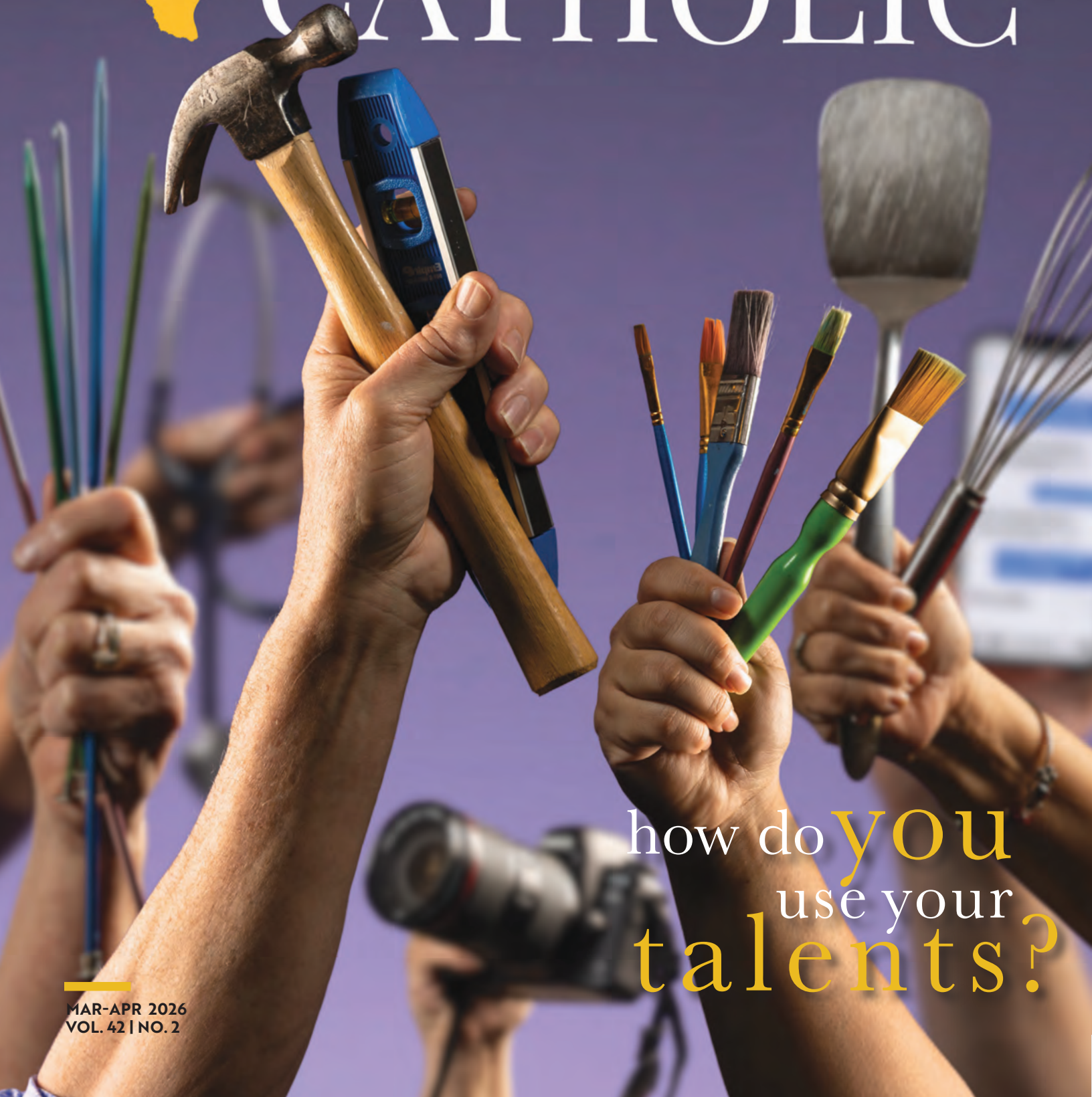


BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH



# NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC



how do **you**  
use your  
**talents?**

MAR-APR 2026  
VOL. 42 | NO. 2

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**NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC Magazine (USPS 751-370) (ISSN 0899-7020)** is published bi-monthly by the Most Rev. Michael F. Olson, Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Worth. For those who are not registered parishioners in the Diocese of Fort Worth, subscription rates are \$18 for one year, \$35 for two years, \$50 for three years. Periodicals postage paid at Fort Worth, TX. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to North Texas Catholic, 800 W. Loop 820 S., Fort Worth, Texas 76108.

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# Laundry day

Beyond any doubt, laundry is my favorite chore.

The task begins with a jumbled basket of dirty clothes and ends with fresh, clean clothing — all put away neatly and ready for future wearing.

Yes, it requires a little sorting and perhaps some stain pretreatment on my part, but the heavy lifting is done by the machine.

I've never ascribed to the maxim that "cleanliness is next to godliness"; please don't check the high shelves in my home for dust. However, in the comparison between laundry and the sacrament of reconciliation, the saying has some truth. You won't find it on an SAT test, but here's a Catholic analogy: Laundry is to clothing as reconciliation is to our soul.

As humans, we all sweat, spill, and sin — and this leaves behind blemishes on our clothing and stains on our soul. Thank God (and Maytag) for knowing us so well and providing the means to cleanse ourselves.

I will admit some discouragement when I realize that I'm largely confessing the same sins each time. Am I throwing up barriers that prevent the Holy Spirit from helping me to overcome sin? Am I not trying to refrain from this sin?

On the other hand, I wash the same laundry each week without a second thought. No guilt for needing to rid the clothing of the same dog hair or food spills week after week. I'm not dismayed when I see the laundry basket filling up again. It's a normal and necessary part of life.

As I was doing laundry, I realized that God never tires of forgiving me, even of the same sins. In fact, He already knows the smudges and splatters on my soul; I just need to show up with my basket.

This awareness makes me more intent to receive His love and grace in the sacrament of reconciliation. After all, Jesus has already done the heavy lifting by dying on the cross for my sins.

And when I find myself repeating a sin that I confessed the week before, let me thank God for His endless mercy and patience and the opportunity to encounter Him in reconciliation.

*Susan Moses*

EDITOR

# Views from the Pews

From white to green to purple — the colors and celebrations of the liturgical seasons invite us to grow in grace and deepen our spiritual life as the days grow longer with the promise of spring’s arrival.

**Grandparents Day.** St. John the Apostle Catholic School ended Catholic Schools Week with a beloved tradition in many diocesan schools: Grandparents Day, which the North Richland Hills school celebrated on Jan. 30 with bingo, donuts, and student presentations.

**School visits.** Bishop Michael Olson celebrates Mass and makes classroom visits to each of the 17 Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Fort Worth at least once every school year. Here, a student at St. Rita Catholic School in Fort Worth asks the bishop a question.

**Blessing of the throats.** The optional memorial for St. Blaise, a bishop martyred in 316 who saved the life of a boy choking on a fish bone, includes the traditional blessing of the throats with candles, seen here at St. Michael Parish in Bedford.



NTC/Rodger Mattison



NTC/Juan Guajardo



NTC/Juan Guajardo

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## St. Andrew to build youth center

**FORT WORTH** — What was a campus parking lot will soon house a two-story structure for the benefit of St. Andrew Parish, school, and the community at large.

On Dec. 18, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the planned Star of the Sea Youth Center. The construction should take approximately a year, St. Andrew Parish Business Manager Bill Brown said.

Six atriiums will fill the top floor, providing catechesis class space for children aged 3 to 12. Middle and high school aged children will use the ground floor for various ministry groups.

With interest in catechesis classes and youth ministries increasing, the current limited available spaces at St. Andrew for such activities have long since grown insufficient.

“As we break ground today, we take the first step in construction of the Star of the Sea Youth Center,” Father Dan Pattee, TOR, said. “We believe that both our Lord and Lady have led us to this point.”

Bishop Michael Olson agreed, thanking all



NTC/Juan Guajardo

Bishop Michael Olson, Father Dan Pattee, TOR, and Principal Laura Behee break ground.

who have contributed to the center.

“We thank you for the hopes and dreams inspired by Christ,” Bishop Olson said. “Thank God for placing it on our hearts to build this center. We dedicate this in hopes of establishing and raising high Your Son, Jesus Christ, in the hearts of the faithful,

especially the young.”

St. Andrew Principal Laura Behee said, “This will give us more room for more grade levels of participation for our school, the parish, and students from other schools.”

— Matthew Smith

## # iGiveCatholic Results FOR THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH



### TOP PARISH

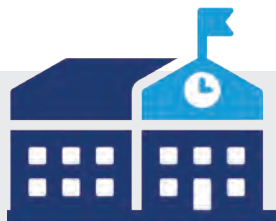
Most Blessed Sacrament, Arlington

\$292,151 from 334 donors

### TOP SCHOOL

St. Andrew Catholic School, Fort Worth

\$201,365 from 408 donors



### TOTAL DIOCESE

\$926,443 from  
2,052 donors

given to  
43 parishes,  
schools, and  
ministries

# Diverse and universal

Diocese honors religious men and women

## WHITE SETTLEMENT

— The Diocese of Fort Worth celebrated the annual World Day of Consecrated Life on Feb. 13 with prayer, dinner, and fellowship at St. Peter the Apostle Church in White Settlement.

About 50 religious men and women attended the evening vespers, which featured Scripture, hymns, and prayer in four languages: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Latin.

Father Jonathan Wallis, vicar general for the diocese, gave a short

reflection during the vespers. He commented on the diversity of the religious men and women who serve the diocese, coming from about 10 religious orders from around the world.

He said, “One of the great things that we have here in the Diocese of Fort Worth is the presence of so many religious.

“Wherever we come from, we serve the same Lord; we serve the same Church. And that is what unites us,” he continued.

Sister Theresa Tran, LHC, teaches religion



Sister Theresa Tran, LHC, and Sister Yolanda Cruz, SSMN, share a hug and a laugh.

NTC/Juan Guajardo

at St. Rita Catholic School in Fort Worth and enjoys the annual event.

Sitting at a table with sisters from three religious orders, she said, “Even though we have different languages and are from different countries, I don’t see any difference. I feel a closeness to all my brothers and sisters here.”

Father Babji Merugu, SAC,

has served as parochial vicar of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller since December 2024. The Pallottine priest said, “It’s very good to meet other religious priests, and nuns as well. We feel brotherhood and sisterhood like one family. We’re all called to do the same mission, irrespective of our culture. It’s wonderful.”



NTC/Juan Guajardo

## The Good Shepherd’s example



Respect Life Mass illuminates, inspires need for courage, presence, prayer

**ALEDO** — Bishop Michael Olson encouraged the faithful to follow the example of the Good Shepherd and protect the most vulnerable members of society in remarks made at the annual Respect Life Mass on Jan. 22 at Holy Redeemer Parish in Aledo.

“Tonight, we gather around the altar and we encounter the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in Word and in sacrament,” the bishop said. “We are nourished by His very Body and Blood that transforms us. He is here tonight with us, and He places in our midst a child — the child that is overlooked and neglected and hated because he is viewed

as nothing more than an inconvenience to success. He breaks apart a system by showing us the dignity of the human person, in the weakest among us.”

More than 150 people attended the bilingual Mass. The group included many individuals working to protect life from conception to natural death. The altar was adorned with roses representing children lost to abortion.

The Respect Life Mass has been celebrated in the diocese for at least 15 years, said Terri Schauf, Respect Life coordinator.

— Mary Rampellini



# A Church of many cultures

PHOTO GALLERY



More photos of the Lunar New Year celebration here: [North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.com](http://North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.com)

Lion dancers entertain the crowd after Bishop Michael Olson celebrated Mass at Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Fort Worth on Feb. 15, where hundreds of Catholics marked the Lunar New Year with Vietnamese traditions.



## God's love, revealed

Middle school students gather for fun, fellowship, and faith enrichment

**FORT WORTH** — With a bustling atmosphere somewhere between a pep rally and a school dance at times, the annual Diocesan Middle School Rally enjoyed its largest turnout and perhaps most successful celebration in its history.

More than 360 students from 16 parishes gathered at Hartnett Arena at Nolan Catholic High School for the Feb. 14 event, and while a smattering of Valentine's Day shirts and accessories dotted the crowd, the primary objective was quite clear — to proclaim the love of Jesus Christ to students.

"We do this by facilitating an environment wherein they can encounter Christ in a threefold manner," Director of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry for the Diocese of Fort Worth Victoria Ramon said. "In fellowship with other young Catholics from across the diocese; in speakers



More than 360 students from 16 parishes enjoyed the middle school rally.

invited to witness and teach about Christ; and in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament in exposition."

