Bishop Vann removes Fr. Gil Pansza from ministry because of a violation of the terms of the Charter

Editor’s note: Bishop Kevin Vann issued the following statement to a news conference, Thursday afternoon, Dec. 14, at The Catholic Center in West Fort Worth. The floor was then opened to questions put forward by reporters from area television and radio stations and the Fort Worth STAR-TELEGRAM. The video of the news conference is available at the diocesan Web site, www.fwdioc.org.

It is my sad duty to announce that I have removed Father Gilbert Pansza, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Wichita Falls, from active ministry in accord with the terms of “The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.”

In continuing to review the files of the diocese, we discovered an admission from Fr. Pansza of sexual abuse of a minor that occurred in the early 1970s. The behavior to which Fr. Pansza admitted, as I said, occurred in the early 1970s before he was even a seminarian. We have turned the information about the incident over to the appropriate legal authorities. Since his ordination to the priesthood in 1980, Father Pansza has served in various parishes in both Fort Worth and Wichita Falls.

Pope Benedict XVI calls visit to Turkey an unforgettable spiritual experience

By John Thavis

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Benedict XVI called his visit to Turkey an unforgettable experience and said he hoped it would lead to improved relations between Christians and Muslims.

The pope made the remarks at his noon blessing Dec. 3 at the start of the Advent season, addressing pilgrims two days after returning from a pilgrimage of dialogue in Turkey.

The pope thanked the organizers of the four-day trip, including Turkish authorities, for ensuring that the visit was “peaceful and fruitful.” He expressed his gratitude to “the friendly Turkish people” for giving him “a welcome worthy of their traditional spirit of hospitality.”

He said the visit was “an unforgettable spiritual and pastoral experience, which I hope will help produce an increasingly sincere cooperation among all the disciples of Christ and a beneficial dialogue with Muslim believers.”

The papal visit was designed as a primarily ecumenical trip and featured important encounters with Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

But the pope generated the most interest in Turkey and in the world by meeting with Muslim leaders and visiting the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, where he prayed alongside a Muslim cleric.

‘Nativity’ producer has Fort Worth connection

By Mark Pattison

WASHINGTON (CNS) — It was “dumb Irish luck” that got “The Nativity Story” its Nov. 26 screening at the Vatican, according to Marty Bowen, the film’s Catholic producer.

“I was ‘altar boy of the year’ at Holy Family Church in Fort Worth, Texas, in ‘82 and ‘83. When you have that kind of clout, you can make things happen,” Bowen joked.

In a more serious vein, Bowen said, “The church is looking for entertainment that will embrace its values, rather than be on the defensive with films like ‘The Da Vinci Code.’”

Bowen talked to Catholic News Service from Rome, where

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SEE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY…, P. 7

SEEKING WARMTH — Girls dressed as angels huddle around a bonfire as they wait to join a living Nativity scene outside Our Lady of the Lakes Church in Random Lake, Wis., Dec. 1. Despite a blizzard earlier that day, members of the parish presented the 30-minute program. (CNS photo/Sam Lucero, Catholic Herald)
Chicago deacons help with rebuilding efforts in New Orleans

By Florence Herman

NEW ORLEANS (CNS) — A group of permanent deacons from Chicago has planned three trips a year to help repair and rebuild post-Katrina New Orleans.

Deacon Sal Lema, director of communications for the Province of the Most Pure Heart of Mary of the Carmelite Fathers and Brothers, enlisted help from fellow deacons in the Chicago Archdiocese after hearing about the needs from a member of his province who was in New Orleans after the August 2005 hurricane to offer help from the larger Carmelite community. “He couldn’t believe what he saw,” Deacon Lema recalled during an October building trip to New Orleans. “When I heard it, my reaction was, ‘We’ve got to do something, and that something had to be a hands-on project.’”

Deacon Lema and Deacon Joe Windblad came to New Orleans at the invitation of Carmelite Sister Beth Fitzpatrick, congregational leader.

Both Sr. Beth and Carmelite Sister Camille Anne Campbell, president and principal of Mount Carmel Academy, an all-girls school that was inundated by more than 8 feet of floodwater but reopened in January, identified a great need: rebuilding a small print shop at the back of their complex that churned out the thousands of pages needed to keep the school and community running and in touch.

After surveying the 1,500-square-foot building, measuring, and figuring, the deacons flew back to Chicago. They preached and cajoled, and got all the materials necessary to completely rebuild the shop. A freight line arranged to transport 7,000 pounds of materials for free.

In January, Deacon Lema and five other deacons drove to New Orleans — “941 miles, we’ve got it down to a science,” Deacon Lema said — and after four and a half days of almost nonstop work from sunup to sundown they left a completed shop ready to be refitted with equipment.

However, the deacons saw much more that needed doing. “We went back and preached about the needs that were still here,” Deacon Lema told the Clarion Herald, newspaper of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. “We found a lot of people who wanted to come and do hands-on work.”

Their next project was the sisters’ four-story motherhouse, which had both water and wind damage. “We knew that we could get some areas of it up and running,” Deacon Lema said, adding that a volunteer plumber fixed all the leaky pipes and toilets, getting showers and lavatories working again.

By the time the deacons returned in June for their two-week stay, they had begun to organize their efforts as Project Hope. The subtitle, “Hope is on the way,” carried over to their Web address, www.hopeisontheway.org. They all wear red T-shirts with “Chicago deacons” on one side and “Project Hope” on the other.

“The first time we came down, we’d raised $16,000 in donations,” said Deacon Lema. “The second time, we raised $4,000.” For their October work, the deacons raised $14,000. Two weekends of preaching at his parish, Mother of Good Counsel in Homer Glen, Illinois, raised $5,000, and a parish bake sale netted more than $1,000.

Beginning in June, project volunteers stayed at a nearby bed and breakfast, with the sisters providing lunch and school alumni families or local restaurants providing supper.

Deacon Lema’s consistent message to deacons and others interested in the project is “we gotta come; it’s a kind of commitment.” At a convention of Chicago deacons, 12 signed on for the trips planned for January, June, and October.

In January, said Deacon Lema, they will help New Orleans Deacon Dwight Alexander, who has assisted them during previous trips, rebuild his flooded house and continue their work at the motherhouse.

He never knows what’s getting in terms of volunteer helpers, said Deacon Lema. “But the people coming have the skill to do the jobs needed.”

In June, they pulled up flooring and tile at the motherhouse; in October, they re-laid flooring and readied the kitchen for new cabinets and counters.

From the beginning, Deacon Lema said, his Carmelite province has been generous, not just with donations but with time. “They’ve been giving me time to come here and do the work,” he said, adding that his wife joined him last June.

“It feels good to get your hands into the work, to get dirty,” he said. “Like bad pennies, we’ll just keep turning up.”
Cassata High School’s new president, Sal Espino, plans on telling about school’s success stories every chance he gets

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

Correspondent

When Fort Worth City Councilman Sal Espino addressed the Northside Rotary Club Nov. 28, he had more to offer the crowd than just news about community issues. On Nov. 13, the real estate attorney became president of Cassata High School, and the position has given his speaking engagements a new focus.

“I like telling the Cassata story — the success stories that start here,” Espino says from his as yet undecorated office. “I’m going to use my contacts in the community to explain how this high school started and what it does, every chance I get.”

And the school’s rich, colorful history will provide the new president with a wealth of interesting material. Started by Sister President Sal Espino

Cassata students must overcome the school’s nurturing administrator shares one tidbit of encouragement that he’s always found helpful: Faced with a daunting task, it’s not so much finishing first that counts, but that you finish.

“I like the idea that this school gives young people a second or even a third chance at an education,” Espino says enthusiastically. “I’m coming into this job 100 percent energized.”

Born in Mexico and brought to the United States as a 5-year-old, the Northside resident knows from personal experience the value of a high school diploma. A product of the Fort Worth public school system, he graduated as valedictorian of a traditional classroom setting. Using a well-tested curriculum that stresses small class size, individual attention, and self-paced goals, the alternative high school has graduated more than 3,500 at-risk students since its inception.

During his first month on the job, Espino has spent time getting to know the 121 young men and women currently enrolled at the Hemphill Street campus. Recognizing the obstacles some Cassata students must overcome to graduate, the school’s nurturing administrator shares one tidbit of encouragement that he’s always found helpful: Faced with a daunting task, it’s not so much finishing first that counts, but that you finish.

“I like the idea that this school gives young people a second or even a third chance at an education,” Espino says enthusiastically. “I’m coming into this job 100 percent energized.”

According to Espino, Cassata was designed to help students who had difficulty succeeding in a traditional classroom setting. Using a well-tested curriculum that stresses small class size, individual attention, and self-paced goals, the alternative high school has graduated more than 3,500 at-risk students since its inception.

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Born in Mexico and brought to the United States as a 5-year-old, the Northside resident knows from personal experience the value of a high school diploma. A product of the Fort Worth public school system, he graduated as valedictorian of Polytechnic High School before earning a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Texas Christian University. After TCU, Espino went on to study law at Southern Methodist University and is now a member of the State Bar of Texas, the Tarrant County Bar Association, and the Mexican-American Bar Association. He currently serves on the tax increment finance boards for the Texas Motor Speedway, North Tarrant Parkway, Trinity River Vision, Lone Star, and the Fort Worth Sports Authority.

In addition to his civic and community obligations, Espino is an active volunteer at All Saints Church where he is involved in numerous parish groups and liturgical ministries. His dedication to the church and his desire to work for a nonprofit organization attracted him to the administrative opening at Cassata High School.

“When I read that Cassata was looking for president, I saw an opportunity,” says Espino. “The mission of Cassata appealed to me. I want to help young people find their place in life through education.” Espino and his wife Elizabeth have four children of their own.

The councilman’s heartfelt answers to questions posed by the selection committee won him the job, according to Cassata Principal Bill Hardisty.

“We asked why a city councilman would want this position. He said he always wanted to work for a nonprofit [organization] and do something positive for the young people in the Fort Worth area,” the principal remembers.

“Having someone of his stature, demeanor, and personality is an asset to the school. His selection was unanimous.”

And the students seem to agree with the decision, Hardisty adds.

“They’re reelected to have someone from the Fort Worth City Council here,” he says. “Frankly, our ability to draw someone of that caliber to this small school surprised us.”

Buoyed by the support of students, parents, and staff, Espino says he’s eager to roll up his shirt sleeves and go to work for Cassata. As president, his chief responsibilities involve public relations, development, and fundraising. Immediate goals include increasing the visibility and awareness of Cassata in the area, building a strong financial base, and raising the capital needed for upkeep and improvement of the school’s facilities.

Now the bearer of two titles — city councilman and Cassata High School president — Espino is often queried by his constituents about the growing high school dropout rate. Solving the problem, he says, requires a three-pronged strategy — childhood literacy programs, quick interventions for at-risk students, and recovery.

“Cassata is part of the recovery process. It’s another option for kids who have lost hope,” he explains.

According to Espino, Cassata succeeds because it embodies the values the Catholic Church teaches — respect, dignity, tolerance, and support. “When students walk up the steps of this school, they know they’ll find those things here,” he says.
Ministry Formation Day in Fort Worth to be held Jan. 6

“Who Do You Say That I Am?” is the theme of the diocesan Ministry Formation Day to be held Jan. 6 at Nolan Catholic High School, 1401 Bridge Street in Fort Worth. The event, which will begin at 6 p.m. and end at 9:30 p.m., is open to allisters, Spanish, is an opportunity for enrichment, fellowship, and development of practical skills for ministry. Registration will begin at 8:15 a.m.

The keynote address — first in English, at 9:30 a.m., and then in Spanish, at 10:45 a.m. — will be presented by Bishop Kevin Vann. During the English keynote address, “Why the Church Matters,” Bishop Vann will speak about the importance of Catholic language workshops will be held, and while the Spanish keynote is offered, English-language workshops will take place. There will be another round of workshops in the afternoon, prior to the conclusion of the event at 3 p.m. The sessions in the Vietnamese language are planned.

Workshops will be offered on a variety of topics, including “Volunteers: You All Are Called to Serve”; “Catholic Response to Moral Quandaries.” “How to Get Pro-Life Committees Started in Your Parish,” “Keeping the Faith of the Catholic Sacrament,” and “Hands-On Lenten Ideas for the Classroom.”

All involved in parish or school ministries, whatever their volunteer or paid staff, are welcome to attend. The cost, which includes lunch, is $20 per person prior to the early registration deadline of Jan. 2. After that date, the cost is $25 per person. Scholarships are available.

For more information, call the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist at (817) 560-3500 or visit the diocesan Web site at www.fwoc.org.

Good Shepherd Parish invites distanced Catholics to ‘Come Home’

The Adult Faith Formation team of Good Shepherd Church, 1000 Tinker Road in Colleyville, has a message for inactive, disconnected, or alienated Catholics within the Diocese of Fort Worth. “Please accept this invitation to Come Home,” say members of the formation team. “Your church misses you.”

The Come Home Ministry at Good Shepherd Church will offer a five-session program, beginning Tuesday, Feb. 6. Each Tuesday evening session will begin at 7 p.m. and will conclude by 9 p.m.

