aceptando con mucho gusto más donaciones. Aquí afuera se pueden ver los trabajos preliminares ya realizados en el terreno para la construcción de un nuevo edificio de aulas, pero tuvimos que suspender las obras debido a la falta de dinero. Quisiéramos también añadir un estacionamiento y pavimentarlo cuando tengamos algún día el dinero que se necesita para hacerlo”.

### UNA COMUNIDAD HUMILDE, UNA RIQUEZA DE FE

“Es un templo de Dios”, dijo Luz María Moreno del nuevo edificio de su iglesia. Moreno ha sido un feligrés de la Parroquia de Sacred Heart por más que treinta años. Con la ayuda del Padre Felipe



El feligrés Artemio Escalante reza durante la misa de dedicación. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

la comunidad hispana creció mucho. Su apoyo y el de muchas personas ya fallecidas desde que se empezó el proyecto fueron muy importantes porque nunca se dieron por vencidos. María siente mucho respeto hacia la parroquia por el trabajo que toda la comunidad ha realizado para que este sueño se hiciera realidad, dijo Moreno. Ella siente mucho respeto hacia la parroquia por el trabajo que toda la comunidad ha realizado para que este sueño se hiciera realidad. Siente la presencia de Dios al pensar en el edificio, que para ella y muchas otras personas es un sitio extremadamente sagrado.

“Me siento tan agradecida y privilegiada por tener este templo de Dios”, Moreno repitió. “La comunidad que tengo en esta iglesia — ellos son mi familia”. Ella es un testigo de la voluntad de Dios.

“Algo como un sueño hecho realidad de tantos años”, dijo Artemio Escalante, feligrés de la iglesia por veinte años. “Tomó mucho tiempo hacer el plan y construir el edificio. El tiempo iba pasando y cuando dijeron, ‘Ahora sí, ya es realidad,’ para nosotros ya era algo emocionante. De mi parte, yo me creo una persona tan chiquita allí que no se ni que hacer a veces por el agradecimiento a Dios”. 🇺🇸



Una mujer ora durante la Misa de Reparación para Víctimas y Sobrevivientes de Abuso celebrada por el Obispo Michael Olson. (NTC/Ben Torres)

# Protección y Sanación

La Oficina de Ambiente Seguro está comprometida a proteger a todos

Por Karla Silva

Según el Departamento de Servicios para la Familia y de Protección de Texas, los estudios demuestran que cada día más de 184 niños son víctimas de abuso en Texas; y un promedio de siete o más niños es maltratado cada hora. Estas estadísticas son una de las razones por las que la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro de la Diócesis de Fort Worth considera de suma importancia su doble misión: la Promesa de Proteger y el Compromiso de Sanar.

La Oficina de Ambiente Seguro fue establecida en el 2002, tras la publicación del *Estatuto para la Protección de Niños y*

*Jóvenes* de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de los Estados Unidos, cuya finalidad era responder a la crisis de abuso sexual dentro de la Iglesia. El documento, que comprende un conjunto de procedimientos para todas las diócesis de los Estados Unidos ayudó a formalizar los procedimientos para abordar prontamente las acusaciones de abuso sexual de menores por parte del clero católico. Estableció como requisito varias medidas para prevenir todo tipo de abuso. Sirve además como guía para la reconciliación, la sanación, la rendición de cuentas y la prevención de futuros actos de abuso.

“La Diócesis ya contaba, antes del

2002, con una persona encargada de atender este tipo de casos y cualquier víctima de abuso con compasión y los debidos recursos, pero el Estatuto estableció pautas específicas para responder prontamente a cualquier reporte de abuso de niños, adolescentes y adultos vulnerables. Su finalidad es prevenir todo abuso a través de la formación, para que todos reconozcan las señales de abuso, y se lleven a cabo las verificaciones de antecedentes penales. El objetivo es contar con personas calificadas en la Diócesis y excluir del servicio o empleo aquéllos que sean potencialmente peligrosos o que tengan algún antecedente



La cuarta Misa anual de Reparación para Víctimas y Sobrevivientes de Abuso fue celebrada en la Catedral de St. Patrick. (NTC/Ben Torres)

de violencia o abuso”, comparte Sandra Schrader-Farry, la Directora de la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro. Ella enfatiza que todas estas medidas se implementan y aplican a todas las personas que estén involucradas en servir en cualquier ministerio de la Diócesis, incluidos los empleados, voluntarios y visitantes.

El Estatuto sirve de guía para lograr diligentemente el cumplimiento de uno de los pilares de su misión: La promesa de proteger. “Todas las personas en la Diócesis, incluidos los voluntarios y empleados a todos los niveles, así como el clero, deben someterse a la verificación de antecedentes y referencias, además de tomar el entrenamiento para adultos, ‘Protegiendo a los niños de Dios’, y renovar cada dos años”, explica Schrader-Farry. “El objetivo es crear conciencia de los peligros que existen, sensibilizarse sobre las víctimas de abuso y reconocer las señales de abuso o intento de abuso. Se incluye también la manera de responder ante un caso”, explica Gabriela García, Coordinadora de Ambiente Seguro.