The day's festivities started with sports, games, and a movie. After lunch and a performance from the

event's emcee and Christian rapper and performer Joe Melendrez, the students heard talks on faith and prayed before the Holy Eucharist.

— John English

# PRIEST ASSIGNMENTS

BY MOST REV. MICHAEL OLSON

**REV. IGNATIUS HEMBROM, TOR**

Previously Parochial Vicar of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Fort Worth, has been appointed **Pastor** of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Carrollton, effective Jan. 15.

**REV. VICTOR MANUEL CONTRERAS JUAREZ, CORC**

Previously Parochial Vicar of St. Matthew Parish in Arlington, has been appointed **Pastor** of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Fort Worth, effective Feb. 1.

**REV. EMMANUEL NICODEMUS MALLEY, SAC**

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed **Parochial Vicar** of St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington, effective Dec. 22.

**REV. NORBERT IRAKO MUKABWA, SAC**

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed **Parochial Vicar** of St. Jude Parish in Mansfield, effective Dec. 22.

**REV. OSCAR SANCHEZ OLVERA, CORC**

Previously Pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Fort Worth, has been **reassigned** by his order, effective Jan. 31.

**REV. FRANCIS TAN TIEN TA, CRM**

Previously Parochial Vicar of Vietnamese Martyrs Parish in Arlington, has been **reassigned** by his order, effective Jan. 14.

**REV. SUSHIL WILLAM TUDU, TOR**

Previously Pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Carrollton, has been **reassigned** by his order, effective Jan. 14.

**REV. GABRIEL M. THUAN TRUNG VU, CRM**

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed **Parochial Vicar** of Vietnamese Martyrs Parish in Arlington, effective Jan. 9.

# IN MEMORIAM

## MONSIGNOR RAYMUND MULLAN

Monsignor Raymund Mullan, priest, musician, and author, died on Sunday, Dec. 14, 2025, at the age of 88. Msgr. Mullan was incardinated in the Diocese of Fort Worth on June 29, 1994, the 32<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of his priestly ordination in the Archdiocese of Pretoria, South Africa.

With permission from the archbishop, in December 1989 Msgr. Mullan emigrated from South Africa with

his parents to Texas, and in January 1990 was assigned as associate pastor at St. John the Apostle Parish in North Richland Hills.



Msgr. Ray Mullan

Having served 23 years as pastor of St. Mary Parish in Graham and St. Theresa Parish in Olney, he retired from full-time priestly ministry in 2014 and moved to Mansfield, where he celebrated daily Mass at St. Jude Parish and glorified the Lord through his hobbies of music and writing.

## DEACON EDUARDO GARCIA

Deacon Eduardo Garcia, 81, devoted husband, father, and servant of Christ, died Jan. 28 at home surrounded by his family.

Born in Monterrey, Mexico, the second of six children was raised in a home filled with faith, music, and laughter. As the eldest boy, he left school in sixth grade to help support his family.

In 1967, he immigrated to Fort Worth, where he later met his wife, Olga.

They married in 1969 and remained inseparable for 56 years. Together, they raised their twin sons, Eduardo Jr. and Henry, and cherished their six grandchildren.



Dcn. Eduardo Garcia

He worked many jobs, including 25 years in the printing industry. Ordained to the diaconate in 1995, he served as a deacon at St. Matthew Parish in Arlington for 20 years. In addition to celebrating baptisms and marriages, he tended to the sick and dying with a special grace.

# The Color Purple

The forty days of Lent begin with Ash Wednesday

Marking the beginning of Lent, Ash Wednesday is a holy day of prayer and fasting. The ashes serve as a powerful outward symbol of interior repentance and awareness of the need to turn back to God in ways small and big.

*NTC* photographers visited four parishes in the diocese, including St. Mary of the Assumption in Fort Worth, where a man receives ashes at right. (*NTC/Juan Guajardo*)

Below and below right, Father Jose Francis, TOR, celebrated an Ash Wednesday Mass, where he marked foreheads at St. John Paul II University Parish in Denton. (*NTC/Kevin Bartram*)



SEE MORE PHOTOS



# SEEKING AT SEEK



Father Jonathan Wallis carries the Eucharist as more than 4,500 young adults participate in Eucharistic Adoration during the third day of the SEEK 2026 Fort Worth Conference at Gaylord Texan in Grapevine on Jan. 3.

## Campus ministers hope SEEK 2026 Conference sows seeds of deeper faith going forward

By Matthew Smith  
Photos by Juan Guajardo

Whatever their individual motivations for showing up, emcee Jake Abard told several hundred of the more than 4,500 young Catholics attending the Jan. 1-5 SEEK 2026 Conference at the Gaylord Texan Resort and Conference Center that the important realization going in is that the conference seeks to provide a place for each of them to encounter the Lord.

“Some of you are maybe wondering, am I supposed to be here?” Abard said. “Does God really have a plan for me? On the other hand, others of you are probably pumped and ready to go.”

Bishop Michael Olson likewise welcomed the several thousand on hand during the conference’s second-day morning Mass.

“[SEEK] is truly an opportunity for Christian friendship as we start a new year and continue our celebration of the liturgical season of Christmas,” Bishop Olson said.

Students from more than 100 colleges and 219 parishes across five states attended along with alumni, campus ministers, four bishops, and about 200 priests. Participants attended Mass, Adoration, met old and made new friends, heard from numerous speakers, and ate, played, and prayed together.

This year marked Texas State University senior Tyler Suchart’s fourth

SEEK Conference.

“It’s just a lot of fun,” Suchart explained of his reason for returning year after year. “The overall experience, the different speakers are always just amazing. Plus, I just love meeting a lot of new people each year.”

Suchart added that, as in past years, the current edition of SEEK lived up to his expectations.

“It’s, for me, coming in with the expectation that God is always calling us in little ways. God’s calling us everywhere and so I think I’m coming in open to how He’s calling me.”

Rebecca Luna from the Diocese of Corpus Christi, a first-time attendee, felt much the same.

“After a couple of days here, my main

Young adults wave their school flags during the SEEK 2026 Fort Worth Conference.

takeaway is that the Lord is never done with my heart,” Luna said. “There’s a lot more to unpack and He wants me to continue to grow.”

Suchart agreed.

“It’s probably not that I’m going to figure my entire life out over these five days,” Suchart said. “But it’s about maybe seeing a certain direction to go next. It’s a journey.”

## HOPE REFRESHED, SHARED

These are sentiments campus ministers from several of the schools represented at the conference found refreshing, given their hopes that students will retain the excitement and faith impacts of SEEK well past the conference’s conclusion.

“Sure, that’s always a challenge,” Tarleton State University Campus Minister Nathan Mena said. “We come to events like this to be uplifted, be encouraged, and strengthened. But there’s always that, ‘What happens after the big event?’ concern.”

Mena compared the faith moment opportunities and camaraderie SEEK offers to biblical mountaintop experiences involving Jesus, Moses, Abraham, and others.

“The big moments happen on the mountain,” Mena said. “But most of the Bible occurs in the day-to-day. Same thing for us. So, we come to these big moments, big events like SEEK but then all go back to our campuses, families, whatever. So, as campus ministers, we’re always thinking, ‘How can we capitalize on these big moments?’”

Such involves follow-up, on-campus prayer, and activities, among other efforts.

“We want to make sure this isn’t just five days of faith and excitement and then on to whatever’s next in their lives,” Mena said. “But rather a lasting reminder to let this be a beginning to live again, start anew as disciples for Christ.”

Midwestern State University Campus Minister Debbie Veitenheimer returned to SEEK for the second year running with a group of students.

“I was concerned last year that they would go to this big event with all the great speakers, excitement, and everything going on, but then maybe forget about it once the conference ended and they went back home,” Veitenheimer said.

Fortunately, such was not the case.

“Once school started back, one of the first things we did was have our kids give kind of personal witness to the kids who didn’t go to SEEK,” Veitenheimer said. “They were telling the other kids, ‘You need to sign up for next year. We need more to go next year.’ Telling them how great the experience was.”

Which, Veitenheimer said, happened. Student numbers jumped from 13 in 2025 to 21 this year.

“More than just the personal witness from the students who went last year, I definitely, in the vast majority of them,



Continued on Page 12

## From Page 11

saw more intentionality in their prayer lives after the event,” Veitenheimer said. “More involvement in things in our ministry and more desire to step up into leadership roles. They definitely took what they gained from SEEK with them, and I hope to see that again this year.”

### SEEK REAL CHANGE

University of North Texas and Texas Woman’s University Campus Minister Sam Macaraeg said it impacted him to see the “grounding and confidence in the faith” so many experienced during the conference.

“I think for these young people to see so many fellow young Catholics living out their faith and the truth of the Gospel proclaimed gives them hope in a way that’s very relevant,” Macaraeg said. “That it kind of illuminates hope and light for them in a world that’s pretty dark at times.

“Because anyone can learn about the faith. But unless you see it playing out among others in concrete ways, it’s kind of hard to make it your own.”

It’s always a work in progress, Macaraeg added.

“Throughout the conference, we’re meeting in small groups at lunch to process what we’ve experienced and gained from that day,” Macaraeg said. “Once we get back on campus, it becomes a matter of continuing to support and give them opportunities to seek real, positive change and transformation as they grow in their faith.” 🇺🇸



More than 4,500 young adults participate in Eucharistic Adoration.



A group of participants from the Diocese of Fort Worth pose for a photo at the SEEK 2026 Fort Worth Conference.



Sister Josephine Garrett, CSFN, speaks during the Conference.

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2026](https://NorthTexasCatholic.org/smugmug.com/SEEK-2026).



Matt Jacobs, director of transportation for Catholic Charities Fort Worth, delivers boxes of iron supplements to more than 40 clinics, hospitals, and pregnancy centers in Tarrant County. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

# A Healthy Start

By Brenda Raney

Catholic Charities Fort Worth has provided low-cost transportation to Tarrant County seniors and disabled residents for more than a decade. In April, the transportation department began ferrying more than just people throughout Tarrant County — they now transport iron supplements as part of the North Texas Maternal Health Accelerator project.

Iron supplements have been shown to be an effective means of improving the health of pregnant women and their babies.

The goal of the Accelerator project is to lower maternal morbidity rates by 20% in the next three years. Spearheaded by Fort Worth Mayor Mattie Parker, the program includes three philanthropic organizations: Anne Burnett Marion School of Medicine at Texas Christian University, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, and Child Poverty Action Lab.

For CCFW Director of Transportation Matt Jacobs, distributing the iron supplements “fits right into what we do.”

Jacobs said he is highly committed to the project and personally delivers the supplements to participant agencies so as not to disrupt his drivers’ scheduled routes or make a client wait on a later delivery time.

So far, CCFW has made more than 85 deliveries of iron supplements to 43 clinics, hospitals, and pregnancy centers in Tarrant County.

Also, CCFW distributes the iron supplements to clients through Gabriel Project. Managed by Connie Beck, Gabriel Project is a mainstay of CCFW’s efforts to provide resources and support for pregnant women until their child reaches one year old. The holistic nature of programs like Gabriel Project adds structure, tracking of outcomes, and education to the iron supplement distribution.

“The purpose of the Accelerator is to bring down barriers that cause severe obstetric complications in women so they have healthier outcomes for moms and babies at delivery,” Beck said.

In addition to the iron supplements, Gabriel Project provides moms-to-be with everything from practical items such as car

seats, diapers, and baby wipes to emotional support provided by trained volunteers known as Angels.

One such volunteer is April Martin, a veteran Angel of five years, who became involved after getting married and becoming a mother at the age of 17.

“I just recall not knowing anything about caring for myself, caring for my child, what to expect, what my body would be doing, different emotions,” Martin said. “When I first became aware of this program, I said, ‘This is wonderful.’”

While case managers deliver iron supplements to Gabriel Project participants, Martin is knowledgeable about the complications that can arise from low iron levels in expectant women. “Iron deficiency, especially when it gets to the anemic level, can have effects on the mom and the growing baby,” she said. “I think it’s a great program.” ✦

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



# From palms to ASHES

Lent begins with the ashes from the palms of the previous year

By Matthew Smith

**A**s Deacon Guillermo Muñoz and others set up a portable fire pit outside Bedford's St. Michael Parish on Jan. 26, Father Joseph Moreno delivered a prayer for the 10 or so gathered.

"God of tenderness and mercy," Fr. Moreno said. "You fashioned us from the dust of the earth and bid us to follow your Gospel call.