Topics to be addressed in the sessions will include: an introduction to the Come Home program, Jan. 9; stories of separation and return, Jan. 16; a discussion of the sacraments, Jan. 23; a tour of the church at Good Shepherd, Jan. 30; and information about the Catholic Church, its teachings on divorce, and the annulment process, Feb. 6. Those active in the Come Home program at Good Shepherd offer a safe, welcoming environment for conversation about a return to active participation in the Catholic Church. For more information, contact Karen DelFillips at (817) 421-3877, or Diane Kruse at (817) 482-1404. For childcare reservations, contact the parish office at (817) 421-3877 prior to Jan. 1.

Dr. Mark Goodwin to speak on ‘Making Sense of the Gospels’ Jan. 11, 11

Dr. Mark Goodwin, author and professor of biblical studies and theology at the University of Dallas, will present a two-part series on “Making Sense of the Gospels in the 21st Century” at Good Shepherd Church, 1000 Tinker Road in Colleyville, Jan. 11 and 18. Each session will begin at 7 p.m. and will conclude by 9 p.m.

The Jan. 11 session will focus on the question, “What are the Gospels and how do we make sense of them?” The Jan. 18 session is entitled “Making Sense of the Gospels: The Four Faces of Jesus.”


LITTLE SAINTS AND ANGELS — The students, faculty, and staff of Our Lady of Victory School in Fort Worth welcomed Father Robert Wilson, pastor of Holy Cross Parish, Fort Worth, as their guest on Wednesday, Jan. 16, from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the cafeteria at St. Maria Goretti Church, 120 S. Duris Dr. in Arlington.

The seminar will begin with a dynamic presentation by the. Theology of the Body Evangelization Team (TOBET) from the Diocese of Dallas. The workshop will include a viewing of a DVD series by writer and speaker Christopher West, with time for questions and discussion. Each participant will be provided a workbook.

Registration is required prior to Jan. 11. For more information or to register, contact Lana Pellenz at (817) 274-0643 ext. 226, or e-mail lpellenz@smgparish.org.

St. Augustine Men’s Purity Group meets weekly

The St. Augustine Men’s Purity Group, a support group for men who struggle with sexual sinfulness as much as those found on the list of most frequent American sins, meets Tuesday evenings at 7 p.m. in Room 213 at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School, 2016 Willis Avenue, Fort Worth.

For more information, visit the group’s Web site at www.sampg.org or e-mail Mark at saintaugustinepurity@yahoo.com or call St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish office at (817) 431-3877.

Retrouvaille weekend Jan. 19-21 to offer help for hurting marriages

A Retrouvaille weekend, part of a program which offers help to married couples who are struggling in their relationship, will take place Jan. 19-21 in the Metroplex area. Offered through the Family Life Office of the Diocese of Fort Worth, Retrouvaille is a three-month process which combines a live-in weekend with post-weekend follow-up sessions.

Through the Retrouvaille program, couples who are divorced in their relationship learn how to listen, forgive, and communicate. Supportive group process holds buildings long-term and lasting together. All names and conversations will be kept confidential.

To register or for more information, call (900) 470-2420, or visit online at www.retrouvaille.org.

Rachel’s Vineyard retreat, Jan. 5-7, to offer post-abortion healing

A Rachel’s Vineyard retreat, designed to offer healing for women and those struggling with the psychological and spiritual pain of abortion, will be held Jan. 5-7 in Fort Worth.

Rachel’s Vineyard retreats offer a safe, non-judgmental, and supportive environment to those struggling with-abortion’s aftermath. The retreat team, which includes a priest and a licensed counselor, provides the confidential support needed to help participants process their feelings of anger, shame, guilt, and grief, so that they may be open to experiencing the healing love and mercy of God.

Mothers, fathers, grandparents, and former participants in the abortion industry — anyone who has been hurt by abortion — are welcome to attend.

For more information or to register, call the confidential help line at (817) 923-4757 or e-mail to forgiven@rachels.org. All inquiries are strictly confidential.

Annual Respect Life Mass to be celebrated Jan. 19

All are invited to participate in the annual Respect Life Mass at St. Patrick Cathedral, 1200 Throckmorton Street, downtown Fort Worth, Jan. 19 at 10 a.m. The diocesan liturgy, held each January, will mark the 40th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion.

“Your presence and participation in prayer and worship will be an important sign of support to the efforts of many people who serve diligently to protect the most vulnerable—the sick, the poor, and the chronically ill, and the elderly,” said Deacon Richard Stojak, director of the diocesan Respect Life Office, and Diocese of Fort Worth. “The Respect Life Mass is a wonderful opportunity to show support for the unborn and those who provide spiritual, material and emotional help to them.”

For more information, call the Family Life office at (817) 560-1990.

Support group offers help for grieving divorced, widowed, and separated

Starting a New Life, a structured, confidential support group sponsored by the diocesan Family Life Office, is available to those grieving the loss of a spouse through death or divorce. A new 10-week cycle will begin Monday, Jan. 22, during which participants, supported by peers, will work through the stages of grief and pain that accompany the loss of a spouse. Meetings will be held Monday evenings from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Catholic Renewal Center, 1493 Bridge Street in Fort Worth.

All faiths are welcome. For information, contact Pat Trout at (817) 261-0796 or e-mail to hengle@sheglow.net, or Kevin Gamble at (817) 626-9382. More information is available online at www.renewalcenter.org.

Young Serrans awards banquet set for Jan. 27 in Dallas

All are invited to attend the Young Evangelizer Group (YSC) of Dallas 2007 Award Presentation and Banquet to be held Saturday, Jan. 27, from 6 to 9 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the Hilton DFW Park East.

In recognition of the devastation they have experienced in light of personal experiences, and to come to the session with questions, insights and knowledge to give to others, the potluck supper will be served at 6:15 p.m., and the talk will continue from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Following theGraphNode will also meet Feb. 15 to discuss Stones from the River by Ursula Hegi.

The correct conversation space will be reserved to a spot or for more information, call the Young Evangelizer Group at (817) 560-2452 or e-mail to lolu@danluby@hotmail.com.

Calix support group meets monthly at Holy Family

Calix, a monthly support meet for Catholics who are alcoholic, focuses on enhancing the quality of life through sobriety, support, and stemming the tide of addiction and seeking recovery, is offered the first Saturday of each month at Holy Family Church, 6150 Pershing Ave. in West Fort Worth. The next meeting will be held Jan. 6, beginning at 10 a.m. in the church hall.

Calix meetings focus on enhancing spiritual growth through sharing Eucharist, discussion, and fellowship.

For more information, contact Deacon Joe Milligan at (817) 757-6768 ext. 105 or Tom S. at (817) 735-1519.
Cardinal Newman Institute to offer series on 'Western Theological Tradition'

The Cardinal Newman Institute will offer its second series within a six-course sequence leading to a certificate in theological studies issued jointly with the College of St. Thomas More in Fort Worth. The series, offered in 10 weekly classes entitled "Western Theological Tradition," will be taught by Paul Menge.

Each class, beginning Jan. 15, will be held on Saturday mornings from 9:45 a.m. until noon in the conference room at St. Mary the Virgin Church, located at 1408 N. Davis Drive in Arlington. The course will investigate the growth and development of Catholic doctrine. No previous studies are required.

For more information or to register, call (817) 277-4859, or visit the College of St. Thomas More Web site at wcmu.edu.

New Year's Eve Dance to be held at Fort Worth KC hall

The annual New Year's Eve Dance benefiting the North American Conference of Separated and Divorced Catholics Region 10, will be held Dec. 31 from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 4500 Columbus Trail in Fort Worth.

Music will be provided by BluePRINT, which will play "no-shash funk and rock," according to a Charlie's Productions flyer. The event will also offer musical selections. Limited hors d'oeuvres will be included, and black-eyed peas will be served at midnight.

This event has a high attendance of singles, according to organizers. Parents with children are welcome.

The cost is $15 per person. Reservations are encouraged. For table reservations, call Charlie Valdez at (817) 284-4811 ext. 309 or send email to CourageDFW@Catholic.org or call (817) 927-5383. For more information, contact Vince Chairez at (817) 896-5726 or (817) 551-5251.

Beginning Experience offers help to those grieving loss of spouse

The Beginning Experience is a ministry for those who have lost a spouse due to death, divorce, or separation. The next weekend session will be offered Jan. 19-21 at the Catholic Renewal Center, 4903 Bridge Street in East Fort Worth, next to Nolan Catholic High School.

The program is designed to help those grieving the loss of a spouse to put closure on the past and to create a new beginning in the present. The ministry, although rooted in the Catholic tradition, is open to people of all faiths.

For more information or to register, call the Catholic Renewal Center at (817) 429-2920 or visit online at www.beginningexperience.org.
In sign of respect to Muslims, pope prays in Blue Mosque

By John Thavis

ISTANBUL, Turkey (CNS) — In a gesture of respect to Muslims in Turkey and around the world, Pope Benedict XVI prayed in Istanbul’s famed Blue Mosque, his first papal visit to an Islamic place of worship.

As the pope walked with Mustafa Cagrici, the grand mufti of Istanbul, to the “mihrab” niche that points the way toward Mecca, the mufti said he was going to pray.

The pope stood alongside him, bowed his head, and moved his lips in silence for about a minute. The historic visit marked the second time a pope has entered a mosque. (CNS photo/Anatolian News Agency, Reuters)

The grand domes of Istanbul, pray in the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey. Nov. 30. When the mufti said he was going to pray, the pope bowed his head, folded his hands, and moved his lips in silence for about a minute. The historic visit marked the second time a pope has entered a mosque. (CNS photo/Anatolian News Agency, Reuters)

By Cindy Wooden

ISTANBUL, Turkey (CNS) — Claiming the brotherhood of their respective patron saints — the apostles Andrew and Peter — the spiritual leaders of the world’s Orthodox and the world’s Catholics joined together in prayer and solemnly affirmed their commitment to the full unity of their churches.

Incense and ancient hymns chanted in Greek set the atmosphere as Pope Benedict XVI paid homage to the Orthodox church by attending a Nov. 30 Divine Liturgy celebrated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

The liturgy at the Orthodox Church of St. George in Istanbul marked the feast of St. Andrew, patron of the patriarchate.

The pope and patriarch greeted each other with kisses on the cheek, but then the pope moved to a raised wooden throne at the side of the church while the patriarch celebrated the solemn liturgy.

After the almost three-hour liturgy, Patriarch Bartholomew led Pope Benedict to a balcony overlooking a courtyard. They both blessed the crowd, then the patriarch took the pope’s hand and held it aloft as they waved and smiled at the applauding crowd below.

“In the liturgy, we are reminded of the need to reach unity to proclaim the Gospel in prayer,” the patriarch said in his homily.

“Therefore, we kneel in humility and repentance before the living God and Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose precious name we bear and yet as some seem whose solemn garment we have divided,” the patriarch told the pope and other members of the congregation.

“We confess in sorrow that we are not yet able to celebrate the holy sacraments in unity,” Patriarch Bartholomew said. “And we pray that the day may come when this sacramental unity will be realized in its fullness.”

As the Orthodox faithful processed up to Communion, they kissed the chalice as a gift.

“First among equals” made part in the one table of the Lord, sharing the same bread and the same chalice,” the pope said.

“At the end of the liturgy, he gave Patriarch Bartholomew a chalice as a gift.

The patriarch, in turn, gave the pope a Book of the Gospels, expressing his hope that Catholics and Orthodox would be imitators of Christ and would allow love, unity, and peace to prevail.

After the liturgy, the pope and patriarch signed a joint declaration committing their churches to continuing theological dialogue and greater practical cooperation, especially in promoting Christian values in increasingly secularized societies.

They also expressed their concern for the poor and for victims of violence — especially in the Middle East — and terrorism, and for those whose religious freedom is not recognized fully.

At Divine Liturgy, pope, patriarch affirm commitment to unity

By Cindy Wooden

ISTANBUL, Turkey (CNS) — Pope Benedict XVI and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew signed a joint declaration at the Orthodox Cathedral of St. George in Istanbul, Turkey Nov. 30. The declaration committed the Catholic and Orthodox churches to continuing dialogue and greater practical cooperation.

“May our daily prayer and activity be inspired by a fervent desire not only to be present at the Divine Liturgy, but to be able to celebrate it together, to take part in the one table of the Lord, sharing the same bread and the same chalice,” the pope said.

“At the end of the liturgy, he gave Patriarch Bartholomew a chalice as a gift.

The patriarch, in turn, gave the pope a Book of the Gospels, expressing his hope that Catholics and Orthodox would be imitators of Christ and would allow love, unity, and peace to prevail.

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Joint Declaration Signed — Pope Benedict XVI and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomow sign a joint declaration at the Orthodox Cathedral of St. George in Istanbul, Turkey Nov. 30. The declaration committed the Catholic and Orthodox churches to continuing dialogue and greater practical cooperation. (CNS photo/Catholic Press Photo)
Pope encourages Turkish Christians to live in harmony with Muslims

By John Thavis

ISTANBUL, Turkey (CNS) — Closing out a four-day pilgrimage of dialogue in Turkey, Pope Benedict XVI celebrated Mass with the tiny Christian community in Istanbul and encouraged it to live in harmony with the Muslim majority.