La Oficina de Ambiente Seguro procura que todas las parroquias de la Diócesis estén al día con el entrenamiento y las asiste a ponerlo en práctica adecuadamente. En una de las visitas a la Parroquia de Holy Name, García se percató de la gran necesidad existente de que más personas tomaran o renovaran su entrenamiento. “Cuando hablamos con el párroco, el Padre Ignacio convocó

enseguida a la comunidad y en sólo dos semanas entrenamos alrededor de 300 feligreses de esta parroquia”, agrega García.

El Padre Ignacio participó del entrenamiento junto con los feligreses y señala que la seguridad es un elemento fundamental de la Iglesia, ya que es el lugar para vivir la fe y tener un encuentro personal con Dios. Por eso, crear un ambiente de respeto, diálogo y hermandad, en el que se preocupen los unos por los otros, es primordial para hacer de la Iglesia un lugar seguro para todos. “La gente reconoce la necesidad de estos entrenamientos y muestra interés en aprender más sobre este tema y prevenir todo abuso. Aunque ya existía un ambiente de protección, estos entrenamientos lo fortalecen al concientizar y extenderlo a los feligreses de la parroquia”, añade el Padre Ignacio.

Los esfuerzos realizados han dado frutos, ya que hasta el momento 25,274 personas adultas en la Diócesis han recibido este entrenamiento y han pasado la verificación de antecedentes. Se cuenta con 182 personas que sirven de facilitadores del entrenamiento, informa la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro.

El Compromiso de Sanar es el segundo propósito de esta Oficina. Hay una línea directa de asistencia a víctimas, que ofrece consejería y cuidado pastoral; y se celebra la Misa Anual de Reparación, que comenzó hace cuatro años. El Obispo

Michael Olson la celebró nuevamente el sábado 6 de abril en St. Patrick Cathedral. Se contó con la asistencia en persona de unos 100 feligreses, y 310 participaron de la transmisión en vivo a través de la página web de la Diócesis. “Estamos aquí para reparar los pecados de los líderes, ministros y miembros de la Iglesia que han adoptado con demasiada facilidad la postura de incredulidad y coacción en el silencio ante los que hablan la verdad en Cristo”, explicó el Obispo Olson en su homilía.

Facilitadores, coordinadores, voluntarios, víctimas y feligreses oraron durante la Misa por las víctimas y los sobrevivientes de abuso. “Esta Misa nos motiva y nos recuerda la segunda misión de nuestro ministerio, que es sanar y ayudar a brindar paz a todos los que han sido perjudicados”, expresa Pat McGrail, el Director Asistente de la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro.

Schrader-Farry destaca que la clave para lograr éxito es la constante cooperación entre la Oficina diocesana y los párrocos, facilitadores, coordinadores y ministerios que laboran incansablemente para crear lugares más seguros. “Es extraordinario ver que la mayoría de las personas que participan de este esfuerzo son voluntarios que tienen el deseo de servir y reconocen la importancia de este asunto, contribuyendo así a la misión de toda la Iglesia”, añade Schrader-Farry.

Este programa ofrece esperanza, ya que hoy día las cosas se están haciendo de manera muy diferente a cómo se hacían antes. Hay más información sobre las posibles causas y señales que se pueden detectar para prevenir el abuso.

“Gracias a la formación y la Misa de Reparación podemos ver que las personas están dispuestas a conversar sobre el tema y hacer lo necesario para combatir este problema. Queremos que la gente tenga la certeza de que la seguridad y protección son una prioridad. Nos afanamos constantemente para lograrlo”, concluye Schrader-Farry. 🇺🇸

# Lleno del AMOR DE DIOS

Cómo un diácono responde a su llamado de ser padre, esposo, misionero y un Mariachi

Por Christina Benavides

**E**n la constitución dogmática sobre la iglesia, *Lumen Gentium*, el Papa Pablo VI describió que “los diáconos reciben la imposición de las manos «no en orden al sacerdocio, sino en orden al ministerio de servicio».” (*LG 29*)

El Diácono Alfonso Ramírez de la Parroquia de Immaculate Conception de Denton es un gran ejemplo de dedicación a su comunidad y profunda fe para llevar a todos el amor de Dios eterno.

Descubrió su llamada al diaconado hace más de veinte años al ver las vestiduras de un diácono de su parroquia. En ese momento sintió que “algo dentro de mí ser; algo que me iluminó; algo que me invitó a vestirme igual que él”, recuerda el Diácono Ramírez. “De ahí, me nació esa llamadita para empezar el proceso del diaconado”.

Luego de ocho años — tres años dedicados a la Luz de Cristo para crecer espiritualmente y cinco años de formación — fue ordenado al diaconado permanente en el 2009 en la Parroquia de St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.

## UN SECRETO DIVINO

El Diácono Ramírez y su esposa Olga Rosillo se casaron hace cuarenta y tres años en la Parroquia de St. Thomas de Pilot Point. Tienen cuatro hijos: Roberto Carlos, 43; Karla Anai, 39; Anna Karen, 35; y Luis Alfonso, 27.

“Mi familia ha sido siempre lo más importante para mí. Si tengo tiempo para mi familia, tengo tiempo para todo el mundo. Eso para mí, es lo más importante”, señaló el Diácono.

No importa cuánta responsabilidad se tenga, dijo el Diácono. “No hay un secreto en particular para poder servir al Señor. Sólo uno tiene que estar disponible para hacer la voluntad de Dios”.

Es también importante deshacerse del concepto de que hay que sentirse ocupado, afirmó el Diácono.

