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NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC



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Better than a happy New Year?

If you are reading this, I wish you a happy New Year. This time of year, it's a greeting I share in conversations, calls, notes, and emails, extending my sincere wish that 2026 will hold good things for close friends and family as well as the people I encounter casually.

Happy New Year is shorthand for: May God bless your new year with good health, financial security, and warm relationships with family and friends.

In other words, may your circumstances provide relief from stress and anxiety, and may you experience no serious problems that threaten your stability.

All good things.

But a recent homily from Father Brett Metzler got me thinking. He mentioned that many parents are more concerned with their children's happiness than their children's holiness.

The world we live in prioritizes happiness, but holy is better than happy.

In the short term, holiness might be painful, as God may use suffering to draw us closer to Him or to help us grow in virtue. Sometimes we, or the people whom we love, may experience suffering for no apparent reason.

And holiness is certainly more challenging, as it requires the discipline of praying daily, reading Scripture and other spiritual books, and attending Mass.

Having a holy New Year also demands that we love others, even those we don't particularly like; go to confession regularly; and put others' needs ahead of our own.

Yes, it takes effort, but one benefit to having a holy New Year is that we're in good company. The Holy Spirit walks with us, and the saints and the Church on Earth accompany us and intercede for us.

As we grow in holiness we also grow in the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

And if 2026 is a holy New Year, we should be happy indeed.

Susan Moses

EDITOR

Views from the Pews

Some of our favorite traditions of December are during Advent, from the Advent wreath to the feast days of beloved saints. The installation of deacon candidates as lectors is also appropriate during Advent, as the men wait and prepare for ordination.

Anticipation in Advent. Father Mel Bessellieu, sacramental minister of St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish in Roanoke, lights a candle marking the beginning of Advent, a time of hope and preparation to celebrate the birth of Jesus and to ready our hearts for His second coming.

Installation of lectors. At a Dec. 5 Mass at St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington, Bishop Michael Olson installed four deacon candidates as lectors, marking a significant step in their five-year formation process to the permanent diaconate.

Our Lady of Guadalupe. An estimated nine million indigenous people converted to Catholicism after Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to St. Juan Diego in 1531. She's still leading souls to her Son today, prompting celebrations at many parishes, including Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Fort Worth.



NTC/Juan Guajardo



NTC/Juan Guajardo



NTC/Juan Guajardo

THERE'S MORE



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Beloved daughters

FORT WORTH — On Dec. 3, just days after the start of Advent, the Catholic Culture Committee at Nolan Catholic High School hosted an event for teen and adult women called “Beloved: a gathering of God’s daughters.”

Rooted in a spirit of community, the evening included breaking bread, faith sharing, prayer, and writing notes of blessing. Every activity intentionally affirmed a truth many young women are still learning and perhaps more mature women sometimes forget: Each is loved and cherished, not according to the world’s standards, but because they are daughters of their Heavenly Father.

Event organizers and Nolan parents Michelle Stavens and Summer Riney shared a vision to bring together mothers, daughters, and women connected to Nolan including alumni, grandmothers, and staff.

One hundred women registered to attend and were provided with dinner, journals, Marian bracelets, and prayer



NTC/Richard Rodriguez

A mother and daughter share a letter of gratitude at Nolan’s “Beloved” event.

cards courtesy of event sponsor Smart Families. Nolan Chaplain Father Brett Metzler began with prayer, followed by a meal and fellowship. Nolan Principal Susan LoCoco and Alex Mechalske, head coach of girls varsity soccer, led talks offering encouragement and sharing their own faith journeys.

Stavens said feedback has been very positive. “We live in a world where it’s easy to feel we are not enough. Our prayer was

that everyone left that evening knowing they are enough just as they are because they are beloved daughters of Christ,” she said. “They are cherished, chosen, and valued not for what the world says, but for who they are in Him.”

The Catholic Culture Committee’s next event will be for fathers, sons, and all Nolan men sometime before Lent.

– Jennifer Johnson



Steward of beauty

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Fort Worth receives award for historical preservation from Historic Fort Worth, Inc.



A worshiper at St. Mary of the Assumption. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

FORT WORTH — Fort Worth’s St. Mary of the Assumption Parish’s 2024 restoration culminated in a Steward Award from Historic Fort Worth, Inc.

Father John Perikomalayil, HGN, and several St. Mary parishioners attended Historic Fort Worth’s awards presentation ceremony at the Woman’s Club of Fort Worth.

Being chosen for the award came as a happy surprise, Fr. Perikomalayil said.

“One of our parishioners, who is also a member of Historic Fort Worth, proposed our church as one of the best stewards of preservation,” he said. “Then I got a letter saying we were getting the award.”

St. Mary Parish dates to 1909, although the current church

building opened in 1924.

For several months last year, scaffolding filled the church’s interior, stretching from floor to the ceiling 35 feet above to allow workers to restore St. Mary’s beautiful plaster and mural artworks.

Admittedly, appearance and design are hardly the primary purpose of a church or Mass, but they can still enhance worship and faith, Fr. Perikomalayil said.

“The aesthetics of a church invites people to reflect on the heavenly realities and connect with them from a physical point of view,” he explained. “Which lends to a spirit of prayer and devotion as you enter and sit in the church.”

– Matthew Smith



Waiting together

Young Adult Advent Day of Reflection provides important time to reflect

AZLE — With Christmas right around the corner, it is important to remember the true reason for the season of Advent.

At the Young Adult Advent Day of Reflection on Dec. 6, local Catholics between the ages of 18-35 were reminded that during this season, waiting should be considered a virtue.

About 40 people gathered at Holy Trinity Church in Azle for the event with guest speaker Jeff Hedglen, the campus minister at University of Texas at Arlington.

The retreat schedule started with an opening prayer followed by Hedglen's Advent reflection. Participants had the opportunity for confession, then the day's events wrapped up with a lunch and closing prayer.

Victoria Ramon, diocesan director of youth, young adult, and campus ministry, said the Young Adult Advent Day of Reflection first started in 2023, and this year's theme was "Mary's



The Young Adult Advent retreat provided opportunities for faith discussions.

NTC/Richard Rodriguez

Fiat," her joyful "Yes" to God when asked to be the mother of Christ by the angel Gabriel.

Ramon said she hopes the participants take away two important ideas from the reflection.

She said, "It gives young adults a chance to hear what the Advent

season is meant to be and a couple of ways we can enter more deeply into it. And then second, it's a way for them to find community. We think we're alone on the journey a lot of times, but we're really not."

— John English



Connected community

High school conference creates connections with God and peers

COLLEYVILLE — The underlying message of the third annual Emmaus Conference on Nov. 15 was straightforward — young people are loved by God, and they have a place within His community.

The daylong event held at Good Shepherd Parish in Colleyville offered an assortment of activities, from a morning pep talk to confessions, Eucharistic Adoration, rosary making, games, and eventually a Mass to close out the day.

Victoria Ramon, diocesan director of youth, young adult, and campus ministry, said the annual Emmaus conference is designed for high school students in grades 9-12.

"It's really just a time for them to come together with the whole Church here in the Diocese of Fort Worth and to grow in their knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church," Ramon said. "That means what He has done for us, what He continues to do for us, and giving them an opportunity to respond to their call to follow Him."

When the conference started three years ago, just under 200 people participated in the event. This year's conference had nearly 300 participants.



High school students play games at the annual Emmaus Conference. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

— John English



'Fishers of Men' honoree



Guadalupe Radio Network presents a stole to Bishop Michael Olson at the inaugural Fishers of Men dinner. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

MORE PHOTOS



On Oct. 25, Bishop Michael Olson was recognized as the first recipient of the "Fishers of Men" award for his outstanding efforts in evangelization at a dinner hosted by the Guadalupe Radio Network station KCPP 1140 AM in Fort Worth and 101.5 FM in Cleburne.

More photos here: North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.com.



Between memory and hope

St. Ann parishioners remember loved ones in annual Mass of Light

BURLESON — Father Reehan Soosai Antony, SAC, celebrated the annual Mass of Light at St. Ann Parish in Burleson, inviting the faithful to gather around the altar and pray for the souls of their dearly departed.

Before the liturgy, more than 40 individuals and families bearing candles lit in memory of a loved one processed into the sanctuary. As each name of the deceased was called, they stepped forward and placed the candle before the altar.

In his homily, Fr. Antony reflected on the Gospel passage in which Jesus entrusts His mother to the disciple John, emphasizing the role of community and God's accompaniment in time of grief.

"You are not alone," he reminded the congregation. "This community is with you and for you in your pain. We have gathered here this evening to pray for all the departed souls and also to pray for all of you who are going through this great



Father Reehan Antony, SAC, prays over the memorial candles at St. Ann's Mass of Light.

NTC/Richard Rodriguez

loss, pain."

The priest shared his condolences for the loss behind every candle.

"Every flicker of that candle reminds us of a name, a face, and a life," he said. "Today, we stand between memory and hope. Memory that they are not with us ... and hope

that they are away from our side, but they continue to live on the other side — in the presence of God."

God's light accompanies the faithful through loss even in the silence of grief, Fr. Antony said.

— Christina Benavides



Mary, memories, and a tree that lives on

BRIDGEPORT — Beside the recently built rectory at St. John the Baptizer Church in Bridgeport is a sculpture of the Blessed Virgin Mary carved into a tree trunk. The story of how it came to be is as touching as the woodwork itself.

The rectory's contractor, longtime

parishioner Brandi Schedcik, was undergoing treatment for cancer while overseeing every detail of the project. "She did everything she would do in her own home," said Father Anto Vijayan Carloose, SAC, who has served as St. John's pastor for four years. "She did her best in every corner of the house."

Once completed, Schedcik attended Bishop Michael Olson's blessing of the rectory, and then passed away soon after. Fr. Carloose "wanted to create a memorial for her somewhere near the new building because her personal touch was through the whole house," he recalled.

Then, shortly after Schedcik's death, the big tree on the side of the house also died. Fr. Carloose suggested carving the tree in her memory. He consulted with Schedcik's husband, John, about what she would have liked. "He said she would love Mother Mary," said Fr. Carloose.

Kevin Roach, a local tree sculptor,

was contracted to carve an image of the Blessed Mother. When it was completed, Fr. Carloose celebrated Mass with the Schedcik family and blessed the sculpture. Since then, many parishioners have visited the carving and remarked how much they love it.

Roach, a self-taught tree sculptor who has been in business for eight years, said he was provided some reference photos of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but was also allowed to add his own touch. Once a design was agreed upon, the physical work to create the eight-foot sculpture took two days. "Most people view a sculpture from about 10 feet away, so this is a little larger than life," Roach said. "A lot of the features are enhanced to allow for the viewing distance and still get the idea."

Roach believes that art is a way for people to deepen their faith.

"I think there's something in our genetic makeup, as far as sculpture goes, to help a person discover [things] in themselves, whether it's religion or something else," he added. "So I do believe sculpture can help a person become more spiritual."

Regarding this particular sculpture, Roach hopes his artistry inspires viewers "to find a place of peace where they can sit and think," he said.

— Jennifer Johnson

Father Anto Vijayan Carloose, SAC, stands next to the Marian sculpture outside his rectory in Bridgeport. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Congratulations!

FORT WORTH — Renée Underwood, CFRE, chief development officer for the Advancement Foundation, was presented with the award for Outstanding Professional Fundraising Executive by the Fort Worth Metro Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals on Nov. 11 at Ridglea Country Club.



Renée Underwood, CFRE

PRIEST ASSIGNMENTS

BY MOST REV. MICHAEL OLSON

REV. JESURAJ, SAC

Previously Hospital Chaplain and Priest in residence at St. Patrick Cathedral in Fort Worth, has been **reassigned** by his religious order, effective Dec. 11.

REV. FRANCIS KWASI POKU

Previously Parochial Vicar of St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington, has been appointed **Hospital Chaplain** and Priest in residence at St. Patrick Cathedral in Fort Worth, effective Jan. 1.



Priests from the Fort Worth Diocese gather to celebrate several ordination anniversaries at the Fort Worth Club, Nov. 19. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

A GIFT TO BE HONORED

By Susan Moses

It was a meal of thanksgiving, but no turkey was served. Bishop Michael Olson honored more than 20 priests who celebrated milestone anniversaries of their ordination in 2025 with a luncheon at the Fort Worth Club on Nov. 19.

The prelate welcomed approximately 60 priests to the meal with a prayer of gratitude, thanking God for the gift of a priestly vocation and the “desire you placed in our hearts to serve Your Son and His people.”

Before dismissing the priests to continue their lives of service, Bishop

Olson closed the luncheon by recalling remarks that Pope Leo XIV made about the priesthood.

Remembering and renewing the grace of a priestly vocation, said the bishop, “joins our hearts in the heart of Christ and our lives in His life, and thus enables us to bring the Word and the sacraments of salvation to God’s holy people in order to bring about a world reconciled in love.” 🇺🇸

THERE'S MORE!



See photos of the jubilee luncheon by scanning the QR code or visiting NorthTexasCatholic.org/local-news.

PRIESTS CELEBRATING JUBILEES IN 2025

- **Rev. Sojan George Puthiyaparampil**, 25 years
- **Very Rev. John Robert Skeldon**, 25 years
- **Rev. Vinh Van Vu, CRM**, 25 years
- **Rev. Claudius Stephen Mndolwa, SAC**, 20 years
- **Rev. Sam Ferix Antony Jesu Antony, SAC**, 15 years
- **Rev. Simon Harkins, FSSP**, 15 years
- **Rev. Fernando Preciado Villegas**, 15 years
- **Rev. Xavier Silvadasan, HGN**, 15 years
- **Rev. Keith Hathaway**, 10 years
- **Rev. Ronaldo Mercado**, 10 years
- **Rev. Zachary Burns, TOR**, 5 years
- **Rev. Ruben Tena Guzman, CORC**, 5 years
- **Rev. Pedro Javier Martinez**, 5 years
- **Rev. Matthew Simons, TOR**, 5 years
- **Rev. John Stasiowski**, 65 years
- **Rev. Dennis Smith**, 50 years
- **Very Rev. Karl Schilken**, 45 years
- **Rev. Peter Wiafe Akenteng**, 40 years
- **Rev. Msgr. Francis Boakye Tawiah**, 35 years
- **Rev. Joy Joseph, TOR**, 30 years
- **Very Rev. Daniel Kelley**, 30 years
- **Rev. Michael Ciski, TOR**, 25 years

BY GOD'S HAND



Bishop Olson dedicates long-awaited St. Teresa of Calcutta worship space

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

“We do not build God’s kingdom by our own strength but by His strength in us.” Those encouraging words from Deacon Daniel Zavala continue to inspire the burgeoning faith community at St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish as it welcomes members and develops the infrastructure needed to grow the 92nd and newest parish in the diocese.

“We are going to build our parish community and continue to center it around Christ in the Eucharist,” the deacon said, addressing congregants who filled the recently constructed parish hall/worship space for a dedication Mass celebrated by Bishop Michael Olson and concelebrated by Father Mel Bessellieu on Nov. 29 in Roanoke. “Thank you for being with us tonight and becoming part of something very special.”

Purchased by the diocese in 2004, the 31-acre parish site on Alta Vista Road was formed from the boundaries of Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Philip the Apostle, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and St. Francis of Assisi parishes and will serve Catholics in far north Fort Worth.

Responding to the rapid population growth in Tarrant and Denton counties, Bishop Olson announced the establishment of a new parish on Aug. 1, 2022, and, after consultation, named St. Teresa of Calcutta as its patroness.

Founder of the Missionaries of Charity and popularly known as Mother Teresa, the diminutive sister was dedicated to serving the dying and destitute. In 1979, she received the Nobel Peace Prize — an award the humanitarian accepted, “for the glory of God and in the name of the poor.” Pope Francis canonized the Albanian-born missionary, who lived most of her life as a citizen of India, in 2016.

A view of the new St. Teresa of Calcutta parish hall/worship space in Roanoke prior to the Mass of Dedication celebrated by Bishop Michael Olson on Nov. 29. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Three Missionaries of Charity traveled from the order's convent in Dallas to attend the dedication Mass. More than a dozen parishes in the United States are named for the modern-day saint — an honor she would consider humbling, they said.

"She was shy, but if it glorifies God and brings people closer to Jesus, it's all right," said one of the Missionaries of Charity in attendance.

Bishop Olson hopes St. Teresa of Calcutta's patronage of the new parish makes people mindful of seeing Christ in the poor and others who are overlooked.

"The heart of all of this is the love



Parishioners attend the Mass of Dedication and the blessing of the new altar at St. Teresa of Calcutta parish hall/worship space in Roanoke. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

of Jesus Christ in our lives," he told the *North Texas Catholic*. "A lot of people, including myself, have prayed for this for a long time. It's an opportunity to see more growth and development for the life of the Church in the diocese."

Construction of the 19,062-square-foot parish hall/worship space began in November 2024 under the direction of Dcn. Zavala, St. Teresa's coordinator of parish life, and Tom Ross, diocesan director of construction and facilities. The structure's Spanish mission-style design features arched windows and entries, a stone exterior facade in the center of the building with adjacent stucco sides. Upholstered seats with kneelers can accommodate 625 worshippers.

"It's very striking in appearance," Ross said, noting the parish experienced tremendous support since its inception. "From day one, people liked the location and started attending services. We rented school facilities to meet their needs and that's one reason why construction was expedited."

Thomas and Anna Henz belonged to the youth group and married in Mansfield's St. Jude Parish before joining St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Keller. When St. Teresa of Calcutta opened and began offering weekend Masses, they became members.