Brothers and sisters, your community is on the humble path of daily companionship with those who do not share our faith, yet profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us adore the one, merciful God,” the pope said in a sermon.

“You know well that the church wishes to impose nothing on anyone, and that she merely asks to live in freedom, in order to reveal the one whom she cannot hide, Christ Jesus,” he said.

About 300 people packed into the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit for the Dec. 1 Mass. Several hundred more stood in the cathedral’s inner plaza and in the courtyard of a nearby church, following the liturgy on a TV screen.

Turkey has only 32,000 Catholics in a population of 72 million. Most of them live in Istanbul, which has for centuries been a bridge to the West.

The pope, wearing red vestments to mark the work of the Holy Spirit were meant to express the main aisle, smiling broadly and greeting many of the enthusiastic faithful who reached out from either side. One man waved a Turkish flag.

Before Mass, the pope blessed the statues of two popes in the courtyard of the cathedral: Pope John XXIII, who served for 10 years as apostolic nuncio in Turkey and was considered a good friend of the country; and Pope Benedict XV, who during World War I built hospitals in the region and made diplomatic moves in favor of Turkish prisoners.

The larger-than-life bronze statue of Pope Benedict XV was unveiled in 1921, at a ceremony attended by many Muslim Turks. It bears an inscription hailing the pontiff as “the benefactor of all peoples, regardless of nationality or religion.”

After blessing the statues, the pope released four doves, one at a time, as symbols of peace.

The Mass was the final event of a trip that included political and ecumenical encounters. Before leaving for Rome from Istanbul’s airport, the pope thanked city authorities and told them, “I am leaving a part of my heart in Istanbul.”

The evening before, several hundred young Catholics paid an unscheduled visit to the pope’s residence at the apostolic nunciature in Istanbul. After they prayed and sang outside his window for more than a half-hour, the pope came to the window and offered a blessing and words of appreciation, telling the young people he would always keep them in his prayers.

Earlier Nov. 30, the pope joined Armenian Orthodox Patriarch Mesrob II at his cathedral in Istanbul for a prayer service. The pope spoke again of the importance of ecumenism, in view of the “tragic divisions” among Christians that “give scandal to the world.”

“Precisely by the witness of their faith and love, Christians are called to offer a radiant sign of hope and consolation to this world, so marked by conflicts and tensions,” the pope said.

“We must continue, therefore, to do everything possible to heal the wounds of separation and to hasten the work of rebuilding Christian unity,” he said.

The pope also appeared to refer indirectly to the Armenian massacre when he said that the faith of Armenian Catholics has been transmitted “often in very tragic circumstances, such as those experienced in the last century.”

An estimated 1.5 million Armenians — more than half the Armenian population at the time — died in a forced evacuation by Ottoman Turks in 1915-18. Turkey rejects the accusation of genocide, saying the deaths were due largely to disease and famine.

In private encounters later that evening at the apostolic nunciature, the pope met with Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan Filuxinos Yusuf Cetin and with Turkish Chief Rabbi Ishak Haleva.

Catholic community in Turkey lives in continuous experience of Advent, sustained by hope, says pope

FROM PAGE 1 while facing Mecca.

The pope recalled with special affection the “dear Catholic community” in Turkey. He said that despite its small size, the Catholic Church in Turkey stands out for its pastoral life “in conditions that are often not easy.”

The pope said Turkish Catholics are, in effect, living in a continuous experience of Advent, sustained by hope and trust that God is coming.

The message of Advent, he said, is that Christ “is coming into human history, to knock at the door of every man and woman of good will, to bring the gift of brotherhood, harmony, and peace to every individual, every family, and every people.”

As Christians await the celebration of the birth of Christ, they should renew this sense of hope with prayer and with concrete demonstrations of love, he said.

At an Advent vesper service the evening before in St. Peter’s Basilica, the pope said the coming of Christ was a sign that “the real God ... is not a God who stays in heaven, uninterested in our history.”

“He is a father who never ceases to think of us and, in great respect for our freedom, wants to meet us and visit us,” he said.

As part of spiritual preparation for Christmas, the pope encouraged people to pray during Advent, and emphasized that good works should go hand in hand with prayer.

“In this sense, Advent is more than ever a time of communion with all those — and thank God, there are many — who hope for a more just and fraternal world,” he said.

The commitment for justice should be a meeting ground for people of every culture and every nationality, including believers and nonbelievers, he said.
Permanently endowed scholarship fund established in memory of Fr. Lewandowski

Through the generosity of the Society of Mary (Marianists) Province of the United States and members of the Denton religious and lay Marianist community, a permanently endowed scholarship fund has been established in the Catholic Schools’ Trust of the Catholic Foundation of North Texas in memory of Father Bob Lewandowski, a Marianist priest who, prior to his death in 2003, ministered in Denton for many years.

This new scholarship fund will benefit Immaculate Conception School in Denton and will boost dollars distributed for financial assistance to students and their families in need, beginning with the 2007-2008 school year.

“With the generosity of the people of the diocese, a sum of $20,000 is allotted for distribution again this year. Applications must be submitted to Dr. Dan Luby, director of Development for the Catholic Foundation of North Texas; Father John Klobuka, SM, pastor of St. Mark Parish, Denton; and Elaine Schad, principal of Immaculate Conception School, Denton.

The signing ceremony took place at St. Mark Church in Denton in early November, with Marianist Brother Michael O’Grady, provincial representative, and Father John Klobuka, SM, pastor of St. Mark’s, in attendance. Also present were members of the Denton lay Marianist community, Principal Schad, and Pat Miller, associate director of Development for the Catholic Foundation of North Texas, Diocese of Fort Worth.

NEW LONDON, Connecticut (CNS) — Catholic Digest and the National Council of Catholic Women have announced a partnership that they hope will both strengthen their missions via mutual empowerment.

“The NCCW was established 75 years ago, and Catholic Digest has been published for 70 years. Catholic institutions to further their missions via mutual empowerment.”

The NCCW president, “We are eager to give women the opportunity to join with other Catholic women nationwide who strive to live their faith and serve the church,” said Ellen Bachman, NCCW president, “and we are delighted to also offer them the opportunity to enrich this faith by reading Catholic Digest.”

Kathleen Stauffer, Catholic Digest president and publisher, said the partnership “is a wonderful opportunity for two established Catholic Digest partners with NCCW

Persons actively involved in ministry within the Diocese of Fort Worth for two years or longer and planning study programs that are in service of that ministry are invited to apply to the diocese for educational grant assistance.

Made available through the generosity of the people of the diocese, a sum of $20,000 is allotted for distribution again this year. Applications must be submitted to Dr. Dan Luby, director of Development for the Catholic Foundation of North Texas; Father John Klobuka, SM, pastor of St. Mark’s, in attendance. Also present were members of the Denton lay Marianist community, Principal Schad, and Pat Miller, associate director of Development for the Catholic Foundation of North Texas, Diocese of Fort Worth.

Continuing education grants available to those in active ministry

Deadline for applications is Jan. 16

Persons actively involved in ministry within the Diocese of Fort Worth for two years or longer and planning study programs that are in service of that ministry are invited to apply to the diocese for educational grant assistance.

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Proceeds benefit needy throughout North Texas

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| March 10-18, 2007 $1,899 or 1 night extra - S. Giovanni Rotondo (St. Padre Pio) - March 10-19, 2007 - $1,995 per person |
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This Christmas, Miracles Are Happening.
Pope celebrates Mass for Turkey’s 'little flock' of Catholics

EPHESUS, Turkey (CNS) — Pope Benedict XVI asked Turkey’s tiny Catholic community to live their faith with courage, hope, and optimism. The pope celebrated the first public Mass of his four-day trip to Turkey Nov. 29 under the shade of pine and olive-laden trees next to the House of the Virgin Mary at Ephesus. When he addressed the “little flock” of Catholics in Turkey, he was not referring literally to the fewer than 200 people present for the Mass high on a hill over Ephesus, but it felt that way to the congregation. The Mass in honor of Mary was a brief aside dedicated to Catholics in a trip dominated by outreach to the country’s Muslim majority and by celebrations at the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Pope Benedict told those present that he wanted “to convey my personal love and spiritual closeness, together with that of the universal church, to the Christian community here in Turkey, a small minority which faces many challenges and difficulties daily.”

Bill requiring notice about fetal pain in abortions fails in House

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. House of Representatives failed to reach the two-thirds majority needed Dec. 6 for passage of the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act. The legislation, which would have required that women undergoing an abortion at least 20 weeks into their pregnancy be informed that an abortion causes pain to the fetus, had been backed by President George W. Bush. The U.S. Catholic bishops had not taken a stand on the bill. The vote in the House was 250-162 in favor of a move to suspend the rules and pass the legislation. A two-thirds majority was needed for such a procedural move. During floor debate on the bill, Rep. Chris Smith, R-New Jersey, its chief sponsor, cited expert testimony showing that unborn children have “a developed system of pain perception and response” by 20 to 22 weeks into the pregnancy.

Religious leaders call attention to growing atrocities in Darfur

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Religious leaders in the Save Darfur Coalition urged the weekend of Dec. 9-10 to call attention to the ongoing atrocities in the Darfur region of western Sudan. “Nobody knows the exact number” of those killed in the conflict, said David Rubenstein, executive director of the coalition, although he estimated 400,000 have died in the violence. “There are people dying every day, and at risk of death every day,” Rubenstein said during a Dec. 5 conference call with reporters. “They are being burned from their homes and villages.” “Mostly, what they need is security,” said Rubenstein, adding that “3.5 million people … have been affected by this conflict, and the systems of survival have shut down.” In a related matter, 78 religious organizations, including five Catholic groups, signed a full-page ad in the Dec. 5 issue of USA Today urging a “call to your conscience” on Darfur. Catholic signers were the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Pax Christi USA, and the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

Catholic Digest takes young readers back to Mary’s time in Nazareth

NEW LONDON, Connecticut (CNS) — What was it like to grow up in Nazareth in Mary and Joseph’s time? Did people use educated lay people? Did children go to school? What did people do for fun? Through a new booklet produced by Catholic Digest, young Catholics can get answers to those questions and more, as the national monthly magazine takes them on a journey back in time to explore daily life in Nazareth with young Mary. A 24-page booklet, “If I Grew Up in Nazareth ... Take a Trip Back to the Time of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus,” includes an interactive account of the life of the young Mary, packed with activities and crafts, vocabulary words related to the Catholic faith, and educational writing exercises. Geared for third through seventh graders, the colorfully illustrated booklet also features fun facts about “The Nativity Story,” a movie filmed in 2006 about young Mary and Joseph. Copies of “If I Grew Up in Nazareth” may be ordered by calling (800) 321-0411, or online at www.catholicdigest.com/nativity.

The booklet is 99 cents per copy, and a minimum order of 10 copies is required.

Da Vinci’s ‘Adoration of the Magi’ study makes brief appearance at Library of Congress

In a Da Vinci painting 24 years after the study was completed.

“Adoration of the Magi,” a study by Leonardo da Vinci, was on display for two days, Dec. 7-8, at the Library of Congress in Washington, its only U.S. venue. It was on loan from the Uffizi Gallery in Italy. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)
Our striving for peace must be authentic (the Prince of Peace gave his life for it)

By Dan Luby

During this graced season we celebrate the ancient and still astounding news that God invites us into his very own life, not from a distance, by messenger; but from within human history and life itself.

in the Christmas Gospel; we sing it in carols; we write it in our holiday letters to friends and family; and we wish it in our own hearts. It is a Christmas blessing-to hope for and extend to our fellow inhabitants of this weary and troubled world.

And what are we hoping for when we hear Handel’s “Messiah,” when we sign those cards, sing those carols?

Many of us hope first for peace on the global stage — a cease-fire for wars, large and small, an end to terrorism and genocide as strategic tools to gain for either nation or within households, whether physical or emotional, is always false, never lasting. We have to decide that the peace we seek is not simply the avoidance of unpleasantness or stress, but true peace, for all.

Second, we have to look into our own hearts to examine our attitudes and values. Authentic peace, rooted in a genuine respect for the inherent dignity of each human person, demands a commitment to protect and honor that dignity, from conception to natural death, even at great personal or communal cost. As Pope Paul VI famously said, “If you want peace, work for justice.”

Finally, the peace of which Jesus is prince calls us to confront the warring factions in our own lives. The conflicts of conscience, of action which stir within each of us must be named and brought to prayer. The gaps between our professed values and faith on the one hand, and our concrete actions on the other, must be recognized, and reconciliation must be sought.

Long sad experience makes clear that genuine peace — at whatever level, for whatever duration — is a discouragingly difficult goal. We hope for it, yes, but when it comes to living it out, even in those areas of life in which we have made control, we fall short, time and again.

The good news is that, though God asks our full-hearted cooperation, he commits himself to transforming and empowering us so that, in the end, our ultimate success is assured. During this graced season we celebrate the ancient and still astounding news that God invites us into his very own life, not from a distance, by messenger; but from within human history and life itself.