“No me pongo en mi cabeza eso de que voy a estar ocupado; que voy a estar haciendo esto, esto, y aquello... Es que, a veces, las preocupaciones nos ahogan”, explicó. “Por ejemplo, tengo un compromiso y debo estar a las tres en camino algún lugar, pero de repente,

me veo que todavía sigo en otro sitio a las dos y media. Y me digo, ‘Ay, me están esperando’, y me voy manejando mi carro desesperado. Pero me recuerdo constantemente de lo que me dijo una vez un sacerdote, ‘que en tu vida jamás te pongas límites y jamás te pongas horarios. Ponte siempre en las manos de Dios y Él se encarga de todo lo demás en tu vida’”, anotó el diácono.

## EL DIÁCONO MARIACHI

Desde que tenía cuatro años, el Diácono Alfonso Ramírez le ha encantado la música. Desde entonces, ha estado tocando el violín como integrante de un mariachi.

Cuando se ordenó de diácono en el 2009, el Obispo Vann le dijo sonriendo, “de hoy en adelante, ya no vas a ser simplemente un mariachi”. Un chiste que todavía el diácono recuerda porque ser mariachi es más que una simple profesión para él — es una forma de vivir la vida y adorar a Dios.

“Mucha gente piensa que el mariachi es nada más que para estar tomando, para estar ahí, pero en realidad no es así.



El Diácono Alfonso Ramírez reza en la Parroquia de la Immaculate Conception en Denton. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

El Mariachi es para juntarnos y convivir; para llenarse de alegría y llevarla a los demás. Esto es lo que más me gusta. Cuando estamos juntos, nos llenamos de la alegría de Dios”, enfatizó el Diácono Ramírez.

La misma alegría que él siente en su amor por compartir la música la encuentra en ser diácono.

“Dice San Pablo ‘muéstrame tu fe y te mostraré nuestras obras’. Para mí, la obra es alegría... Compartir el amor de Dios a través de la fe y del amor. Eso es para mí la fe: la obra que hacemos”, él dijo.

### ACTIVIDADES COMO DIÁCONO

El Diácono Ramírez trabaja al menos dos misas cada domingo en su Parroquia de Immaculate Conception en Denton o en las Parroquias de St. Michael de Grapevine y Bedford, que él visita todos los meses para ayudar en las Misas en español.

Ayudó también en el ministerio de los encarcelados por un tiempo. Visitaba a los confinados cada ocho días, como lo hizo el diácono anterior.

Cuando comenzó la pandemia del COVID, el diácono empezó a llevar ropa, zapatos y medicina al Distrito Federal de México dos veces al año.

Luego de ver la necesidad de la gente allí y haber hablado con los sacerdotes del área, el Diácono Ramírez empezó a llevar canastas con artículos básicos para los inmigrantes de la Casa Hogar de la Madre Teresa Calcuta, un orfanato en San Miguel de Allende. Lleva también canastas a los Padres de la Iglesia de la Candelaria y a un orfanato de niñas que está al lado de la Basílica de Guadalupe.

“Les ayudamos con lo que podemos dar con el favor de Dios y la generosidad de la comunidad”, agregó. “Poder servir a Dios a través de este ministerio es lo más hermoso que puedo sentir. Me brinda mucho gozo y alegría que, como

diácono, puedo compartir el amor de Dios con la gente”.

### CONSEJOS PARA TODOS

A los hombres que han pensado entrar al diaconado permanente, el Diácono Ramírez les aconseja que se “enamoren de Dios”. A los padres que buscan ayuda para inculcar a sus hijos el verdadero amor a Dios, les aconseja que siempre les lean a sus hijos y le hablen de Dios.

“Nosotros, como padres, queremos darle lo mejor a nuestros hijos. Pensamos en la riqueza del mundo, pensamos en las vanidades del mundo. Pero nunca pensamos que lo mejor que podemos hacer para nuestros hijos es inculcar en ellos el amor de Dios — eso es lo más importante de nuestra vida de fe, que nuestros hijos crezcan con ese amor en su corazón”, concluyó diciendo el Diácono Ramírez con una gran sonrisa llena del amor de Dios. ✝

# CONFIGURARSE CON Cristo Siervo

Isaac McCracken es ordenado al Diaconado de Transición

Por Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

**E**l Reverendísimo Obispo Michael Olson se dirigió al seminarista Isaac McCracken con estas palabras momentos antes de ordenarlo al diaconado de transición durante una Misa en la Parroquia de St. María Goretti de Arlington, que se celebró el 19 de marzo, día de la Solemnidad de San José.

Más de 350 personas, incluidos familiares, amigos y clérigos, asistieron a la ceremonia que da inicio al último año de formación de un seminarista antes de ser ordenado al sacerdocio. El diaconado transitorio es uno de los tres rangos del ministerio clerical de la Iglesia. Y puede ayudar en la Misa, proclamar el Evangelio, hacer la homilía, presidir bautismos, bendecir matrimonios y realizar los Ritos de Sepelio cristiano.

Comparten funciones y responsabilidades similares a las de los diáconos permanentes, pero los diáconos de transición tienen además la responsabilidad de continuar su formación para el sacerdocio.

Para que un hombre pueda ser un sacerdote configurado con Cristo, ha de configurarse primero con Cristo siervo, afirmó el Obispo Olson ante la congregación.