"It was closer to home and has a small community feel to it," explained Henz, the father of two school-age children. "There are a lot of young families, so we're all growing up together."

The thriving faith community is ideal for people seeking to engage with their parish.

"Other parishes are bigger and more established, and it's harder to get involved," he reasoned. "Everyone has a place here. Everyone is trying to find something deeper — something more."

Before consecrating the recently installed oak altar with holy chrism and sanctifying it with incense, Bishop Olson delivered a homily celebrating the completion of the parish hall/worship space at the same time the Church marks the start of a new liturgical year on the first Sunday of Advent.

"It's in this space where you truly understand where we are all going together as the Church — in the community of your parish family and under the patronage of St. Teresa of Calcutta," he said. "It is here in this present moment and in this space where you — His called and elected disciples — will receive the source of love and learn to love each other as Christ loves you and

Continued on Page 12

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then carry that love outward into the world, especially among the poor.”

In closing, the bishop reminded his listeners of something Mother Teresa said about death and judgment.

“He will not ask, ‘How many good things have you done in your life,’” the prelate said, quoting the much-admired saint. “But, rather, ‘How much love did you put into what you did?’”

Dcn. Zavala said Mother Teresa’s faith, practicality, and determination inspired him during the construction process. As a young man, the Los Angeles native received a two-year degree in construction and architecture before pursuing a career in aerospace engineering.

“I never thought at this point in my life I’d be doing this,” admitted the deacon,

recalling his years rebuilding porches and repairing roofs as a student. “God called me to do this, not because I’m the holiest, but I’m somebody who is driven. Failure is not an option.”

He relied on prayer, discernment, and repurposing to make the project a success. A baptismal font, found in diocesan storage, was cleaned, put back together, and placed in a double-wide trailer, home to the parish’s chapel. Stained glass windows removed from St. Jude Church were placed near the back doors of the new parish hall, and the chapel’s altar came from

storage at St. Patrick Cathedral.

“Anytime anyone offered anything, I took it,” Dcn. Zavala pointed out, adding the spirit of frugality is similar to how

Mother Teresa lived her life and mission. “We took things people didn’t want anymore and repurposed or reused them, doing the most we could with little or no money.”

The deacon often turns to the parish’s patroness during times of frustration or indecision.

“When something is not going right, I pray to her,” he confessed. “I’ve had a lot of Holy Spirit moments. I see God’s hand in this.” 🇺🇸

SEE MORE PHOTOS!



See more photos by scanning the QR code or visiting NorthTexasCatholic.Smugmug.com/Dedication-Mass-of-St-Teresa-of-Calcutta-in-Roanoke

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St. Vincent de Paul Conference President George Burton coordinates volunteers as Thanksgiving baskets are distributed at St. Catherine of Siena Church in Carrollton on Nov. 22. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)



Quick Response to Hungry Families

By Mary Lou Seewoester

“You’re such a blessing!”
“Thank you so much!”
“You have no idea how much this means.”

Tracy Dalrymple, Catholic Charities Fort Worth Community Care program manager, received grateful responses like these nearly every time she sent a Walmart e-card for groceries to someone who had lost their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits during the government shutdown.

A second collection Nov. 1 and 2 at all parishes in the Diocese of Fort Worth made this urgent and timely assistance possible. In a letter to parishes requesting a second collection specifically for food assistance, Bishop Michael Olson reminded parishioners, “We who are faithful Catholics must know that the poor and hungry come first because they are Christ among us.”

Parishioners responded to Bishop Olson’s request with more than \$165,000, which was divided between the diocese’s

19 parishes with food pantries and CCFW. Outside of the special collection, the diocese donated an additional \$100,000: \$50,000 to CCFW and \$50,000 was split among parishes with food pantries.

Dalrymple said CCFW was able to quickly disburse the funds by providing parishes with the phone number for a dedicated line and the link to a simple online application form.

“Parishes gave out that phone number and some parishes even helped people submit their forms,” Dalrymple explained. “It was easy to attach copies of their ID and SNAP benefits letter.”

On Nov. 12, the day the online form went live, the agency immediately began receiving referrals from parishes and St. Vincent de Paul Societies.

“The requests came in quickly and funds were dispensed quickly,” Dalrymple noted, adding that Walmart gift cards are easy to dispense and redeem.

Though not always able to disburse the full SNAP benefit amount, the agency tried to provide as much assistance as possible, Dalrymple explained.

“These funds are helping families that have been so affected by the loss of SNAP benefits and everything else going on [economically],” she said.

Rita Gauthier, director of Client Services at the CCFW Northwest campus in Wichita Falls, said the Wichita Falls office also dispensed special collection funds for food assistance. Once parishes were notified, “calls came in quickly,” she said.

Cindy Casey, director of CCFW Client Services, pointed out that money from the special collection is returning to the parish level.

“We’re using those funds to assist people referred to us by Catholic parishes,” she explained. “This is an opportunity to offer assistance to people we would not be able to help normally. And we are deeply grateful to our diocese, our bishop, and parishioners who are assisting those in need.” 🇹🇽

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



MANY YEARS OF REMEMBRANCE

St. Mary Parish in Windthorst rededicates historic grotto

By Lisa Moore

As the Catholic Church around the world celebrated the 100th Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, St. Mary Parish in Windthorst additionally celebrated both the church building's 100th year and the 75th anniversary of its large grotto, dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

After Mass, Father Michael Moloney, OFS, and the congregation gathered outside the large grotto with the Scotland-Windthorst Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post, Knights of Columbus, and Legacy High School's JROTC.

David Teichman, VFW quartermaster, read a brief history of the grotto's rich legacy: Parishioner Charles Lindeman built a small Marian shrine to commemorate his late wife, Mary, dedicated only a few hours before news of the Pearl Harbor attack reached Windthorst. Sixty-four parishioners and the priest at the time enlisted in the war. The community of Windthorst dedicated their safety to Our Lady's intercession. All of the men returned.

"As World War II raged on, vision for a larger shrine emerged," Teichman told the crowd. "Throughout the war, these servicemen sent portions of their military pay home to fund the shrine's construction."

The large grotto, complete with its 1,600 lb. Italian statue of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, was dedicated August

1950 with all 64 servicemen present.

Tim Lindeman, grandson of Charles, read an account of the large grotto's construction on behalf of his uncle Joe, who could not attend Sunday. Joe Lindeman warmly recalled the priest at the time, Father Pat, building the grotto with a cigarette hanging from his mouth, "the first time I'd ever seen a priest without his Roman collar on."

Everyone contributed what they could, Lindeman recollected.

"Because we [as a family] had no money to offer for the construction of the grotto, we helped with the construction by gathering and hauling loads of rocks to the build site by horse-drawn wagon," Lindeman read. "I feel sure other families hauled rocks also because there's no way we could have hauled that many."

In its 75 years, the grotto has only grown in importance to the community. It's seen the addition of three pillars dedicated to fallen veteran relatives from combat in Japan, Korea, and Iraq. It's also seen the construction of a short encircling wall including bricks engraved with the names of veteran parishioners, dating from the first World War to the Vietnam War.

Most recently of all, however, the grotto itself was rebuilt from the foundation up. Fundraising began in March 2024, and the project was completed January 2025. While the church building is already dedicated, Fr. Moloney explained, the rebuilt grotto was rededicated that Sunday.

Barbara Hoff, its chief caretaker since her mother stepped down in 2010, spoke about the restoration.

"The walls were getting some really big stress fractures," Hoff explained, noting that she approached Fr. Moloney in 2023 when her foot went through one of the levels. The construction included tearing down walls and rebuilding with the same rock, as well as restoring the star-shaped decorations on either side of the top exterior cross.

"Anytime I threw out a call for help, I never had anybody tell me that they couldn't come up here to do this," she said. Everyone from the community helped, she said — from junior-high aged boys to the Knights of Columbus and the VFW, as well as her own grandsons, who regularly assist her work.

"It is actually my honor to get to do this," Hoff said, whose work includes caring for the garden, candles, funds, and overall cleanup and maintenance. "The grotto to all of us is a place of comfort and peace."

With the restorations complete, the grotto's legacy is ensured to be shared across generations.

"I had a lady come up to me Sunday whose brother was killed in the Korean War," she said. "Her whole family was there. It's a place where they can go and know he's been remembered. Gary Johnston [who was killed in Iraq] has a lot of classmates that still live in Windthorst, so it's very touching for those kids to come



Parishioners attend Mass at St. Mary Church in Windthorst on Nov. 23, when the parish marked the 100th anniversary of the church building and re-dedicated the Our Lady of Perpetual Help Grotto on its 75th anniversary. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

back there because his history is there. It's a very calming place for everybody. People just driving through town say, 'Hey, we saw your church and we decided to stop.'"

Religious education classes now visit the shrine, Hoff said, allowing children to find grandparents' names in the stones.

"I've had religion classes come down here, and those kids are so excited; they ask some of the best questions ever," she said. "Here's somebody with my same last name — how are they related to me?" So we've talked, and the VFW, David Teichman, has talked to them about what it means, what's their patriotism? So it's really cool to have our VFW be that involved with the kids in school and talk to them and tell them, 'Hey, this is what life is about.'

"My grandkids think it's a cool place



Veterans watch as Father Michael Moloney, OFS, blesses the Our Mother of Perpetual Help Grotto outside St. Mary Church in Windthorst on Nov. 23 during a rededication ceremony. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

because they can climb all around," Hoff laughed. "That's my wish: for the young people to come down here. We need to

keep this history alive for future generations. Tell your kids and grandkids the stories." 🇺🇸



Past, Present, and Future

St. Sophia Ukrainian Catholic Church celebrates 25 years

By Susan Moses

So much to pack into a small church.

First, the people. About 180 parishioners filled St. Sophia Ukrainian Catholic Church in The Colony on Nov. 2, packing the pews in the 110-seat church and overflowing into the parish's social hall.

Then, the clergy. At the sanctuary, the Most Reverend Venedykt (Aleksiychuk), bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Chicago, presided, as well as two priests who formerly served the parish who made a special visit for the parish's 25th anniversary celebration. The current priests, Father Kostiantyn Popov and Father Frank Avant concelebrated, accompanied by the parish's deacon and altar servers.

Finally, the holy space overflowed with the beauty and tradition of the music, the icons, incense, and the spirituality of the divine liturgy.

THE PRESENT

Before the Holy Mass began, about a dozen children dressed in traditional embroidered dresses or shirts greeted Bishop Venedykt with flowers and a traditional loaf of Ukrainian bread.

The choir led the congregation with responses in Ukrainian and English. A helpful booklet provided translations for those who speak no Ukrainian, which included five seminarians from the Diocese of Fort Worth seated in the first pew.

Jeffrey Ambreit, a Fort Worth seminarian serving a pastoral year at All Saints Church in Fort Worth, said celebrating the "beautiful liturgy" with Bishop Venedykt was a blessing — "just being able to be part of their celebration, experiencing our communities working together, and seeing that diversity."

After the Epistle and Gospel were

chanted in English, Bishop Venedykt addressed the congregation in his homily, which focused on growing in holiness each day.

He said, "In English, they say 'past is history; future is mystery.' Present time is the most important time in my life, but so often it's difficult for me to accept this present time, because it's difficult, hard.

"You ask God why it's painful or difficult. God gives everything for one reason: for our sanctification," he continued, pointing out that when we grow in holiness, it not only helps us but also our family and our community.

Afterwards, the parish hosted a sold-out banquet at nearby Holy Cross Catholic Church. The 250 in attendance enjoyed a traditional Ukrainian musical performance, dancing, and food, as well as speeches from each of the parish's priests and the bishop.

◀ Hundreds of parishioners gather at St. Sophia Ukrainian Catholic Church on Nov. 2 for the Divine Liturgy and 25th anniversary of the parish. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

THE PAST

Richard Bogdon was baptized and confirmed in the Ukrainian rite shortly after he was born in Pittsburgh. Worshiping with the traditions and sacred rituals of the church of his Ukrainian grandparents helped unite the family in the customs and language of their culture.

As an adult, his career took him to North Texas where there was no Ukrainian Catholic Church, and he began attending a Roman Catholic Church in Plano.

More than 25 years ago, Bogdon and several others with ties to the Ukrainian Catholic Church approached the bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Chicago, which governs the Midwest and Western states, and asked about establishing a parish in North Texas.

At the beginning, a Ukrainian priest from Houston visited monthly to celebrate the divine liturgy as the group looked for a suitable site.

One of those parish founders was Father Deacon John Novocilsky, who drove the bishop to look at potential church properties. Ordained in 2007, he serves at St. Sophia.

In 2000, a former Baptist church in The Colony was purchased and renovated. An iconostasis was added to separate the nave from the sanctuary, and custom icons were painted by a Pennsylvania artist.

Because the facility had more space than the fledgling congregation needed, the excess space was leased to a charter school and a day care center to help with expenses.

THE FUTURE

When Father Pavlo Popov became the parish administrator in 2011, about 40 parishioners attended Holy Mass on Sundays. This August, when he left to serve at a Chicago-area parish, that number had grown to about 125, with as many as 300 attending Holy Mass on Easter or Christmas.



Bishop Venedykt of the St. Nicholas Eparchy celebrates the Divine Liturgy at St. Sophia Ukrainian Catholic Church on Nov. 2. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Fr. Pavlo Popov said the congregation also includes some parishioners without Ukrainian ties, who feel drawn by the closeknit community and the spirituality of the worship.

The church attracts parishioners from across the Metroplex, said Father Kostiantyn Popov, who was ordained a priest in 2024 and is Fr. Pavlo Popov's brother. Fr. Kostiantyn now serves as administrator for the parish.

But even as the parish celebrated its 25-year anniversary, Bogdon, who helped start the parish, is preparing for the future. "We want to build a new church, so this will be a steppingstone to what we can do going forward," he said.

Planning is in the earliest stages to build another church on the same site, which would double the seating, provide

a choir loft, and feature a dome typical of Byzantine churches.

Despite being more than 6,000 miles from Ukraine, the Ukrainian Catholic Church has a home in North Texas.

Fr. Pavlo Popov explained, "We need the beauty, we need the richness of the tradition, the East, to have that universality. Having St. Sophia creates an amazing opportunity for all the Catholics to come and visit, to experience and realize that the universal Catholic Church is much more than what we imagine."

The richness of tradition, however, is not the church's strongest asset, Fr. Pavlo Popov continued. "Most importantly, without the Holy Spirit, without the divine inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, it would not have survived for 2,000 years." 🇺🇸

GOD'S TIMING

Father Michael Ciski, TOR, celebrates 25 years of priesthood

By Matthew Smith

God's call to priesthood rang early for Father Michael Ciski, TOR.

Or so he's been told.

An old friend from Fr. Ciski's school days wrote him upon learning of his decision to enter the seminary.

"She said, 'What took you so long?'" the priest recalled. "Said she remembered me talking about becoming a priest back in second grade. Which I don't remember at all. But it must have been there from way back and later, things in life just sort of led me that direction."

Fr. Ciski, who serves as pastor of Colleyville's Good Shepherd Church, celebrated his 25th anniversary of ordination on Nov. 18.

Grade school intentions aside, the priest, 66, entered seminary later in life.

"One year, my older brother aged me a year as a joke," Fr. Ciski said with a laugh. "But I finally figured it out and think I'm 66 now."

Cradle Catholic and born and raised in Toledo, Ohio, he sums up his early upbringing as a Mass on Sundays traditional Catholic with few additional frills.

FROM PILLS TO PEWS

Witty, engaging, and warm of personality, the pastor laughed when asked how he spent the first 30-odd years of his life.

"You need to know my sense of humor," Fr. Ciski joked. "I say that's all confessional."

The truth, it turns out, is substantially less scandalous. He entered college intending to pursue a pharmacology degree.

"I did four of a five-year program, took a semester off and that semester lasted 12 years," Fr. Ciski said.

With a house, a car, and girlfriend, life was good, he said, on the surface at least.

"Everything was nice. But something was missing."

Restless perhaps, he left the Church for several years and attended churches of various denominations.

"They were all nice too," Fr. Ciski said. "But there was something missing there as well."

The Franciscan friar admits that he didn't know exactly what was missing, until he did.

"I realized it was God. It was the Church, and I came to realize it was the sacraments, especially the Eucharist."

That which he couldn't put his finger on now seems clear as day, the priest said.

"When I walked back into a Catholic church, I felt the presence of God there as opposed to walking into another church, where it's a big auditorium," Fr. Ciski said. "I still get that feeling on Good Friday when we don't have the Eucharist in the tabernacle. You walk into the church, and it just feels funny."

A FATHER FORMED

In addition to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and confession, he cites relationships formed as his favorite aspects of priesthood. The priest especially appreciates



Fr. Mike Ciski, TOR, meets with parishioners after celebrating a Mass for the 25th anniversary of his ordination on Nov. 23 at Good Shepherd Parish in Colleyville. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

opportunities to counsel, comfort, and interact with couples getting married and parishioners suffering the loss of a loved one.

“Being able in both cases to walk with them on those journeys,” Fr. Ciski said.

Early Mass, he joked when asked his least favorite aspect.

“I’m not a morning person.”

But even then there are still lessons learned.

“One of my best experiences of being a priest happened one Father’s Day. I was on call, and we had early morning Mass at 7 a.m., which again — I’m not a morning person.”

Hospital calls at all hours kept Fr. Ciski busy that day.

“By the last, I was thinking why can’t everybody get sick at the same time?” the priest said. “Then I thought, if I was a

parent and my kid was sick, I’d be getting up all night to do this. And that hit with the reality of what a father really is.”