"Look on us with kindness as we prepare these ashes, which will mark the beginning of our Lenten journey."

Following that, Dcn. Muñoz set fire to palms collected from years previous, which parishioners had dropped off at the church to be properly disposed of. The fire took quite a bit of time given the bumper crop of palms returned to the parish over the past several years and required several reloads into the pit as fire consumed the palms.

"We may be here all day," Dcn. Muñoz said with a laugh.

One attendee, eyeing the blaze's rising smoke column, joked that some passerby might summon firefighters. The deacon and others stirred the burning mixture now and then to better distribute the ashes — ashes the parish used for Ash Wednesday distribution on Feb. 18.

Fr. Moreno, who was assigned to St. Michael last year after Lent, said he's unsure whether previous priests ever

burned palms for ashes on site. Many parishes, Fr. Moreno added, simply purchase packets of ashes from religious supply stores.

"This is something to see," Dcn. Muñoz said. "I knew the ashes for Ash Wednesday came from burned palms from previous years, but I've never seen it done."

Neither had St. Michael Parish Coordinator Kimberly Guidry Speirs, who livestreamed the burning ceremony on the parish's Facebook page.

"I have to admit I just never really thought about it," Speirs said. "I guess, when I was a kid, someone told me the ashes come from palms from the year before, but I never gave it a second thought after that."

Speirs said she appreciated that Fr. Moreno decided to burn the palms on site for parishioners to watch.

"This is really eye opening to see the life cycle of the ashes," Speirs said. "Realizing that these are palms from previous years and that the palms we get this Palm Sunday will show up next year to be burned. It sort of brings things full circle."

Fr. Moreno said he organized the event both for fun and as an opportunity to highlight Ash Wednesday, which begins the season of Lent.

"I do a catechetical minute before each homily and last week's was about palms and ashes and where they come

from since we're about to head into Lent," Fr. Moreno said. "We decided to burn them here after Mass because we have a huge amount of palms from earlier years and because we've encouraged people to drop off their palms from previous years."

Some bring in palms from last Lent each year. Others still have several years of palms.

"That's perfectly fine," Fr. Moreno said. "You can keep them as long as you want."

So long as they're treated with reverence and respect, Fr. Moreno added.

"You don't want to throw them away," Fr. Moreno said. "That's the big thing. Because the palms are blessed, they become sacramentals. For anything blessed there are two ways to dispose of it. That's to bury or burn it."

Parishioners may burn palms on their own or bring them to a parish to be burned.

Fr. Moreno characterized the burning event as a Lent bookend of sorts.

"We distribute palms at the end of Lent and have ashes at the beginning," Fr. Moreno said. "So that connection between the palms and ashes works to show us where we're going through our pilgrim journey of Lent.

"As we start Lent, we receive ashes from the palms of the previous year. So our destination is already in sight."

Fr. Moreno chuckled when asked if the ashes derived from the burning would



Deacon Ken Coffey (left), Father Joseph Moreno, and a parishioner burn palm leaves from Holy Week 2025 in order to make ashes for Ash Wednesday at St. Michael Parish in Bedford on Feb. 2. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

be enough to cover St. Michael’s Ash Wednesday services.

“A little bit of ashes go pretty doggone far,” Fr. Moreno said. “We had at least a few years of collected palm. I think we could probably supply ashes for the whole deanery with what we got today.”

Deacon Jack Gardner of Prosper’s St. Martin de Porres Parish quipped that they often see more attendance on Ash Wednesday than on actual holy days of obligation.

“We have an ashes service at 6 a.m. that day, then three Masses where we distribute ashes,” Dcn. Gardner said. “They’re always heavily attended. People get into it.”

Although Ash Wednesday is not a holy day of obligation, it’s a day all Catholics should participate in, Dcn. Gardner added.

“Because it’s a physical way we can honor God by calling to mind our mortality as the season of Lent begins,” Dcn. Gardner said.

Dcn. Gardner explained the minister says either, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return” or “Repent



Parishioners prepare palm leaves for burning at St. Michael Parish in Bedford. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

and believe in the Gospel” as they apply ashes to parishioners’ foreheads.

“Those are very powerful words,” Dcn. Gardner said. “So the physical act and image of having ashes placed on your forehead helps bring that to mind. Then

you carry the mark, the ashes, around with you all day, which makes you aware you’re Catholic.”

It’s in that regard a fun, communal, but profound experience, Dcn. Gardner said of Ash Wednesday. 🇺🇸

# LENT, SCRUTINIES, AND TRANSFORMATIVE grace

How the graces of Lent benefit both the faithful  
and the Elect preparing for baptism

By Lisa Moore

**T**o any confirmed Catholic, the liturgical season before Easter known as Lent is marked by prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. However, to the Elect — those preparing for baptism at the Easter Vigil — it's also the period of purification and enlightenment, the final stage of formation before baptism, confirmation, and Holy Eucharist, marked by prayerfully discerning full communion with Christ and His Church in their lives.

But the Lenten season can and should be treated as one and the same by both long time Catholics and those about to enter the Church through baptism, according to many faith formation directors.

“Purification and enlightenment is all

about reflection and examination of our interior life and how everything that has been received during the catechumenate period — all the doctrine and traditions of our faith — how that is reflected in the life that we are living, and how we can live that more deeply,” said Laura Nelson, diocesan director of faith formation. “It’s not just for the Elect. It takes place during [the liturgical season] when all the faithful are called to reflect on how we are living a life of faith.”

## THREE SCRUTINIES

The final six weeks of the Elect’s formation are also shaped by the Scrutinies, to ready the Elect for their relationship with Christ in the sacraments.



A sponsor places her hand on the shoulder of one of the Elect during the Rite of Election on Feb. 11, 2024, at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in Wichita Falls. Catechumens and candidates from parishes throughout the Northwest Deanery attended the liturgy. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

“The word scrutinize — we shouldn’t think of it as something negative,” said Michelle Ebambi, OCIA coordinator at St. Joseph Parish in Arlington. “‘Scrutinize’ here is in the sense of trying to find out where we stand with God, and during Lent, the Church as a whole is called to stop being busy and take time to pray more, to repent, to examine our sinfulness and come back to God, because Jesus is the healer.”

“The beautiful thing about the Scrutinies is that they have a double purpose: to reveal what is weak, sick, and sinful in the hearts of the Elect so that it can be healed; and to reveal what is honorable, strong, and holy so that it can be strengthened,” said Robin Harris, OCIA director at St. Michael Parish in Bedford. “It’s really about preparing them for the effect of baptism and understanding

that God does what He says in the sacraments.”

### **WATER, LIGHT, AND LIFE**

Usually celebrated on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays in Lent, each of the three Scrutinies begins with Gospel readings from John.

The Gospel for the first Scrutiny is Christ and the Samaritan woman at the well (*John 4:5-42*), calling us to examine our sins and to welcome Christ as the living water in our baptism.

“I always thought when I was younger, ‘Why would you be joyful about having all your sin pointed out?’” Harris laughed. “But when you realize that the joy of being healed from sin is like going to reconciliation, when you leave feeling that grace and complete relief having been absolved of your sin because you’re

truly contrite, that’s the beauty of those stories.”

The second Scrutiny, the healing of the man born blind (*John 9:1-41*), calls us to reflect on our need for Christ to give us His vision.

“We have eyes, but we don’t see — like spiritual blindness,” Ebambi stated. “We think that we see, but we might be blind to God’s light. Jesus is the light of the world. Seeking Jesus puts us on the path of the light.”

The raising of Lazarus (*John 11:1-45*), the final Scrutiny, calls us to recognize Christ as the Resurrection.

“People are called to think about why they should follow Jesus,” Ebambi said. “We have the hope of gaining eternal life with Him. He has power over death and

**Continued on Page 18**



Zulema Cano places her hand on the shoulder of her nephew, Jayzel Cano, during the Rite of Election ceremony at Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Fort Worth on March 6, 2025. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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will resurrect us, and we're going to be with Him in heaven forever."

"If we're really opening Gospels up for people before they get to the Scrutinies," Harris noted, "then the reality of what happens within the sacraments is so much greater, especially when it comes to baptism and new life and being called out of death. You're a new creation. You see things with the lens of God instead of the lens of humanity."

After the homilies these Sundays, the Elect are then called forward to receive prayers from the congregation and priest, first in silence, then in intercessory prayer. The priest lays hands on them individually, praying a minor exorcism prayer for strengthening and healing.

### ABUNDANT GRACE

The Gospel readings and the prayers of these Sundays all combine to mutually benefit both the Elect and the faithful alike.

"We do this during Mass so the whole congregation is witness," said Ebambi. "It reminds them that, when they were baptized, they committed to something."

"Sometimes as an adult Catholic, you get lethargic, like, 'Okay, it's time to stand and say this; repeat after me,'" Harris said. "But for somebody receiving the sacraments, you're reminding them that there's power in what we're professing to be true and revealed by God."

"It helps us in our renewal of our faith, and that can be a powerful exercise of faith for somebody. We as a community here are going to do it again because we witnessed them making that profession for

themselves, and then we're going to do it for ourselves as a reminder of our baptism. We're professing and we're proclaiming, but we're also witnessing our faith in the world."

"Lent is the time to ask ourselves if we are just going through the motions of our faith," Nelson remarked. "Are we actually believing it and living a life of love in response to the gift of love that God has given us? It's a time to assess where we are in the journey of faith and to strive for an ongoing conversion of heart that is expressed bodily by the way we live our lives."

"The most important thing to emphasize to the Elect is that these aren't just rituals," Nelson continued. "They are gifts. The graces that they receive are going to be transformative." ✝



Deacon Mike Mocek (left, front row) and lay Stephen Ministers at Holy Family Parish in Fort Worth pose inside the sanctuary. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

# Caring Companions

Trained Stephen Ministers provide caring, confidential ministry to people in distress

By Christina Benavides

**T**here's nothing magical or high tech about listening to people work through grief or adversity, said Deacon Mike Mocek of Holy Family Parish.

"It's just really being with someone, listening to them, and praying with them, and helping them find their way through difficulty," said the deacon, who has served the Fort Worth parish for more than 20 years.

A Stephen Minister is a lay person who

has been vetted, been interviewed, and received more than 50 hours of "pretty extensive training," Dcn. Mocek said. Among the 13 active ministers at Holy Family, there are "everything from teachers to personnel specialists to engineers to attorneys to retired military ... the one common thing is they just want to use their talents to help people."

Ministers "are trained to listen, they're trained to accompany, and they're trained to pray with someone who needs prayers," he explained.

Care receivers may be struggling with "the loss of a loved one, a breakup of a relationship, the loss of a job, or dealing with financial problems. You know, just any of life's problems that are thrown at us from time to time."

Those dealing with daily struggles, big or small, are invited to ask about the ministry, the deacon added.

"I think oftentimes we downplay our problems and say, 'Well, that's not that

Continued on Page 20



Stephen Leader Cay Moore (third from right, first row) stands with a group of lay Stephen Ministers at St. Ann Parish in Burleson. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

### From Page 19

big a deal,' but they can drag us down if we leave them and don't get help."

Upon learning of a care receiver and their struggles, a Stephen Leader like the deacon will connect the individual with a Stephen Minister. Together, receiver and minister decide on the location, structure, and length of their meetups.

But they all share the same goal: to afford the receiver, a fellow child of God, a space to share their struggles without fear of reproach or guilt of burdening others.

### HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK

"We have family and friends that we can talk to a certain degree," explained Cay Moore of St. Ann Parish in Burleson. "But with Stephen Ministry, it's confidential, it's judgment free, and that listening is powerful."

There is a complete and total focus on the care receiver that helps individuals work out life's sorrows and stresses without the fear or guilt of burdening others, she said.

"When you're going through certain types of trauma, you have to say the same things over and over and over again, and

friends and family get tired of it," Moore said. "You get on that loop of 'I'm repeating myself, I'm repeating myself,' but you have to do it because you haven't been able to work through that yet. And so that's the gift that the Stephen Minister can give by sitting there and being patient."

The group of nearly 20 Stephen Ministers she leads at St. Ann provides support to the parish and surrounding community by "working behind the scenes, very quietly" — and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, Moore said.

"Every single Stephen Minister working



with a care receiver will talk about the Holy Spirit, how they could start to see the change from the early crisis to where people begin to work through [their grief and struggles] through the healing of the Holy Spirit," she said. "I think that's probably the most beautiful part of this is we feel the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit works through us."