“La dignidad de la Eucaristía exige un sacerdocio vibrante de la caridad de Cristo, que vino a servir y no a ser servido”, explicó. “El diaconado es el medio por el cual Cristo enciende la caridad en el corazón del hombre al que prepara para la ordenación sacerdotal”.

## CRECIMIENTO EN LA FE

McCracken, que era feligrés de la Parroquia de St. Vincent de Paul, ingresó al St. Joseph Seminary College en St. Benedict, Louisiana después de estudiar economía por dos años en la Universidad de Texas en Arlington (UTA). Él está muy agradecido del ministerio universitario de UTA y de los sacerdotes recién ordenados que celebraron Misa en el centro católico del campus por inspirar su propia vocación.

Jeff Hedglen, el Director del programa de ministerio universitario de la UTA, recuerda cómo McCracken servía en la Misa y se involucraba en los diversos roles de liderazgo junto a sus compañeros.

“Siento mucho gozo de haber sido parte de la vida de Isaac mientras estaba en la universidad, y de verlo crecer en la fe; y más tarde, discernir el sacerdocio”, dijo Hedglen, que proclamó la segunda lectura de la Misa de Ordenación.

## PROMESAS Y ORACIÓN

Durante el Rito de Ordenación, el seminarista de 26 años hizo por primera vez tres promesas: vivir una vida célibe como signo de dedicación a Dios y servicio a los demás; respetar y obedecer al Obispo y a sus sucesores; y rezar fielmente la Liturgia de las Horas.

Después de la Letanía de los Santos, el Obispo Olson hizo la imposición de manos sobre la cabeza de McCracken mientras invocaba los dones del Espíritu Santo necesarios para ejercer su ministerio, el elemento más





El Diácono Isaac Joseph McCracken junto al Rev. Jonathan C. Wallis durante la Misa de ordenación al diaconado transitorio el 19 de marzo en la Parroquia de St. Maria Goretti de Arlington. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

VEA EL  
VIDEO Y  
FOTOS



Vea el video y todas las fotos de la ordenación diaconal de transición del Diácono Isaac McCracken escaneando el código QR o visitando [NorthTexasCatholic.smugmug.com/Isaac-McCracken-Transitional-Deacon-Ordination](https://NorthTexasCatholic.smugmug.com/Isaac-McCracken-Transitional-Deacon-Ordination).

esencial de la liturgia de la ordenación.

El diácono transitorio recién ordenado recibió las vestimentas del diaconado de manos de hombres que fueron fundamentales en su camino vocacional: el Diácono Bruce Corbett y el Diácono Normand Etienne.

Ya investido con las vestimentas de su nuevo cargo, el Diácono McCracken recibió del Obispo Olson el Libro del Evangelio mientras escuchaba del prelado las siguientes palabras: “Recibe el Evangelio de Cristo, en cuyo heraldo te has convertido. Cree lo que lees. Enseña lo que crees y practica lo que enseñas”.

#### APOYO Y CELEBRACIÓN

Gary y Joann McCracken, los padres del Diácono McCracken, expresaron que la Misa de Ordenación fue un momento de celebración después de observar los

años de estudio y discernimiento de su hijo. Como diácono de transición, McCracken continuará su preparación para el sacerdocio en el, Theological College en Washington, D.C.

La madre de dos niños, Joann McCracken describió a su hijo menor como amable, inteligente y honesto. “Y muy valiente. Es importante que un sacerdote tenga valentía, especialmente hoy día”, añadió.

Glen McCracken cree que la habilidad que su nieto tiene para aprender idiomas le ayudará en su ministerio. El nuevo diácono, que domina el español y conversa además en alemán, está aprendiendo latín con la esperanza de leer las obras de los Padres de la Iglesia en su texto original.

“Me siento muy orgulloso de él”, comentó el abuelo. “Veo la forma en que trabaja con todos, y es muy dedicado”. 🇺🇸



Lizbeth González, estudiante de primer año de Cassata Catholic High School en Fort Worth, hace sus tareas escolares el 11 de abril. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

# Fe y excelencia

Los padres se sacrifican para que sus hijos reciban los beneficios de la educación católica de la Diócesis

Por Karla Silva

**N**umerosas familias eligen inscribir a sus hijos en las escuelas católicas de la Diócesis de Fort Worth porque imparten una profunda formación en la fe y ofrecen excelencia académica.

La Diócesis tiene 17 escuelas católicas que comprenden desde el nivel preescolar hasta la preparatoria. Su misión es formar a los estudiantes y la familias en la tradición intelectual y la moral católica enraizadas en la fe y la recta razón. De esta manera, los estudiantes y sus familias conocerán y amarán la verdad, la belleza y el bien creado por Dios, basados en la razón y la revelación plena en Jesucristo.

“Nuestra misión principal es guiar a nuestros estudiantes hacia el cielo. Todo lo que realizamos en la escuela se centra en Cristo. Nuestro objetivo es compartir la fe católica con los estudiantes para que se conviertan en personas buenas, santas y representantes de Cristo en el mundo”, expresa la Dra. Arica Serna, la Directora de All Saints Catholic School de Fort Worth. La escuela abarca desde preescolar a octavo grado y brinda un modelo de enseñanza católica clásica y lenguaje dual. El énfasis de esta enseñanza clásica es que los estudiantes puedan comprender la relación de Dios con todo lo que les rodea,

incluido lo académico, y así, lleguen a profundizar en su relación con Él.