CONSIDER THE VOICE

Among current-day challenges facing the Church, Fr. Ciski lists social media and the internet.

“I think it’s people always being connected to their phone or some device at the cost of relationship with one another,” he said. “I hear from people who suffer from a lot of what’s out there on the internet or admitting how much time they waste scrolling through their phone. It’s hard to put that stuff down.

“That was my homily this weekend. What voice do you listen to? The voice of God, or the voice of the world?”

And yet, even there is opportunity, Fr. Ciski added.

“With social media and the internet, I think we need to find more ways within the Catholic Church to do more positive things with those. That I think could be very helpful, especially with younger people.”

CROSSWORDS AND CROSSROADS

The priest fills his scant free time with crossword puzzles, travel, and reading — biographies and history mainly.

A photo of him and his brother in front of the Eiffel Tower sits atop a table in his office, a trip taken in honor of their late sister’s memory.


On a more upbeat note, Fr. Ciski laughed while recalling seeing Pope Leo on a recent pilgrimage.

“One of our pilgrims has a White Sox pennant,” he said. “The Pope saw it and gave our group a thumbs up.”

Joyful surprise, he said of Pope Leo’s election.

“No, I never thought we’d see an American pope. At least not in our lifetime.” 🇺🇸

THERE'S MORE!



See photos of Fr. Ciski's Jubilee Mass by scanning the QR code or visiting NorthTexasCatholic.org/local-news.

A Worthy Dwelling Place

A new Carmelite Monastery is established in Cooke County

By Susan Moses

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, observed Dec. 8, celebrates that Mary was preserved from sin from the moment of her conception, thus preparing a worthy dwelling place for her Son, Jesus Christ.

Thus it was fitting that on Dec. 8, the Diocese of Fort Worth also celebrated a worthy dwelling place for the Carmel of Jesus Crucified, a Discalced Carmelite Monastery established in the northwest section of Cooke County.

Bishop Michael Olson celebrated a Mass for the Foundation of the Carmel of Jesus Crucified at the monastery's temporary location.

Six nuns and two women in formation now reside in the cloister, living a life of prayer and sacrifice "for the sake of the reparation for sins, the sanctification of God's people, and for the salvation of souls," Bishop Olson explained to the small congregation of families, supporters, and diocesan staff.

After Mass, Bishop Olson, accompanied by Vicar General Father Jonathan Wallis, Father Brett Metzler, Father Austin Hoodenpyle, and Father John Martin, performed the Rite of Enclosure for the new monastery. As the clergy circled the building with prayer and holy water, the congregation followed behind in prayer.

A NEW CARMEL

The Holy See, through the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and So-

cieties of Apostolic Life, granted permission for the establishment of the Carmel of Jesus Crucified in the Diocese of Fort Worth in late November.

The monastery is affiliated with the "Christ the King" Association of Discalced Carmelite Monasteries in the U.S., which has several member monasteries. Most of the nuns now residing in North Texas have relocated from the Lake Elmo, Minnesota, monastery.

A Dallas man with family ties to Muenster offered his property in Cooke County as a temporary site for the nuns. The rolling, wooded hills offer "the seclusion so important to the spirituality and vocation of the Carmelite life," said the bishop.

The enclosure, explained the bishop, "can attune the Carmelite sisters and nuns in their vocation, their vocation to be attuned to God's promptings and attuned to the needs of the Church," by spending time centered in Christ "through meditation, through contemplation, through Adoration of Him."

Initial plans are underway regarding a permanent 35-acre site for the monastery on nearby land owned by the Dallas man's brother. The donor said, "I've been praying for years — three or four years at least — asking God what to do with this land to share it with people. 'This is your land. This is not mine. How do I share it?'" he remembered praying.

He downplayed the significance of the donation, insisting the land always belonged to God. He said, "It's a wonderful thing for the community. I'm glad to play

a very, very small part of it."

The nuns may reside at the temporary site as long as necessary for the permanent monastery to be funded and built.

RAPID RESPONSE

When the Catholic communities in Cooke County heard that the Carmelite nuns were planning to open a monastery in the area, "a lot of people raised their hands," said a donor who, like the others, preferred to remain anonymous.

Within two weeks of the sisters deciding on a location in late November, donations of land, a manufactured home, money, construction supplies, and services had materialized.

With the day for the dedication Mass scheduled for Dec. 8, contractors moved the Carmel of Jesus Crucified to the top of their project list, pouring concrete for the monastery's common area and renovating the manufactured home to accommodate eight cells for the religious women.

An existing structure on the property serves as a common space for worship and activities.

Other faithful have volunteered ongoing support for the sisters, planning to regularly remit a portion of their farms' eggs, milk, and even freshly caught fish for the nuns.

Mary Del Olmo, a consecrated virgin who lives nearby, will be a bridge between the community and the nuns as needed. She and two others are forming a guild to provide practical and prayer support for the convent.

Bishop Michael Olson celebrates the founding Mass of Carmel of Jesus Crucified. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



A HIDDEN BLESSING

“I don’t think we realize how blessed we are to have this monastery in our diocese,” said Del Olmo, adding that their dedication to prayer blesses the local and worldwide Church.

Del Olmo saw the Holy Spirit at work as she helped coordinate the preparations for the nuns’ arrival. As the plans fell into place within a matter of weeks, “so, so, so many miracles” occurred, she recalled.

Bishop Olson said that, although hidden, the sisters offer “a witness of hope and holiness that strengthens us all.” He prayed, “May their vocation bring forth many graces, including priestly and religious vocations, holy and happy marriages, and faithful discipleship.”

Not only do the Carmelites pray for us, but Bishop Olson also reminded the faithful to offer prayers for the vocation of the Carmelites.

During the Rite of Enclosure, he led the congregation in prayer. “Grant your servants who will live in these premises these blessings: To listen to You in faith; to speak to You in prayer; to seek only You in their work; to find You in all they do; to become witnesses to the Gospel.”

Amen. ✝



Bishop Michael Olson leads a procession to bless the Carmel of Jesus Crucified.

NTC/Juan Guajardo

PRAYER REQUESTS AND SUPPORT

Prayer requests may be made by phone, 940-641-5564, or by mail:
Mother Marie of the Incarnation, OCD
Carmelite Monastery
P.O. Box 308
Muenster, TX 76252

For those wanting to provide financial support, checks can be made to “Carmelite Monastery.” Please write “for the Texas Foundation” in the memo line.



Students work on a project at the St. Joseph Workshop at Sacred Heart Catholic School in Muenster on Oct. 21.

Trade Agreement

Muenster community and Sacred Heart Catholic School cooperate to offer students an opportunity to learn trade skills

By Christina Benavides
Photography by Juan Guajardo

On any given weekday afternoon in Muenster, 10 students make their way into a repurposed shed tucked behind Sacred Heart Catholic School. Books and backpacks are set aside in exchange for tools and equipment.

First, the class session begins with prayer to St. Joseph, patron of workers.

They then gather around an experienced tradesman — their community teacher for the day — eager to learn the project that will occupy the next 40 minutes.

Today's task: add a drain to a dummy wall. Constructed by the carpentry class with studs spaced 15 inches apart, the walls serve as practice ground for running electrical wire and installing plumbing.

Measurements, drills, saws, glue — all part of the lesson as Paul Bartush Jr. of Bartush Plumbing explains the day's assignment. Soon, the students set off in pairs to begin their work.

A SAINT TO RELY ON

Students in the St. Joseph Workshop program meet every day, with a schedule designed to learn one trade each day, five days a week.

Midway through its first year, the program is capped at 10 to accommodate space limitations and allow flexibility as the structure takes shape. So far, students studied OSHA guidelines and explored everything from electrical work and plumbing to small engine repair, carpentry, and welding.

Looking on from the doorway, Father Austin Hoodenpyle, the school's chaplain, considered the workshop's name.

"This parish places a high value on work and on a good work ethic," the pastor said. "A class like this connects the spiritual good of the parish — the love of the faith; the love of St. Joseph — with that work ethic in the same way that Catholic education always does: combining the spiritual and the material world in which we live."

As patron of families, fathers, and workers, St. Joseph holds a special place in the Muenster parish community, the priest said.

"The people in Muenster really began a devotion to St. Joseph to protect us, especially from bad weather, violent storms, things like that. For the last 100 years, we really haven't had any destructive weather in town," Fr. Hoodenpyle said. "So St. Joseph is important to the community as well as a model of what Christ allows us to do through His Incarnation, elevating

A Muenster tradesman teaches students how to work on boot jacks they crafted in the St. Joseph Workshop at Sacred Heart Catholic School in Muenster on Oct. 21.

work from being menial to something meaningful.”

COMMUNITY OF FAITH

At the heart of the St. Joseph Workshop program is Sacred Heart Principal Andrew Fulsom.

When the Connecticut native arrived in Muenster — recruited by a former college roommate — he quickly recognized the need for a distinctive program that would set the Catholic school apart from its public counterpart.

A former history teacher, Fulsom understood the value of trades, having worked as a welder and ironworker himself. In Muenster, a town of roughly 1,400, he saw a growing demand for skilled tradesmen and apprenticeships, even as nearly half the population were already farmers and tradesmen.

Fulsom, now in his second year as principal, also noticed the gap that traditional schooling leaves for graduates who don't pursue higher education and set into motion a plan for a community-driven project that would equip students with real-world skills.

Sacred Heart is “unique in terms of the sheer dedication of this one town to this one school, where 95 percent of our students are from Muenster,” Fulsom said. “The school would not survive without the volunteers of this community.”

By God's grace and with the “providential affirmation of what we're doing,” including a generous donation of \$25,000 to get the program off the ground,” Fulsom was able to coordinate five tradesmen to volunteer and donate their time to teach the next generation of workers.

As one of those volunteers, Bartush responded immediately after receiving Fulsom's email to alumni about the project.

“I was like, ‘This is exactly what I want to do.’ I reached out to him probably the same day it was sent,” Bartush recalled.

“Our world is in a position where for



every five, six plumbers we lose, we only gain one back,” Bartush explained.

Thanks to donations and community support, the program has had a promising start, Fulsom said. “Those examples are set through the alumni and people who do give back to the church and the school. We want the kids that go here to see that and be part of that.”

Looking ahead, he hopes to expand on the workshop by hiring a welder to teach students and by exploring the possibility of chartering a Future Farmers of America program. “We need to trust in the providence of God that He's going to keep building this program,” Fulsom said.

For now, students are doing their part to offset costs by selling some of their projects, including a rocket stove at the parish picnic. “Not only is it an opportunity to give back, but it's also something that can help build our

program a little bit more,” Fulsom said.

SOULS AT WORK

Inspired by Plato, the program emphasizes the formation of the mind, body, and soul, Principal Fulsom explained.

“The students come to life in that room,” he observed. “Along with their souls being formed here in Mass, we think that we're going to create leaders in all areas of the country and not just in academics.”

Bartush agreed. As a Sacred Heart alumnus, he's excited to help provide another path to consider.

“We want the kids to understand that we do want them to consider a higher education whenever they get out of high school,” Bartush said. “That's always an option, but there's also another option, and that's the trades.” 🇺🇸

A student flips during recess at Holy Family Catholic School in Fort Worth on Dec. 2. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



not yet

Smart Families encourages Catholic families to delay smartphones for kids

By Sandra Engelland

When Diane Price, principal at St. Joseph Catholic School in Arlington, first heard about the Smart Families program over a year ago, she knew instantly it could be a game changer for the families at her school.

Smart Families, which started in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, asks families to delay giving their children smartphones until high school and keep them off social media until age 16.

Why? Because a growing mountain of research shows that abundant use of technology in childhood has a detrimental impact on the developing brain.

Apps and video games are designed to boost dopamine levels, which make them highly addictive to children who haven't fully developed parts of their brain that govern self-control, according to research presented by Smart Families. As with any addictive behavior, the younger you get hooked, the harder it is to break the habit and the more it impacts the brain's functioning.

Add to that reports that rates of depression in teens doubled between 2011 and 2021 and anxiety in teens doubled since 2016. Some researchers say that internet usage is a key contributing factor, reducing time teens spend interacting in person and sleeping.

Even though smartphones, tablets, and smart watches are not allowed in classrooms, Price said she saw the impact of too much technology outside of school in shortened attention spans and increased anxiety and depression. She saw Smart Families as a way to equip parents and students with knowledge and a supportive community for going against the culture.

Price said, "We're all moms and dads, and we're all trying to do what we can to help our

children develop in an emotionally healthy and God-centered way."

'REWIRE THEIR BRAINS'

Smart Families, founded by Catholic parents Brian and Jennifer Kuzma, offers schools a three-year program to help change the culture in delaying the use of smartphones and social media. A foundation they established covers all the costs for participating schools.

Patrice Hall, Smart Families regional director for North Texas, said more than 20 schools in the Fort Worth and Dallas dioceses are currently participating in the program.

Smart Families is growing exponentially, from 18 schools in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston three years ago to 115 today, with one in England, one in Mexico, and two at other Christian schools in Houston and Wichita, Kansas.

The program aims to educate teachers, parents, and students about the neuroscience behind technology and "balance that with Catholic formation and Catholic values," Hall said.

In the three-year program, year one focuses mainly on the neuroscience; year two looks at a holistic approach of mind, body, spirit, and soul; and year three examines the impact of artificial intelligence and rapid changes in technology and algorithms.

The program includes five events a year per school: two for parents; two for students; and the family code dinner, where families sit down to a technology-free dinner provided by Smart Families to discuss their family values and develop a family code.

Hall said some schools offer extra programming and support.



Students play soccer during recess at Holy Family Catholic School in Fort Worth on Dec. 2. (NTC photo illustration/Juan Guajardo)

At St. Andrew Catholic School in Fort Worth, educators are offering parents a book study on “The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness” by Jonathan Haidt.

Hall said, “Haidt’s thesis is we’ve spent the past generation over-parenting in the real world and under-parenting online.”

Instead of spending time engaging in creative play with friends or on their own, children are playing online games or endlessly scrolling TikTok or YouTube because of the dopamine rush.

“Tech is designed to rewire their brains, and that’s not what God wants for us at all,” Hall said. “God created our brains for wholeness, and there’s no ending to YouTube or games.”

NOT GOD’S DESIGN

Like Price, St. Andrew Principal Laura Behee said she was “onboard instantly” when Smart Families presented at a diocesan principals’ meeting.

“We’ve never allowed smartphones on campus, but we were seeing issues around tech creeping into the school,” Behee said.

When the Smart Families program kicked off at St. Andrew in August, they

made parent meetings mandatory for at least one parent or guardian in each family.

The “Anxious Generation” book study for parents is going well and will wrap up in March.

Behee said, “It gives parents an opportunity to talk with other parents in the community and support each other.”

Smart Families recently came to St. Andrew for two days of student education based on grade level.

“It was really well-received,” Behee said. “We sent parents information on ways to further that education at home.”

At St. Rita Catholic School in Fort Worth, educators offered parent meetings in both English and Spanish.

Principal Kindra Johnston said one of the parents at the Spanish meeting was excited to talk about the information with her eighth grader and older children. She also asked about education going beyond the school.

Johnston said she talked with Hall about offering an educational session open to the parish as a whole.

The school will have its family code dinner in the spring, and Johnston said she’s looking for other opportunities to

host phone-free family events.

She also linked limiting the use of technology to faith.

“It’s taking care of the body and mind God gave us. Bringing in Catholic education is really, really important from kindergarten all the way up,” Johnston said.

She said Smart Families encourages parents whose children already have smartphones to reconsider.

Johnston said, “While it can be scary to say ‘no’ to teens, parents have got support and it’s science-driven.”

There’s always the option of a “dumb phone” with the ability to talk or text but not go online.

Price said she urged parents who had already given their children smartphones to reconsider and ask themselves, “What benefit is it truly?”

Price said she’s still waiting to see the positives of social media for children.

“What I see is unpleasantness and disconnection,” she said. “This is not how we make friends and keep friends. This is not how God designed us.

“We need to build bonds and community the old-fashioned way — in person and not by words on a screen.” 🇺🇸



NTC/Juan Guajardo

Cristo Rey student Vanessa Rodriguez cuts the ceremonial ribbon for the new STEAM center at Cristo Rey Fort Worth College Prep on Nov. 5.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Cristo Rey Fort Worth students, family, staff welcome school's growth with new STEAM center

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

Sixteen-year-old Julia Lopez eyes the now-completed construction project on the campus of Cristo Rey Fort Worth College Prep with enthusiasm and gratitude. The \$5.5-million new STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) center, funded by capital campaign donations, gives the innovative Catholic high school 12 spacious classrooms, four integrated science labs, a conference room, and a black box theater for the performing arts.

"I'm excited because it provides our growing student body more room," observed the 10th grader from Burleson. "It may not seem connected to learning but having classroom windows with natural

sunlight makes a difference."

Under construction since March, the 10,000-square-foot space adds a second floor to the high school's existing blueprint. Engineers helped administrators envision a way to make room for more classrooms by converting an existing auditorium.

Cristo Rey purchased the 4.47-acre property on Altamesa Boulevard — once home to an interdenominational church — in 2019. The entrepreneurial work/study school opened in 2018 with 75 students and now welcomes more than 300 ninth through 12th graders. Administrators hope the expansion will allow Cristo Rey to accept even more economically disadvantaged youth over the next few years.

The goal to serve 425 students would make Fort Worth one of the larger schools in the Cristo Rey network. Currently,

there are 41 Cristo Rey schools in 24 states providing a college preparatory Catholic education for adolescents with limited economic resources. By combining rigorous academics with professional jobs supplied by corporate partners, the program allows students to earn a portion of their tuition while gaining valuable work experience. The remaining cost of education is covered by philanthropy and family contributions.