May the Prince of Peace fill us with the disquiet we need to move us from the false peace of complacency to the courage and love of true peace.

By Mary Morrell

“A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but sorrow of the heart is broken.” — Proverbs 15:13, KJV

Hosting a big party at your home brings with it many unanticipated challenges. We had a few this past week as we prepared for an engagement party with some 50 guests.

The day before the party, as my husband was grilling hamburgers for dinner, he asked, “Remember those chocolate macaroons I bought for the party?”

“Yes,” I answered wryly, knowing some strange tale was about to follow. “Well, they’re a little — um — barbecued.”

“Barbecued?” This was one I never expected.

“Yeah, but you can still use the top layer. They should be fine.”

I guess the expression on my face demanded more explanation, so he went on to say that he had put the macaroons and the carrot cake in the barbecue grill the day before to keep them cold while protecting them from the occasional raccoon that would show up for dinner.

Forgetting his decision, he lit the grill and while waiting for it to get hot, he noticed smoke pouring out from inside. He ran to open the lid and there sat the cake and cookies, both inside of sadly misshapen and seriously blackened plastic containers.

“Frank, I don’t think it would be a wise idea to try and rescue some barbecued macaroons and feed them to 50 guests. Plastic is not meant to be eaten.”

I had to laugh at the varied perceptions that make us different.

He figures why waste the whole $10 by throwing all the cookies away. I think why take a chance for $10.

Noted he said, there were no macaroons or carrot cake at the party.

But in spite of our unique ways of looking at things, the one thing we can usually agree on is the need to keep a sense of humor. Life is filled with enough real tragedy, enough serious challenges and burdens without adding to it unnecessarily by making minuia into mountains.

Still, dealing with day-to-day frustrations, disappointments, and even some crises, requires more than the ability to joke. It requires a steadfastness of heart and trust in God that creates a positive attitude, an attitude of gratitude for the many blessings that remain even beyond the burdens.

Martha Washington once wrote, “I have learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions and not on our circumstances.”

My father taught me this by his own life — raised during the Depression, his dad murdered when he was only seven, having to quit school at 12 to work and support his mother, denied many things we would take for granted — still his whole life was framed by gratitude and an abiding cheerfulness born of a peaceful heart.

Not everyone is as blessed as he, but everyone is given the opportunity to change.

Advent is a powerful time to reflect on the need.

As Father Edward Hayes wrote in his spiritual classic, A Pilgrim’s Almanac, “Advent is the perfect time to clear and prepare the Way. Advent is a winter training camp for those who desire peace. By reflection and prayer, by reading and meditation, we can make our hearts a place where a blessing of peace would desire to abide and where the birth of the Prince of Peace might take place.”

Mary Morrell, is the associate director of religious education for the Diocese of Metuchen, and author of ANGELS IN HIGH TOP SNEAKERS.
Spirit of Giving
isn’t that what it’s all about?

By Donna-Marie Cooper O’Boyle

Is the season for satisfying all of our cravings and desires — or so it seems. Everywhere we look, we’re bombarded with bold advertising and endless promises prodding us to buy the best, most unique gift yet.

It seems that each year, advertising for the holiday season is beginning earlier. We can barely enjoy our Thanksgiving dinner without the subliminal messages of “Buy! Buy! Buy!” ringing in our ears.

Meanwhile, our kids are exposed to the very best advertising techniques when they watch their favorite TV shows. Children know what they want and even where it can be bought and what Web site it can be ordered through.

At such a “Gimme, gimme, I want,” time, how can we get our kids to think of others and be more giving? One way is to help them become more aware of those less fortunate around us.

This is possible from preschool age on up, and there are many opportunities in our own communities. There are soup kitchens to help at or where donations of food or money are welcome. Kids can help decorate holiday cookies to be given to the homeless through a local soup kitchen. There are town organizations in need of gifts or money for the less fortunate.

Many places of worship put together care packages for needy families. By contacting local churches, temples, town halls, or social service agencies we can find out exactly what’s needed. Getting the family involved is a great thing. Kids can even put aside part of their allowance, so they can feel they really contributed.

Perhaps you know of a struggling single parent who would benefit from some unsolicited, anonymous gifts to brighten the holiday season. A lonely senior citizen would cherish a visit from children at this time of year. Children have a magical way of bringing smiles and warmth to people’s hearts. Some Christmas cookies, a handmade card, a Christmas Carol, and some good company may be just the remedy to bring some much needed joy.

Your family can start your own tradition and visit a local nursing home, hospital, or home for the mentally or physically challenged. Find out who could really use a visit, someone who may not have local relatives or friends. The little bit that we give of ourselves somehow by the grace of God, becomes an even larger gift given back to us.

There’s a special corner of heaven reserved for Mothers

By Kathy Cribari Hamer

“Yes! And if I try to talk on the phone....”
“Questions? Skinned knees? Broken toys?”
“Gammy was right!” Meredith exclaimed.
“Special place. Only mothers allowed.”
I finished for her. “I learned that the day Andrew put a hot dog in the VCR.

“There is a special place in heaven for mothers.” My wonderful friend, Pat Molina, has demonstrated that rule more explicitly than 1,000 lessons from my mom. If there is a special place in Heaven, at the right hand of God, Pat will have earned it a dozen times over — twice for each grandchild.

The foundation of her large extended family, Pat has cared for many in the three generations with whom she shares her life. When her children started giving her grandchildren, she accepted that role as though she had been primed for it every day of every decade. Never complaining, she changed her own work schedule to care for them while their parents worked; the children spent the right hand with them when her parents needed a break.

A longtime teacher in St. Andrew’s religious education program, Pat also made sure her grandkids attended Mass and participated in Sunday classes.

So many times I have looked into her eyes — they are humble as well as wise — and asked, “In spite of all the surprising life gives us, how do you maintain your peacefulness and serenity?” Pat smiles, shakes her head, tells me she just does what she has to do. “I have to take care of my kids and grandkids,” she says, simply, with a quiet half-laugh.

I stand in awe of her.

For the past four weeks, all of Pat’s extended family has been with her, in an ironic juxtaposition, sleeping on couches and floors, in a crowded waiting room, caring for this person who has cared for nothing but them. She is fighting for her life in intensive care.

Pat met the mother of all coincidences a month ago, I stand in awe of her. She suffered fractured vertebra, a punctured lung, and remains in intensive care, in a comatose state, her body fighting its way back to the one thing in life she loves more than all others: her family.

Pat has always reminded me of the Madonna, in her serenity and quiet joy. But the effects of this incredible accident have shown her to me in a sort of saviour role. Two children — a toddler and a newborn baby — were in the back seat of her car. She had just opened the door to pick up the baby when she must have heard the crack of the branch, turned her head upward and caught its full force.

It is diffi cult for me to stop thinking of my friend Pat,
Accepting God’s incarnation HERE!

By Sharon K. Perkins

F or the first time in three years, I put up our family Christmas tree. Dusty from prolonged storage and disuse, still sealed in the box with the packing tape from Christmas 2003, it lay with trunk disassembled and limbs compressed, waiting for someone to bring its wire branches and synthetic needles to life.

It was entirely out of character for me to neglect the Christmas decorating for two years in a row. It had nothing to do with lack of decorations (we have at least eight boxes full) or even lack of time (I’d always made time before). For me, putting up a Christmas tree was always a symbol of hearth and home, stability and hospitality — and I hadn’t really felt that way since we moved from Texas to Ohio three years ago. Besides, I reasoned, we go out of town for the holidays anyway; why put up decorations when no one would see them? The final argument — the clincher — was that we only planned on living in Dayton long enough for me to finish graduate school, and it just wasn’t worth unpacking something that would only have to be repacked.

But on some deeper level, leaving the decorations in their boxes was an act of protest, symptomatic of the feeling that I’ve been “homeless,” at least in the sense that no house in Ohio could ever take the place of the home, family, and friends that we left behind. “Home is where the heart is,” the saying goes, and my heart was in Texas.

And so the small, artificial tree gathered dust. All because I had no room in my heart for Dayton — and all that it symbolized — although Dayton had plenty of room for me. I felt as rootless as Mary must have felt during her pregnancy and childbirth, first traveling to visit her cousin Elizabeth, then trekking to Bethlehem to give birth in a stable, then to Jerusalem for the presentation in the Temple, then back to Nazareth. Talk about postpartum stress!

Reflecting on Mary’s circumstances and her travel itinerary, I wondered how she might have remained composed, peaceful, and unresentful of her situation. Of course, she had a constant — the presence of Jesus in her womb and his Holy Spirit in her heart. And she had Joseph, the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna to witness to this presence and encourage her to carry on. Jesus not only made his home in Mary; she made her home in him, and the geography was secondary.

Conversion sometimes comes in those “aha” moments, and this moment was mine. My home, first of all, is where Jesus is, and the “Dayton Jesus” had made himself real to me in many ways that I had resisted because he wasn’t “Texas Jesus.” I had been blessed with new friends, new opportunities, and many kindnesses. My family had not only adjusted well to the move, but they were flourishing. My intellect and my soul were being stretched for the better. I was truly not as homeless as I was blinded by my own discontent.

Christmas is the feast of the “incarnation,” which is a ten-dollar word used to express the truth that Jesus Christ takes on human flesh — in his earthly body, in our hearts, and in our broken human situation. As the prologue to John’s Gospel states, “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” Wherever “us” happens to be, there Jesus dwells, whether in Fort Worth or Dayton or Timbuktu. And whatever place Jesus lives can become our home, too.

THE INCARNATION

Changes us, our lives, our families, our world, forever

JESUS’ BIRTH WEDS LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF HUMANITY

What can we make of Jesus’ birth? There is so much to say about any birth. Here I’d just like to say that Christmas is a reminder that the incarnation is real — and that it poses a challenge to us.

First, Jesus’ birth says a lot about God. God is among us, not distant and uninvolved. We’re challenged to recognize what kind of God we have.

Second, his birth says a lot about us. I think it affirms humanity’s worth — that human nature wasn’t simply beneath the Lord.

I like to think the incarnation is all about bringing out the best in humanity. It clears the way to see why it makes sense to be hopeful for our world.

In his encyclical God Is Love, Pope Benedict XVI talked about the incarnation. It bears the challenge to us to love and to serve others, he suggested.

With the incarnation, “love of God and love of neighbor are now truly united,” the pope said.

And because “love of God and love of neighbor have become one,” the pope explained, we can “find Jesus himself” in the least of our brothers and sisters, “and in Jesus we find God.”

Mary cradling the infant Jesus is depicted in a 17th-century painting by Carlo Maratta. (CNS photo from Art Resource, Enrich Lassing)

David Gibson
Editor, Faith Alive!

Even an Ohio home where a family of transplanted Texans celebrate around a Christmas tree that’s been dusted off, strung with colored lights, and festooned with shiny ornaments, testifies that Jesus, the Incarnate One, lives here.

Sharon K. Perkins and her family are former members of St. Rita Parish in Fort Worth. Sharon was director of the diocese’s first Synod.
God’s Christmas embrace reveals his presence

By Dan Luby

The RIGHT time to celebrate the birth of Christ

By Father Herbert Weber

Where should we put the tree this time? For the 21 years we’ve lived in this house, Christmas tree placement has followed an invariable pattern. One year, it stands in the corner by the window, between the piano and the couch. The next, we put it in the corner by the stairs, alongside the orange chair.

The construction last summer of some built-in cabinets and shelves has altered the geography of our living room only slightly, but enough to raise the specter of change. New possibilities emerge, and fevered imaginings and earnest consultations are required.

This afternoon I stand on the stairs, looking down at the living room and conjuring yet-to-be-executed options. I recall Christmases past and picture all those trees in memory, for contrast with the new possibilities. One bygone Christmas in particular leaps to mind.

We shuffled slowly toward the Christmas tree on a cold, sunny Christmas morning, a full complement of celebrants — parents, kids, beloved uncle. We are gathered sleepily in pajamas and robes, in comfortable jeans and bulky sweaters, in roomy, fleecy sweatshirts. Our feet are still a little cold despite the wood socks or the mosquitos lined with fake fur.

The chilly air is perfumed with the sweet yeasty smell of Christmas stollen and freshly ground coffee. In the kitchen, the muffled grovel of the tea kettle harmonizes oddly but comfortably with the happy gurgling sounds of the coffee maker.

Our voices, still furry with sleep, wish each other “Good morning,” and “Merry Christmas.”

This particular year, we have agreed that each of us will share the gift of something to read that might more closely focus on what it is we are really doing, who it is we are really celebrating.

I am especially ampued about reading the passage I’ve selected from one of my favorite writers, Frederick Buechner. For decades, his spiritual insights and poetic language have challenged me with their freshness and truth, and moved me with their beauty. This was a passage I have loved for years about the unfulfilling presence of God in the woof and warp of the most ordinary, everyday moments.

Memory has obscured for now who read what, and in what order. I recall vividly though that, when it is my turn to read, I am overwhelmed with emotion and have to stop. I finally hand the book to my brother. My kids pat my shoulder and murmur solicitously. My wife holds my hand, and we are all embarrassed at this unexpected outburst of feeling.