La fe se integra en todas las actividades diarias. Se comienza con la oración de la mañana, seguida del Ángelus a mediodía, y una oración antes de irse a casa por la tarde. Se celebra Misa en la escuela con la participación de los estudiantes, al menos, una vez a la semana. Cada escuela ofrece clases de teología o religión para formar a los estudiantes en la fe.

Juana Carrillo-González, mamá de Cristian y Lizbeth González, que asisten a la preparatoria Casatta High School de Fort Worth, comenta, “Para nosotros es

muy importante que no sólo se hable de Dios en la casa, sino también en la escuela. Mis hijos llegan a casa y comparten lo que han aprendido sobre la fe. Como ya entienden cosas que no sabían antes, abren la Biblia y nos ponemos a conversar. Así aprendemos todos juntos como familia”.

Se hace hincapié en las virtudes y los buenos modales. “Cada mes los estudiantes se enfocan en una virtud diferente, como la gratitud, la cortesía y la honradez. Los Santos se presentan como modelo de estas virtudes. Asimismo, se practica un buen comportamiento por semana, como el de saludar a los demás. Todo esto está dirigido a formarles para que puedan distinguir entre lo bueno y lo malo. En última instancia, la meta es que los estudiantes lleven a Cristo a los demás”, explica la Dra. Serna.

Lupita Rosales, la mamá de Noé Rosales, un exalumno de Cristo Rey College Prep de Fort Worth, comparte que la enseñanza católica fue de suma importancia para su hijo. Gracias a la buena formación en la fe y las virtudes, además de la conexión que había entre lo que Noé aprendía en la casa y la escuela, ahora que ya estudia en la universidad, puede diferenciar entre lo bueno y lo malo al escoger sus amistades, así como en la manera de comportarse.

Otro motivo importante por el que los padres eligen la educación católica para sus hijos es la excelencia académica que ofrece. El plan de estudios que las escuelas diocesanas imparten está aprobado por la Agencia de Educación de Texas (TEA) e incluye instrucción en teología, literatura, matemáticas, ciencias, historia y, en algunas escuelas, como All Saints, también se incluyen clases de latín. Por ser ésta una escuela de lenguaje dual, los alumnos reciben instrucción en inglés y en español, lo que los ayuda a dominar ambos idiomas.

“Otra de las cosas que más me motivaron para cambiar a mis hijos de la escuela pública a la escuela católica es el número de estudiantes que hay por clase.



Los estudiantes de All Saints Catholic School de Fort Worth rezan durante la Misa escolar el 17 de mayo de 2023. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Hay muy pocos en comparación con otras escuelas. Por lo tanto, los maestros le pueden prestar más atención a cada estudiante, y mis hijos han mejorado mucho académicamente”, señala Carrillo-González.

La Dra. Serna nos explica que la proporción de maestro a alumno es de un maestro por cada dieciocho alumnos. Esto varía a veces, ya que, en algunas escuelas, el número de alumnos por maestro podría ser aún más bajo. Los maestros pueden dar una atención más individualizada y asegurarse de que los estudiantes sean exitosos cuando los grupos son más pequeños.

El plan de estudios incluye cursos de enriquecimiento, como son las clases de arte, música, teatro y educación física, así como también el acceso a clases y clubs extracurriculares. “En All Saints contamos con béisbol, básquetbol, fútbol, y voleibol, así como clubs que los estudiantes ayudan a formar, según sus propios intereses. Por ejemplo, el club de legos, club de correr, coro y otros”, afirma la Dra. Serna. Otro ejemplo es la escuela preparatoria Nolan

Catholic High School de Fort Worth, que cuenta con clases y clubs de STEM, robótica, artes escénicas y artes visuales, entre otras.

A diferencia de las escuelas públicas, las escuelas católicas son privadas y requiere que se pague la inscripción y matrícula de los estudios. Cabe señalar que ésta es una de las principales razones por la que muchos padres de familia no inscriben a sus hijos en las escuelas católicas.

“Me gustaría recalcar a los padres de familia que hay ayuda económica disponible. Este año 81% de nuestros estudiantes reciben asistencia económica. Mi misión como directora es hacer todo lo posible para que el costo no sea la causa de que sus hijos no reciban una educación católica”, expresa la Dra. Serna.

Tanto Carrillo-González como Rosales señalan que sus hijos han recibido ayuda económica. No obstante, entienden también que el sacrificio económico, ya sea pequeño o grande, vale la pena por todos los beneficios que la educación católica brinda a sus hijos. 🇺🇸



Amador Motos es voluntario del Ministerio de Guardianes de la Parroquia de St. Elizabeth Ann Seton en Keller el 7 de abril. (NTC/Scott Wagner)

# Guardianes DE LA FE

El Ministerio de Guardianes es uno de servicio y protección

Por Violeta Rocha

**E**l mismo día que Amador Motos llegó a Texas hace tres años desde su tierra natal, España, decidió asistir a Misa en la Parroquia de St. Elizabeth Ann Seton de Keller. Al salir de la Celebración Eucarística recibió una calurosa bienvenida y un reclutador le habló e invitó a servir en un ministerio completamente nuevo para él: el Ministerio de Guardianes.