Four senior classes have graduated from Cristo Rey Fort Worth with 92 percent of alumni persisting through college.

STUDENTS WITH GRIT

Dani Ray Barton, Cristo Rey Fort Worth president since 2023, is looking forward to next May when the first class of alumni will earn college diplomas.

"People in the community are seeing

results,” said the school’s founding work/study director, noting one third of the freshman class are siblings of current or former students. “Families are happy with what their older children are accomplishing, and our corporate partners value the program and value the students as individuals.”

Cristo Rey began its mission to educate young people with 20 corporate participants. Today, the work/study program boasts 75 partnering businesses and firms.

“It’s amazing to see the impact it’s had on the kids. They grow quickly in these corporate settings,” said Barton, calling the work relationships formed and confidence gained “our secret sauce.”

The newly minted STEAM Center is key to Cristo Rey’s continuing success.

“This is the first true capital investment we made, and our students, families, and staff deserve that,” she added. “Like a lot of schools, we had humble beginnings. You grow, figure out what’s needed, and find resources in the community to help you do that. This space reflects the good work our team is doing.”

The student body was surveyed to assess what improvements they wanted. Swimming pools and rock-climbing walls didn’t make the list.

“They asked for lab spaces, bigger lockers, and wider hallways. They’re teenagers, but they [understand] what’s most important,” the administrator acknowledged. “Hopefully, having more classroom space to serve more families provides the momentum to do other things.”

Adding a kitchen and renovating the gym so the school can host home basketball games are targeted goals and part of Cristo Rey’s ongoing journey.

Barton is eager to show prospective students and their families the light-filled classrooms, inspiring murals, and state-of-the-art science labs that are now part of the Cristo Rey Fort Worth experience.

“Our students, parents, and team are GRITTY,” Barton insisted, referring to the school’s core values of Grace, Responsibility, Integrity, and Tenacity. “They don’t deserve anything less than other schools and students.”



Cristo Rey students work on an assignment inside the new STEAM center at Cristo Rey Fort Worth College Prep. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



A look at the new STEAM center that added several classrooms, science labs, and a black box theater to Cristo Rey Fort Worth College Prep. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

A GAME CHANGER

The new STEAM addition is a game changer for students, according to Debbie Morrison, chairman of Cristo Rey Fort Worth’s board of directors.

“It lets our students stay on track with their peers in public school who have the advantage of quality facilities,” said the longtime Cristo Rey supporter. “True science labs allow them to become familiar with procedures they’ll use in college. It will give them confidence.”

Even before the remodel, Cristo Rey students were excited to come to school every day, Morrison enthused.

“They do the extra work it takes to come to Cristo Rey and are

grateful to the generous community giving them this opportunity,” she said. “The impact it’s having is immeasurable.”


Martin Muñoz wanted to attend

Cristo Rey because it’s Catholic and the work/study curriculum offered “an experience unlike any other.” The 15-year-old hopes to become a cardiologist.

“I think the STEAM center will help me do that,” said the Holy Name parishioner. “More space and new equipment will make studying easier.”

Coming to Cristo Rey also allowed Muñoz to grow in faith.

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“My parents noticed changes in my behavior,” said the sophomore, who comes from a religious family. “They say I’ve matured.”

His classmate, Julia Lopez, has similar hopes for a career in the medical field. She believes the enhanced science labs will help her achieve the goal of attending college and earning a nursing degree.

“Our school is smaller than most, but the opportunities are large,” said the St. Joseph Catholic School alumna who will become the first member of her family to enroll in college.

A lot of her peers at Cristo Rey grew up thinking an education beyond high school wasn’t possible.

“This school not only helps you get into college, they make sure you stay in college,” Lopez continues. “Counselors care where you are in life. They want you to succeed.”

Many Cristo Rey alumni are first



Cristo Rey teacher Ms. Vega administers a test for her students at the new STEAM center at Cristo Rey Fort Worth College Prep. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

generation college students, but academic achievement is not the school’s only objective.

“Yes, we want our students to get a college degree. Yes, we want them to be

doctors, lawyers, and engineers, but we also want them to be good people,” Barton asserted. “We want them to be men and women of faith, purpose, and service.

“That’s our ultimate goal.” 🇺🇸

GROWING SAINTS

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think about it

Parishioners take on challenge to create environment which fosters religious vocations

By Matthew Smith

A diocesan-wide effort launched in January 2025 to spread awareness and encouragement of vocations grew into that and more, said Connie Keenom, a parishioner at St. Andrew in Fort Worth.

“It just seems like within this year, our parish, school, and community have pulled together more as one big family of openness to vocations of priesthood and religious life,” Keenom said.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parishioner Wendy Collins responded in kind when asked about the Keller parish’s recently formed vocation ministry.

“We prayed as a parish for vocations before this ministry started,” Collins said. “But this is on a different level; we’re actively working to create a culture of vocations throughout the parish.

“It started slowly, but we’re getting more people involved and I’m excited for next year.”

Collins and Keenom said a January vocation ministry workshop at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton inspired and challenged them and other attendees to bolster vocational awareness in their respective parishes.

Several priests, seminarians, Serra Club members, and parishioners hosted that workshop in hopes of growing vocational awareness and support throughout the diocese.

The fostering of vocations, Pope St. John Paul II said, “must be incorporated fully into the life and activity of the [Church]” rather than relegated to marginal activity.

Bishop Michael Olson, during a Mass



Moises Rodriguez and about a dozen others attended the Nov. 15 St. Andrew Breakfast, a monthly meeting for young men discerning a call to the priesthood. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

that began the January workshop, stressed that the “ministry for vocation fostering belongs to everyone.”

Father Brett Metzler and others echoed Bishop Olson’s words during the workshop in supplying attendees with encouragement, strategies, and tools in motivating them to foster vocational awareness in their own parishes.

Fr. Metzler stressed the urgency of fostering a culture of vocations throughout the diocese to offset the increasingly

secular world’s anti-vocation stance.

Keenom and fellow St. Andrew parishioner Paula Fultz attended the January workshop, then subsequently replied to a call for volunteers to form the St. Andrew Parish vocation ministry.

Both joked that they dove in excited if unsure of exactly how to proceed or the ministry’s chances of success.

“We just prayed, knowing we’d been called to this,” Keenom said. “Saying, ‘Jesus, let us serve you, and everything



Diocesan Vocations Director Father Brett Metzler answers questions posed by men discerning the priesthood at the monthly St. Andrew Breakfast. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

began falling into place.”

With assistance from St. Andrew’s pastor, Father Daniel Pattee, TOR, the initial committee of 10 got to work.

“We understood that if we didn’t give vocations acknowledgement, recognition, and pray for them, we were going to have a weak link,” Fultz said. “Right now, that weak link has been the priesthood. We don’t have enough of them.”

St. Andrew vocation ministry members researched vocation ministries at dioceses far and wide, ranging from Houston to Australia to formulate a plan of action.

“We didn’t just say we were praying for priests and religious,” Fultz said. “But for marriage, family life, and all vocations too because we’re working to create a vibrant, friendly environment welcoming to all vocations.”

Such efforts have included prayer chains, presence at the parish fall festival and other events, distribution of prayer cards and vocational information as well as outreach to parish shut-ins and students at St. Andrew Catholic School.

“We don’t have any pretext that we’re experts,” Keenom said. “All we are is a conduit to get education, events, and awareness out that every person in our parish has a call. We’re not here to advise or counsel them, but to help get them where they need to be and to the people who can help them with that.”

Collins spoke of similar efforts on the part of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton’s vocation ministry.

Collins spoke of growing vocational awareness and interest at her parish — as did Keenom and Fultz at theirs — and excitement over plans to increase such outreach efforts in the

years ahead.

“It’s what God wants your vocation to be,” Collins said. “We try to touch on all of that, that everyone has a vocation. It might be priesthood or religious. Might be married life or being a single person.”

Collins cited a couple who recently joined the ministry.

“They have great energy and motivation and young children,” Collins said. “One of their comments was that we need to encourage [vocation fostering] in the home.”

Holy Redeemer Church of Aledo parishioners Matthew and Shelley Aguirre praise Father Joseph Keating’s efforts in recruiting a diverse group of parishioners with different areas of expertise to the parish’s vocation ministry.

“We received an outline of goals and objectives then, as a team, started chipping away at those,” Matthew Aguirre said.

The group tackled small goals initially.

“We glued the vocations prayer inside every hymnal in the church, and now [parishioners] say that prayer before every Mass begins,” Aguirre said.

Having previously attended a large parish in Dallas, Aguirre said he doesn’t see much difference in raising vocational awareness at small versus large parishes.

“I honestly believe that if it’s supported and driven by the pastor, no one’s going to have an issue with getting it started,” Aguirre said. “I think it’s just hearing the call as a servant of God. Because I certainly wasn’t a vocations expert when I heard the call.”

Two students inquired about vocations after a recent vocations talk by Fr. Keating, Aguirre added.

Small or large parish, vocational promotion ministry is essential, Collins said.

“It’s so important for all our parishes, even if they start with two or three people,” Collins said. “You don’t have to reinvent the wheel. There are toolkits, information, and so many resources on our diocesan website, Serra International, and Serra USA to help you get started.” ✝



NTC/Rodger Mallison

Schoenstatt Pilgrim Mother Movement members Susan Ortega and Maria Elva Garcia transfer a travelling shrine at St. Francis of Assisi in Grapevine.

Transformed by Mary

Faithful families grow closer to Christ through devotion to Our Lady of Schoenstatt

By Christina Benavides

For many families, the center of their home is in the kitchen or around the television. But in a growing number of homes in North Texas, a small shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Schoenstatt calls everyone together.

“It is where we gather,” Andrea Woolums told the *North Texas Catholic* about the “living shrine” that embodies the ideals of the Schoenstatt movement within the family unit. “When the kids were living at home, we had family prayer there at night, and then when they were teenagers and always gone, we had prayer there in the morning.

“It’s where we brought everything — each of the baby’s sonogram pictures went

there, and any troubles that we had and have, we bring it there,” said Woolums, director of religious education at St. Mark Parish in Argyle.

The Woolums are one of many families around the diocese receiving graces through participation in the Schoenstatt movement, driving deep devotion to the Blessed Mother.

The Schoenstatt movement traces back to 1914 when Father Joseph Kentenich and a group of seminarians made a “Covenant of Love” with the Virgin Mary in a small chapel in Schoenstatt, Germany.

The beautiful chapel soon became a popular location for pilgrimage, prayer, and meditation as Mary was known to grace visitors with her presence and lead them to a deeper love of Christ, her son,

explained Marcie Yoder of St. John Paul II Parish in Denton. As visitors shared word of the graces received, the movement began to take hold, and “over time, it turned into a shrine,” she said, “and now we have over 200 of those shrines all over the world.”

Yoder has visited the Texas shrines located in San Antonio, Austin, and Lamar.

“They’re beautiful, beautiful shrines. Not very big. They fit about 20 people inside, but they’re absolutely beautiful,” she said. “If you haven’t had a chance to visit one, I would highly recommend it.”

Echoing her invitation is Father Jeff Roedel, ISP, a Schoenstatt priest based in the Austin Diocese. “For many people, a steppingstone toward creating a really intimate connection with God is a personal,

intimate relationship with Mary,” he explained. “We believe Mary is truly present in the Schoenstatt shrines.”

Recently assigned to moderate the movement in North Texas, Fr. Roedel will travel to North Texas several times a year to dedicate shrines to Schoenstatt, visit with groups, and provide spiritual direction to couples and families. His first visit in early October saw him dedicate four new home shrines for parishioners at St. Mark in Argyle and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Keller and celebrate the anniversary of the movement’s Oct. 18, 1914, founding.

Two diocesan parishes are also home to small wayside shrines at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller.

TO RECEIVE GRACES

There are various branches of the Schoenstatt movement for the faithful to receive graces from the Blessed Mother: family, couples, and youth devotional groups; installing a personal shrine at home, like the Woolums; or joining a traveling shrine Rosary rotation.

“All of these are tied to that same goal of bringing people closer to our Lord Jesus Christ through our Blessed Mother and gaining that grace through participating in that relationship, that covenantal relationship,” explained Yoder.

At the head of the diocesan Schoenstatt Pilgrim Mother Movement, Yoder coordinates more than 60 traveling shrines across 14 parishes in the diocese. The traveling shrines look like smaller replicas enclosed in a wood casing. Within groups of four to 15 people, the small image of the Blessed Mother with her Son travels weekly, moving from home to home. In the week a family has the shrine, they will pray the Rosary before the image.

“The traveling shrine’s primary purpose is to increase the praying of the Rosary and to bring the Blessed Mother’s graces into each home,” she said. “She brings us peace and strength to carry the burdens of everyday life and gives us inner conversion and unity in our families.”



Monica Ramirez (top right) with her daughters, Hailey, 11, Melanny, 8, and Fatima, 5, gather as members of the Schoenstatt Pilgrim Mother Movement at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine, Nov. 29. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

Sometimes, it’s hard to let Mother Mary go because of the joy her presence brings, Yoder said.

“When she comes to our homes, it calls to mind a deeper presence with Christ and Mary, which is what it’s all about, so we find a deeper love of God and genuine joy,” Yoder said.

A FAMILY TRANSFORMED

When Woolums first encountered Schoenstatt in 1993, she was a parishioner at St. Francis of Assisi in Grapevine and learned of the movement after becoming involved in a mother’s group, where some Austin-transplant members were devotees and shared about the graces. From there, Woolums and her husband, who had recently converted, joined a Schoenstatt couples’ devotional group, “and the rest is

history,” she said.

As her family grew, so did their devotion.

“Looking backwards, it’s phenomenal,” she said. “My husband and I didn’t know much about the faith at all. We have literally been transformed.”

Woolums and her husband attribute their nine children’s active lives of faith to the graces of the Blessed Mother through the devotion to the movement, which included participation in individual home shrine devotions and daily family prayer.

Even as Woolums continues to participate in a couple’s group at St. Mark, her son and his wife are starting up another group for younger couples.

“Schoenstatt has been an amazing gift to our family, and I am humbled and grateful for that gift in our lives,” she said. 🇺🇸

Camping, Community, & Catholicism

Diocesan-chartered Scout troops feature opportunities to grow in friendship, leadership, and faith



By Brenda Raney

O rder, discipline, integrity — these values are essential to a strong life of faith.

They also guide the growth of a young Scout working to earn some badges.

Father Joseph Keating, Eagle scout and pastor of Holy Redeemer Parish, believes these values are why Scouting has “a synergy with our Catholic faith.”

“The discipline that you learn in Scouts helps you to follow through on your commitments and to be a man of integrity,” he said.

Fr. Keating has supported the growth of Scouting troops at his Aledo parish.

“God created the order of the universe,” he explained. “So, learning rules of order — whether it’s in the meetings or how to keep your campsite tidy or stay on schedule — all of these contribute to our contact with the God who is the God of order.”

This harmony between faith and Scouting isn’t accidental. Lord Baden Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, included an oath in the program that states, in part, Scouts will do their duty to God.

According to Lee Sperry, chair of the Fort Worth Diocese Catholic Committee on Scouting, that oath comes to life daily in the Catholic Scouting programs he manages.

“The mission of Catholic Scouting is to have the young people encounter Christ through Catholic values, teachings, and the experiences they have in Scouting. What we do is provide them that Catholic avenue to learn more about their faith as it relates to their Scouting,” Sperry said.

Sperry points to several faith-based emblems available to Catholic Scouts. For Cub Scouts, the Light of Christ and the *Parvuli Dei* (Children of God) emblems help them develop a personal relationship with Jesus. For older Scouts, the

Ad Altare Dei (to the altar of God) fosters spiritual growth, and the Pope Pius XII emblem explores vocations and ministries as calls from God.

Upon the completion of all four Catholic faith emblems, Scouts receive the *Chi Rho* award, a recognition which is unique to the diocese. Also, faith-based activities, such as a Ten Commandment Hike and a Scouts Read Sacred Texts activity, encourage youngsters to engage with Scripture.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

At the heart of Scouting is community involvement and leadership. These values are inherent in the merit badge process where boys select a topic, complete relevant assignments to demonstrate proficiency, and present findings to family, friends, or community leaders.

The highest achievement in Scouting America is the Eagle Scout Award which incorporates all the leadership and learning opportunities of a merit badge



Scouts Teddy Cordell and Baron Henry salute the flag during the Pledge of Allegiance at a Scout Troop 1099 meeting. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)



Cub Scout James Ordonez, 6, participates in a meeting of Scout Troop 1099 at Holy Redeemer Parish in Aledo on Dec. 2. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

plus an element that benefits the community.

Troop Committee Chair and Cub Master at Holy Redeemer Parish Chris Caggiano points to these types of activities as the benefits of scouting.

“There are so many things that can pull young men in a variety of directions,” Caggiano said. “I think Scouting provides just a wonderful opportunity to teach young men to grow in their faith and also in what the community expects from them.”

One of the ultimate challenges is the wilderness experience at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. The seven-to-12-day immersive trek includes camping, climbing, and more as Scouts hike trails that lace over 140,000 acres of wilderness.

“These big adventures [like Camp Philmont] teach young men how to lead and how to make mature decisions and be productive members of society. That is important to the Catholic Church, and it’s important to communities in general,” Caggiano said.