Moore has served as a Stephen Leader alongside her husband, Joe Page, since 2020. From her unique standpoint, she can see the impact of the understated ministry. Often, she'll run into former care receivers who are living a renewed life of faith, with increased participation in the parish, now

unburdened and looking to delve deeper. "You see them active and involved, and they have hope, and they're back in the life of Christ," she said.

### TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER

When Dorothy Mladenka's husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, he stayed at home with her for a time before circumstances required him to move to a facility for advanced care.

The Holy Family parishioner had heard of Stephen Ministry at Mass, read about it in the bulletin, and acknowledged her daughter Jennifer's suggestion to reach out, "but I was not thinking about calling to be part of that," she admitted.

That changed after Dcn. Mocek personally checked in with her.

"Jennifer had mentioned that maybe this would be a good thing for you," Mladenka recalled the deacon telling her. "He said he would assign someone to me and that everything was done anonymously."

The sessions started off a little stilted, but with some coffee, prayer, and the space to talk freely, it became easier to share.

"We were meeting once every two or three weeks for quite a while. I felt so blessed to have someone as compassionate and helpful and prayerful as her. She was and is wonderful," she said.

The visits worked around Mladenka's schedule. "I don't want to be in your way; I just want to be helpful," her Stephen Minister would tell her.

With time, she found compassion, healing, and friendship.

"I didn't realize how much benefit that would be until we actually got into it," she said. "I see the need for that sort of compassion and understanding from people more so than I did before. And I certainly know that we all need each other, that's for sure."

Mladenka now is the one to refer others to Dcn. Mocek and share the message of Stephen Ministry with friends and neighbors: "You can call them and see what happens because it is so inspiring. [My Stephen Minister] was so good about all these prayers that should help me to remember what we're doing, what we're here for, and how important it is for each of us to support each other."

### A BAPTISMAL CALL

At the roots of Stephen Ministry is a Lutheran pastor who couldn't meet the demand for his individual counsel, so he started training lay people to assist him in meeting the needs of his congregation.

Monsignor Joe Pemberton first heard of Stephen Ministry while assigned as pastor of St. Rita Parish in Fort Worth and helped support its growth in the parishes he served in the diocese.

Most Blessed Sacrament parishioner Tommy Woodson and his wife, Linda, served as Stephen Ministers and leaders at the Arlington parish and worked closely with Msgr. Pemberton.

They saw firsthand how the ministry helped ease the faithful as well as relieve some weight of a priest's workload.

The warmth and friendly approach of Stephen Ministry "can be a great help and support" to a priest, Tommy Woodson said. "I think that's what [Msgr. Pemberton] saw and was hoping for, so that he wouldn't fall short in terms of meeting the pastoral needs of the parish."

Msgr. Pemberton agreed, sharing how "from a pastor's perspective, Stephen Ministry has really been a great help.

"For one thing, it's impossible for me or any priest to visit everyone who needs to be visited, so they become an instrument of reaching out to folks who need someone from the parish to be with them."

Often, Stephen Ministers will discover and, with their receiver's permission, share with their pastor how their receiver has sacramental needs or had strayed from the Church and desires to return. Once aware of the need, a priest can arrange to meet with them.

"Stephen Ministry also is a great empowerment of the laity to live out their baptismal call in serving their brothers and sisters in the name of Christ," the retired priest added. "They discover that this journey to God is done within a community, and we're all part of this family, and some of the family members are hurting."

This opportunity for the laity to help neighbors in pain can remind both receiver and minister we are never alone in grief.

"We believe that you're like Jesus, walking with somebody at their time of need," Woodson explained. 🇺🇸



# A BLESSED opportunity

Path for Catholic school financial support opens

## WHAT IS TEFA?

The Texas Education Freedom Accounts (TEFA) provide \$1 billion in funding to give parents greater freedom in choosing the best educational environment for their children.

Parents receive more than \$10,000 per child for a Catholic school education or other private school. Students with certain disabilities qualify for \$30,000.

## AM I ELIGIBLE?

Texas residents who are U.S. citizens or have been lawfully admitted into the U.S. may apply. Children with disabilities and lower income households will be prioritized.

## HOW DO I APPLY?

Go to [educationfreedom.texas.gov](https://educationfreedom.texas.gov). The process takes around 15 minutes.

## WHAT IF I NEED HELP?

The Catholic Schools Office has a step-by-step guide and other resources on the website, [catholicschoolsfwdioc.org](https://catholicschoolsfwdioc.org).

## WHEN DO I APPLY?

Applications are accepted through March 17, and the timing of the application will not affect your eligibility or prioritization.

## WHEN WILL I KNOW?

Parents will be notified if their children will receive funding in early April.

STAY  
UPDATED



Sign up for important TEFA updates at [CatholicSchoolsFWDioc.org/tefa-school-choice](https://CatholicSchoolsFWDioc.org/tefa-school-choice)

# 'RENEWED AND TRANSFORMED' BY GOD'S WORD AND SACRAMENTS

By Susan Moses

**N**ick Culter of Holy Redeemer Parish in Aledo had never met them before, but he spent his weekend with some old friends.

Dr. Scott Hahn, Dr. Jeff Morrow, and Dr. John Bergsma of the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology presented a "Renewed and Transformed" conference at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Keller.

Culter said books, podcasts, and videos of the three Catholic theologians were an authoritative and helpful source of knowledge as he and his wife explored Catholicism and ultimately entered the Church at the Easter Vigil last year.

On Feb. 6-7, Culter and more than 900 others attended six talks by the men, who themselves are converts. Their presentations explored the sacraments of Holy Eucharist and reconciliation in light of both the Old and New Testaments.

The conference, Dr. Scott Hahn told the *North Texas Catholic*, is "designed to have that Emmaus experience where hearts are burning within us [as the Scriptures are explained], and then the eyes of faith are opened in the breaking of the bread, the Eucharist. ... I really think that discovering the center and the source of Scripture in our Eucharistic worship is life changing."

That message was received by Culter. After the conference, he said, "It made

me realize that I can never stop learning about the Eucharist. I can never appreciate the Eucharist enough — just the graces, the actual graces that come from receiving the Eucharist."

Linda Corso, a St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parishioner, had a similar response to the presentations.

"Dr. Hahn talked about how amazing it is that we are unamazed with the Mass and the Eucharist. People go up so nonchalantly — it becomes routine, and it should never become routine," emphasized Corso.

Corso entered the Catholic Church in 2000, and she said the conference's Bible teachings helped generate "that enthusiasm that stirs in your soul like when you first become Catholic when you're a convert and you're just so on fire. Okay, I'm on fire again," she said.

The themes of renewal and transformation resonated, especially with Lent approaching, she added. After attending the conference, she plans to "put more time into reading the Bible, and not just to read it, but let it transform me."

In the 25 years since Dr. Hahn founded the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, he has seen fruit from their

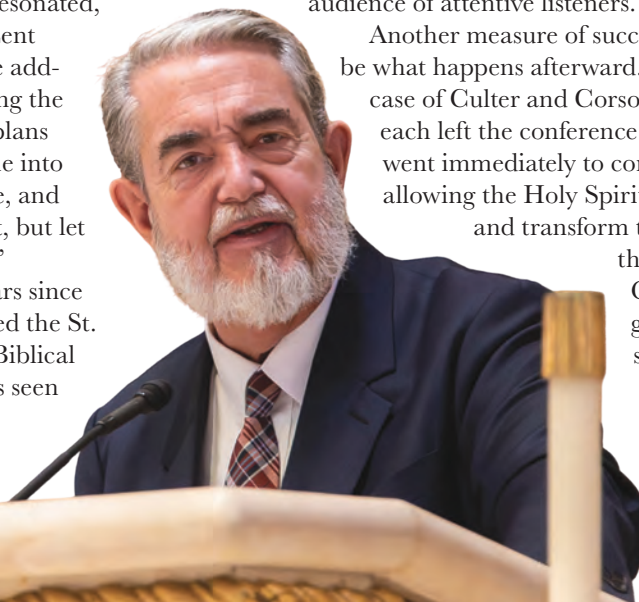
efforts to help lay Catholics become biblically literate and clergy become biblically fluent, ultimately leading to transformation by the Word of God. He said, "Forty years ago, even 25 years ago, I wouldn't have had enough faith to ask for all of the signs of hope that I'm seeing now."

He said Catholics, and the Catholic curious, have access to formation and a vast supply of materials available via the internet, books, and movies. Catholic conferences are full. OCIA classes are doubling in size each year — "signs that people are just waking up and coming to life spiritually. ... It really seems to be a grassroots phenomenon where nobody's going to get the credit because it is so decentralized, except the Holy Spirit," he said.

The success of the "Renewed and Transformed" conference at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton can be measured by the large audience of attentive listeners.

Another measure of success would be what happens afterward. In the case of Culter and Corso, they each left the conference and went immediately to confession, allowing the Holy Spirit to renew and transform them

through God's grace in the sacraments. ✚



Dr. Scott Hahn (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

# Classroom Companions

Catholic schools benefit from a variety of supports



George, a lionhead rabbit, sits tucked inside a St. Francis of Assisi bird feeder at St. George Catholic School in Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

By Christina Benavides

**T**he Diocese of Fort Worth is blessed with 17 Catholic schools that work hard to support their students. A school district that grows by faith and faithful, the schools are ever evolving to further support student development in Catholic values and virtue as well as in academic excellence.

Beginning in fall 2026, the Texas Education Freedom Account (TEFA) grants, which prioritize students with special needs, will expand access to Catholic education for prospective students and families (see page 22).

However, long before TEFA passed, Superintendent Frank Perez said the diocese's Catholic schools had been working to address an increase in students with learning differences and have been "adding services where we are able to better support students."

The Schools Office is accustomed to meeting the needs of students who need dyslexia or speech therapy. Enrollment needs and budgets drive what other kinds of supports schools are equipped to provide for students with learning differences.

"We encourage families to contact their interested school to discuss what supports are available on that campus," Perez said, adding that the Schools Office is exploring means to "offer more comprehensive supports in the future," possibly through contractual partners.

Principal Mary Burns of St. John the Apostle Catholic School in North Richland Hills believes she has been called to find ways to serve more students with an array of learning disabilities and differences.

"We are called to the evangelization and formation of all God's children," she said.

Burns shared that she is working closely with two Nolan alumni whose

nonprofit is dedicated to creating inclusive, student-centered learning environments. Together, they have performed an audit on St. John's current capacity to serve their population of students with learning disabilities and have started training teachers on strategies to better reach their students, including those with diagnoses such as dyslexia, autism, ADHD, medical disabilities, and a variety of emotional, behavioral, and attention disorders.

"It is my desire — and that of many Catholic school educators — to serve all the students that God sends to us," she said.

Regardless of a student's academic support needs, students and staff can benefit from the social and emotional support of a four-legged specialist.

Three diocesan schools have found furry forms of emotional support, which is most appropriate during this jubilee year of St. Francis, patron saint of animals.

A second grader pets therapy dog Gig'em while handler Carolyn Apodaca speaks to the class at Holy Trinity Catholic School in Grapevine. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

## GIG'EM, HOLY TRINITY!

Heads turn and hearts race when Gig'em walks the halls at Holy Trinity Catholic School in Grapevine. With one lick and one flop of drooping, curly ears, a day's worth of worries and stresses immediately vanish.

The 12-year-old Cavalier King Charles spaniel has been in the business of pet therapy for nearly half of his life, under the warm and attentive care of handler and owner Carolyn Apodaca. Having heard of the relief a trained therapy animal could bring to those dealing with emotional stress, the A&M graduate of the class of 1969 decided to move forward with training Gig'em alongside her daughter, who had been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder.

"She and I went to classes, and he could tell when she was sad and could tell when she was upset but couldn't talk," Apodaca said, thinking back to the early days of Gig'em's training. It took some perseverance, but the spaniel's kind disposition and her handler's teamwork drove them to earn accreditation by the third attempt.

Since then, Gig'em has visited car dealerships, nursing homes, college libraries during finals seasons, and sometimes he'll even be spotted on the steps at Apodaca's home parish, Good Shepherd in Colleyville. There, the sweet pup performs what the parish priests have described as "angel work," providing comfort for the grieving, while his handler shares in the healing with devoted prayer.

It was at Good Shepherd where Apodaca met Holy Trinity Catholic School Principal Karen Ullman. Apodaca had hoped to bring Gig'em's gift of "giving love and kindness" to the school's students for some time and was ecstatic when Ullman agreed.