My brother continues reading the passage while we all listen intently, glad for the distraction of beautifully wrought prose from a fellow pilgrim. I regain my composure and reassure my family that I have not slipped a cog nor suffered the emotional equivalent of a Charlie horse. There is nothing wrong, I tell them, and make a joke about sleep deprivation and mid-life crises. They smile anxiously, relieved to hear me cracking wise but still uncertain about why I have become so emotional.

Standing on the stairs now years later, I know that what moved me that chilly Christmas morning was not sadness, nor fear, nor anything dark. What brought me to speechless tears was a momentary glimpse of the brilliant and healing light of the Incarnation of God in human life which Christmas celebrates.

For that is the miracle of this holy and charmed season — that God embraces us with such passion, such tenderness and love, that he not only draws near to us, he becomes one of us and remains present in the community which gathers in his name to continue his mission to the world. For a moment on that cold Christmas morning, I saw a flash of his grave and loving gaze in the sleepy and beautiful faces of my family.

In the end, I suspect we’ll put the tree over on the window side this year. And wherever it is, whatever else happens on Christmas morning or any of the days to follow, the Lord is indeed Emmanuel, God-with-us, both now and forever.

Christmas joy to all.

Dan Luby is the director of Christian Formation for the Diocese of Fort Worth.

No one knows David’s age or even his real name. David was the name given to him at the house. He is physically very limited and usually lies on a little mat. As I held David on my lap, I found I could get a little response from him as I rubbed his stomach. What appeared to be a slight smile on his face was an expression of the kindness felt in that home.

After spending time with the children, our group celebrated Mass in the yard with both the workers and the residents. The children couldn’t respond and likely did not know what was happening, but having them there for the Eucharist was a statement of solidarity. The Lord was present in their home sacramentally as well as in the goodness of the love of all those who took care of them.

The mystery of Christmas is truly about the Lord’s presence throughout the year and in every part of the world. Through Jesus’ birth, hope and joy are brought to each situation.

Even hectic and confusing times are the right time to celebrate the birth of Christ.

Father Herbert Weber is the founding pastor of Blessed John XXIII Parish, Ravenna, Ohio. (Copyright © 2006, Catholic News Service)
My 2006 Christmas wish for you

By Father Eugene Hemrick

A continuous renewal of fervor is needed in our lives in order to keep alive our love for another or our desire to pursue a religious calling, our hope to conquer new worlds, build castles, make valuable discoveries, and leave our mark on life.

To be a poet is to be creative. It involves firing up our imagination and recognizing whole new universes in mere details. Those of us blessed with a poetic nature may have advanced in age, but we never lose our youthful vitality.

May you see anew the blue skies, the cheerful whiteness that only snow can create, and the daze within the sun! May they reveal to you universes never seen before!

May you find in someone you love and in your calling in life a new and existing significance never previously imagined!

May youthful ideals recycle themselves, mutate, inspire, and invigorate you!

May you cherish as never before the values upon which your country and our church are built, and may you rediscover their enormous worth and life-giving powers!

May the yearly event of God descending to earth to become the greatest Christmas present of all time elicit from you a great sense of awe.

May the poetic spirit with which God blesses us course through you and renew the ageless gifts of "vision" tucked within your soul!

Father Eugene Hemrick is a long-time columnist for Catholic News Service. (Copyright © 2006, Catholic News Service)

A resounding family memory of Christmas

By Beverly Corzine

On the icy plains of southeastern Colorado, December nights seemed to last forever. Perched on my knees in a high backed wooden chair, I occupied my favorite strategic spot that allowed me to sample a forbidden cookie while at the same time I could look at my reflection in the darkened window and make a few clever designs in the condensation on the pane. The trick was to escape my mother's sharp eye and the familiar reprimand, "Don't mark on the windows; I just washed them."

For days I had been living under the threat that if I didn't mend my ways, Santa Claus would surely pass over our house. In addition, my dad's favorite Christmas sport was to say, "If Old Whiskers starts messing around here, I will grab him by those chin whiskers and send him on his way." In my child's imagination, I was reasonably sure that my dad could not catch Santa, however, the possibility remained. To break up the session of torment, my mother reminded my dad that she really needed firewood, if we wanted her to finish her baking for the house full of company we would have on Christmas Day.

The smell of apples and cinnamon and the heat of two steaming hot pies that my mother placed on racks in front of me provided a sharp contrast to the blast of Arctic air that tore from one end of the kitchen to the other as my dad, bundled in his red plaid mackinaw, went out to fetch more wood for the gigantic black cook stove that waited in the opposite end of our kitchen.

Crimping the edges of the last pie crust, my mother sent up the first trial balloon about getting ready for bed. Usually, it would take several announcements before I had to yield to authority. However, going to bed early on Christmas Eve would not require the usual bedtime skirmish.

Nevertheless, there should be enough time for my last watch and for the opportunity to clear the evidence of my artistic endeavors from the cold window pane. With a mouth full of cookie, I turned to erase the evidence from the black window pane. There on the other side of the window shrouded in inky darkness, a man was staring back at me. He looked at me; I looked at him. Time stood still.

Finally, I recognized this stranger. It was Santa! I turned to get my mother's attention. At that exact moment Santa disappeared. Words were spewing out of my mouth so fast that my mother could only say, "Beverly, slow down, slow down. Now tell me what is the matter?" I was shaking with excitement, but finally, I had command of intelligible spoken English.

"Santa is outside! Santa tapped on the window. I saw him, Mommy. He was really there in the dark on the other side of the window. Really! Really!"

By the time I was ready to utter the last "really," I was shaking like a leaf. Bewildered, my mother looked out the window. Seeing nothing but her reflection, she comforted me with the fact that I most assuredly just saw my own reflection. I, of course, was having none of that explanation. I knew that man was Santa without a doubt.

My mother was still trying to calm me down when my dad entered the back door, loaded down with wood for the stove. I knew my dad would believe me. After all he was always on the lookout for "Old Whiskers" at Christmas. Dumping his load in the wood box, my dad said, "What's going on in here? I could hear you out in the woodshed."

As soon as I described the apparition that appeared outside the window, my dad sat in motion one of the most exciting adventures of my young life. Hurrriedly, he helped me with my coat. We got the flashlight. We were going to catch Old Whiskers. Seizing upon the excitement our dog began to bark. We were all ready for the chase.

In the midst of this hullabalo, my mother was trying to be the voice of reason. "John, for heaven's sake, what are you doing? This child has no business running around in the cold like a chicken with its head cut off!"

Three steps and out the door we ran. The barking dog, the running man, and a little girl were racing at breakneck speed in search of Santa Claus. My dad was running so fast that my feet only hit the ground about every other step. The way the dog was barking assured me that she had already spotted the elusive Mr. Claus.

Rounding the garage at top speed, my dad tripped, pulling me after him. We landed right in the middle of a burr patch. By this time we were both laughing so hard we could barely catch our breaths. Our faithful little terrier continued to race ahead in the darkest of nights. Stumbling around, my dad was finally able to find the ailing flashlight and bring it back to life.

We defeated hunters limped into the warm kitchen. My mother stood there shaking her head. "Just look at you two! John, have you taken leave of your senses? I will never get all of the stickers off your clothes, much less get them out of her hair!"

My dad could only laugh.

With upturned head, I watched the exchange of these two adults. I spied the suppressed smile on my mother's face. I knew this was not a real argument. There was a secret there I could not quite discern.

After the burr removal process ended, my dad tucked me in bed for the night. I said my prayers. Then as a postscript, I said, "Daddy, you know Santa Claus has a ring just like yours."

Early the next morning I crept with dented flashlight in hand to see if Santa had left any presents for me after our thwarted attempt to catch him. The flashlight's beam captured it all, dolls, books, all of it.

During my growing up years, my mom, dad, and I always reminisced about that glorious adventure. My parents loved telling the story to my children. Now I am the grandmother who entertains grandchildren with tales from long ago.

In May of 2005, my husband and I visited the remains of the home of my childhood on the deserted Colorado plains. An unsuspecting motorist happening upon it would never guess that anything unusual had ever happened here.

Beverly Corzine is pastoral assistant at Arlington's Most Blessed Sacrament Parish.

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Santa is outside!
Santa tapped on the window. I saw him, Mommy. He was really there in the dark on the other side of the window. Really! Really!"
St. Bartholomew Parish dedicates new Parish Life Center

When Father Richard Beaumont came up with the idea of establishing an endowment for his parish, St. Bartholomew in Fort Worth, in April 1986, he had no idea what the Lord intended to do with the money, but felt the fund would somehow be used to serve his parishioners in the future.

Fast forward 20 years to Nov. 20, 2006. Fr. Beaumont is now retired, and leadership of the community has passed to Pastoral Administrator Brother Paul McMullen, who, together with the parish development committees, has overseen the planning and construction of a new 22,819-square-foot Parish Life Center. Both men were present for the building dedication ceremony, led by Bishop Kevin Vann.

The evening dedication began in the church with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Vann. At the Mass’s conclusion, the bishop led a procession from the church into the new Parish Life Center, where the proud parishioners gathered in the large hall for the blessing of the building.

“After much work and prayer, we gather to bless the center. We pray that the Word of God will echo from its walls,” Bishop Vann told those gathered.

Br. Paul, who is a Third Order Franciscan, spoke next, voicing the thoughts of many in the crowd. “Well, here we are, folks,” he began. “Thanks to all of you for your dedication and your support. You are the ones who made this happen.”

Br. Paul’s remarks were followed by a reading from Scripture and prayers of intercession for the new center and the parishioners of St. Bartholomew. Br. Paul then led Bishop Vann on a tour of the new facility, during which the bishop blessed each room with holy water, ending with a blessing of the large crucifix hanging in the parish hall.

The new center was designed by the architecture firm O’Connor Architecture and Interior Design, which also designed new church buildings for the parishes of Immaculate Heart of Mary and Holy Name, both in Fort Worth. The building contains 12 classrooms, a large youth room, a kitchen, and a parish hall. Construction began by contractor JBM Builders after the groundbreaking Aug. 24, 2005, the feast day of St. Bartholomew.

Br. Paul envisions the new Parish Life Center. “It’s such a blessing,” Joyce Yokell said, about the building’s completion. “It’s been a long time in coming. Br. Paul has done a fabulous job at this parish. This was one of his two goals. The first was the Spanish Mass and the next the [Parish Life Center].”

Augustina and Paschal Odidika brought their two children to the dedication of the new center. “We are so, so proud,” Augustina beamed. “God gave a great vision to Fr. Beaumont, who built the endowment fund for whatever came into our hearts.”
He looks at Luke in which Elizabeth’s baby, John the Baptist in the womb, leaps for joy in the presence of Jesus inside Mary, and he leaps himself, aware of his Lord’s presence in our world.

His is a holy impatience. He wants the coming kingdom to be the present kingdom. He wants to have the moment happen now when all the kingdoms of the earth bow down to worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

His is a model of holy impatience for the rest of us as we strain toward not only the birth of the Christ Child at this holy season, but toward the fulfillment of his kingdom: swords beat into plowshares; the lion lying down with the lamb; the poor and humble lifted up; and the rich and haughty pulled down.

And I seem to hear a refrain that will carry us forward from the stable in Bethlehem all the way to the throne room of the Lamb:

O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

QUESTIONS:

Have you contemplated the coming kingdom of our Lord and how it proceeds from the small and humble beginning of the birth of a child?

How can you personally hasten its coming?
Jesus’ coming brings Divine Transformation

By Jeff Hedglen

This year my preparations for the birthday of Jesus took a strange detour. Charlie, Rudolph, and George took me aside and gave me a lesson on the significance of the incarnation.

In my annual ritual to try to tap into the holiday spirit, I turned to one of my favorite pastimes — watching the classic Christmas television shows. I never tire of seeing the hapless Charlie Brown bring a sad looking tree to the school Christmas Pageant he is charged with decorating. His struggle to find the real meaning of Christmas is always inspiring, especially with the great music, magical 1965-era graphics, and of course Linus, center stage with a single red nose results in his being shunned because he is different; George Bailey is the type of person that if he lived today would be on a steady diet of anti-depressants. At some point in each of the stories there is a turning point that radically shifts this person’s perspective. Here is where each of these seemingly secular stories reveals the power of Christmas.

Imagine a world unsure of itself, filled with uniquely gifted individuals, that refuses to celebrate their differences, favoring ridicule instead. And try as they might, those gifted individuals just cannot seem to get it right. Does this sound familiar? Though this scene could easily describe our current society, it was to this world that God sent his Son. This moment was the turning point all of history was building toward.

When the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us, all creation took on new meaning and found limitless potential. Just like in the Christmas stories on TV, what we see on the surface is often not the whole truth. Deep within each of us lie possibilities unrealized.

December 31, Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Cycle C. Readings:

1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
2) Colossians 3:12-21

Scripture Readings

Scripture Readings

By Beverly Corzine

Last week I knew it was truly Christmas when I heard Luke’s beloved description of the nativity of Jesus. “What child is this?” seems to be the continuing question on the lips of each man or woman who meets Jesus and his parents in the second chapter of Luke’s Gospel. What child is this, indeed! Looking back through the cross gives us 20/20 vision. Likewise, in our mind’s eye we have seen a tiny hand close around Mary’s finger. From our vantage point in the 21st century, how could anyone miss the point?