“Ni se me había ocurrido que este tipo de ministerio existiera en la Iglesia”, apunta Motos. Con experiencia previa militar y de seguridad, lo vio enseguida como una invitación que provenía de Dios y una oportunidad fundamental “de servir y proteger”.

Mike Short, el Director de Seguridad de la Diócesis, explica que el Ministerio

de Guardianes consiste de voluntarios de las parroquias que están capacitados para brindar seguridad y actuar de forma inmediata cuando se presenta una situación de emergencia. Se supone que ellos respondan de una manera rápida en cualquier emergencia médica que ocurra, u otras situaciones que podrían requerir una respuesta con armas o sin armas, en lo que llegan los socorristas, personal de primeros auxilios u oficiales de seguridad.

Según estudios realizados, el tiempo de respuesta de los primeros socorristas en una emergencia, incluso cuando se trata de una tan crítica como un tiroteo, llega a ser de 15 minutos, agrega Short. “Por tal razón, se comenzó a estudiar diferentes posibles caminos de atender estas situaciones en nuestras iglesias y tratar de reducir ese tiempo para responder relativamente rápido durante cualquier

situación de emergencia”, dijo Short.

Las primeras evaluaciones a nivel diocesano para fortalecer la seguridad de todos se empezaron en el 2017. Short trabajó como consultor para la Diócesis desde el 2018 hasta que fue nombrado Director de Seguridad en el 2020. Bajo su dirección, se fueron planificando y desarrollando poco a poco diversos entrenamientos que dieron lugar al nacimiento de este ministerio.

Motos siente que servir dentro de este ministerio ha sido un proceso “precioso”. Asegura que, aunque “todos los guardianes esperamos que nunca ocurra un evento grave que justifique que estemos ahí”, se regocija de tal manera que, tanto el clero como los fieles, “muestran estar muy agradecidos” por la presencia de una mayor seguridad en las parroquias.

Le brinda también mucha alegría ver

la conexión que hay entre ser guardián y su devoción personal a San José. “Él fue el primer guardián de Jesús y lo cuidó; además, el Ministerio de Guardianes encaja muy bien con mi experiencia y espíritu militar, y la necesidad que todos tenemos de proteger a la comunidad de la Iglesia”, explica Motos.

José Aponte, feligrés de Holy Angels de Clifton, fue uno de los primeros voluntarios en integrarse al Ministerio de Guardianes. Incluso, fue parte del estudio realizado por la Diócesis hace seis años y tomó los primeros entrenamientos que se han seguido ofreciendo. Hasta la fecha, hay cuatrocientos voluntarios que han recibido capacitación para ser guardianes.

Aponte señala que la tan solo existencia del ministerio “hace una diferencia porque nunca sabemos cuándo algo malo pueda pasar”. Por eso, enfatiza la función preventiva del ministerio. Ver a su “pequeña” parroquia repleta de familias enteras, que en su mayoría son de origen mexicano, y que están ávidos de escuchar la Palabra de Dios y recibir los sacramentos, lo llevan “a ponerse en un sentido de alerta y tener que estar disponible para proteger y actuar”, añade.

“Como católico, mi rol tiene que ser de servicio a la comunidad y a Dios, que me dio ciertos dones, y esos dones son para ponerlos al servicio de todos,” enfatiza Aponte, originario de León, Guanajuato.

“Gracias a Dios, el Obispo Michael Olson contactó a una persona altamente calificada, como lo es Mike Short”, declara Aponte, cuya profesión es de ingeniero agrónomo. Él trabaja con veteranos de guerra para darles apoyo y describe que el entrenamiento que reciben los guardianes es a nivel de un policía de unidad especial SWAT, y se combina con rigurosos exámenes psicológicos que deben pasar.

Además de voluntarios armados, el Ministerio de Guardianes cuenta con voluntarios no armados, que ya están sirviendo en un ministerio establecido dentro de la parroquia. Se trata de los ministros de hospitalidad y de bienvenida. Ellos toman también el entrenamiento diocesano para aprender a observar e identificar vulnerabilidades atípicas. Su función es estar vigilantes para crear así



Jose Aponte trabaja como voluntario del Ministerio de Guardianes en la Parroquia de Our Lady of Guadalupe en Morgan. (NTC/Matthew Redden)

varias “capas de seguridad y facilitar el responder con rapidez”, explica Short. Él invita a que todos “tomen ventaja” de la capacitación que se ofrece en línea. Aunque no está escrito en español, se puede tomar fácilmente añadiendo subtítulos.

El equipo médico es otro componente del Ministerio de Guardianes. Consiste en que las parroquias traten de identificar los feligreses que ejercen la profesión médica o que poseen la certificación médica. Sin embargo, señala Short que siempre existe la posibilidad de capacitarse a través de la Cruz Roja para aprender a usar efectivamente el equipo de primeros auxilios que cada parroquia debe tener, incluido el desfibrilador, en caso de un paro cardíaco; y aprender a cómo detener una hemorragia.

Para establecer el Ministerio de Guardianes en una parroquia se busca primero tener un grupo de líderes. Se trata de personas que asuman la responsabilidad de actuar e implementar los servicios de soporte necesarios. A nivel diocesano, se tiene también un tipo de seguridad implementada, ya sea contratada o como ministerio. No obstante, más voluntarios

son siempre bienvenidos y necesarios. Apunta Short que al protegernos “nos dirigimos directamente hacia Jesús” y resalta los valores de la comunidad hispana, que los mueve a “preocuparse y cuidarse los unos a los otros”.