Apodaca and Gig'em visit the Grapevine school once every week or so and stop by classrooms where the dog's



presence has been requested.

"Gig'em's gift for Christmas was to go and help people who are in the nursing home and brighten their day," Apodaca told Amy Adams' class of third-grade students on Jan. 13.

In Kathy Smith's second-grade classroom, Gig'em wandered the room, saying hello as Apodaca related an interesting update about his day to the class.

In Christy Wasielewski's classroom, Gig'em sat down with a reading buddy, gently listening as a student flipped through the pages.

In the hallways, students paused and asked for permission to greet the senior dog. In the main office, Principal Ullman crouched down to greet Gig'em

**Continued on Page 26**



A student at St. Rita Catholic School listens to her teacher's lesson while reaching out to pet the school's service animal, Scout. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Administrative Assistant Lauren Menchaca carries George and Pepper, lionhead rabbits, that belong to St. George Catholic School in Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

### From Page 25

comfortably with a big hug as office staff told the *North Texas Catholic* how students are “so thrilled when they see Gig’em walk in. ... It really brings them a lot of joy.”

The spaniel and handler duo are always welcome in the office, especially when students have found themselves in a spot of trouble. “Makes a difference with their emotions and their attitude,” one faculty member shared. “The focus becomes outside of them and their current situation, and it helps them focus on Gig’em and [allows] all of the other emotions to kind of regulate.”

After a long day at work, Gig’em usually plops down to catch up on rest at home, Apodaca said. Although it is a bit tiring, visiting with students is one of their favorite parts of the week.

“It’s a blessing,” she shared.

### ST. GEORGE HOPS TO IT

Before she became the administrative assistant at St. George Catholic School, Lauren Menchaca was a substitute and an



active member of the Fort Worth parish’s youth group.

“I really love getting to work with all of the kids,” the 20-year-old said. “I love every single one of them.”

As an administrative assistant, Menchaca is often on the phone, answering emails, or assisting Principal Nikki Leafgreen. A bonus responsibility also has her working with the school’s two fluffiest residents: George and Pepper.

The lionhead rabbits first arrived at the Catholic school about six years ago and are held in a spacious hutch in one

of the classrooms, which they share with first-grade students and Blaze, a bearded dragon.

The students show great love and ownership of their class pets, Leafgreen said. “The kids are the ones who take care of the bunnies, and they have a zoologist in the classroom, so it’s a lot of fun.”

Menchaca also keeps an eye on the rabbits’ care and broadens their access to other students. Every so often, she encounters a student entering the building “needing a little bit of extra love or, I don’t know, just looking a bit anxious.”

On those days, she pulls them to the side and asks them to wait in the office. “Then I come back in the room with George and Pepper,” she said. “You can immediately notice it in the kids. It’s like all that tension that they had just goes away and they’re just gentle with the bunnies. I love to see it.”

Working at the Catholic school has helped the young adult to come closer to God, especially now that she has so much to pray for.

“I feel like I need to pray for every single one of them,” she said, gesturing toward her fellow faculty and the students at the school. “They have, all of them, taught me something different.”

Along with George and Pepper’s warm support, St. George Catholic School provides their students with well-equipped teachers trained to meet students with a variety of learning needs plus an on-staff dyslexia therapist, a school counselor, small group learning, focused phonics interventions, and off-site speech services.

### SCOUT FOR ST. RITA

“We have to remember, she’s a retriever, not a giver,” is a common refrain heard at the entrance of St. Rita Catholic School.

As you walk into the school, a couple of tennis balls sitting near the main doors are in easy access for the school’s resident therapy dog, Scout the golden

retriever. Whether she’s jumping after a tossed tennis ball while the pre-kindergarten students wait for their turn for the restroom, calmly receiving pats from students in a classroom, or even praying alongside the students in the hallway, the young dog has dug her way into the hearts and daily routines of the school’s faculty and students.

“She’s part of the identity of St. Rita’s. Every classroom has a picture of her somewhere,” principal and handler Kindra Johnston said. Well into her third year of serving the students and faculty at the Fort Worth school, Scout has inspired growth in St. Rita’s students.

“The love and development of empathy have been huge,” Johnston said, explaining how the golden retriever has improved her students’ “faith in humanity.”

Even the most introverted of students find themselves looking for Scout, Johnston said.

Fourth grader Lola told the *NTC* that Scout is her best friend.

“She’s got her favorite students or those that usually need a little more love,” Johnston said.

Along with Scout’s sunny presence, students at St. Rita Catholic School receive support from Literacy United for dyslexia support and speech as well as differentiated accommodations in class. 🇺🇸



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Heather Reynolds, president and CEO of Catholic Charities Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

# HOME AGAIN

Heather Reynolds returns to Catholic Charities Fort Worth as CEO to apply years of research experience

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

**A**fter spending seven years at one of the most acclaimed universities in the country researching effective poverty programs, Heather Reynolds is returning to Catholic Charities Fort Worth as president and chief executive officer.

Her homecoming is perfectly timed. Just as Bishop Michael Olson and CCFW's Executive Board began searching for a qualified administrator to lead the mission-oriented agency, Reynolds resigned her position as managing director of the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at University of Notre Dame and moved back to the city where she attended college and began a successful career in social work.

The Texas Christian University

graduate spent 17 years at CCFW working her way up from a 22-year-old intern in the clinical counseling department to assuming leadership of the organization at age 25. The promotion made her one of the youngest CEOs of a nonprofit in the U.S.

"Our daughter is just months away from entering high school, so we had to decide whether to remain in South Bend another four to five years or make a change," Reynolds said, explaining Fort Worth always felt like home. "When the CEO position became vacant at Catholic Charities, I was asked to come in for an interview."

## A HEART FOR POVERTY WORK

Her first day back on the job was Feb. 17. Coming back to the agency where she spent so many years was an easy decision.

"Catholic Charities has my heart," said the Arkansas native. "Where else can you work in one of the best communities on earth, with an amazing cause and in an amazing diocese? My heart is in poverty work, and I'm so excited to be going back to Catholic Charities."

During her tenure as CEO, Reynolds launched a \$16 million capital campaign to build the facilities necessary to aid a growing number of impoverished families. Successful strategies developed under her watch include Padua, a holistic case management program assisting needy families, and Stay the Course, a program designed for low-income students facing education challenges.

LEO researched the effectiveness of Padua and found it increased the probability of unemployed

participants finding full-time work.

“It worked and now LEO and Catholic Charities Fort Worth are working together to raise money from national donors to expand and replicate Padua in Chicago and South Bend,” she explained. “The CCFW model will be implemented in two other cities and that makes me so proud. Padua has amazing outcomes for families and their economic condition. And it started here at Catholic Charities Fort Worth!”



Heather Reynolds (center) poses with Catholic Charities Fort Worth staff and board members on Feb. 17.

## FINDING WHAT WORKS

When Reynolds arrived at Notre Dame, LEO conducted 25 research studies across the country. Today there are more than 110 studies trying to identify innovative and effective programs and policies that help people move permanently out of poverty.

“I’ve become even more passionate during my time at Notre Dame about the importance of evidence in services,” she said.

At the federal level, the U.S. spends \$26,000 per recipient on anti-poverty programs.

“That’s a lot of money and we don’t know what works,” the CEO pointed out. “If we’re going to be about the dignity of the human person, I’m going to make sure people coming through the doors of Catholic Charities Fort Worth are given programs and services that actually work.”

According to the data she studied, one of the most vulnerable populations in society is the family — specifically fathers and husbands.

“Even programs that typically work

don’t work for men,” she said, citing workforce participation and education attainment as examples. “And we all know men are critical to the family structure and raising healthy boys.”

Reynolds wants to make sure future CCFW programming brings fathers back into the family services picture.

“The way our system works today nationally, it doesn’t incentivize men to stay with and participate in the family,” she added. “We need to change that.”

## ENERGIZED AND GRATEFUL

The recently named CCFW executive spent her first few days at the agency’s Thornhill Drive headquarters getting to know employees and listening to their concerns. A lot has changed since she left the nonprofit in 2018.

“I’m coming in with a long history but also fresh eyes because of my time at LEO,” said Reynolds, who promises to bring what she learned to Catholic Charities. “I’m excited to get to know the team that has been working so diligently every day making sure we are the hands

and feet of Christ.”

Spending seven years with like-minded people, immersed in research to solve poverty, is very different from the immediacy of social work.

“I had the time and headspace to go deep into an issue because there wasn’t a flow of people who needed help right away,” she observed. “Experiencing that was a gift.”

Energized and grateful for new opportunities, Reynolds is ready to go back into the trenches with clients.

“I’m ready to be in solidarity with the poor and walk into a lobby full of people again,” she said enthusiastically. “I missed that. I can take what I learned and bring it back to Catholic Charities for the greater good.”

Reynolds, her husband John, and their daughter Olive are looking forward to immersing themselves in Texas culture again with one newfound interest.

“I’ve developed an affinity for Notre Dame football,” she admitted. “I love the traditions surrounding the team, so I’ll be a huge fan going forward.” 🇺🇸

# for love that lasts, put God first

The sacrament of marriage mirrors the sacrificial love  
between Jesus Christ and His Church

By Jennifer Johnson

**L**ong-time married couples are often asked about their secret to a successful and happy marriage. Answers probably vary, but the Catholic Church's response is short and sweet: Put Christ at its center.

The sacrament of marriage is a lifelong, sacred covenant between a man and a woman that is meant to mirror the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church. Just as Jesus perfectly displayed sacrificial love for mankind's salvation, marriage should also witness to the free, complete, permanent, and exclusive sacrificial gift of self between spouses.

Deacon Jim Bindel, who oversees marriage preparation at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in Wichita Falls, said there is a right ordering and an important connection between God, prayer, and nuptial love. "You have to love God first. If you love God first, you will love your spouse more than you ever thought you could," he said. "The more you pray, the more you understand that."

In addition to being a witness of God's love for the Church, Dcn. Bindel asserted that marital vocations have an eternal component.

"This commitment is a call to holiness and to participating in God's will and plan for all of humanity," he said. "It is part of our spiritual journey where, when man and woman become one, the goal is to get each other to heaven."

Echoing that idea was nationally acclaimed speakers and authors Dr. Andrew and Sarah Swafford who spoke at a Marriage on Tap event held at Good Shepherd Parish in Colleyville on Jan. 31.

Dr. Swafford described marriage as a training ground for the ultimate good, which is heaven. "Time flies, eternity awaits," he said. "Every person who ever lived still does somewhere."

The Swaffords shared ideas about how to keep Christ at the center of one's marriage and said that it starts with pursuing virtue and purging sin. "Self-mastery makes possible the self-gift of love," said Dr. Swafford. He pointed to the Beatitudes as a vehicle for taking personal inventory and discovering areas of spiritual weakness. In addressing these, we unite more closely to Jesus by increasing virtue in our lives.

The Swaffords shared that an



Dr. Andrew and Sarah Swafford speak at a Marriage on Tap event at Good Shepherd Parish in Colleyville on Jan. 31. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)



Paul and Colene Barbaro share a laugh during Marriage on Tap at Good Shepherd Parish. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

important part of healing from past sins is to “surrender the debt” by forgiving others and ourselves. Experiencing God’s mercy and sharing that gift with those who have hurt us has a direct impact on family life. “The greatest gift you can give your spouse and children is the gift of your own healing,” Sarah affirmed.

Courtney Duffy, who attended the Marriage on Tap event with her husband of almost 32 years, agreed that each spouse must individually pursue their own healing and their personal relationship with God. “We are all broken, and we bring our brokenness to Jesus for healing,” she said. “I cannot heal my spouse, but I can provide a loving place for that journey.”

The Swaffords reminded attendees to bring excellence to their marriages and families. “Instead of giving the world our best, we need to give the ones in our household our best,” Dr. Swafford said. “There’s always going to be rupture [in relationships]. It’s all about how you repair.”

They explained how identifying common patterns that tear down oneness — such as invalidation, escalation, and negative interpretation — is a positive step toward repair. Learning how to spot the triggers or lies in a relationship can help couples understand what those patterns

are and why they happen, both of which are necessary to adequately heal marital weak spots.

“We invite Jesus into our marriage when we acknowledge our shortcomings and pursue healing,” said Kate Casey, who attended the event with her husband of 30 years. “We also lean into our faith when we practice patience and forgiveness with each other and ourselves.”

The Swaffords emphasized the need for married couples to journey through marriage and family life with other like-minded couples. They spoke about pursuing faith-based marital friendships using a Polish word that St. Pope John Paul II lived out as a single man seeking community during the Communist invasion of Poland: *srodowisko* [pronounced sro-doh-VISko]. They explained *srodowisko* as a “zone of freedom” for “friendships based on faith.”