SCOUTING OPPORTUNITIES

For 16-year-old Douglas Johnson, Scouting has been part of his life since second grade. His Scouting resume includes 109 merit badges, a trip to Germany to convene with other Catholic Scouts, and an *Ad Altare Dei* emblem.

He is currently working toward his Eagle Scout award and the Pope Pius XII emblem. In July, he will be part of a select group of 70 Scouts from across the country who will participate in the St.

George Trek at Camp Philmont. This 11-day high adventure leadership experience asks participants to make, per the National Catholic Committee on Scouting, “two commitments: to the ongoing discernment of their vocation and to engagement in their home parish and diocese.”

Johnson credits Scouting for skills that help him manage a challenging school schedule that includes advanced placement classes and marching band where he plays the mellophone.

“Scouting has helped me with my planning and organization skills, being able to plan out an event and the specifics behind it, as well as budgeting for meals whenever I’m a quartermaster.”

His advice to those considering Scouting is, “Just try it. You might meet some people that will be your Catholic friends and peers for life, especially since in some areas, it’s hard to find other Catholic friends in [public] school.”

According to Johnson, “finding Catholic peers that are your age that can give you advice and not just your parents is certainly helpful.”

Behind every good troop are the adults who volunteer their time. The diocese requires troop leaders to be part of their parish and complete Safe Environment training and Scouting America’s Youth Protection training.

Diocesan-chartered Scouting America (formerly Boy Scouts of America) troops are at Holy Redeemer, St. Andrew, St. Rita, and Holy Trinity Catholic School in Grapevine. 🇺🇸



Sounds of the Season

Diocesan musicians share their favorite Christmas music and how it helps them understand the Incarnation of Christ

By Susan Moses

Sure, Christmas music can be the background for baking cookies, driving in your car, or shopping at a store, but it can be so much more.

Profound truths set to music. Lyrics that double as poetry.

Sister Rose Martin Huong Le, OP, explained, “For me, Christmas hymns are not just seasonal music — they are theology set to melody. They carry the mystery

of the incarnation in every note, reminding us that the Savior’s coming is both a historical event and a living reality.”

Catholics have a vast treasure of Christmas hymns, with the earliest dating back to fourth century Rome and new ones being composed each year.

The style has changed over the centuries, but the 2,000-year-old Good News of the birth of our Savior continues to inspire musicians and the faithful who sing along.

Christmas music is written for a diverse audience too, from the simplicity

of children’s songs such as “The Little Drummer Boy” to the sophistication of Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio.”

I invite you to read the pages that follow, in which seven individuals share their thoughts on Christmas music. Two more describe their favorites in our Spanish section on pages 52 - 54.

I also extend an invitation to fully engage as you sing the songs of the season, contemplating the joy, the hope, and the wonderful mystery of Emmanuel, God with us.



Sister Rose Martin Huong Le, OP

organist for the Blessed Imelda Convent

VOCATION IN MELODY

Though I earned no formal degree in music, my path has always been shaped by song. It began in the parish choir, where I discovered music is more about service: blending voices, carrying the weight of sacred hymnody, and offering beauty back to God. Each hymn taught reverence, each chord taught patience, and each silence taught trust.

Now I am entrusted with the gift of playing organ for the sisters' community. It is not a role I claim as expertise, but as calling. To place one's hands on the keys is to place one's heart before the Lord, offering not performance but prayer.

CARVE TRUTH INTO THE SOUL

Among the many carols, "O Come, All Ye Faithful" has always stood out. It's bold, triumphant, and basically the

hymn equivalent of saying, "Everyone in the chapel, get in here!" The melody sweeps you up whether you're a trained soprano or just humming along.

One line in particular always stops me in my tracks: "Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing." These few words capture the mystery of the Incarnation — the eternal Word choosing to dwell among us in human form. Every time I play those notes, I feel the weight of its truth pressing gently on my heart.

JOYFUL TRADITIONS

One of my cherished traditions is slipping away for extra practice on the organ during Advent — not only to strengthen my hands, but also to prepare my heart for the coming season.

At Christmas, the sisters and I bring carols to nursing homes and retirement residences for priests, sharing music as a gift of comfort and

joy. When we gather among ourselves on Christmas Day, the singing is not always simple; at times it blossoms into a true concert, complete with harmony, skits, and spirited performance. We discover again that the mystery of Christmas is most beautifully revealed in communal joy — voices lifted together, hearts united, and love made visible in songs.

GLOBAL SYMPHONY OF JOY

Christmas is the feast of joy, and joy demands expression in every style imaginable. From solemn chant to lively carols, each culture and generation has found its own way to sing the mystery of the Incarnation. The diversity reflects the universality of Christ's birth — He came for all people, and all people sing differently.

Continued on Page 38

At left, Sister Rose Martin Huong Le, OP, prepares to play the organ for the Dominican Sisters of Mary Immaculate at a Nov. 23 Mass at Blessed Imelda Convent. (NTC/Ben Torres)



Mat Burkepile

director of music, St. Peter Parish, Lindsay

MUSICAL BACKGROUND

I have been playing musical instruments since I was young. My main talent is in violin. I played violin since I was in fourth grade and this took me all the way to earning a master's in music.

Due to the shortage of organists in the world today, I learned organ to better serve the Church. I took private lessons but also listened to a dear friend and organist from my childhood who was able to teach with great experience with a simple sentence.

My current role fits me very well. I love Church music; I love making music; I love discovering and sharing music; and I love passing on music to the next generation.

I take every opportunity to be the Church's champion for all things music. And it's not just inside the walls of the church. I help the local college with events; I have helped local schools with music; and I help the broader Catholic community by writing and performing music for EWTN's ChurchPop on occasion.

OLD FAITHFUL

"O Come All Ye Faithful" really sets the tone for Christmas. We know the angels, shepherds, and wise men were inspired to come and see the newborn king. That song always makes me feel like a part of that great moment in history. It's also a very old but popular song that reaches many different people and generations.

"Come and behold Him, born the King of Angels" is a great lyric for setting the stage for Mass.

JOY AND WONDER

I am filled with wonder when I watch the community "come and adore Him" and join in the life of Jesus. As



a man, I don't admit to crying very often, but this song reminds me that the Church is the bride of Christ. When the church doors opened at my own wedding I couldn't help but be amazed at the beauty of my wife. I was so happy I couldn't help but cry.

I hope when the music strikes up, Jesus looks at us, His people, and cries with joy in the same way.

ETERNAL MUSIC

I think the Church has done such a good job teaching us at a young age about Jesus' birth that we really attach to that hope in a very real way in our everyday life. As a result, we hear Christmas music differently than we do everyday hymns. They have a timelessness.

But, the message at Christmas is clear: Mary's yes leads us to changing our attitudes, and that allows Jesus to enter our lives in a positive yet simple way.

READY AND ABLE

I secretly carry my violin around in my truck, starting at Thanksgiving until Christmas. If I drive past a musician on a street corner. I take the time to join them (if they want me to), just to bring Christmas to everyone possible.

STARTING YOUNG

A favorite Christmas hymn from my childhood is "Gesu Bambino." It is the first Christmas song I played at Mass with my older brother. I was terrified but I learned of the love and support of the Catholic music community. Having support



Mat Burkepile plays the violin in St. Peter Church in Lindsay, where he serves as director of music. (NTC/Thomas Otto)

and lots of practice, the song became a beautiful treasure that I love.

Honorable mention: the "O Christmas Tree" specifically from the movie "Ernest Saves Christmas." Like Ernest, sometimes we sing Christmas songs and don't really know the words. It was meant to be comedy, but it was very real!

My children's choir loves "Silent Night." Being a community of German ancestry, they love learning about their culture. It also helps that there are, to the English speaker, funny sounding words. They enjoy it on so many levels, and it builds a sense of community and history.



Father Raymond McDaniel

pastor, St. Philip the Apostle Parish, Flower Mound

EDUCATED AND EXPERIENCED

I earned a bachelor's and master's degree in music and worked 10 years in sacred music in the Episcopal church before converting to Catholicism.

From time to time I sneak in and play our wonderful pipe organ for my own enjoyment, and occasionally accompany the hymns for Stations of the Cross and benediction.

MUSICAL MESSAGE

For me, the texts and tunes of Christmas music combine in a powerful way to illuminate the real meaning of this important feast, the coming of God's Son as a man like us in all things but sin. Christmas hymns remind that the child in the manger is God Himself, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

HIDDEN GEM

My favorite Christmas hymn is "Once in Royal David's City," an English favorite, but sadly not that well known in this country. Its poetry tells the Christmas story in a beautiful way, and the tune supports that in a touching way.

A LYRIC TO REMEMBER

The final verse of "Once in Royal David's City" contrasts the humble birth of Jesus with His glorious Ascension and the promise of eternal life.

"Not in that poor lowly stable / with the oxen standing by, / we shall see Him, but in heaven, / set at God's right hand on high."

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Father Raymond McDaniel plays the organ at St. Philip the Apostle Church in Flower Mound in this NTC file photo from 2023. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Dr. Christina Alves directs the choir at St. Andrew Church in Fort Worth on Nov. 30, the first Sunday of Advent. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

Dr. Christina Alves

director of liturgy and music, St. Andrew Parish, Fort Worth

A CHERISHED GIFT

With a doctorate in vocal performance from Louisiana State University, I have performed various roles with several opera companies, taught liturgical and cantor workshops, and cantored for many diocesan liturgies. I enjoy connecting people and helping them discover their God-given gifts.

I am grateful for my husband, Thomas, and my four adult children and spouses for their support in my vocation as wife and mother, and my 33 years of ministry at Saint Andrew Parish.

PERSONAL FAVORITE

I have several favorite Christmas hymns: “Angels We Have Heard on High,” “Silent Night,” “Still, Still, Still,” and “In the Bleak Midwinter,” but “O Holy Night” is my favorite. While I am aware of its origin, I love this carol because of the melody, accompaniment, and beautiful poetry.

“O Holy Night” is my favorite for personal reasons. In 2017 my mother passed away on Dec. 25 in Arkansas while we were singing at Midnight Mass at St.

Andrew. We were to drive to see her and family on Christmas morning. When I got the call that she was near death, I sat in my car in the church parking lot and sang “O Holy Night” to her over the phone before Midnight Mass. I knew she could hear me. She shared my love for this hymn and I chose it for her funeral Mass a few days later.

LYRICAL LESSONS

Two phrases in “O Holy Night” stand out to me.

The first is “Long lay the world in sin and error pining, ‘til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”

Some of the people I encounter through ministry struggle with their sense of worth. Many people long to have peace and have forgotten how much they are loved by God. Helping them become aware of His love by inviting them back, connecting them to others, inviting them to the gift of the sacraments, and praying through music — all of these opportunities bring God’s healing.

The second is “Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices!”

Falling on your knees is such a posture of humility and reverence! How many times in our lifetime do we fall on our knees in prayer over the pain of losing a loved one; in prayer for someone who is seriously ill; for challenges at work or home; in desperation needing help; for guidance in speaking the right words; for our children to discover God’s will for them; in gratitude for forgiveness or daily blessings?

We fall on our knees not only at Christmas time, but for a lifetime.

ADVENT ANGELS

During the season of Advent at my Catholic elementary school in Arkansas, before we ate our lunch each day, the students stood behind their chairs and we sang a verse a cappella of “O Come O Come Emmanuel.” I can still hear it in my head, the acoustics were fantastic! It sounded like angels.



Frederick Bob

choir president, Our Mother of Mercy Parish, Fort Worth

YOUNG TALENT

I've been singing in choirs since I was 9. The choir director at my childhood church in Lafayette, Louisiana, asked me to join the choir. He thought I was in the eighth grade because I was 5' 7", but I was actually in sixth grade.

I joined Our Mother of Mercy in October 2006. I was in the pews for maybe a month, and they said, "You need to join the choir, brother."

MUSIC AT MASS

A lot of people say, "I like to come here because of the music." It's not like a concert. The music only adds to what the Word of God is saying. We make sure the music is always surrounding the Gospel. Whatever Father says, the music says, so you hear it throughout the Mass.

Music tends to bring the Holy Spirit in. If you come to church, we can uplift somebody.

SETTING THE CHRISTMAS SCENE

"O Holy Night" is my favorite Christmas hymn. It sets the scene. No one had room for Him anywhere else. He's in a manger, but it's a beautiful thing that life has come and the night has got to be holy.

He's coming to save the world. Everybody doesn't know that right at the beginning. The song brings that out.

I do like "Silent Night" as well. "All is calm" shows Jesus comes and He brings peace. "All is bright" shows Jesus is light. Until you realize that He is the light of the world, you're going to miss it. If you truly believe that Jesus Christ has come to save and He's the light of the world — it's just beautiful and powerful.

Listen to the words; they go with the melody.

A GIFT TO SHARE

Singing in the choir is a gift. And if you come to church for the salvation of your soul, you will help somebody else along the way.

To be in church and get the Word that is delivered that day — you receive what you need, then you bring it out. Come, receive it, and share it. I'm not asking you to preach, but share it.

A lot of people have left the Church for various reasons. Our job is to get them to come back to be one, because we're one body. We are many people, but we are still one body of Christ.

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Frederick Bob at Our Mother of Mercy Parish in Fort Worth. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)



David Gilmore

director of music, St. John Paul II University Parish, Denton

MUSIC, MAJOR

I have a bachelor's in music education, a master's in conducting and vocal performance from Northeast Louisiana University, and doctoral studies in choral music from Arizona State. I taught middle school, high school, and college for 20 years. But I have directed church choirs since I was 17 in Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches.

I have been exclusively in Catholic churches, converting in 1993.

I went into the business world 30 years ago but have continued in church music, serving on the staff of St. Mark

Parish in Argyle, St. Rita Parish in Dallas, and volunteering as a cantor at Immaculate Conception Parish in Denton and as a cantor and handbell director at St. Philip Parish in Flower Mound.

I have been music director at St. John Paul II since 2019 where I plan and execute the Saturday vigil and Sunday morning Masses, direct the choir, and supervise the organist, Saturday cantor, and eight scholarship students.

MUSIC OUTLASTS THE SEASON

We have such an extensive catalogue of Christmas music.

I would go back to Palestrina and Victoria as the pinnacle of polyphony that set the standard. They wrote such magnificent settings of Christmas music that all the composers that followed tried to emulate them. Victoria's "O Magnum Mysterium" is just perfection.

CHERISHED CAROL

I would have to say that my favorite carol is "Of the Father's Love Begotten." It is built on chant and the text encompasses the entirety of the Christmas story all the way to the angel chorus.

Odd choice, I know, but we sing a lot of chant-based music at JPII. This particular hymn starts out really paraphrasing *John 1* in a way. And the second line is strengthening the Nicene Creed. All in all, it's just the perfect text.

ALL THE TUNES

As you can probably tell, I am very rooted in ancient music and just tend to think in terms of older hymns.

Having said that, I was part of a professional caroling group a few years ago and have gotten one of my scholarship students involved. I learned all of the music, even the mall music. So I do like lots of it.



Dr. Brandy Cope teaches music to a Pre-K3 class at St. Martin de Porres Catholic School in Prosper. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)





David Gilmore directs the choir and accompanying musicians at a concert at St. John Paul II University Parish in Denton on Nov. 23. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

Dr. Brandy Cope

music teacher, St. Martin de Porres Catholic School, Prosper

MANY INSTRUMENTS, ONE VOICE

I have a master of music and doctor of musical arts from University of Nebraska-Lincoln. During my education I studied the oboe, voice, and piano. I regularly play piano, guitar, ukulele, and recorder during my school days. I also occasionally play English horn and bagpipes.

I have worked professionally in performance and teaching, from private lessons to college classes.

SIMPLE AND MEANINGFUL

“In the Bleak Midwinter” is one of my favorite Christmas hymns. The poem was written by Christina Rossetti around 1872. The primary musical settings of the poem are by Gustav Holst and Harold Drake.

I enjoy the Holst musical setting because it is more friendly towards congregational singing. I would describe the

melody as austere and contemplative. The simpleness of the music provides space to reflect on the meaning of the text. I love that Holst’s setting makes participating in such a beautiful work more accessible to a congregation.

HIS HUMILITY

I am always struck by the second verse of the hymn. This verse speaks of both the power and humility of Christ. A God whose power is so great that “heaven cannot hold Him nor Earth sustain” yet He is willing to be born in a stable on our behalf.

“Our God, heaven cannot hold Him,
nor Earth sustain;
heaven and Earth shall flee away
when He comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter
a stable place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.”

FAMILY TRADITION

Every year my family enjoys decorating Christmas cookies together and listening to Tchaikovsky’s “Nutcracker Suite.” I was in ballet as a child and the music of the ballet was always very special to me and today it brings back so many fond memories.

MARY’S LULLABY

Considering Jesus as a baby makes His humanity seem so much more real. So many Christmas hymns have lullaby-like qualities such as smooth, flowing melodies and gentle accompaniments.

Christmas hymns often evoke images of a mother singing to her child. These songs paint a picture of Mary being a mother to a very real child, to whom she likely sang as she held Him. Many people treat the Nativity story like a fairytale, but the idea of mother and child connects to our humanity. 🇺🇸



RACING TOWARD HEAVEN

Global track and field star prepares for confirmation at St. Mark

By Mary Rampellini

Winning is business as usual for Cooper Lutkenhaus, who ranks as one of the fastest men in the world.

But it was actually in defeat that the member of St. Mark Parish in Argyle was catapulted to track and field's center stage this past August.

The scene was Oregon's storied Hayward Field, and the occasion was the USA Track and Field Championships. Lutkenhaus turned on the jets for a close second place finish in the men's 800-meter final, his time of 1:42.27 the sixth-fastest in the world for 2025.