Pese a que “hay mucho trabajo por hacer con respecto a proveer una mayor seguridad”, Short señala además que ha habido mucho “progreso”, que ha resultado en que la implementación de este programa “sea cada vez más eficiente y conveniente”. Destaca el trabajo realizado en la Parroquia de Good Shepherd de Colleyville en el 2022, cuando una persona armada se parapetó en la Sinagoga Congregación Beth Israel, ubicada sólo a una cuadra de la parroquia.

En esa ocasión el Ministerio de Guardianes “jugó un papel muy importante”. Sus voluntarios mostraron gran “hospitalidad” a las familias y sirvió como “puesto de comando” para la policía y los medios de comunicación. Tenían ya establecida una red de comunicaciones eficiente; y supieron actuar rápida y eficazmente para ayudar.

“Esto es precisamente para lo que estamos entrenados”, concluye Short. 🇺🇸

## Un llamado duradero



NTC/Juan Guajardo

**SU NOMBRE:** Padre Ariel Muñoz Sánchez, CORC, párroco de St. Matthew de Arlington.

**UNA MADRE DEVOTA:** Padre Muñoz fue criado en el campo del estado de Querétaro de México. Para llegar a la Misa de la iglesia más cercana, él y su madre caminaban entre 40 minutos y una hora. “Mi madre amaba mucho a la Iglesia y se sentía muy cercana a los sacerdotes de la parroquia. Aunque vivíamos en un rancho, mi madre siempre iba a la iglesia para asistir a Misa”.

El sacerdote recuerda que con frecuencia llegaban a su casa sacerdotes y seminaristas que iban de paso por los ranchos. “Mi mamá los atendía, les daba desayuno o almuerzo. Y así, poco a poco, se me fue metiendo en la cabeza la idea de querer ser sacerdote como ellos”.

**RESURGIR DEL LLAMADO:** El Padre Muñoz y su madre emigraron a Texas cuando él tenía sólo 12 años. Vivían muy lejos de la ciudad, pero iban a la iglesia tanto como podían. Él ayudaba a dar catequesis a los niños de la parroquia.

Mientras tanto, su tío entró al seminario de la Orden de la

Confraternidad Sacerdotal de Operarios del Reino de Cristo (CORC) y fue enviado a España para continuar sus estudios. “Él nos mandó una foto en que aparecía vestido con su sotana. Esa foto tuvo un gran impacto en mí. Ya yo tenía 20 años y me volvió nuevamente ese deseo que tenía de niño de ser sacerdote. Esas ansias resurgieron en mí. Sentí un profundo deseo de responder a ese llamado; sentí una ansia tremenda y, de tal manera, que lo que quería en ese momento era tener alas y poder irme. Deseaba tener los suficientes recursos o tener lo necesario para irme al seminario en aquel momento. Sin embargo, para lograrlo tendría que pasar por un largo proceso”.

**PERSEVERANCIA HASTA ENTRAR AL SEMINARIO:** El Padre Muñoz siguió los consejos de su tío y no entró a la Orden de los Operarios porque ellos requerían un pago mensual por cada seminarista. “Como éramos pobres, lógicamente había que pensar en eso”.

Decidió entonces entrar al seminario de los Misioneros de Cristo Redentor, donde se quedó por seis años y terminó sus estudios secundarios y la preparatoria.

Luego, se salió del seminario y se fue a

trabajar por un año como campesino en los Estados Unidos. Cuando regresó a México, su tío ya había sido ordenado como sacerdote y lo invitó a conocer los Operarios y su comunidad. “Ahí estaba el director vocacional e inmediatamente empezó a hablar conmigo y me decía, ‘Órale, tú tienes que ser sacerdote — tú tienes que ser sacerdote’”.

El Padre Muñoz perseveró y logró entrar al Seminario Mayor de la Confraternidad Sacerdotal de Operarios del Reino de Cristo en septiembre del 1989.

#### **FECHA DE ORDENACIÓN:**

Ordenado al sacerdocio el 26 de septiembre del 1997 en la Catedral de Querétaro, San Felipe Neri, en México.

#### **ENAMORADO DE SU**

**VOCACIÓN:** “He intentado dar lo mejor de sí mismo como sacerdote. Yo digo que, si volviera a nacer otra vez, volvería a ser sacerdote. Es una vocación muy bonita. Hay altas y bajas. Si te dijera que todo es una maravilla, sería una mentira, ¡Eh! Al ver lo que Dios hace contigo, cómo la gente confía todavía en el sacerdote para recibir los sacramentos y pedir consejos, me parece que todo esto es increíble... Sí, definitivamente yo volvería a ser sacerdote porque hay mucha gente que nos necesita”.

#### **UNA IGLESIA DOMÉSTICA**

**HERMOSA:** “Una alegría para mí y la satisfacción más grande es ver cómo llega tanta gente a la iglesia y cómo entran familias completas con todos sus hijos — a veces, hasta con cuatro o cinco niños. Es bonito observar cómo llegan a Misa todos los domingos y cómo se sientan todos en un solo banco. Una familia, y todos juntos en la iglesia; eso es muy hermoso”.