“You cannot do this alone,” Sarah said. “We really need each other because it’s really hard.” She shared that the best decision they ever made was to invite other married couples to their home on a monthly basis, which they call “First Saturdays.” For years, the Swaffords have gathered with the same six couples and their children to pray a decade of the

Rosary, sing praise songs, share a meal, and have honest conversation.

“[The kids] see other families pray and then they go play while couples share their ‘high’ and ‘low’ from that month. The magic is in that,” Sarah said. “You have to work hard to have a village today. Find a *srodowisko* you can share highs and lows with. Start with just one other couple.”

The Caseys have also benefited from a similar experience in their marriage. “Jim and I are members of a small church community with six other couples. The group has helped us grow in our faith, and we enjoy the love and friendship we have found with the other couples,” Casey said. “We are all in the same stage of life so that helps us understand and support each other. Our [community] has helped us grow in our prayer life as individuals and as a couple.”

Dcn. Bindel said it is important for couples to surround themselves with like-minded people who have similar values so that they do not become “influenced by things outside of our faith that tug at us and pull us away.” Married couples should “get involved in parish life so that you know you are not alone,” he said. “You have a parish family to support and take care of you.” 🇺🇸

# many years, much faith

Catholic Campus Center at Midwestern State University celebrates a milestone anniversary

By Jenara Kocks Burgess

This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> year that Catholic students at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls have had their own building on campus — the Catholic Campus Center. For the last 25 of those years, one woman has been at the helm with a singular mission.

“My number one goal for the campus ministry is to remain open to the Holy Spirit’s movement and to cooperate with God’s plan, rather than get in His way. I often have ideas or plans for a new school year, but first I need to check with my student leaders to see if they agree that my thoughts reflect the needs of the community. And then I try very hard to remain docile to the Holy Spirit and let go of the things that seem to not go according to God’s plans for the ministry,” said Debbie Veitenheimer, campus minister.

Scrapbooks note that Catholic Campus Ministry was established on the MSU campus in 1983 with a priest and campus minister who both had offices at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in Wichita Falls.

Students gathered once a month in a tiny chapel in Killingsworth Residence

Hall. All other events were held in the Clark Student Center until the CCC building was built in 1986.

## DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Veitenheimer said the MSU CCC has changed in many ways during her 25 years as its campus minister.

“It began small with students predominantly from the Caribbean. Over the years, it has grown in size and in diversity. Today we are probably triple the size we were 25 years ago and sadly, we have almost no Caribbean students. Instead, we have many students from Latin and South America. In fact, at any given time, one-third to half of those gathered are Spanish speaking,” Veitenheimer said.

She also said since the Catholic Church is universal, it is especially important for campus ministers to serve students who come from abroad alongside American students.

“They are so far from home, and often the only thing that unites them is having a shared Catholic community. The language of the Church is unity and love, and so even if English isn’t their first language, their faith reminds them of home. I love meeting Catholic students from across the world and learning how they grew up in



the faith,” Veitenheimer said.

She started a tradition of displaying the flags of the home countries of students involved in the ministry — about 30 flags.

“That way, when they walk into our building, they see their flag and feel welcome and at home,” she said.

## A PLACE TO GROW

“We have tried a variety of different outreach efforts over the years. Personal invitation is definitely one that bears the most fruit, partnered with good hospitality once a new student walks in our building,” Veitenheimer said.

Weekly activities include Mass, faith and fellowship night, OCIA, reconciliation, and the Divine Mercy Chaplet. Other events range from Eucharistic processions to Catholic trivia nights.

“Being at the CCC has helped me



Students at Midwestern State University Catholic Campus Center enjoy a lighthearted moment before they pray a blessing over Debbie Veitenheimer, campus minister. The MSU CCC building opened 40 years ago, and Veitenheimer has served 25 years. (NTC/Bertha Salazar)

grow so much in my faith. Having it on campus has encouraged me to build meaningful habits like praying the chaplet, spending time in fellowship, and having quiet moments alone with Jesus. It has also helped me form connections with people my age who share similar beliefs, which has made me feel far less alone,” said Rita Zapata, a senior early education major at MSU, who has been involved in the CCC for the past three years.

Omar Combie of Saint Lucia is a 2022 graduate of MSU with a degree in mass communications. “The CCC was one of the most important aspects of my MSU experience. It provided me with great community, spiritual grounding, and part-time employment as a student assistant. Many of the memories I hold

dear from my time at MSU are CCC moments,” he said.

Combie said his time at the MSU CCC improved his interpersonal skills and leadership traits, which has been a tremendous help with his job as marketing assistant at Sir Arthur Lewis Community College in Saint Lucia, a volcanic island country in the eastern Caribbean Sea.

“Secondly, the CCC was a watershed moment for my faith formation which ultimately led me to apply for the priesthood in my archdiocese. I am currently in a pre-seminary program,” he said.

#### **OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES**

In addition to helping students learn about the universality of the Catholic Church by welcoming students from all

countries, Veitenheimer is convinced of the importance of offering students an opportunity to serve others on mission trips.

Over the years, she has taken her students on international mission trips to Mexico and Guatemala as well as domestic trips to Joplin, Missouri, after the EF-5 tornado in 2011, and recently to Chicago.

“Our recent trips to Chicago have also afforded students a chance to see up close the day-to-day life of young religious brothers and sisters. The Franciscans of the Eucharist are a model of humbly serving Jesus to those He has surrounded them with in an impoverished Chicago neighborhood. Mission trips, even for a week, change the lives of my students,” she said. 🇺🇸



# Building support

A guild forms to provide prayerful and practical support for the spiritual mission of the Carmel of Jesus Crucified

By Susan Moses

In a matter of weeks, the people and parishes of Cooke County rose to the challenge of providing land and materials to build a temporary dwelling place for the Carmel of Jesus Crucified, a new Discalced Carmelite Monastery established in the rolling, wooded hills south of the Red River. On Dec. 8, 2025, Bishop Michael Olson celebrated Mass and performed the Rite of Enclosure for the cloister.

To prepare for the monastery's founding, benefactors donated land and a manufactured home; carpenters, electricians, and plumbers transformed the home to accommodate eight cells; and parishioners cleaned, organized, and sewed curtains.

Currently, local farmers provide eggs, milk, cheese, and produce to the Carmel;

a fisherman sends his catch on a regular basis; and woodworkers are constructing bookcases, hanging racks, and a table and benches. Students at Sacred Heart Catholic School in Muenster are building a "speak room" to enable the nuns to host a visitor without breaking their enclosure.

Another new structure is being built: the Guild of the Carmel of Jesus Crucified, an auxiliary organization to provide a "sustainable, systematic way to help" with the needs of the six nuns and two women in formation, said Mary Del Olmo, a consecrated virgin who lives nearby and serves as a bridge between the community and the nuns.

Sustainable, Del Olmo explained, so that a burden of needs doesn't fall on one person, and systematic, so that if someone steps away for one reason or another, support continues seamlessly.

The guild hopes to create a community of supporters across the diocese to "support the needs of the Carmelite nuns of the Carmel of Jesus Crucified in a practical and concrete way while at the same time supporting their spiritual mission of prayer, solitude, and silence," their mission statement describes.

## BROADER SUPPORT

The faithful of Sacred Heart Parish in Muenster, St. Peter Parish in Lindsay, and St. Mary Parish in Gainesville have been "unbelievably excellent and immensely helpful," said Elaine Schilling, a Sacred Heart parishioner who is helping establish the guild.

One of the guild's early objectives is to broaden the base of prayerful and practical support for the Carmel.

Beth Kelley, business manager of St.

At left, students from Sacred Heart Catholic School construct a “speak room” for the Carmel of Jesus Crucified.

Center, Bert Hesse helped adapt the manufactured home to accommodate eight women.

At right, Bert Walterscheid takes measurements for the “speak room.”  
(NTC/Thomas Otto)



Peter Parish in Lindsay, is a founding member of the guild and coordinates a weekly grocery run for the cloister.

Kelley said, “I’m hoping that people become aware of them, not just in Cooke County, but in the whole diocese. They’re not just here for us. They’re here for the whole diocese.

“I hope in the long range that all the community feels their love and support and their prayers — that it becomes a part of all of our lives; we all help take care of them. And as they’re praying and serving us, that we as a community are able to serve them as well.”

### MUTUAL SUPPORT

In a recent letter to Carmel supporters, Mother Marie of the Incarnation, OCD, wrote that each of us is being called by God, and our calls can be interdependent. “You know this, for even our call to found here in your midst, you have accepted and received as your call from God. Today, we want to take this moment to thank you for your yes to this call and for all that yes has meant for us.”

After thanking the community for their material support and friendship, Mother Marie continued, “God has been so good to us. We see His light shining

brightly in you, in the charity with which you have welcomed us. God called us here to pray. To pray for priests, to pray for the dear, dear people of your diocese who are very obviously close to the heart of Jesus, and to pray for those who have wandered away from God.

“As we pray for all of you and thank you for all that you do to help us maintain the solitude and silence proper to our life, we ask you likewise to pray for us to be faithful to our proper calling — faithful to the hidden prayer to which we have been called. In this way, we will support each other and bring abundant fruits of holiness to gladden the heart of Holy Mother Church.”

### QUIET PLACE TO PRAY

In addition to the development of a guild, initial plans are underway regarding a permanent site for the monastery on about 40 acres of land near the temporary enclosure. The nuns will reside at their current site as long as necessary for the permanent monastery to be funded and built.

Del Olmo, who is also a member of the guild, said, “What people don’t realize is this type of life that they live — this monastic life, this enclosed life — just puts

them so near Jesus’ heart. There are so few distractions in their day-to-day life. And so the prayer that they offer for us, it’s just so powerful.

“And they’re praying for all of us, whether we’ve asked for it or not. And somebody’s praying all the time for us, for whatever our needs are.

“They’ve given everything to follow Jesus to that quiet spot to pray. Even Jesus left the world to go pray on the mountain. Even He left the apostolic life to just go to be with the Father. That’s what they’re doing. And so that grace is going to just spread all around our entire diocese and bless all of us,” Del Olmo explained. 🇺🇸

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND SUPPORT

Prayer requests may be made by mail:  
Mother Marie of the Incarnation, OCD  
Carmel of Jesus Crucified  
P.O. Box 308  
Muenster, TX 76252

For those wanting to provide financial support, checks can be made to “Carmel of Jesus Crucified.”

Or, scan the QR code to see the Amazon Wish List of the Carmel.

AMAZON  
WISH LIST





Photography on pages 36-37 by Juan Guajardo

# Helping Hands

Woodworkers, crafters, bakers, and cooks give back their God-given talents to benefit the Church and her faithful

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

Parishes flourish when members contribute their time and talents to serve the Church and each other. In the Diocese of Fort Worth, scores of North Texas Catholics are using their God-given abilities to provide hope, spread joy, and touch the lives of others with faith and friendship. Here are some ways people — skilled at knitting, sewing, carpentry, and cooking — are building the Kingdom of God by sharing their gifts with others.

When Carlos Cornejo came to the United States in 1986, he spoke no English, had no formal education, and was only 17 years old.

But what the native of Mexico lacked in schooling, he made up for with a desire to learn

and an innate talent to craft functional and decorative objects from an ordinary piece of wood. The Krum resident considers his self-taught skill a gift from God.

“I’ll never forget the co-worker who taught me how to read a tape measure,” Cornejo said, recalling his first job in construction trimming houses. “I’m from Mexico, and we used centimeters there, so it was different for me.”

Today, when the woodworker isn’t making custom cabinets for his employer, he’s helping transform the sanctuary at St. John Paul II University Church in Denton. Founded in 2012

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Carlos Cornejo, a woodworker and parishioner of St. John Paul II Parish in Denton, has built several custom pieces for the church. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



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to accommodate the growing spiritual needs of nearby university students, the parish moved into a new church building in 2019. Since then, Cornejo, a parishioner, has created two side altars, an ambo, and kneelers from the beauty of white oak timber. His latest project is fashioning a corner platform to house a hand-carved Divine Mercy statue from Italy donated by a parishioner.

“Everything I make — everything I do — is for Him,” he remarked, explaining his stewardship of time and talent. “Whenever you give something, the Lord returns it to you a hundred times more. I thank the Lord for everything He’s given me.”