The result set off a flurry of events. Lutkenhaus qualified for the World Championships in Tokyo. He picked up an agent, turned pro, and signed with Nike. It's a likely story for an athlete with his elite level of talent — but the twist is that Lutkenhaus is just 16.

As such, he is the youngest man to ever run for Team USA in a world championship, which was in September. As part of his journey to that point, Lutkenhaus won two state titles and five national titles, plus set multiple records that include the world standard for 18 and under runners in the 800.

In the midst of all the fresh fame, however, remains a young man focused

◀ Cooper Lutkenhaus, center, with his brothers, Andrew, left, and George along with his parents George and Tricia are shown at St. Mark Parish in Argyle. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

on his faith. Lutkenhaus currently is a confirmation candidate preparing to receive the sacrament in May.

FAITH OVER FAME

St. Mark is the home parish for his parents, George and Tricia, who both have leadership roles at Northwest ISD in Justin, and his brothers, George Jr., a former Division 2 swimmer, and Andrew, a Division 1 runner.

Cooper, a junior at Northwest High School, is fully “plugged in” to the confirmation program, said Charlie Berneche, coordinator of youth ministry at St. Mark.

“So many kids, if they were to be given the world, there’s that very easy temptation to be like, ‘I don’t need the faith,’” Berneche said. “But no, he’s very much plugged in. That’s probably the biggest thing: his poise, maturity, and his humility in the program. Humility. I’ve seen a lot of that from him.

“Getting to meet him and his parents, it’s definitely evident that the faith is a foundation for them, for that whole household. [As Scripture says, you’ll know the tree by its fruits.] The fact that he’s displaying all these very admirable qualities ties the fruits into the health of the tree, the foundation of the faith.”

FAMILY TIES

Cooper’s choice of confirmation name represents some of his family history.

“I chose St. Christopher as my saint for a couple reasons,” he said. “My grandmother has given my brothers and me a St. Christopher medallion for our cars when we all got our driver license to keep us safe when we travel. I thought it would be appropriate to use him as my confirmation saint, knowing all the travel that I have ahead of me the next several

years. In a way, my grandmother selected him for me without even knowing it.”

Lutkenhaus will have two sponsors, aunts Laura Fisher and Donna Neu.

“They stood with my brothers during their confirmations,” he said, “so I asked that they both be a part of my confirmation.”

He also will have the encouragement of his brothers.

“It’s hard to believe he is already preparing for confirmation,” said George Jr. “I remember walking him down to the front of church to get his children’s bulletin at the end of Mass. It’s clear he has improved in his faith and knows it’s his turn to take control of what he puts into and gets out of the Church.”

A NATURAL TALENT

Cooper is indeed integrating his Catholic values into this new phase of his life, which includes participation in the Nike Elite Program.

“I think the biggest thing about my faith that I try to bring to the group is to ‘just be a good guy,’” he said. “Learning how to follow the ways of Christ and ‘be a good guy.’ Take care of others, help others when you can, and be someone that others can depend on.”

On the track, Cooper is a natural, according to George Sr.

“Physically, he has been gifted with that rare combination of speed and endurance that suits the 800 meters so well,” George said. “More important than anything, though, is his ability to handle pressure situations with his standard, ‘It’s just running’ attitude. He does a good job of not overcomplicating situations and controls himself well in big moments. Pretty rare for a 16-year-old.”

So rare, the family found itself in unprecedented territory after the national

finals in August.

“We leaned significantly on our faith over the summer,” Tricia said. “Things and decisions came fast and furious in a short amount of time. It always came back to faith in God and faith in family to make decisions.

“Cooper is fortunate to be surrounded by a large family and a school that looks out for him. We always tell people we never turn down free advice and sometimes the best place to get that is to just look up!”

STAYING THE COURSE

Andrew has been impressed with his younger brother in many areas.

“Few 16-year-olds could handle the pressure that he has gone through,” he said. “It comes with ups and downs. I think he has the perfect mentality and really looks forward to big moments. He is fortunate to be surrounded by lots of people who just want to see him succeed and be the best person he can be — no matter what the clock or race results say. When it’s all said and done, running is something he gets to do, but it’s not who he is.”

As for Cooper, he said training offers quiet moments for spiritual reflection at times. His favorite Bible verse is *Philippians 4:13*. It reads, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

“It’s a pretty standard verse that you see throughout the athletic world, of course,” he said. “I would never ask for God to bring me a victory. He has enough to worry about. I do ask that He gives me strength and courage as I step out onto the track. Sometimes those moments can be overwhelming. I just appreciate the gift He has given me and hope I can use it to the best of my ability.” 🇺🇸



His Transformative Love

By Christina Benavides

Faith is precisely this: not the colossal effort of reaching a supernatural God, but rather, welcoming Jesus into our lives, the discovery that God's face is not distant from our hearts. – Pope Leo XIV

Love's transformative power shines brightly in the Resendiz family of St. William Parish in Montague, where Adriana and Guadalupe share with their five children a boundless love of God first encountered through their matrimonial union and deepened by His continued presence in their lives.

HOW THEY MET: Orphaned at a young age, Guadalupe Resendiz moved to Texas at the age of 10 to live with his sister. In high school, he excelled in

weightlifting, track, and football. When a knee injury prevented him from joining the Marines after graduation, he pursued a career in boxing, which culminated in a Golden Gloves championship in Fort Worth in 1999. Not long after the win, Guadalupe met Adriana, who had recently arrived in Nocona from her native Guanajuato, Mexico.

With their relationship established, "I found such a peace that everything about sports, about boxing, all that, was left behind," Guadalupe said.

A NEW FOUNDATION FOR FAITH:

The two cradle Catholics prepared for marriage at the nearby parish, St. William. They credit the marriage preparation at the parish as the catalyst for their shift from a passive faith to active participation in the church community.

Adriana said, "From when we got married onward, we started to get more involved here in the church."

BLESSED TO WED: Guadalupe and Adriana were married at St. William on Aug. 14, 2004.

"When we look back, we see that God has always been there, helping us, and even now, thanks to God, I feel very blessed," Guadalupe said.

WHOLE AGAIN: Reflecting back, Guadalupe considered how he had always been "looking for something" since his youth. For a while, sports helped fill the hole: "I thought I could expel that need that I felt." However, "when I had my own family, and when I encountered God, grew closer to Him, I began to know His love. I finally felt fulfilled as I

◀ Adriana and Guadalupe Resendiz of St. William Parish in Montague with their children, Angel Gabriel, Karen Guadalupe, Alexis Emmanuel, Dulce Maria, and Nicole Adriana. (NTC/Thomas Otto)

experienced love, the true and pure love of God.”

AN ENCUESTRO: About two years into their marriage, the couple attended an *Encuentro* retreat.

“It was there where we had an encounter with God, an encounter with Jesus, where from then on we fell in love as a couple, I feel that we also fell in love with God.”

After the retreat, Guadalupe “found peace” and his understanding of service transformed. “Everything has been different and now we serve God, we serve God with love, with desire, with enthusiasm.”

COMMUNITY OF FAITH: Although the Resendiz family resides in Nocona, which has its own Catholic church, they travel to St. William, the nearest parish offering Mass in Spanish.

According to the U.S. Census, Montague has fewer than 240 residents, while Nocona has nearly 3,000.

While the numbers may read as quite small, the community’s love for the faith is immense.

With the posadas, “we celebrate and visit each other’s homes,” Adriana shared. “We also pray the Rosary to the Virgin the evening before December 12. As a community, we unite, and it is very beautiful.”

The close-knit parish creates opportunities for togetherness. Often, after a Rosary, they will share a *chocolatitio* or other treats.

LOVE TO SHARE: “We fell very much in love with the ways of God and from there, we have tried to instill in our children the graces that come from God and the Holy Rosary,” Adriana said.

Praying the Rosary is a daily practice for the family. As their children

grew, they began to take more active roles in leading the prayers.

The Resendiz family also places great value on sharing their faith through service. “We are in love with God and that is what we are instilling in our children,” Guadalupe said.

As well as teaching catechism, confirmation, and adult formation classes, Guadalupe and Adriana have served at the parish as acolytes, Eucharistic ministers, and organizers of Hispanic traditions. They emphasize to their children that “for God, even in the smallest ways, there is service to Him.”

Each child actively serves at the parish, from helping with money collection or teaching catechism to serving as altar servers, collecting the offering, or lighting candles.

GIFTS OF GOD: It had always been in their plan to have four children. However, “it was God, our Lord, who said, ‘Four? No, it will be five,’” Adriana said. “He has the last word.”

Their children’s names reflect their devotion: the eldest named after the Angel Gabriel; the second, Karen Guadalupe, after Our Lady of Guadalupe like her father; the third, Alexis Emmanuel – “God is with us”; the fourth, Dulce Maria, after the Blessed Mother; and the fifth, Nicole Adriana, a gift from God, named after Guadalupe’s mother, Nicole, and Adriana’s mother, Nicolasa.

Their children’s names provided a starting point for the two to teach their children about the lives of the saints.

GO FORWARD: Love and activity in the faith “is very easy to cool off as it is very easy to stay home,” Adriana said. “But we have to keep going forward to be in love with Christ, and we must not let the love be extinguished.” ✚

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

To Report Misconduct:

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

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

To Report Abuse or Suspected Abuse:

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

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

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



An Abundant Fatherhood

NTC/Juan Guajardo

HE IS: Father Linh Nguyen, pastor of St. George Church in Fort Worth. He has also served as parochial vicar of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller.

NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR: Fr. Nguyen was baptized at St. George Church and was raised at Christ the King Church, about three blocks away.

He explained, “My childhood home is a couple blocks down from here. This is where the vocation began. All that nurturing, that fostering from the local community, from my family and extended family got me to this point. Being back here to serve and work with the people who still live in this area, and inspire the next generation of vocations, is a great honor and privilege.”

GROWING UP: Weeknights they prayed as a family, and his parents dedicated Sundays to serving God, bringing their three children to choir practice at 8:30 a.m., Mass, faith formation, and Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement, lasting through late afternoon.

The long Sundays weren’t an obligation, he said. “I loved every moment about it because that was where I found the most joy.”

FATHER OF MANY: As a child, Fr. Nguyen told his cousin he wanted 50

kids. His vocation, he said, was God’s way of answering that desire.

ORDAINED: May 22, 2021, at St. Patrick Cathedral with five other men, the largest ordination class in the history of the diocese.

POWER OF PRAYER: Celebrating Mass, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, and keeping a holy hour helps him “feed and nourish my day; stop and breathe and center myself again; orient my eyes back to Christ.”

JOYS OF PRIESTHOOD: Fr. Nguyen appreciates being with people through all the different moments of life.

One day stands out in particular. In the morning, he baptized the first grandson of a family he knew well, and in the afternoon, he celebrated the funeral of his beloved grandmother.

“To welcome a new child into new life in Christ, then to come home and bury my grandmother — to celebrate and have that connection to the beginning of life and faith and the ending moments of faith — is beautiful,” he remembered.

SCHOOL DAYS: Fr. Nguyen can often be found in the halls and classrooms of St. George Catholic School. “Wherever

I can squeeze in more time, it’s always the best,” he said.

He hopes the students see “the love of Christ radiate in the people who care for them, and God cares for them much more than we do. They can turn to God in any moment, good or bad.”

TRUSTWORTHY TRIO: Fr. Nguyen has three favorite saints: Saint Peter, for overcoming weakness and doubt with faith and perseverance; Saint John Paul II, for bringing joy and humanity into his priesthood; and Saint Teresa of Calcutta, “who reminds me that theology has to have a face, has to have a person that we serve and minister to.”

HEALING WOUNDS: One of his favorite places to serve the faithful is in the confessional, for many reasons.

“To be in the confessional in the person of Christ; to be able to absolve someone of their sins; to help them continue to grow and to receive the graces they need in their moments of weakness and frailty and brokenness; to know that God loves them unconditionally; to help them mend that relationship and continue to strive for holiness, for virtue; to continue to fight and overcome those temptations and sin in their life, is still tremendous to me.” 🇺🇸

Offering Mercy

NTC/Juan Guajardo

I've been a priest now for more than seven years, and it has been an amazing journey!

I'd like to share some of my experiences as a priest as it can paint a picture of the Catholic priesthood and may inspire someone discerning this vocation.

For the first five years of priesthood, I was the chaplain at Nolan Catholic High School while helping with vocations in our diocese.

In that time, I really enjoyed helping our youth discover the love of Jesus Christ, and I did that through many different ways. I would step into theology classes, teach about Christ, and answer their questions about the faith.

We had discipleship groups of boys and girls where we would meet once a week to eat breakfast, pray, talk about life, and read over the upcoming Gospel for Mass. We would discuss what a vocation is and how we discern the vocation God desires for us.

Also, I enjoyed offering the mercy of Jesus Christ in the sacrament of reconciliation all day on first Fridays and whenever they saw my office door open throughout the week. There were days I must have heard more than 100 confessions. Often, I would be wiped out by the end of the school day, but it was fulfilling to know I was an instrument for offering God's

mercy to His People.

Other great moments in the priesthood have been the ability to help out at most of our parishes in our diocese.

Because I did not have a parish, I was asked to go to different parishes each weekend. I met so many wonderful people across our diocese, people who loved priests and taught me a lot about the rich history of their parish community.

I was also blessed to go to Ghana, Africa, with Bishop Olson and see the Catholic faith in Africa. There, we met the archbishop of Kumasi as well as families of the Ghanaian priests serving in our diocese. We heard the stories of how Catholicism came to their country, as well as their joys, aspirations, and struggles. It was quite moving to be at a large Mass where everyone in the congregation was singing with great enthusiasm.

Also, just a couple of years ago, I was sent to St. Joseph Seminary College in Louisiana where all of our seminarians go for their bachelor's degree in philosophy before they go off to get a master's degree in theology.

I have enjoyed being at the seminary as a formator, helping these men in their discernment of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. I enjoy teaching seminars on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, chastity,

and the virtues.

I enjoy accompanying these men as they all come from unique backgrounds and experiences. It is inspiring to see how God is still calling men to labor in His vineyard, to see how He has worked in these men's lives, and continues to work, in very real ways.

I am currently the vice-rector, and it is fulfilling to know that my work is having an impact on the Church in the United States.

There have been countless experiences as a priest that have been deeply moving: bringing the sacraments to the dying in their last moments; comforting those who have just lost a loved one; baptizing babies, etc.

I am deeply grateful to God for this vocation, for calling me to this life. There has never been a dull moment, an existential or midlife crisis, because I know Jesus Christ and that He has called me to this.

Although I am imperfect and sinful, Jesus Christ still desires to use me as His instrument for His mercy. And because I am imperfect and sinful, I have encountered His mercy in a real way, inspiring me to go out and share with others what I have received! 🇺🇸



Fr. Maurice Moon

Father Maurice Moon is the director of collegian seminarian formation and on the formation faculty at St. Joseph Seminary College.

The Power of Yes

Yes. This is often the answer we want to hear. Especially to questions like: Will you marry me? Or can I have a raise? Or can I get an extension on the due date for this assignment? Or did I pass all my classes? Or are my medical scans clear?

We love to hear yes! But do we have this same excitement when something is asked of us? Can you help me move to a new apartment this weekend? Or do you want to teach in the religious education program this year? Or can I borrow \$500?

Offering a yes can be tricky. It is a willingness to offer a part of ourselves as a gift to someone else. It is also an opening up to possible discomforts, challenges, unknowns, and fears. Alongside these feelings are positive possibilities. A yes can bring blessings, new opportunities, grace, and mercy, as well as deeper encounters with friends, family, and God.

It is fair to say many of these same emotions and thoughts were coursing through Mary as the angel appeared to her with the news of her impending pregnancy.

Set aside for a moment that an other-worldly being was appearing to her and talking to her. She was going to be pregnant? As a virgin? Before completing the marriage rite?

What was Joseph going to say? What about her parents and the community? Why would God ask this of her? The questions must have been a mile a minute all while an angel from heaven was glowing and floating and waiting for her answer. (At least that is how I see the scene in my head.)



Jeff Hedglen

I imagine the grace of God was heavy in this moment, and, like a flood, it washed away all her questions and allowed her trust in God and her abiding faith to give her clear vision to simply say, “Let it be done to me according to Your will.”

Mary’s “*fiat*” (“Let it be done”) is an exemplary model for how to say yes to all that God brings our way. And just like Mary’s yes, the full ramifications and implications of the assent were not known at the time of its telling.

Think of some of the big yeses we might say in our life. The yes to college or career. Maybe we changed our major a few times, or have changed jobs over the years, or never finished college, or have been laid off. What seemed like a straightforward yes can turn into a topsy-turvy, wild ride.

Or the “I do” to our spouse that set in motion countless other joys and struggles, some expected, other never imagined. A professor once told me of

a time when he was up at 3 a.m. with a colicky baby. He was lamenting to God how tired he was and how soon the workday was going to start. He glanced at the wall and saw his wedding picture and felt God say to him, “When you said ‘Yes’ then, you were saying ‘Yes’ to now.”

Or the yes to caring for aging parents, which brings many super emotionally charged moments; some levels of vulnerability that never crossed our minds; and some glimpses into our parents’ lives that, as children, we could never have imagined.

As we bask in the wonder of Christmas with the New Year upon us, it seems like a good time to ask ourselves the question with the most important “Yes” of all: Have we ever said “Yes” to God in the total-surrender “My life is yours, do with me what you will” way of Mary?