#### **CONSEJO PARA LOS PADRES:**

“Sigán educando a sus hijos en la fe. No descuiden el cultivar la fe en sus hijos. Éste es el regalo más grande que les pueden dar”.

#### **LA BELLEZA DE LA**

**RECONCILIACIÓN:** Más que nada, el Padre Muñoz ama la Eucaristía, pero también le brindan mucha satisfacción los días de las Confesiones. “Aunque me sienta un poquito cansado, me da también una gran alegría ver cuánta gente todavía cree en el Sacramento de la Reconciliación y viene a confesarse para recibir la misericordia de Dios a través del cura”.

**PASATIEMPOS:** Hacer rompecabezas y ver películas del oeste de YouTube porque le recuerda el tiempo de cuando se criaba en el campo.

“Yo salí del campo, pero el campo no ha salido de mí. ... Cuando yo voy a visitar a mi hermana, me siento que me hace falta el machete y el sombrero. Y cuando voy a visitar a los que fueron mis compañeros de trabajo en aquel tiempo, los encuentro por ahí. Celebro la Misa y luego los voy a saludar y les pregunto cómo están. Entre ellos, me siento también como otro campesino, aunque ya es una realidad distinta. Ciertamente, ya llevo 27 años de cura y algunos de ellos ya son abuelos”.

#### **BENDECIDOS POR LA FE:**

“Si tienes una buena relación con Dios, vas a tomar buenas decisiones y vas a tener fuerza para luchar contra cualquier obstáculo que se presenta en tu vida.

“Pero si no estás con Dios, no tendrás virtudes internas que te sostengan y ayuden como la paciencia, la caridad, la prudencia, que son virtudes que tienes que ponerlas en práctica todos los días”. 🇺🇸

## **AMBIENTE SEGURO**

### **Para Reportar Mala Conducta Sexual:**

Si usted o alguien que usted conoce es víctima de abuso sexual por parte de cualquier persona 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.

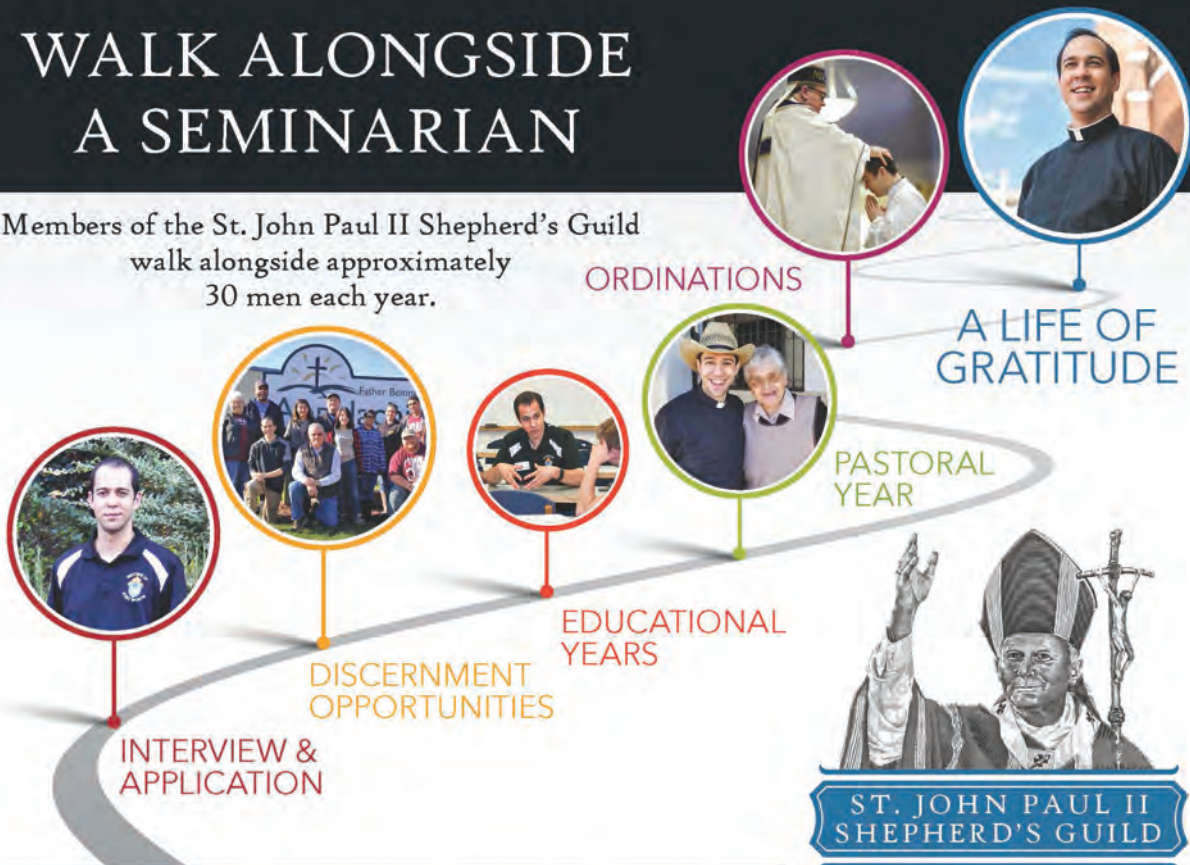
Para más información sobre nuestros programas de prevención de abuso, visite [fwdioc.org/safe-environment](http://fwdioc.org/safe-environment)





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