Linda Bean, coordinator for the prayer shawl ministry at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine, shows a finished and blessed shawl on Feb. 9 after a ministry work session. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Cornejo doesn't sign any of his pieces, but he takes satisfaction knowing they'll remain part of the church when he's long gone.

"When I die, everything I've built will stay here," he added. "As long as my family knows my work, and the parish likes the job I do, I'm happy to make whatever they need."

Cornejo's donated furnishings enhance the interior of the sanctuary, according to Robert Black, the parish's business manager.

"The side altars he built are very similar to the high altar we have," he observed, commenting on the very detailed craftsmanship. "We don't have a lot of room so when we add items to the church they have to fit in aesthetically."

His humility, carpentry skills, and desire to serve the parish earned Cornejo a comparison to another talented woodworker: St. Joseph.

"We call him our St. Joseph," Black

enthused. "It's wonderful that we have parishioners with God-given skills who are willing to share them with others."

### HEARTS SPEAKING WITH HANDS

Formal prayer can strengthen faith and express concern for others. For a group of women at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine though, the proverb, "our hearts speak best through our hands," rings true.

Using their sewing, crocheting, knitting, and quilting skills, the needleworkers make prayer shawls, lap robes, and baby blankets for those needing physical and spiritual comfort.

"It's tangible proof that people are thinking and praying for them," explained Linda Bean, who started the ministry in September 2024 with Barbara Warnke. "It's not just for sick people, but also those going through a rough time. What we make is something they can hold onto."

In the last 18 months, 32 members of the ministry made 90 prayer shawls and lap robes along with 39 baby blankets for Loreto House — a pregnancy and parenting resource center with locations in Denton and Flower Mound.

Each piece of handiwork is delivered with a sewn-in label stating it was "prayerfully created" along with an attached Miraculous Medal, greeting card, and laundry instructions. Father Sojan George Puthiyaparampil, pastor, blesses the handiwork collectively in November. People can request a shawl or lap robe by contacting the parish.

"The beauty of this ministry is that it can involve homebound people," said Bean, who meets with members on the second Monday of each month in the morning and again in the evening to accommodate different schedules. "I go in periodically and find shawls left on

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the shelves for me by people who don't attend the meetings."

Some parishioners participate in the prayer shawl ministry by leaving bags of yarn in the office. Another patron sends a check to the parish office for the purchase of material.

Bean, a New York native whose grandmother taught her how to make doilies at age seven, said the ministry is a way of sharing your creativity and expertise to benefit others.

"It's an action thing — a way to do something for somebody else," she continued. "It's a way of serving our community with faith and love."

**FOOD AND FELLOWSHIP**

Always an active ambassador for Christ, Rita Cooper spent most of her 73 years on Earth loving, praying, and cooking for people.

"She was a cook for years. That's all she ever did," said Denise Clemons, explaining that her mother was a longtime employee at the old El Chico Restaurant and also worked at other businesses downtown. "She loved to cook and feed people."

The deceased St. Thomas the Apostle parishioner always kept food in the car in case she came across a homeless person.

"Now, I do the same," her daughter admitted. "I had a great mom and I'm grateful for her example."

Following in her mother's footsteps, Clemons is continuing a ministry Rita Cooper started decades ago at St. Thomas Parish in Fort Worth to raise money for the parish's building fund. What started with breakfast burritos made and sold by the longtime cook and her sisters for \$1 eventually turned into a monthly fundraiser known as the Saturday Supper Social.



Members of the prayer shawl ministry at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine make shawls on Feb. 9 at the church. After completing a shawl, Fr. Sojan George, pastor, blesses the items, after which they are donated to community members in need. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)





From left, Tina Castaneda, Helen Mahan, and Mary Ann Krivanek prep for a Saturday Supper Social at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Fort Worth on Feb. 14. (NTC/Ben Torres)



Clemons and a team of other volunteers use their culinary and hostess skills to offer food and fellowship to worshippers once a month after the 4 p.m. Mass. Spaghetti and tacos are menu favorites and cost \$10 a plate. Ingredients for the entrees and desserts are all donated.

“In 10 years, we’ve raised over \$50,000,” the organizer said. “It’s not a large amount of money, but we want to keep the plates affordable so people can have that social time.”

Promoting fellowship is an essential part of the ministry. Many senior citizens, and parishioners grieving a spouse, look forward to the monthly post-Mass gathering.

“We want to make sure people can have a meal with their church family,” Clemons pointed out. “It’s rewarding not only financially for the parish, but it’s nice to see church members spending time together. As the parish grows, we don’t want to lose that.”

#### **A RECIPE IN DISCIPLESHIP**

At Our Lady of Fatima Parish, no social occasion is complete without a

cake baked by Father Vinh Van Vu, CRM. The pastor, who celebrated the silver jubilee of his ordination last year, is known for making special Vietnamese confections for Christmas, Tet, and other festivities.

“I started baking cakes when I was in the Diocese of Amarillo to raise funds for the church,” said the native of North Vietnam. “Since then, I’ve always baked cakes for the parish I was in.”

The self-taught pastry chef relied on YouTube and internet videos to master the art of baking and explore recipes. Over the years, the 73-year-old became more inventive by adding unusual flavors and ingredients to a basic recipe.

“I always make them a little different by adding some rum or coconut cream,” explained the priest, who bakes as many as 20 cakes for parish events. Cakes are also his standard hostess gift when visiting a parishioner’s home.

“I don’t make them to raise money.

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Father Vinh Van Vu, CRM, pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Fort Worth, makes his Pandan honeycomb cake on Feb. 3 at his rectory. Fr. Vu enjoys cooking and loves to bake desserts to thank his parishioners. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



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Now I just give them to people for free,” he said. “I just want them enjoyed.”

One cake flavor Fr. Vu avoids is chocolate because “the Vietnamese don’t like chocolate. It’s too sweet.”

For Fr. Vu, making cakes is a recipe in discipleship.

“My hobby is another way to serve people,” he said. “When I have a day off, I like to bake. I make a cake every week for our kitchen volunteers.”

### CRAFTING FOR CHRIST

Creativity is making a difference at St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish in Roanoke. Almost as soon as Bishop Michael Olson established the faith community in 2022, a small circle of artisans offered to host a fundraiser for the new parish, and Crafters for Christ was born.

The group’s first sale in October 2024 featured all quilted items — table runners, Christmas tree skirts, blankets, and stuffed animals.

“After that first sale, people got to know us,” said Kathy Smith, one of the original organizers. “Parishioners came up to tell us they didn’t quilt but could crochet, knit, or make cards, and the ministry grew from that.”

Crafters for Christ has hosted several more craft sales since then — the most recent in a new building that serves as both a parish hall and worship space. It was the first time





Members of Crafters for Christ, from St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish in Roanoke, make Valentine's Day cards on Feb. 11. The cards were distributed to nursing home and care facility patients. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

members had the room to actively advertise the fundraiser to the public.

The December 2025 Christmas craft bazaar offered wreaths, scarves, ornaments, and dolls dressed in winter garments. A parishioner who recently returned from India sold handmade saris she brought back.

Not only did the ministry double its earnings from the previous sale, but residents in the area got to learn about the new Catholic parish.

"They would have otherwise just driven by, but the sale brought them in, and they asked questions about the parish," continued Smith, who considers the interaction a form of evangelization. "It was a way of reaching out into the community. So many people told us they didn't know there was a church here."

Along with donating items for sale, the crafters pieced together quilts for raffle, made rosary pouches for first Communion recipients, created palm crosses for confirmation candidates, and provided baby

blankets to new moms.

When the new parish hall/worship space was dedicated in November 2025, members created altar linens and banners in liturgical colors and made a signature quilt to hang in the narthex.

The ministry, which touches many lives, is multi-focused.

"It lets people know who we are as Catholics," Smith suggested. "We're reaching out to the community while supporting our parish and each other."

Deacon Daniel Zavala loves the ministry's name, Crafters for Christ.

"That's what Jesus was all about — using your time, talent, and treasure for the good and building God's Kingdom," said St. Teresa's coordinator of parish life. "That's exactly what they're trying to do."

Even the smallest gifts of stewardship make a huge difference.

"Getting involved is a wonderful way to help the parish and honor God," the deacon added. 🇺🇸

MORE  
PHOTOS!



See more photos of artisans at work by scanning the QR code or visiting [North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.com](https://North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.com)



# Man of many hats

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

**A** hat tells a lot about the person wearing it. It can signal someone's occupation, heritage, team affiliations, or personal style.

But for Dr. Christopher Hull, walking into an examination room sporting a full Native American headdress, a World War II helmet, or a brightly festooned Mardi Gras fedora is more than just a quirky form of self-expression. Over the years, the retired orthopedic surgeon used his eclectic 2,400-plus collection of headgear to build rapport with patients who were often anxious and in pain. Hats became part of the healing process.

"When I walk into an exam room wearing a silly hat according to the day's designation

(like National Popcorn Day), it breaks the ice and puts a person at ease. We have something else to talk about," said the osteopath who grew up in Canyon, Texas. "If I wear a hat from someone's native country, they get really excited. It probably brightens their day and increases endorphines and cortisol levels. If you're happy, you feel better."

A St. Andrew parishioner who converted to Catholicism after marrying his wife, Karen, Dr. Hull's fascination with hats is rooted in childhood. His grandparents sang opera in Italy, and he remembers playing with their hats, stored in an uncle's room, as a youngster. He started his own collection in 1995 when a patient gave him a Russian soldier's garrison hat from the Soviet-Afghan War.

"I wore it around the office during the

◀ Dr. Christopher Hull, who has amassed a collection of over 2,400 hats from around the world. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

day. People would come in, I'd introduce myself and ask, 'How can I help you?'" the physician said, recalling one memorable remark. "A patient told me, Doc, my back is killing me but why are you wearing that hat?"

It was so much fun and opened the lines of communication so easily, that Dr. Hull began wearing a comical or thought-provoking hat one day a week. Before long, both patients and office staff were asking to see the hats more often and the hobby grew.

### A GROWING COLLECTION

"Patients started bringing me hats," he explained. "About 80 percent of the hats were given to me. The other 20 percent I found on trips or by going to antique malls."

The extensive assortment of crowns, military caps, and bowlers includes some intriguing finds. There's a Don Quixote helmet/shaving basin, ceremonial hats from Vietnam, and a cap signed by Admiral Pete "Viper" Pettigrew, a naval aviator who inspired the movie "Top Gun". The latter was a gift from an injured Navy Seal.

A hat worn in the movie "Titanic" and a Native American "roach" head-dress, made by Jim Bonnetmaker who made feathered headpieces for the movie "Dances with Wolves" are other conversation starters.

### FAITH AND MEDICINE

Dr. Hull dedicated a wall in his medical office to Texas history and one pioneer in particular.

The University of Texas graduate is a direct descendant of Erastus "Deaf" Smith who, despite severe hearing loss, served as spy, scout, and guide to Sam Houston's army during the Texas Revolution. Like his distant relative, Deaf Smith was also a Catholic convert.

Catholicism persisted in Dr. Hull's maternal bloodline for several generations until his grandmother began attending a Presbyterian church.

His wife, Karen, is a cradle Catholic from New Orleans. Converting so they

could raise their four children in the faith together "is a decision I've never regretted," he said. The couple are longtime members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem — a lay organization dedicated to promoting the faith and upholding the rights of Christians in the Holy Land.

Faith was an important part of his medical practice.

"I always asked for His help and guidance, and you'd be surprised how often He gives it to me," the specialist said, explaining his relationship with Jesus, the Great Physician. "I was very aware of His presence while doing surgery."

As a knight of the Holy Sepulchre, the black velvet beret and white wool cap with red Jerusalem cross Dr. Hull wears to ceremonial events is treasured apparel, but his prized possession is another Church-related item.