As his life unfolds, we sympathize with Mary and Joseph as they frantically search for their son Jesus. We know he has to be in “his Father’s house.” Where else would a precocious Jewish boy be who happens to be the Son of God? We see his destiny looming before him and the instrument part Mary and Joseph will play in helping this life take shape. It was easy for us to recognize him there in his mother’s arms, but the question is, Do we recognize him now?

When we as parents, grandparents, or teachers look into the faces of children, whose destiny do we see written there? Is Jesus there waiting to flower within the world? Do we take the time to wonder what child has been placed in our care? Who is it that regards us through uplifted eyes?

If we would have been teaching in the temple that day, would we have had the good sense to have seen Jesus as more than a gifted 12-year-old? Smart but never cheeky, he could have answered our questions, but would we have allowed him to push us on a controversial or questionable point? Would we have seriously considered his possible destiny or any part we might have played in it?

To be able to look into the eyes of children and consider the question of shepherd and temple scholar alike becomes an act of courage and an act of faith because we must be prepared to see who is looking back at us.

His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

—Luke 2:51-52

QUESTIONS:

What child or young person in your life offers you a promise of Jesus’ light in the world in the new generation? What crosses do you foresee in her or his life, and how can you support this child as a Christ bearer?

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Miles honran Virgen de Guadalupe en procesión en Los Ángeles, Misa

LOS ÁNGELES (CNS) — Para honrar a la Virgen de Guadalupe en el 475° aniversario de su aparición a San Juan Diego en Tepeyac, México, casi 30,000 personas en Los Ángeles procesaron el 3 de diciembre una milla desde la iglesia La Soledad hasta un estadio colegial donde una Misa especial fue celebrada.

Con el tema “La Madre de Todos los Inmigrantes”, el evento atrajo a gentes de todas las edades y nacionalidades que llevaban banderas de sus países de origen. Algunos vistieron la ropa étnica de su antigua patria para celebrar el día de fiesta de la santa patrona de las Américas.

El alcalde de Los Ángeles, Antonio Villaraigosa, estaba entre los que procesaron por las calles.

La 75° procesión anual en la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles fue prevenida con el mes en que María se le apareció a San Juan Diego y dejó su imagen en su tilma en 1531.

Para la procesión de este año monseñor Diego M. Monroy Ponce, rector de la Basílica de Santa María de Guadalupe en la Ciudad de México, trajo una imagen de San Juan Diego así como una reproducción digital de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe que fue tocada a la imagen original y bendecida. Las imágenes enmarcadas fueron llevadas por las calles, rodeadas por gentes, músicos y grupos de baile en vestuarios.

Recogiendo adoradores a lo largo de la ruta, el grupo entró en fila al estadio del Colegio East Los Angeles, llenando los 20,000 asientos mientras los bailarines y músicos vestidos en trajes brillantes y coloridos procesaban entrando al estadio y ocupaban el centro del campo. Las imágenes de San Juan Diego y Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe también fueron entradas con aplausos y consignas de “¡Viva la Virgen!”.

Unas 50 palomas fueron entonces lanzadas. Éstas volaron juntas alrededor del estadio antes de desaparecer.

La liturgia comenzó con la bendición del cardenal en español e inglés: “Bienvenida, Madre de Dios, a Los Ángeles. Gracias por darnos tu amor y cariño”. “O, Madre Santa, a ti confiamos nuestro sufrimiento, ven a nuestra ayuda, escucha nuestros gritos, órale a Jesús por nosotros”, el continuó. “Tu nos miras con amabilidad. Tomamos en tus manos, cura las heridas infligidas en nuestro viaje. Tú eres nuestra madre y en ti confiamos”.

Aunque la mayoría de la Misa fue en español, las oraciones de los fieles fueron hechas en español, tagalo, vietnamita, maya, inglés, un dialecto nativo americano, indonesio, japonés y tongano.

Nuevo obispo auxiliar, el más joven de EEUU, fue ordenado y pertenece a la diócesis de Detroit

DETROIT (CNS) — El obispo auxiliar Daniel E. Flores de Detroit expresó “alabanzas y gracias a Dios Todopoderoso” en sus primeros comentarios como recién obispo ordenado el 29 de noviembre.

“Todos los dones que he recibido en mi vida, incluyendo el don de este día, se comienzan en el don primordial de Cristo al mundo”, dijo al final de la Misa de ordenación.

El obispo Flores es el 25° obispo hispano activo en el país, el primer obispo hispano en ser ordenado en todas las diócesis de Michigan y, a los 45 años de edad, es el obispo católico más joven de los Estados Unidos.

Después de la ceremonia, la mamá del nuevo obispo, señora Lydia Flores, expresó su orgullo y alegría por su hijo. “Pero, al mismo tiempo, experimento emociones mezcladas, pues sé que cuando me vaya mañana (a su casa en Corpus Christi, Texas), él se va a quedar acá lejos”, dijo.

El cardenal Adam J. Maida de Detroit fue el obispo que presidió en la ceremonia de ordenación.

“Este es un gran momento histórico para nuestra iglesia de Detroit, y especialmente para la población hispana, en creciente aumento, de Michigan” dijo el cardenal Maida en su homilía en la Misa de ordenación.

Cerca de 900 personas, entre sacerdotes, obispos, diáconos, religiosos y laicos, llenaban la catedral del Santísimo Sacramento de Detroit para la ceremonia. Había muchos hispanos de la comunidad local, hispana, como también más de 100 familiares del nuevo obispo y personas que fueron a darle sus parabienes procedentes de la diócesis de Corpus Christi.

El cardenal Maida reconoció que presidente. “Nosotros somos los esfuerzos en marcha por el bien de la diócesis de Corpus Christi. (CNS foto/Larry A. Peplin, The Michigan Catholic)
Saciando nuestra hambre de felicidad
En el pesebre encontramos a Cristo
nuestra luz y esperanza

Por Pedro A. Moreno, OPL
Director, Instituto Luz de Cristo

Crecidas son las ocasiones en nuestra vida cuando estamos convencidos de que algo, o alguien, nos puede traer la felicidad. Nuestros hijos son expertos en saber que les traerá la felicidad duradera y en la navidad nos convencen en comprarles esa supuesta felicidad. Creo que todos hemos hecho esto en nuestra niñez.

Recuerdo varios juguetes que deseaba intensamente cuando más pequeño. Estaba convencido de que aquellos juguetes me traerían la plena felicidad y sin ellos sería el ser más desgraciado del mundo. Una vez fueron unos carros eléctricos con su propia pista, en otra ocasión fue una bicicleta y en otra, fue una pequeña fábrica de juguete para construir en plástico mis propios carros.

Incrediblemente, tal fue mi convencimiento de la felicidad que traerían aquellos juguetes que incluso eché lagrimas por algunos de ellos. Nunca me llegaba todo lo que pedía pero no fallaba, después de recibir alguno que otro de lo tan deseado jugaba con ellos por un tiempo, me cansaba y dejaba de jugar con ellos. Hoy ni me acuerdo donde están o que sucedió con aquellos juguetes.

Son muchos los años que pasan y el hambre de felicidad sigue. Lo que cambian son los juguetes y su costo. Hoy mis juguetes favoritos son libros de teología, radios y películas DVD. Otros prefieren ropa, perfumes, dietas y nuevas siuetas, carros o camionetas, la pareja ideal, el viaje al extranjero, una mascota o incluso una familia. Siempre convencidos que al recibir lo tan anhelado tendremos la felicidad que no termina y nuestra vida habrá alcanzado la perfección aquí en la tierra, o algo que se acerca bastante.

Tanto anhelamos la felicidad que en nuestro mundo de hoy encontramos a muchos que nos lo quieren ofrecer, a un precio módico. Los anuncios en televisión o nos quieren convencer que somos menos persona por no tener lo que ellos nos ofrecen para alcanzar la felicidad, o nos quieren convencer que su producto nos puede incrementar la felicidad a niveles nunca antes visto. Al final son muchos los que se quedan con menos dinero y sin más felicidad que antes.

Obsequios navideños no nos traerán la felicidad plena. El verdadero anhelo de felicidad, la esperanza sembrada en nuestros corazones por la felicidad eterna, solo se alcanza en Dios y por medio de aquellos donde Dios está reflejado. El Señor es el mejor regalo de la navidad. Él es el regalo que no podemos comprar y que lo da todo por nosotros. ¿Tienes hambre de felicidad? Mira en el pesebre, en el regalo que no podemos comprar y que lo da todo por nosotros.

Otro anhelo que muchos están siguiendo es que los Obispos Kevin Vann, de Fort Worth, y Michael Sheridan, de Colorado Springs, son los únicos obispos presentes en la Misa de medianoche del 12 de diciembre en la Basílica de Guadalupe en la Ciudad de México, al inició de la celebración de la fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. La filma de Juan Diego con la imagen de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe se ve a la izquierda de la foto. El Obispo Vann, a la derecha del Obispo Sheridan puede verse en el grupo de cuatro sillas a la derecha del altar. Se estima en 5,2 millones el número de peregrinos asistentes a la celebración de este año. Se dice que la aparición de María a San Juan Diego en México en 1531 ha resultado en millones de conversiones al catolicismo. (Fotos cortesía de Bill Howard, editor del COLORADO CATHOLIC HERALD, periódico de la Diócesis de Colorado Springs, Colorado.)

Monseñor Vann revocó las facultades ministeriales del padre Gil Pansza, diciembre 14

Nota del editor: Monseñor Kevin Vann hizo la siguiente declaración en una conferencia de prensa el día 14 de diciembre en el Centro Católico, situado al lado oeste de Fort Worth. Se pasó después a responder las preguntas de los reporteros de estaciones de radio y televisión en el área y del WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM. El video de la conferencia de prensa puede verse en la página electrónica de la diócesis, www.fwdioc.org.

Es mi triste obligación de anunciar que he removido al Padre Gilbert Pansza, pároco de la Parroquia Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en Wichita Falls, del ministerio activo cumpliendo así con los términos de los Estatutos para la Protección de Niños y Jóvenes.

Al continuar el proceso de revisión de expedientes de la diócesis, descubrimos una admisión del Padre Pansza de abuso sexual de un menor que ocurrió a principios de la década de los 70. El comportamiento al que el Padre Pansza admitió, como he dicho, ocurrió a principios de la década de los 70 antes de que fuera tan siniestra un seminario. Hemos entregado esta información sobre el incidente a las autoridades legales correspondientes.

Desde su ordenación en el 2001, no hemos recibido acusación alguna de abuso sexual de menores contra el Padre Pansza. Estamos tomando esta acción por haber encontrado la información en nuestros expedientes. Hemos removido al Padre Pansza del ministerio activo y el incidente a la Iglesia local. Es angustioso recordarle a los menores y sus mentores el daño que ellos han sufrido.

Quisiera recordarles una vez más que si alguien ha sido abusado sexualmente o tiene conocimiento de alguien que ha sido abusado por un sacerdote o empleado de la iglesia, favor de llamar a Judy Locke, Coordinadora de Asistencia a Víctimas (817) 560-3300 o al Padre Michael Olson en el mismo número.
**América**

**Los obispos de Georgia y de las Carolinas apresan al Congreso por la reforma de inmigración**

ATLANTA (CNS) — Cinco obispos de tres estados que conforman la provincia de Atlanta de la Iglesia Católica de los EEUU les han escrito a miembros del Congreso pidiéndoles que se enfoquen en una reforma de inmigración completa.

En la carta, fechada el 20 de noviembre, se declara que la inmigración es “una preocupación moral que tiene repercusiones en la dignidad humana y los derechos humanos de cada persona”.

Los obispos decían que se sentían “especialmente afligidos por las recientes tragedias de nuestros hermanos y hermanas que encarnaron aumentar el número de deportaciones ejecutadas en nuestros estados. El toque de tambor de retórica deshumanizante constantemente amenaza la paz y el bienestar de nuestras comunidades, causando aumento de sufrimiento y miedo en medio de algunos que son los más vulnerables”.

El arzobispo de Atlanta Wilton D. Gregory y los obispos Robert J. Baker de Charleston, S.C., J. Kevin Boland de Savannah, Ga., Michael F. Burbidge de Raleigh, N.C., y Peter J. Jugis de Charlotte, N.C., les pidieron a miembros del Congreso “que vean el rostro de los niños que quedan separados de sus padres. Los pedimos que escuchen el clamor de los trabajadores que una diada se ponen en riesgo de serios accidentes en su trabajo de fábricas y campos de labranza.

“Los pedimos que sientan el miedo en el corazón de los que no están seguros en los vecindarios en donde viven”, dijeron.

Los obispos explicaron que la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de los Estados Unidos apoya una reforma de inmigración que incluya normas que atiendan a la raíz misma del problema que es causa de la inmigración en “los países de los que salen los inmigrantes”; un camino para la legalización de personas que ya están en el país pero ilegalmente; un programa de trabajadores temporales y la restauración del debido proceso de protección a inmigrantes.