The love of God incarnate in Jesus is the physical manifestation of the question the Father has been asking every person He has ever created. Today, in this moment He is asking you: Will you be mine? ✚

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

Christmas and the Love of God

The Christmas season is finally here. Without question, my favorite time of year. There is something tangibly different about Christmas, all of which originates in the Incarnation.

Referred to by many as the “magic” of Christmas, the distinct feel of this time of year revolves around what the *Catechism* calls “The Christmas Mystery.” In the Nativity of our Lord, within the context of the humble poverty He undertook, heaven’s glory is made manifest (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 525*). At the heart of the mystery resides the “marvelous exchange” where the “Creator has become man, born of the Virgin,” and we “have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled Himself to share our humanity” (*CCC 526*).

The mystery that is Christmas speaks to the purposes of the Incarnation, most notably Christ enabling us to partake in His divine nature (*CCC 460*). Of course, this is inseparable from Him showing us the extent of God’s love (*CCC 458*), for in this “the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him” (*1 John 4:9*).

St. Paul asks the perfect rhetorical question then, when he asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (*Romans 8:35*). For the love of God is

unconditional, a love through which He chooses to bind Himself to us, a love beautifully exhibited in His Nativity.

As examples of trials we experience in life, St. Paul mentions a few circumstances or occasions, one of them being the “sword.” Lord willing, few, if any, of us will experience the “sword” as a form of trial in the literal sense. More broadly applied however, the “sword” can be taken figuratively to mean any form of injury, coercion, or manipulation. In this sense, many of us have been tested by the “sword.”



Jason Whitehead

St. Paul, however, reminds us that, despite the “sword” and the suffering we endure as a result, we are not forgotten and cannot be separated from the love of God, but rather, “are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (*Romans 8:37*). Paul continues by stating the fact that “neither death, nor life... nor things to come... nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God” (*Romans 8:38*).

His comment regarding “life” is interesting, for he is referring to the love of life and how a child of God should not fear to do so. How often, as Catholics, have we had the impression that the suffering of the “sword” should be our norm, meant to be endured regardless, denying ourselves escape from the “sword,” even to the point of viewing this life as being

meant for suffering rather than to be enjoyed to the full?

Of course, we are not to be worldly. However, we are called upon to love the life we are given and possess it with all abundance granted and designed by God. We should enjoy His gift of life. By direct connection, we should enjoy its author, God.

How can we not enjoy One who loves us so? How can we not love One who “intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (*Romans 8:26*)? Of course, the sigh Paul is talking about here is the sigh one gives when one is in such deep love and admiration of another that they are at a loss for words. The Spirit, the very breath of God, the breath of love itself, brings us into the midst of this divine love, into divine love in action. This is how Christ is formed in us. Herein is where the mystery of Christmas is fulfilled in us (*CCC 526*).

How can we not love in return? How can we not enjoy Him? How can we not find freedom in Him, His love, and His gifts? How can we not have a Merry Christmas? 🇺🇸

Jason Whitehead is the diocesan director of evangelization and catechesis. He entered the Church in 2012 and subsequently received a master’s degree in theology.



EL REGALO DE LA MÚSICA

Dos cantantes reflexionan sobre la belleza de la música navideña

Por Christina Benavides

Al presentar el VI Concierto con los Pobres realizado el 6 de diciembre, el Papa León XIV reflexionó sobre el inmenso poder de la música y la describió “como un puente que nos conduce a Dios. Es capaz de transmitir sentimientos, emociones hasta los movimientos más profundos del alma, elevándolas, transformándolas en una ideal escalinata que une la tierra con el cielo”, manifestó el Pontífice.

“¡Sí, la música puede elevar nuestros corazones! No porque nos distraiga de nuestras miserias, porque nos aturda o nos haga olvidar los problemas o las situaciones difíciles de la vida, sino

porque nos recuerda que no somos sólo esto: somos mucho más que nuestros problemas y nuestros apuros, ¡somos hijos amados de Dios!”, agregó.

La temporada del Adviento y la Navidad son momentos en los que el don precioso de la música se hace especialmente presente, pues los himnos que celebran el nacimiento de Jesús resuenan en nuestros corazones y hogares.

Dos cantantes, bendecidas por Dios con gran talento y el deseo amoroso de compartirlo, reflexionan en este artículo sobre la belleza de las melodías de la Navidad y la gracia que aportan a la comunidad; y cómo ayudan a los fieles católicos a prepararse para recibir al recién nacido Jesús, nuestro Señor.

Annette Calderón canta durante la Misa de dedicación de la Parroquia de Sacred Heart en Comanche el 24 de febrero de 2024. (foto del archivo de NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Annette Calderón de la Parroquia de St. Stephen, Weatherford

INICIOS MUSICALES

Mi amor por la música comenzó cuando era apenas una niña pequeña y mi abuelo me enseñaba las letras y melodías de sus canciones favoritas: las rancheras de antaño. Él me enseñaba y juntos cantábamos. ... Luego, en séptimo grado, empecé a aprender guitarra porque en la iglesia el coro en español ofrecía clases. Así, que me animé a aprender a tocar la guitarra y al instante me enamoré de ella.

LA BELLEZA DE LA NATIVIDAD

Siempre me ha encantado “Los Peces en el Río” desde que mi abuelo me lo enseñó. La imagen con la que empieza la canción — la Virgen peinando su cabello — para mí es como asomarse detrás de una cortina y verla allí, bañada por la luz del sol de una manera tan hermosa y ella está radiante.

Recuerdo que me despertaba una curiosidad sobre los peces y cómo, de toda la creación, incluso los animales, sabían que Dios había entrado en el mundo. Tenían esa certeza, esa conciencia de que algo había cambiado y ese saber intensifica la emoción al contemplar la Natividad y el nacimiento del Señor. El mundo está en un momento callado, pero para los corazones es un momento de alegría y paz.

UN MOMENTO DE PAZ

Donde crecí, participaba en el Acostado del Niño, así que, en la Nochebuena, teníamos a los padrinos al frente de la iglesia, acunando al

Niño Jesús mientras cantábamos el cántico “Noche de Paz”.

Recuerdo haberlo cantado por primera vez en inglés para nuestra parroquia. Lo cantábamos luego bilingüe para la comunidad hispana y les encantaba. Los feligreses se acercaban para preguntarme sobre la canción y su significado y yo les explicaba la letra y la emoción que transmite. Reflexionábamos sobre la importancia del silencio, especialmente durante el Adviento cuando Dios entra en el mundo. Él no entró de una manera grande y extravagante, sino que se hizo un niño, en la forma más sencilla. Pudo haber venido de cualquier otra manera, ¿verdad? Pero en cambio, eligió hacerlo así.

LA HUMILDAD DEL NACIMIENTO

Escuchar “Noche de Paz” me trae tantos recuerdos de cómo mi comunidad parroquial se reunía para alabar a Jesús, con esa reverencia y sencillez que nace al saber que Cristo está aquí.

La belleza de su letra hace que la Encarnación se sienta más cercana a nuestro corazón y nos invita a contemplar la humildad de Jesús al venir al mundo, de Dios haciéndose hombre y también la paz que trae su nacimiento. Es algo sencillo. Es humilde. Y uno piensa: ¿por qué no podemos hacer lo mismo en nuestro corazón? ¿En nuestra vida? Siento que es algo alcanzable.

Continúa en la Página 54

AMBIENTE SEGURO

Para Reportar Mala Conducta Sexual:

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

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

Para Reportar Abuso o si Sospecha de Abuso:

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

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

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



De la Página 53

Carolina Imperial, cantante y compositora local

INICIOS MUSICALES

Soy una vocalista de toda la vida y mi formación se ha forjado tanto en el estudio formal como en la experiencia viva de la fe.

Mi voz también ha crecido gracias a la instrucción privada y al servicio como salmista en la Diócesis de Dallas y la Diócesis de Fort Worth. Cantar en la Santa Misa fue lo que me inspiró a inscribirme en el OCIA, lo que finalmente me llevó a recibir el Bautismo a los 21 años.

INSPIRADA POR LA MÚSICA

La música navideña despierta ternura y me hace desear el poder hacer más cada año para servir.

También inspira humildad. Hoy en día, vemos las decoraciones más extravagantes y espectáculos de luces, pero en realidad, un lugar cálido y seguro donde compartir una comida con tus seres queridos y orar es todo lo que necesitamos. Jesús, el Rey de Reyes, nació en un pesebre.

Eso me recuerda que no necesitamos todo lo que la sociedad intenta vendernos ni desviarnos del verdadero sentido de esta temporada tan especial.

EL REGALO DE LA MÚSICA

La música nos une como comunidad. Creamos cultura y tradiciones basadas en nuestros villancicos familiares favoritos y nunca habrá suficiente música para alabar a Jesús. Por ejemplo, no es un himno, pero existe una canción venezolana titulada “Mi Burrito Sabanero”, compuesto por Hugo Blanco. Nunca he tenido una Navidad sin escucharla y ahora, ya adulta, me llena de nostalgia porque siento la misma alegría que sentía cuando era niña.

Los villancicos antiguos como éste llevan años de historia y encuentro sus letras más profundas y reflexivas. En mi humilde opinión, la música navideña actual está demasiado enfocada en

el consumismo y en “regalos y juguetes”, desviando la atención del verdadero significado de la Navidad.

El hogar es la primera iglesia de tu familia.

Ustedes son los líderes y tienen la responsabilidad de enseñar a los jóvenes el verdadero sentido de la temporada, junto con la música que prepara nuestros corazones para el nacimiento de Jesús. El Adviento es un tiempo tan importante: encontramos gozo y paz en la espera, mientras el mundo nos empuja a seguir corriendo. Es un recordatorio para ser pacientes, obedientes y confiados, como lo hizo nuestra Santísima Madre María. ✝



Carolina Imperial frente a la Parroquia de Immaculate Heart of Mary en Fort Worth en 2024. (foto del archivo de NTC/Juan Guajardo)

PROFUNDA DEVOCIÓN Y ALEGRÍA PARA HONRAR A NUESTRA SEÑORA

Por Christina Benavides
Fotografía de Juan Guajardo

Las festividades en honor a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la parroquia que lleva su nombre en Fort Worth se iniciaron con las Misas de vigilia, los matachines y linda convivencia de la comunidad.

Todos los fieles fueron obsequiados después de la Misa celebrada por Fraile Juan Miguel Subiza, OFM Cap, con tacos, panes y postres que disfrutaron juntos en honor a la fiesta de la Santísima Virgen.

El Fray Subiza destacó en su homilía la ternura de Nuestra Señora y cómo Ella está disponible siempre para escuchar nuestras súplicas de misericordia y perdón, guiándonos hacia su Hijo para conseguir la salvación. ✨



PARA VER MÁS
FOTOS ESCANEE
EL CÓDIGO QR



formando discípulos

El Instituto San Junípero Serra prepara 46 corazones para evangelizar

Por Karla Silva

“**H**e comprendido que no puedo dar lo que no tengo, quiero conocer más mi fe y llenarme cuanto más pueda de Dios para poder llevarlo a todos los lugares donde Él me permita caminar”, expresó Joel Rojo, miembro del ministerio de los Cursillos de Cristiandad y uno de los 46 estudiantes que recibieron el 27 de septiembre su certificado por haber completado el nivel I del Instituto San Junípero Serra de la Diócesis de Fort Worth.

El Diácono Rigoberto Leyva, director de la Oficina del Ministerio Hispano de la Diócesis, explicó los inicios del instituto: “El programa de San Junípero Serra es originario de California y llegó a la Diócesis de Fort Worth hace aproximadamente 15 años para responder a la necesidad y el interés del obispo de catequizar a su pueblo. Por lo tanto, es un programa catequético para adultos que se enfoca en la enseñanza del *Catecismo* y de la historia de la Iglesia”.

El programa consta de tres niveles y se ofrece en inglés y en español. Cada nivel está compuesto de diferentes cursos con una duración de 6 semanas cada uno. Las clases son una vez a la semana y duran aproximadamente dos horas.

Al final de cada nivel los estudiantes tienen que pasar un examen de libro abierto sobre el material estudiado en los cursos para poder obtener su certificación,

explicó Victoria Ramón, que tiene una maestría en Catequesis y Evangelización de Franciscan University de Steubenville; y que lleva enseñando en el instituto desde el 2020.

El nivel I toma 24 semanas de estudio, durante las cuales los estudiantes completan cuatro cursos sobre el *Catecismo*.

El nivel II comprende 36 semanas, en las cuales se enseñan seis cursos enfocados en la historia de la Iglesia.

El nivel III, que es el último, se centra en diversas áreas de especialización.

“Hay cinco concentraciones que los estudiantes pueden elegir: Sagradas Escrituras, OCIA, Pastoral Juvenil, Matrimonio y Concentración Familiar. La duración de este nivel depende de la concentración que el estudiante elija”, detalla Ramón.

El Diácono Leyva señala que, aunque los cursos del instituto se han ofrecido en la Diócesis desde hace muchos años, anteriormente muchas personas no concluían los niveles o no llegaban a inscribirse.

Sin embargo, desde hace un año se ha puesto un mayor énfasis en motivar a los miembros de la comunidad a formarse, especialmente a los voluntarios, catequistas, líderes y cualquier persona que desee enseñar temas dentro de los apostolados y ministerios.

“Cada apostolado tiene su propia enseñanza aprobada por la Iglesia, la cual



Victoria Ramón entrega a Raúl Gerda un certificado de finalización el 27 de septiembre.

NTC/Matt Redden

lleva a sus miembros a tener un encuentro con Cristo, que es esencial. Pero de igual importancia es formarse en la enseñanza del *Catecismo* y profundizar en nuestra fe para alcanzar madurez espiritual”, enfatizó el Diácono.

Ramón comparte que ser testigo del crecimiento de los estudiantes es maravilloso, pues “muchas veces se inscriben por recomendación de sus ministerios, pero al escuchar la clase se dan cuenta de que hay tanto que aprender sobre nuestra fe. Dios no cesa de revelar el misterio de nuestra fe, de su amor y



Un grupo de 46 estudiantes recibieron certificados por haber completado el Nivel I del Instituto San Junípero Serra. (NTC/Matt Redden)

misericordia por medio de las enseñanzas de la Iglesia”.

Por su parte, Rojo añadió que recuerda cómo cada clase a la que asistía lo llevaba a experimentar un cambio en su vida. Siente que no solamente creció en su vida de fe, sino también en su papel como esposo, padre e hijo. A menudo, después de las sesiones, pedía al Señor la gracia de poder usar lo aprendido para llevarlo al prójimo y “ser sal y luz de la tierra, como Él nos pide”.

“Y ésa es verdaderamente la meta”, destacó Ramón. “San Pedro nos dice en una de sus cartas que siempre debemos estar dispuestos a dar testimonio de nuestra fe. Este instituto nos prepara para hacer exactamente eso y para poder distinguir entre meras

opiniones o lo que vemos en las redes sociales, y la verdad.

“No sólo para compartirlo con nuestra familia, que es nuestra Iglesia doméstica, sino también porque como cristianos católicos se nos pide realizar obras de misericordia espiritual, y una de ellas es enseñar nuestra fe. Y qué mejor que hacerlo preparándonos bien y en nuestra propia parroquia”, Ramón añade.

El Diácono Leyva y la Profesora Ramón opinaron que el Instituto es muy accesible, ya que se ofrecen cursos presenciales y en línea, lo que hace que nadie se sienta limitado por la distancia.

“Cada curso tiene un costo de \$35 y se ofrece a nivel diocesano, pero los cursos pueden impartirse también



El Padre Pedro Martínez sonríe complacido mientras los estudiantes reciben su certificados de finalización. (NTC/Matt Redden)

en las parroquias, si así se solicita. Se puede enviar a un maestro o que algún feligrés reciba la necesaria formación para que lleve el Instituto a su comunidad. Hay varias opciones, lo importante es pedirlo”, ambos señalan.

“Ésta es una prueba

más de que nuestra diócesis cuenta con las herramientas necesarias para formar y educar a su comunidad. No duden en dar el paso para estar bien preparados en la misión que se nos ha encomendado”, concluye el Diácono Leyva. 🇺🇸

SU AMOR transformador

El infinito amor a Dios transforma la familia Resendiz

Por Christina Benavides

“La fe es precisamente esto: no el esfuerzo colosal de alcanzar a un Dios sobrenatural, sino más bien, acoger a Jesús en nuestras vidas y descubrir que el rostro de Dios no está lejos de nuestros corazones.” – Pope Leo XIV

El poder transformador del amor brilla con fuerza en la familia Resendiz de la Parroquia de St. William de Montague, en donde Adriana y Guadalupe comparten su infinito amor a Dios con sus cinco hijos. Un amor que encontraron a través de su unión matrimonial y que se profundizó con la presencia continua del Señor en sus vidas.

CÓMO SE CONOCIERON: Guadalupe Resendiz, que quedó huérfano muy joven, se mudó a Texas a los diez años para vivir con su hermana. En la preparatoria, se destacó en el levantamiento de pesas, pista y campo y el fútbol americano. Luego de una lesión en su rodilla, que le impidió unirse a la Infantería de Marina después de graduarse, se dedicó al boxeo, que culminó con un campeonato en el 1999 de los Guantes de Oro en Fort Worth. Poco después de la victoria, Guadalupe conoció a Adriana, que acababa de llegar a Nocona desde su ciudad natal Guanajuato en México.

Guadalupe cuenta cómo esta relación con Adriana lo cambió. “Encontré una paz, de tal manera que todo lo de los deportes, lo del boxeo, de todo eso, se quedó atrás”.