“Ayapoyamos estas reformas pues día a día somos testigos de las consecuencias humanas de un sistema de inmigración que está gravemente defectuoso”, dijeron. Los pedimos que escuchen “el coro de mil que el sustrato de inmigración en el sur de EEUU recientemente han seguido de cerca los problemas actuales en la población de Stillmore, Ga. Una redada de inmigración en una planta procesadora de pollo ubicada allí, el verano pasado, dejó sentir su eco en toda la región.

“Representantes de la Planta de Pollo Crider en Stillmore han estado transportando personas con antecedentes penales de un programa de entrenamiento en Macon, Ga., y hombres de una misión de rescate en Augusta, Ga., para llenar las vacantes en la planta, informó la agencia de noticias “The Associated Press” (o “AP” por sus siglas en inglés), unos cuantos días después de que la carta de los obispos se dio a conocer.

Después de que funcionarios federales de inmigración empeñan a visitar la planta Crider, en mayo, para revisar documentos de autorización para trabajar, muchos empleados fueron despedidos por carecer de permiso de trabajo y otros simplemente se fueron. Cuando 120 personas fueron arrestandas allí, la planta, el pasado agosto, por no tener los documentos apropiados, cientos de personas abandonaron la comunidad, dijo AP, y la planta se quedó sin suficiente número de trabajadores para operar normalmente, lo que causó que otros negocios locales también sufrieran.

En julio el Congreso de EUU recientemente han seguido de cerca los problemas actuales en la población de Stillmore, Ga. Una redada de inmigración en una planta procesadora de pollo ubicada allí, el verano pasado, dejó sentir su eco en toda la región.

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Los obispos criticaron la aplicación estricta de las leyes de inmigración, sin otras medidas que se usen para encarar el panorama más amplio de la inmigración, como sin base en la realidad.

“Es profundamente injusto co-locar un rostro a la realidad de terrorismo, perpetrados por algunos criminales, a las puertas de los inmigrantes que trabajan fuertemente para servirnos, mientras que buscan una forma básica de vida para ellos mismos y su familia respectiva. Es también igualmente injusto usar a los recién venidos como víctimas propiciatorias de los problemas económicos y políticos de nuestra nación”.

**El papa envía su apoyo a víctimas filipinas de tifón, trabajadores de rescate**

APRILICA, Filipinas (CNS) — Mientras los oficiales de la Arquidiócesis de Portland en Oregon, dieron un apoyo a los trabajadores de rescate y a los afectados por el tifón de quienes sufrieron la consecuencia de estos accidentes en su trabajo de fábricas y campos de labranza.

**QUEZON CITY, Filipinas (CNS) —** Mientras los oficiales de la Arquidiócesis de Portland en Oregon, dieron un apoyo a los trabajadores de rescate y a los afectados por el tifón de quienes sufrieron la consecuencia de estos accidentes en su trabajo de fábricas y campos de labranza.

**WASHINGTON (CNS) —** En todo Estados Unidos el clero y los laicos preocupados por el calentamiento global y los cambios ecológicos están buscando nuevos enfoques para retardar, detener o revertir los cambios por estos. Por ejemplo, el obispo el arzobispo Flynn, “Este es un problema para todos”.

**En la provincia de Albay, en el sureste de Manila, Durían desató desfiles de terreno en Mount Mayon, volcán que ha estado inactivo recientemente. Se teme que unas 1,000 personas estén atrapadas bajo piedras y lodo que sepultó casas y campos alrededor de Mount Mayon.

Informes a la Diócesis de Laguna confirmaron 111 muertes en Daraga solamente, pero padre Rolando Panesa, administrador financiero de la diócesis, espera que la cifra aumente.

El 4 de diciembre él dijo a UCA News, agencia asistáctica de noticias eclesiásticas con base en Tailandia, “No podemos ir allí ni siquiera con nuestros vehículos de tracción en las cuatro ruedas” debido al fango y los escombros que bloquean las carreteras y los puentes.

**El leólogo Russ Butkus y el biólogo ambiental Steve Colmes, de la Universidad de Portland en Oregon, operador por católicos, dirigieron talleres en noviembre en las parroquias de la Arquidiócesis de Portland sobre el cambio de clima y el bien común.

Butkus y Colmes plantean la idea de una teología católica de climática. En los Evangelios Jesús habla del reino de Dios como el reestablecimiento de la creación, no sólo una re-locación del orden humano.

“Es la restauración y la renovación de la creación — la humanidad y no humana”, dijo Butkus. “Cuando hablamos del reino de Dios tendemos a verlo como siendo sobre los humanos. Pero la Biblia lo ve como mucho más cósmico”.

En la diócesis de Venice, Florida, Mike Holsinger está convencido de que las iglesias en su estado tienen un rol significativo que ejercer en el esfuerzo educativo que tomará para sostener la vida en el planeta Tierra. Él es el único laico, junto con seis sacerdotes, en un equipo de trabajo de diseño de iglesias para el Comité de Justicia Ambiental diocesano.

“Los presidentes de las conferencias eclesiásticas pueden ser diseñados para usar la energía más eficien-temente y las parroquias y las escuelas pueden estar compostas con equipo (que use la energía más eficientemente)”, dijo Holsinger.

**Clérigos, laicos buscan acción en calentamiento global, cambio de clima**

“Los nuevos edificios eclesiásticos están en el país pero ilegalmente; un camino para la restauración y la reno-
Bowen makes leap from agent to producer for ‘Nativity’ movie

FROM PAGE 1
he was spending a week in preparation for the Vatican screening.
He said that when Italians asked him where he was from, he had to stop himself to answer “Los Angeles,” rather than his native Texas, since he has lived on the West Coast for the past 15 years. He spent most of that time as an agent before getting into the movie production business with “The Nativity Story.”

“But if you really ask me where I’m from, I’ll still answer St. Mary’s Church in Mexia, Texas, where I had my first Communion and was baptized,” Bowen told CNS.

From his time spent as a producer, Bowen acknowledged that “you never see a movie get made and released in a calendar year,” as “The Nativity Story” was. “Maybe a quickie low-budget film, but this kind of thing is an almost-impossibility,” particularly given the movie’s budget, which Bowen put at the mid-$30 million mark.

“When we told New Line (the studio) what we wanted to do, they got in line very, very quickly,” he said.

Bowen said he’s a fan of the religious epic genre. “I thought ‘The Passion of the Christ’ was a terrific film,” he told CNS, noting that Jesuit Father William Fulco was a consultant to both that film and “The Nativity Story.” Bowen praised Fr. Fulco as “the most prominent scholar in Aramaic in the country — and, being in Los Angeles, he’s accessible.” Fr. Fulco teaches at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

“The Ten Commandments” was also on Bowen’s short list of favorite religious movies.

Bowen, now a member of Good Shepherd Parish in Los Angeles, defended the decision not to cast a lot of high-profile stars. “The stars of this movie are Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus,” he said. “We wanted to pick the right actor for the part and didn’t want to see it being bogged down.” Simply put, he continued, “Tom Cruise playing Joseph, it would detract from the story.”

He said he did not know what impact the real-life pregnancy of 16-year-old Keisha Castle-Hughes, who plays Mary in “The Nativity Story,” would have on the film’s fortunes. She is one of the movie’s few recognizable stars.

“Time will tell,” Bowen said. “She wasn’t able to be part of our press junkets. When you’re 16 and pregnant, you really don’t want to do that kind of thing.”

In the new film, the tale is not told in a strictly chronological fashion. “People know the story,” Bowen said. “We wanted to mix it up a bit, make them think.”

In his review, David DiCerto, a staff critic for the U.S. bishops’ Office for Film & Broadcasting, classified it A-I — general patronage. “The film’s hopeful message should resonate beyond Christian audiences to a world still groaning for peace and good will,” he said.

Bowen decided to make the leap from agent to producer when screenwriter Mike Rich mentioned his idea to write a screenplay about the Nativity.

“When Mike Rich decided he wanted to write a movie that doesn’t have to do with baseball (‘The Rookie’) or hockey pucks (‘D3: The Mighty Ducks’) but instead was about the birth of Christ, I was going to move from being on the sidelines to ‘I want to do this.’ It’s the kind of movie I wanted to make,” Bowen said.

For a producer waiting for a film to be released, it’s a different kind of anxiety than it is for an agent. “For the most part, you’re hedged,” or have less risk, as an agent, since an agent handles many actors and new films or television shows come fairly frequently, Bowen said.

For a producer, though, “this is a very nerve-wracking process. I’ve tried very hard not to get consumed by it.”

Those who teach share the greatest gift of all: themselves. Bank of America is proud to support the Catholic Schools for empowering the next generations and inspiring all of us to reach higher.

Author’s friendship with Fred Rogers came at a crucial time in his life

From page 24

God can arrange such mutually trusting relationships — for sure! For sure!!

From that letter until his death, Fred Rogers continued to reassure his friend by closing each correspondence with the acronym IPOY (I’m Proud of You).

When people find out about Madigan’s friendship with the man they’ve watched on public television since 1968, they always ask if the soft-spoken, gentle resident of “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” was as thoughtful and caring in person as he was on camera. The creative genius who made youngsters feel safe and secure during trips to the Neighborhood of Make Believe was genuine, the reporter assures them. Television only hinted at the depth of his spirituality.

“When you got to know him and saw how he lived — only then can you get the full measure of his greatness,” Madigan explains. “From the time he woke up until the time he went to bed, he was kind, compassionate, and had a nonjudgmental nature 100 percent of the time.”

He places Fred Rogers on the same iconic plane as Lincoln, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Pope John Paul II.

“There are people who come along every so often in a civilization to remind us what we’re capable of as human beings,” the reporter says, adding simply, “he was remarkable.”

A voracious reader of spiritual literature, Fred Rogers loved to study the writings of great theological and spiritual thinkers — something Madigan also did. Raised in a devoutly religious Catholic family in Crookston, Minnesota, the author grew up pondering questions about God and the meaning of life.

“I’ve always been a spiritual seeker, and, I think, that’s another thing Fred recognized in me because he was definitely one himself,” says the former altar boy, who admired the work of Catholic theologian and author Thomas Merton. “We were kindred spirits in that way.”

It was Fred Rogers who introduced Madigan to the writings of his close, personal friend, the great Catholic spiritual writer Henri Nouwen. Instead of idle chitchat about sports or pop culture, the long-distance relationship thrived on conversations inspired by themes raised in Nouwen’s books — family, love, suffering, human brokenness, and the mystery of death.

“Fred had this ability to be present to people no matter who they were. He was completely empty of himself and focused on what the other person was about,” Madigan explains.

Great religious traditions teach that when you empty yourself, the void is filled with the spirit, the transcendent, the God.

“And that’s where he lived. That’s where his wisdom, compassion, and greatness came from,” the writer continues. “No one was immune to it. Whether you were a cynical journalist or the guy on the street, Fred transformed people by spending five minutes with them.”

Those quiet, deep personal talks and letters left their mark on Madigan, who publicly mourned his friend in an essay published on the front page of the Star-Telegram. His only regret about the friendship is never having the opportunity to say good-bye. The last gift to his mentor was a pamphlet on Benedictine spirituality, entitled “Always We Begin Again” by John McQuiston II.

“It was comforting to think that, as Fred’s fatal illness progressed, he might have been comforted at least a little by the simple beauty and humility of McQuiston’s words,” Madigan writes at the end of his book.

The gifted storyteller also finds solace in sharing Fred Rogers’ message with others. His heartfelt memoir is developing an audience one reader at a time.

“Whether it’s one person or a thousand people, if someone wants to hear my story about Mr. Rogers, I’m here to tell it. You never know who it will help or whose life it will affect,” the author says modestly.

As for his own life, the husband and father says he’s happy and content. The crippling depression that almost destroyed his marriage is gone, and he now enjoys a new appreciation and understanding of his father. Madigan credits caring people, medication, prayer, and his friendship with Fred Rogers for the change.

“Fred always said, ‘That which is most personal is most universal,’” meaning those things we most want to hide are the things we have in common with other people,” he explained. “Friendship’s transformative power comes from being vulnerable with people you trust. When we end our isolation the way I did with him, healing happens.”

Kathy Cribra Hamer, a member of St. Andrew’s, has five children, Meredith, John, Julie, Andrew, and Abby. Her column is syndicated in a number of the best Catholic diocesan newspapers across the U.S. In May of 2005, her column received the first place award for best family life column by the Catholic Press Association of the U.S. and Canada. Kathy is the advisor to the staff of the yearbook at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth.

Hamer...

From page 11

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My mom said there is a

...life column by the Catholic Press

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Christmas 2006

Because of You

We know Joy, Lord
In a child’s eyes,
a teen’s laugh,
a mother’s smile.
In Christmas,
Because of You.

We know Peace, Lord
In a world of war,
In battles of minds,
In struggles of spirit,
In Christmas,
Because of You.

We know Love, Lord
Despite our differences,
Despite our intolerance,
In Christmas,
Because of You.

Joy, Hope, Peace, Love
The gift of a God,
The birth of his Son,
A promise of life,
In Christmas,
Because of You.

Come Lord Jesus, Come.

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Larry G. Miller
Parishioner, Our Lady
Queen of Peace Parish
Wichita Falls

Each year Larry Miller writes a Christmas poem, often sharing it with the North Texas Catholic. From time to time, we publish the poem, sharing it with our readers. Merry Christmas!

Umbert the Unborn
by Gary Cangemi

By Jean Denton
Copyright © 2006, Jean Denton

We know Hope, Lord
In times of despair,
times of loss,
times of fear,
In Christmas,
Because of You.

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Despite our differences,
Despite our intolerance,
In Christmas,
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Christmas 2006

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RACHEL'S VINEYARD
Rachel’s Vineyard of Fort Worth is holding a weekend retreat Jan. 20-22 for men and women seeking healing after an abortion. This retreat helps those who struggle with grief, guilt, and ongoing heartache. For more information, call (817) 923-4752, e-mail to rachelx.6@ymail.com, or visit the Web site at www.rachelx.6.org.

RESPECT LIFE MASS
All are invited to attend the annual Respect Life Mass Jan. 19, marking the 34th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion. The Mass will be celebrated at 7 p.m. at St. Patrick Cathedral, 1206 Throckmorton St., Fort Worth. For more information, call the Respect Life Ministry at (817) 560-3300.

LIFE YOUTH RALLY 2007
A Life Revival Youth Rally 2007 will be held Jan. 12-13 at St. John the Apostle Church, 7341 Genovra Dr., North Richland Hills. The doors will open Friday at 6 p.m. Guest speaker will be Dr. Thomas Verret, of The Renewal, including Father Benner Murphy, CFR, and Carol Everett, former abortion clinic director. Overnight registration is $35, with an admission charge; however, donations will be accepted. Saturday, the event will be held from noon to 7 p.m. The rally will be celebrated by Bishop Kevin Vann at 6 p.m. Live music with The Remnant Band, Daniel Sioufya, a musician from Greenland, Grapevine, for a signed and interpreted Christmas Eve Mass at 8 p.m. Father Ken Roberson will celebrate the Mass in sign, song voice, and the sign choir, as well as deaf leaders, will participate in this Christmas Eve Mass. Family and friends are welcome to join in this special celebration. Reserved seats for the community will be in the front row of the church. Food, refreshments, and a gift of the baptismal font. Early arrival is preferred. There will not be an interpreted Mass at St. John the Apostle Church. Family and friends are invited to join in this special celebration. Light refreshments will be available for purchase. Other guest speakers will include Daniel dilllilla, Dr. Pilkington, and Father Kyle Warriner from the Dallas Deaf Ministry office. Contact Suzette Chains, by e-mail to scharres@att.net, by phone at (817) 264-2601 ext. 227. Fax by e-mail to tuxla@uylee.com.

RETRouvaille Volkendael
Retrouvaille is a special program for married couples struggling in their relationships. The weekend program, sponsored by the Catholic Life Family Office of Diocese of Fort Worth, will be held Jan. 19-21. For information and registration, contact Steve Landon at 800 W. Loop 820 North, Ste. 100, or visit the Web site at www.retrouvaille.org. All conversations will be kept confidential.

BEGINNING EXPERIENCE
The Beginning Experience is a ministry for those who have chosen to celebrate the gift of marriage, divorce, or separation. The weekend retreat provides an environment and tools to help participants prioritize what they value most in their relationships. Participants create a new beginning in the present. The next weekend will be held Jan. 19-21 at the Catholic Renewal Center, 4503 Bridge St., Fort Worth. For more information, call metro (817) 601-4091 or e-mail to DREs@fortworth.dioecesis.net. For more information, call (817) 224-9700.

CATHOLIC PILGRIMAGES FROM DFW

St. Augustine’s group
St. Augustine’s Circle of Runners is a ministry for a men who struggle with sexual misconduct by anyone who serves the church, you may call the Respect Life Coordinator, (817) 560-2452 ext. 201 or e-mail to seasmenspurity@fwdioc.org.

Grief Support Group
To Call Respect Life Coordinator, (817) 560-2452 ext. 107 or e-mail to Mark at seasmenspurity@fwdioc.org.

DEAF MINISTRY SERVICES
The deaf community will gather at St. Fran- cois de Laval Church, 2301 W. Bannerman, for a Christmas Eve Mass with Bishop Kevin Vann at 6 p.m. Light refreshments will be available for purchase. Other guest speakers will include Johnnie Hallock, Dr. Pilkington, and Father Kyle Warriner. Contact the Deaf Ministry Office at (817) 284-3019 for more information.

NEWTON INSTITUTE
This spring, the Cardinal Newman Institute will sponsor a course named ‘The Growth and Development of Catholic Doctrine,’ beginning on the apostolic period and through the great ecu- mical Councils, up to the Middle Ages. No previous studies are required as this course is designed for those wishing to begin exploring the development of Catholic doctrine. The course will investigate the growth and development of Catholic doctrine, beginning from the truths of Catholicism in a casual, social setting held one Tuesday a month at J. Gilligan’s, 3210 S. University St., Arlington. The next “H3” will be held Jan. 16. The guest speaker, Fr. Stephen Sanchez, OCD, will present “The Religious Life of the Recently Deceased” in our Blackberry for Prayer.” Doors will open at 6 p.m., and the speaker will begin at 7 p.m. For more information, contact Lucias Police at (817) 274-0643 ext. 226 or by e-mail to billoc@smqparish.org. Registration deadline is Jan. 15.

REGIONAL PRESENTATION
“The Growth and Development of Catholic Doctrine in the 21st Century” will be presented by Dr. Mark Goodman Jan 18 and 19 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the callatorium of St. Paul’s Hall. Father Goodman has taught biblical studies and theology at the University of Dallas since 1993. His interests include the history of the development of Christian tradition; Catholic-Jewish interreligious dialogue; Paulin literature; and the Church’s position on contraception. For more information, e-mail to joduguay@fwdioc.org or (817) 560-2452 ext. 267. There will be another presentation by Fr. Giancarlo Capovilla, Our Lady of Lourdes Church, 108 NW 4th Ave., Mineral Wells. For more information, e-mail to joduguay@fwdioc.org or (817) 560-2452 ext. 115; or Andrea Aranda at aranda@ fowd.org or (817) 560-2452 ext. 254.

Czech Dinner
The Czech Community and Sacred Heart Church in Seymour will sponsor a Czech dinner with Bohemian sausage, sauerkraut, and kolaches. There will be a registration fee of $10, 5819 W. Pleasant Ridge Rd., Arlington. The Czech choir and musicians from Seymour will also perform. The dinner will begin at 6 p.m. and the performance will begin at 8 a special 12:30 p.m. Sunday Polka Mass, followed by the dinner from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Free admission. For more information, contact Sacred Heart Parish at (904) 889-5252.

LITURGICAL CONFERENCE
The 45th annual Southwest Liturgical Conference Study Week will be held Jan. 17-20 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, at The University of Oklahoma. To inquire about participating, call (405) 752-3141 or request a brochure or for more information, contact the Office of Worship and Spiritual Life, 1068 N. Classen Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73123 or call (405) 721-6561. Details may be found online at www.sclwc.org.

HOFIGEL DEPARTMENT
The Department of Faith Formation offers classes for all ages on the history and development of Catholic doctrine, beginning from the truths of Catholicism in a casual, social setting held one Tuesday a month at J. Gilligan’s, 3210 S. University St., Arlington. The next “H3” will be held Jan. 16. The guest speaker, Fr. Stephen Sanchez, OCD, will present “The Religious Life of the Recently Deceased” in our Blackberry for Prayer.” Doors will open at 6 p.m., and the speaker will begin at 7 p.m. For more information, contact Lucias Police at (817) 274-0643 ext. 226 or by e-mail to billoc@smqparish.org.

CATECHET PRESENTATION
Dr. Sandra Kenneth will present “What is a Catholic Faith Formation Ministry?” at 10:00 a.m., 1000 Tinker Rd., Colleyville, Feb. 1 from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Dr. Kenneth has a Bachelor of Arts in World Languages at Loyola and a doctoral in religious education from Columbia. All catechists, DRE’s, and others interested are invited to this free presentation. For more information, contact Mary or Ginny at (817) 421-1387.

ASSISTED LIVING ATTENDANTS
Catholic assisted living facility in South Dallas seeks professional, live-in experienced attendants to join our team providing care for elderly women. Part-time and full-time positions. 11:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. to 11:30 a.m. Call Vincent Chavez at (817) 896-5726.

NEW YEAR’S EVE DANCE
The annual New Year’s Eve Dance, sponsored by the Singles Ministry, will be held Dec. 31 from 7 p.m. to 12 a.m. at The Ehrenberg Center, 2040 W. Medical District Drive, Fort Worth. For more information, contact Helen Engele at (817) 261-9706 or by e-mail to hengle@hengle.net. Call Renaissance Pilgrimages at (817) 626-9382. Information is also available online at www.fwtdoc.org.

ST. AUGUSTINE’S GROUP
St. Augustine’s Circle of Runners is a ministry for men who struggle with sexual misconduct by anyone who serves the church, you may call the Respect Life Coordinator, (817) 560-2452 ext. 201 or e-mail to seasmenspurity@fwdioc.org. Please call to register, (817) 923-4752, e-mail to rachelx.6@ymail.com, or visit the Web site at www.rachelx.6.org.

CALENDAR

WORLD MARRIAGE DAY
World Marriage Day is celebrated nationally on the second Sunday in February. This year it falls on Feb. 11. Now is the time to gather your team of committed believers to create a new beginning in the present. The next BE weekend will be held Jan. 19-21 at the Catholic Renewal Center, 4503 Bridge St., Fort Worth. For more information, call metro (817) 601-4091 or e-mail to DREs@fortworth.dioecesis.net. For more information, visit the Web site at www.sampg.org. Applications will be accepted until 808-754-7300, or visit the Web site at www.swlc.org. Great pay. For more information, e-mail to tobed@swlc.org or visit the Web site at www.swlc.org.
Tim Madigan’s relationship with Fred Rogers shows the importance of having friends in the neighborhood

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

When I’m Proud of You, the story of a journalist’s unlikely friendship with children’s television icon Fred Rogers, first hit bookstores in August, editors expected a best-seller. The well-written memoir had all the earmarks of success in the publishing world. Not only did the book offer insight into the life of a well-known celebrity, it told a compelling tale of personal crisis, spiritual growth, and transformation.

Despite wonderful reviews, copies of I’m Proud of You didn’t fly off the shelves in Harry Potter fashion. Something better happened. “I started getting mail and hearing from people who said the book was changing their lives,” explains local author, Tim Madigan. “That is what is so amazingly gratifying to me. Fame, notoriety, and money are not the most important things.”

Telling the world about the human greatness of Fred Rogers and the transformative power of friendship is the overriding purpose of the book, says the award-winning feature writer for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. A routine assignment for the newspaper set the stage for Madigan’s introduction to the creator of “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” in 1995.

While writing an article on television violence and its effect on youngsters, the enterprising reporter sought out interviews with two legends in children’s programming — Captain Kangaroo and Mister Rogers. An hour-long telephone conversation with Fred Rogers led to a longer profile piece for the newspaper and a trip to Pittsburgh to watch a taping of the TV show. By the end of that autumn weekend, Madigan would attend Sunday services with his host and forge a lasting friendship that would help the emotionally frail reporter deal with depression, insecurity, a failing marriage, and the loss of a brother to cancer.

Fred Rogers made the first overture toward friendship by leaving a message on Madigan’s answering machine. After that, the pair kept in touch through e-mails, phone calls, gifts, and occasional visits. The contact would last until Mr. Rogers’ unexpected death from stomach cancer in February 2003. Years later the writer still wonders about the force that drew two divergent souls together.

“It happened at the precise moment in my life when it would have the biggest impact,” says Madigan, looking back on the genesis of the relationship. “The mid-’90s were a difficult, dangerous time for me. I never contemplated suicide, but I understand people who do.”

Tormented by dark moods, referred to as “the furies” in his book, the troubled baby boomer found comfort in a personality that exuded kindness, compassion, and acceptance. “I trusted him with my innermost feelings and experiences,” Madigan says of their early correspondence. “I think my vulnerability was something he greatly appreciated. He wanted to know the ‘essential invisibles’ of other people. That was the central theme of his life.”

The term “essential invisibles” is part of a favorite quotation Fred Rogers kept on his office wall. Culled from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s The Little Prince it reads, “That which is most essential is invisible to the eye.” The strained relationship Madigan had with his father was one of the “essential invisibles” shared with Rogers. “So here comes this guy who seems to be a pretty good sort, and he writes him a letter saying, ‘Dear Fred, I can never get my dad to be proud of me. Would you be proud of me?’” the author says, revealing the incident that inspired the memoir’s title.

Rogers’ response to that childlike query set Madigan on the path to true healing. In a letter to his insecure, dispirited friend, the ordained Presbyterian minister turned television celebrity wrote: “Yes — a resounding Yes. I will be proud of you. I am proud of you. I have been proud of you since we first met. Nothing you could tell me would change my yes for you…. Your place in this life is unique — absolutely unique. I feel blessed to be one of your friends. Only...”

SEE AUTHOR’S, P. 22