UNA NUEVA BASE PARA LA FE: Ambos eran católicos desde pequeños y se prepararon para el Matrimonio en la parroquia cercana, St. William. Atribuyen la preparación matrimonial en la parroquia como el catalizador de su transición de una fe pasiva a una participación activa en la comunidad eclesial.

Adriana comentó: “Desde que nos casamos empezamos a involucrarnos más aquí en la iglesia”.

BENDECIDOS AL CASARSE: Guadalupe y Adriana se casaron el 14 de agosto de 2004 en la Parroquia de St. William.

“Cuando miramos hacia atrás, vemos que Dios siempre ha estado ahí, ayudándonos, e incluso ahora, gracias a Dios, me siento muy bendecido”, dijo Guadalupe.

RESTAURADO DE NUEVO: Al reflexionar sobre su pasado, Guadalupe recordó cómo siempre había estado “buscando algo” desde su juventud. El deporte lo ayudó a llenar ese vacío por un tiempo: “Pensé que podía deshacerme de esa necesidad que sentía”. Sin embargo, “cuando tuve mi propia familia y cuando conocí a Dios, me acerqué más a Él, comencé a conocer Su amor. Finalmente, me sentí pleno al experimentar el amor, el amor verdadero y puro de Dios”.

UN ENCUENTRO: La pareja asistió aproximadamente dos años después de casarse a un retiro de Encuentro.

“Fue allí donde tuvimos un encuentro con Dios, un encuentro con Jesús y, desde entonces, nos enamoramos como pareja; siento que también nos enamoramos de Dios”.

Después del retiro, Guadalupe encontró paz y su comprensión del servicio se transformó. “Todo ha sido diferente y ahora servimos a Dios, servimos a Dios con amor, con ganas y con entusiasmo”.

COMUNIDAD DE FE: La familia Resendiz reside en Nocona y, aunque cuenta con su propia parroquia, viajan a St. William por ser la única parroquia cercana que ofrece Misa en español.

Según el Censo de los Estados Unidos, Montague tiene menos de 240 habitantes, mientras que Nocona tiene casi 3,000.

Si bien las cifras pueden parecer pequeñas, el amor de la comunidad por la fe es inmenso.

“Con las posadas celebramos y nos visitamos en casa”, compartió Adriana. “Rezamos también el Rosario a la Virgen la noche anterior al 12 de diciembre. Como comunidad, nos unimos y es muy hermoso”.

La parroquia, al ser tan unida, crea oportunidades para la convivencia. A menudo, después del Rosario, los feligreses comparten un chocolate y otras delicias.



Adriana y Guadalupe Resendiz, de la Parroquia de St. William en Montague, con sus hijos (de izquierda a derecha) Angel Gabriel, Karen Guadalupe, Alexis Emmanuel, Dulce Maria y Nicole Adriana. (NTC/Thomas Otto)

AMOR POR COMPARTIR: “Nos enamoramos mucho de los caminos de Dios y, a partir de ahí, hemos tratado de inculcar en nuestros hijos las gracias que vienen de Dios y del Santo Rosario”, Adriana señaló.

El rezo del Rosario es una práctica diaria para la familia. A medida que sus hijos crecieron comenzaron a asumir roles más activos, como dirigir las oraciones de la familia.

La familia Resendiz valoriza mucho también compartir su fe a través del servicio. “Estamos enamorados de Dios y eso es lo que estamos inculcando en nuestros hijos”, dijo Guadalupe.

Además de impartir clases de catecismo, Confirmación y formación para adultos, Guadalupe y Adriana han servido en la parroquia como acólitos,

ministros extraordinarios de la Eucaristía y organizadores de tradiciones hispanas. Les enseñan a sus hijos que “para Dios, incluso en las cosas más pequeñas, se le sirve a Él”.

Cada uno de los hijos sirve activamente en la parroquia. Ayudan con la colecta del Ofertorio, enseñan catecismo; y sirven también como monaguillos, recogen las ofrendas y encienden las velas.

REGALOS DE DIOS: Siempre habían planeado tener cuatro hijos. Sin embargo, “fue Dios, nuestro Señor, quien dijo: ‘¿Cuatro? No, serán cinco’”, aseveró Adriana. “Él tiene la última palabra”.

Los nombres de sus hijos reflejan su devoción: el mayor lleva el nombre del Ángel Gabriel; la segunda, Karen

Guadalupe, en honor a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, como su padre; el tercero, Alexis Emmanuel – “Dios está con nosotros”; la cuarta, Dulce María, en honor a la Santísima Virgen; y la quinta, Nicole Adriana, un regalo de Dios, que lleva el nombre de la madre de Guadalupe, Nicole, y de la madre de Adriana, Nicolasa.

Los nombres de sus hijos les sirvieron de punto de partida para enseñarles a sus hijos sobre la vida de los santos.

SEGUIR ADELANTE: “Es muy fácil enfriarse y quedarse en casa cuando se trata de vivir en el amor y la actividad en la fe”, señaló Adriana. “Pero tenemos que seguir adelante para estar enamorados de Cristo y no debemos permitir que ese amor se apague”. 🇺🇸

LLAMADOS A SER TESTIGOS DE CRISTO

El Padre José Ignacio Olvera Álvarez, CORC, explica en qué consiste recibir el sacramento de la Confirmación

Por Karla Silva

“**C**on la plenitud del Espíritu Santo es más fácil que vivamos como los hijos de Dios que somos. ¿Y cuándo recibimos esa plenitud? En el sacramento de la Confirmación”, explicó el Padre José Ignacio Olvera Álvarez, CORC, párroco de la Parroquia de Holy Name of Jesus de Fort Worth, donde 178 adolescentes recibieron el sacramento de la Confirmación el mes de agosto.

La palabra confirmación proviene del latín *confirmatio* que significa fortalecimiento y consolidación y, junto con el sacramento del Bautismo y la Eucaristía, la Confirmación forma parte de los sacramentos de iniciación cristiana, los cuales introducen a los fundamentos de la fe.

“En el Bautismo se inicia la vida de la gracia, de la fe y de la relación con Dios; y recibimos el don del Espíritu Santo, en la Eucaristía nos hacemos uno con Cristo, y en la Confirmación se completa la gracia del Bautismo, ya que aceptamos recibir la plenitud del Espíritu Santo, que es el que mueve a la Iglesia y a cada una de las personas que se dejan guiar por Él para ser verdaderos testigos de Cristo”, describió el Padre Olvera.

El Concilio Vaticano II afirma que la Confirmación “une a los bautizados más íntimamente a la Iglesia y los enriquece con una fortaleza especial del Espíritu Santo. De esta forma, se comprometen mucho más como

auténticos testigos de Cristo, a extender y defender la fe con sus palabras y sus obras”.

Por esta razón, la Confirmación, en la mayoría de los casos, se recibe cuando los jóvenes están en su adolescencia y se conoce como el “sacramento de la madurez cristiana”, ya que “este sacramento requiere tener una mayor conciencia del compromiso que se asume y de la gracia que se recibe al asumirlo”, destacó el Padre Olvera.

La preparación para la Confirmación toma alrededor de dos años y debe de tener como meta “conducir al cristiano a una unión más íntima con Cristo, a una familiaridad más viva con el Espíritu Santo, sus acciones, sus dones y sus llamadas, a fin de poder asumir mejor las responsabilidades apostólicas de la vida cristiana”. (*CCE 1309*)

Una vez concluida esta preparación, los bautizados en estado de gracia pueden recibir el sacramento de la Confirmación en una Misa celebrada por el obispo y concelebrada por los sacerdotes de la parroquia.

“Los obispos, al ser sucesores de los apóstoles, son los ministros ordinarios de este sacramento, aunque, en ciertas situaciones, el obispo puede conceder a un presbítero la facultad de administrarlo”, aclaró el Padre Olvera.

De acuerdo con el *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica* (núm. 1298-1301) el rito del sacramento de la Confirmación consta de cuatro partes. La



El Obispo Michael Olson celebra una Misa de Confirmación el 29 de agosto en la Parroquia de Holy Name en Fort Worth. (NTC/Ben Torres)

primera es la renovación de las promesas bautismales y la profesión de fe de los confirmandos, ya que “la Confirmación constituye una prolongación del Bautismo”. La segunda es la imposición de manos sobre todos los confirmandos por parte del obispo o del presbítero delegado “gesto que, desde tiempos de los apóstoles, es el signo del don del Espíritu Santo”. La tercera es “la unción del santo crisma en la frente, hecha imponiendo la mano y con estas palabras: *‘Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti’* (‘Recibe por esta señal el Don del Espíritu Santo’)”. El rito concluye con el beso de paz, el cual “significa y manifiesta la comunión eclesial con el obispo y todos sus fieles”.

El Padre Olvera señaló que hay tres sacramentos que son únicos en la vida de una persona y no pueden repetirse: el

Bautismo, la Confirmación y el Orden Sacerdotal. Esto se debe a que imprimen “una marca espiritual indeleble” (CCE 1304), un carácter que nos dispone a vivir como Cristo y a ser testigos suyos en el mundo, de ahí la importancia de estos sacramentos.

“Desafortunadamente, es muy frecuente que la gente tome los sacramentos sólo como requisitos que se tienen que cumplir, por eso es fundamental que tanto los padres como los hijos comprendan su significado e importancia. Siempre les pido a los papás que acompañen y motiven a sus hijos a asistir a la iglesia y que vean los sacramentos como un oportunidad para vivir en gracia y en relación con Cristo, para que puedan ser testimonio para sus hijos”, comentó el Padre Olvera.

Por otra parte, subrayó la

importancia del papel de los padrinos: “El rol de los padrinos es el de colaborar con la formación espiritual de la persona. No se trata sólo de acompañarlos el día del sacramento. Procuren elegir padrinos que vivan activamente su fe, que hayan recibido sus sacramentos y los vivan, para no caer en la incoherencia de pedirle formar a los hijos sin ellos mismos estar formados”.

Finalmente, el Padre Olvera invita a toda la comunidad a profundizar en el estudio de la catequesis, especialmente a los padres, porque “si no hay conocimiento, ¿cómo va a haber formación? Es responsabilidad de todos profundizar en el sentido de los sacramentos y en el valor de vivir el sacramento que recibimos, ya que la salvación no radica sólo en recibir el sacramento, sino en vivirlo”. 🇺🇸

ENCONTRAR A DIOS en el camino vocacional

El Diácono Matías Lagunas reflexiona sobre su vocación al diaconado y la importancia del matrimonio

Por Christina Benavides

“La vocación es un don precioso que Dios siembra en el corazón, una llamada a salir de nosotros mismos para emprender un camino de amor y servicio.” - Papa Francisco, Peregrinos de la esperanza: el don de la vida

Matías Lagunas miraba de niño a su párroco y se maravillaba de cómo “ese hombre debía estar muy cerca de Dios. Ojalá, algún día, pudiera ser yo”.

Reflexiona hoy día sobre su infancia en su ciudad natal de Guerrero, México, en que vivió una rica tradición católica. Asistió a una escuela católica muy similar a la que ahora sirve como diácono en la Parroquia de St. John the Apostle y su colegio católico en North Richland Hills, donde los alumnos rezan antes de sus clases y esperan con ilusión la Misa.

“Estaba muy familiarizado con Dios”, recuerda el Diácono Lagunas.

Dejó su ciudad natal a los 14 años y cruzó la frontera como un mojado durante una ola de calor de agosto para reunirse con sus padres, quienes ya se habían ido a los Estados Unidos para comenzar una nueva vida en Chicago. Una vez allí, se dedicó a buscar trabajo y a aprender el nuevo idioma y la cultura, que a menudo, confluía con su fe.

“Cuando llegamos aquí a los Estados Unidos, es como si dejáramos a Dios de lado. Lo ponemos en pausa y, lamentablemente, tomamos otro camino”, expresó el Diácono Lagunas. Su madre, que siempre había rezado el Rosario con su familia, estaba muy ocupada con el trabajo, lo que le impedía también al joven Lagunas asistir a Misa la mayoría de los domingos.

Con el paso del tiempo, se hacía cada vez más difícil escuchar el llamado con claridad.

“A veces me digo que, si un sacerdote se me hubiera acercado de niño para hablarme de mi vocación, tal vez habría sido sacerdote”, dijo el diácono. “No lo sabemos, ¿verdad?”.

Aun así, Dios permanece presente, sin importar el camino, señaló el Diácono Lagunas. A los 18 años, conoció y se casó con su esposa, María, y el pasado octubre celebraron 42 años de casados.

“Tomé un camino diferente antes de encontrarme con Dios de nuevo”, aseveró. “Y estoy eternamente agradecido por eso. Nunca me cansaré de darle gracias”.

El diácono y su esposa María aprecian actualmente su iglesia doméstica como padres de dos hijos y abuelos de cuatro nietos.

“Ahora sentimos que nuestra vida está completa porque tenemos a Dios

y tenemos todo por lo que luchamos: nuestra familia”, dijo el Diácono Lagunas. “Ahora los nietos nos dan vida; nos rejuvenecen con sólo escucharlos”.

EL DON DEL MATRIMONIO

El Diácono Lagunas tiene amplia experiencia trabajando con parejas que buscan recibir el sacramento del Matrimonio en la Parroquia de North Richland Hills.

Cuando entrevista a la pareja por primera vez, comienza siempre con la misma pregunta: “¿Por qué se casan?”.

Para el diácono, que tiene 16 años de experiencia, sólo hay una respuesta correcta: “Porque amas a esta mujer. Porque amas a este hombre. Si llevan 20 años juntos, digan: ‘La amo. La amo más que hace 20 años’”.

Señala que las parejas que permanecen unidas ante la adversidad son verdaderos ejemplos del sacramento del Matrimonio. “Cristo nunca dijo que sería fácil”, el Diácono Lagunas apuntó.

La fortaleza del matrimonio del diácono ha moldeado profundamente su vida y su vocación. Su esposa María siempre ha estado “dispuesta a seguirme”. Ayudó a la familia a superar las dificultades y apoyó sus decisiones al emprender una audaz mudanza de Chicago a Texas en el 1997; y a establecer

una nueva vida en una zona más segura con mejores escuelas para sus hijos.

Más tarde, mientras luchaba con muchas dudas durante su discernimiento para el diaconado, María continuó apoyándolo.

“Durante tres años, me acompañó a todas las clases de Luz de Cristo”, explicó. El programa, que se celebraba todos los martes y jueves por la noche, y que le recomendó un diácono de su entonces Parroquia de St. Matthew de Arlington, ayudó a formar a muchos hombres en la fe y a sentar las bases para futuros diáconos.

Después de una de las reuniones, Lagunas llenó una solicitud para unirse al programa de formación al diaconado diocesano, pero creía que no le iban a responder. Sin embargo, al cabo de un mes, recibió una tarjeta por correo.

“Todavía me da risa porque recuerdo haber recibido la tarjeta y haber dicho: ‘No quiero hacer esto’”, recordó el Diácono Lagunas. “Y cuando se lo conté a mi amigo diácono, recuerdo que su esposa me preguntó: ‘¿Entonces le vas a decir que no a Dios? Es a Él a quien le estás diciendo que no’”.

Habló entonces sobre sus inquietudes con la oficina de formación diaconal y, con la guía de ellos, junto con el tiempo, la oración y el ánimo de su esposa, redescubrió la llamada que una vez había rechazado, que estaba aún presente, pero silenciada por las dudas y la negación.

“Tuve muchas experiencias así durante mi formación porque no quería ver lo que alguien más quería”, compartió el Diácono Lagunas. “Dios quería que yo continuara, pero yo no lo quería”.

Antes de su ordenación celebrada el 26 de septiembre de 2009 recibió la confirmación final de que el diaconado era la verdadera voluntad de Dios para él. Durante años, mientras se sentía atormentado por preguntas como “¿Por qué me quieren? ¿Qué puedo ofrecer? ¿En qué me considero digno?”, su esposa las había estado respondiendo constantemente. Ella incluso firmó una



El Diácono Matías Lagunas posa frente a una imagen de María en la Parroquia de St. John the Apostle en North Richland Hills. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

carta diocesana autorizando a su esposo a continuar con la formación.

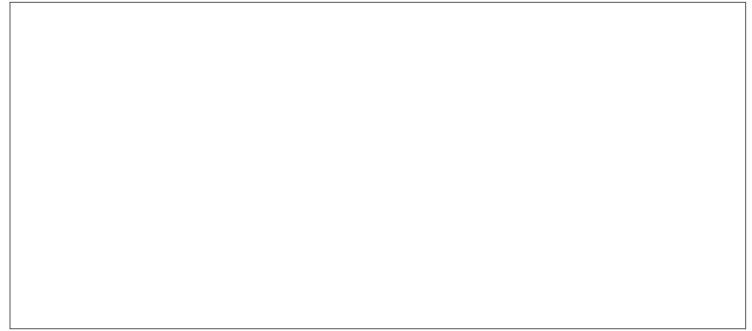
“Veo que tienes las cualidades necesarias y creo que eres una buena persona que puede ser un buen diácono”, le decía María con firmeza. “Cuando me entrevistaron en la oficina, les dije con total sinceridad lo que veo y lo que siento”.

La afirmación de su esposa le ayudó

al diácono a comprender finalmente el llamado de Dios.

“No sabía que Dios hablaba de otras maneras. No me lo imaginaba”, admitió el Diácono Lagunas.

“Solía decir: ‘Espero algún día poder estar cerca de Dios’, ¿verdad? Así que todo era parte de mi vocación. Siempre digo que así fue como Dios me llamó aquí estoy”. 🇺🇸



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JUNTOS

con *Karla Silva*

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