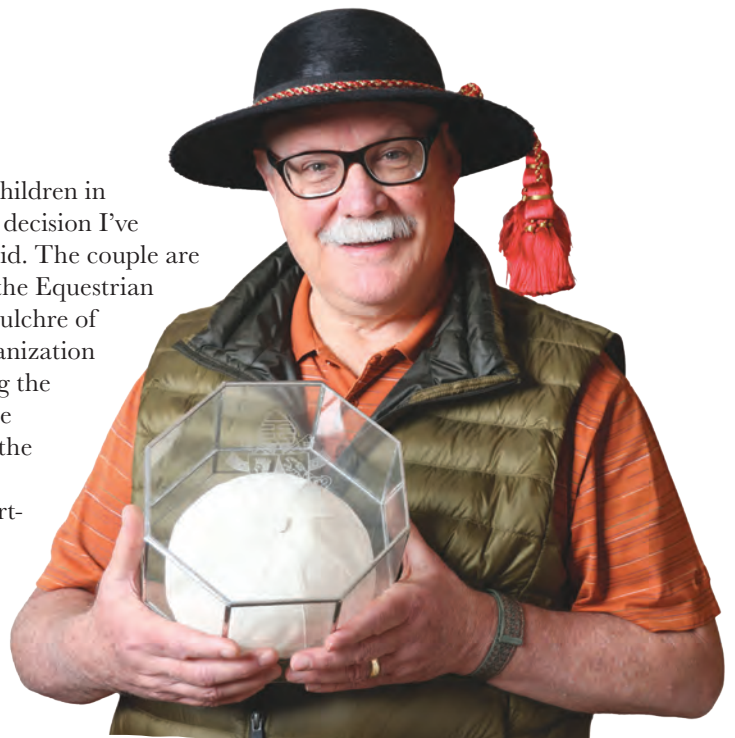
### A TREASURED EXCHANGE

During a 2006 pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Rome with his wife and former Fort Worth Bishop Kevin Vann, Dr. Hull had the opportunity to exchange zucchetos with Pope Benedict XVI. He purchased the white skull cap from the shop where they're made and brought it to the papal audience in St. Peter's Square.

"Pope Benedict came around, picked up a baby to kiss it, and I held out the hat. We all yelled, '*Cambio Papa, cambio Papa*,' which means 'change' in Italian," Dr. Hull remembered. "So he took the zucchetto out of my hand, looked me right in the eye, and gave me the zucchetto off his head."

The skull cap is one acquisition the collector has never worn, remaining in a sealed plexiglass case.

A biretta and bishop's miter are displayed next to the kippahs worn at Jewish



Dr. Christopher Hull holds the zucchetto he received from Pope Benedict XVI. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

services. A nurse working in Sudan also sent him a crown made of thorns similar to the one Christ wore.

### PART OF THE HEALING PROCESS

After collecting hats and amusing patients with them for 47 years, Dr. Hull, now retired, is still looking for ways his hobby can benefit others. Some pieces are slated for a military museum and others will go to a collector in Rochester, New York.

Kid-oriented hats will go to the local Welman Project for use in classrooms and school plays. The nonprofit repurposes surplus business materials and offers free supplies to teachers.

"They're not just hats; they're stories," said the hobbyist, who wrote an 800-page digital catalog describing the more interesting pieces. "A hat tells people who you are, what you think, and what mood you're in."

So what does collecting hats and wearing them for his patients say about Dr. Hull?

"It says I have a good attitude and wanted to entertain them," he commented.

Faith, humor, and connection are all part of the healing process, "and I wanted my patients to have the best result possible." 🇺🇸



# The Heart of the Home

By Christina Benavides

In describing faith in the family, Pope Leo XIV said it’s “like food at the family table and like the love in our hearts. In this way, families become privileged places in which to encounter Jesus, who loves us and desires our good, always.”

Based in the city of Grapevine and St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Theresa and Justin Mason joyously live an active life of faith side by side with their three children, John, 11; Katherine (Kate), 8; and Elizabeth (Elsie), 9.

**BAPTISMAL DATE:** A University of Notre Dame graduate, Theresa moved to

Grapevine in 2007 and set up her own painting company. One of Theresa’s clients, Justin’s cousin, invited her to attend her daughter’s baptism. Little did Theresa and Justin know, they were being set up to meet for a blind date.

**MARRIED:** May 5, 2012, at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine.

**GRAPEVINE ROOTS:** Theresa grew up in a Catholic family in the Midwest while Justin grew up Baptist in the Grapevine area. When the two began dating, Justin started attending Mass with her, and the year after their marriage, he entered RCIA and became Catholic.

**COMMUNITY VALUES:** St. Francis has long served as the cornerstone for the Mason family.

“All the kids got baptized there. They all made their first Communion there, and we got married there,” Theresa said.

The Masons are familiar faces at the parish, regularly taking part in its many family-oriented events, be it the upcoming chili cook-off, annual fall festival, or frequent parish picnics.

Their active family life of faith is closely tied to the Grapevine parish, with its catechesis sessions, father-daughter dances, and the Christmas Eve children’s choir.

“The parish has always been a

◀ Justin and Theresa Mason with their children, John, 11; Elizabeth (Elsie), 9; Katherine (Kate), 8; and their dog Teddy, a 3 year old Basenji, on Jan. 20. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

part of my life, especially growing up Catholic,” Theresa said. “Community and my Catholic faith have always been a part of my life. I grew up doing all the things — altar serving and being a Eucharistic minister. It was always just part of our life.”

**TO BE CATHOLIC:** “I think my faith is the center of everything,” Theresa said as Justin nodded in agreement. “It’s really important for me and us as parents to raise our children in the faith and to teach them what we know and what we believe.”

**A MAN OF CHRIST:** Through music and action, Justin is also an active presence at the parish. In addition to performing at parish events with his country band, the former police officer also supported St. Francis’ Guardian ministry in its early stages.

Fifth grader John hopes to serve the parish in much the same way as his parents have. The young lector said that to be a man of Christ — an idea introduced to him during his favorite summer camps — is to “lead others in the right direction and help others when people aren’t sure what to do.”

**HALLOWED GROUND:** John, Kate, and Elsie shared their excitement about their annual celebration of their baptismal dates. Sometimes her date lands on the Baptism of the Lord, Kate said.

Their excitement for the faith is fueled by the guided prayer, daily readings, trivia, and Wordle-style games on the Hallow app which have really helped their children explore the faith, the Masons shared.

“We’ve kind of grown with it, just trying some different prayers and some of the different things they offer

there to incorporate in the family, too,” Theresa added.

This may look like listening to saint stories on long commutes; joining in Lent and Advent challenges; or praying along with the month of the Rosary in October.

**GATHER US IN:** The family also enjoys celebrating Easter with over 17 cousins as well as gathering with friends from church.

“It truly does take a village,” Theresa said. “Our kids kind of speak the same language, if you will, and I think that makes a big difference.”

**AGENTS OF PRAYER:** Every morning, Theresa and Justin lead about 40 Magnolia real estate agents “from San Antonio to Argyle” in prayer on Zoom, a practice that began during COVID and stuck around. “It’s just part of who we are.”

It is not uncommon that they pray with clients or coordinate home blessings for homes, said the Masons, who merged their brokerage with Chip and Joanna Gaines’ Magnolia Realty in 2020.

“It’s been a really great blessing to be able to share our faith and to outwardly express our faith in all that we do, whether it is at work or with Grapevine — the city and community there — and of course at church,” Theresa said.

**YOUNG WISDOM:** After facing a recent change in their schooling plans, the Mason kids took to Adoration and discerned the lessons of faith God had for them.

“Look to Jesus whenever you don’t feel sure about something and always try to trust God’s plan and know that whatever He does is good in some way,” John advised. 🇺🇸



## SAFE ENVIRONMENT

In the case of alleged abuse by clergy or Church personnel, contact the Victim Assistance Hotline, the Office of Safe Environment or the Vicar General:

- **Victim Assistance Hotline**  
817.945.9345
- **Director of Safe Environment**  
817.945.9334
- **Vicar General**  
817.945.9315

### To Report Abuse or Suspected Abuse:

Call CPS (800-252-5400)

**AND/OR**

Call the local police or 911

### Tips for Communicating:

- Use clear, objective language — describe what was seen or heard without assumptions or speculation.
- Refer to specific behaviors rather than personal judgments or labels.
- When using written forms such as submitting a report to CPS online or the Office of Safe Environment, fill out all required fields with as much detail as possible.
- Please include CPS or Law Enforcement report numbers in reports submitted to the Diocese.

For more information about our abuse prevention policies and programs, visit [fwdioc.org/safe-environment](http://fwdioc.org/safe-environment)



# A Forgiving Father

NTC/Juan Guajardo

**HE IS:** Father Peter Wiafe Akenteng, pastor of Our Mother of Mercy Parish in Fort Worth and sacramental minister for the Ghanaian Catholic Community, which meets weekly at St. Joseph Parish in Arlington.

He is a diocesan priest of the Archdiocese of Kumasi, Ghana.

**DEEP ROOTS:** Fr. Akenteng is the oldest of 15 children, 13 of whom are living, raised by poor farmers. Four of the 13 have religious vocations.

**ANSWERED CALL:** Fr. Akenteng wanted to be a priest from age 5. He was ordained July 27, 1985.

**MANY HATS:** In his 40 years of priesthood, he has taught in seminary, especially Latin and sociology; served as financial administrator for his diocese; instructed catechists; and ministered in parishes large and small.

He studied sociology in Rome and education in the United Kingdom.

**TONGUE TIED:** Fr. Akenteng believes in “no discrimination, no participation in gossip. Those who gossip to you about others will gossip about you to others. As much as possible, I want to avoid that.”

**RECONCILED:** At Our Mother of Mercy, he offers confession six days a week (starting

at 6 a.m.!) and by appointment.

“It is not me doing it, however. I must be very close to the Lord to be able to help those who come. If I don’t have the Lord, I cannot give Him to other people. If I don’t have His mercy, I cannot give His mercy to other people. If I don’t have His love, I cannot give His love to other people. No one gives what he doesn’t have.”

**MORE MERCY:** Since arriving at Our Mother of Mercy Parish last year, Fr. Akenteng has added Masses, confession time, ministries, and activities, especially for seniors.

“We want everybody to be active. Everybody is needed in this parish. We need people to help. I’m very happy that everybody is interested and everybody’s very active. The enthusiasm is very great here and I’m happy.”

**FIRST AND LAST THINGS:** “Every day before I get up from my bed, I go to the Lord. The Lord should be the first thing, or the first person, before you wake up. And then before you go to bed, the Lord should be the last person you talk to before you go to bed. Not the phone.”

**CULTURE CLASH:** “In my culture, anybody you see is a brother, is a sister,” he said, explaining when he came to the U.S., he was surprised people pass

without speaking.

“If you see a new member in your church — it’s not a thief, it’s a member of you.”

**GHANA’S WAY:** Fr. Akenteng said Ghanaian people may be poor, but they are very happy. “Everything we do begins with God. The Ghanaian Catholic would make the Sign of the Cross anytime he begins anything.”

**TAKEAWAY:** “Forgive easily. I want [my parishioners] to forgive. Easily. Forgiveness brings peace. Forgiveness brings unity, brings belonging, brings togetherness. I want us to celebrate together as one body of the Lord.

“When you’re angry, you disturb your heart for nothing. So let it go. You forgive the offender. Yes, he does not deserve your forgiveness, but you deserve your peace.”

**CATHOLIC MEANS UNIVERSAL:** Having lived in four countries, Fr. Akenteng witnessed, “You have one God. You have one Church, you have one faith, you have one Lord. You’re all the same. That is what I love about Catholicism. Wherever you go in the Catholic Church, you may not understand the language, but you can speak the same language — the language of faith. That is wonderful. You’re not divided.” 🇺🇸

## Stilling the Waters

NTC/Juan Guajardo

In Father Jacques Philippe's book *Searching for and Maintaining Peace*, he writes, "Consider the surface of a lake, above which the sun is shining. If the surface of the lake is peaceful and tranquil, the sun will be reflected in this lake ... If, on the contrary, the surface of the lake is agitated, undulating, then the image of the sun cannot be reflected in it."

As Lent approaches, we must ask ourselves not only what is the goal of Lent, but most especially, what is the goal of the Christian life?

Often times in our desire for spiritual growth, we think our goal is merely to get better: to overcome our sins, to get more disciplined, to renew our prayer life, and sometimes, the sneaky desire to honestly just lose a little weight.

All of these are good ventures, but are they the goal? Fr. Jacques Philippe stands in a long line of spiritual writers, including St. Francis de Sales, St. Seraphim, and many others who direct us back to the first and only goal of the spiritual life: God Himself.

Does my life glorify and radiate God to others? Overcoming sins through discipline and time are important aspects to the spiritual life, but they are a means to this end. To the extent that they deepen our interior

sense of peace and connection to the Lord, they serve their purpose.

If in our pursuit of self-betterment, we find ourselves exclusively looking inward with frustration, impatience, and anxiety, how does that glorify God? Are the waters being made calm so that the Lord can be reflected through our life, or does our internal disturbance draw us further from the Lord and cause shortness and anger towards others?



Fr. Brett Metzler

If then, internal peace is the goal and not merely self-betterment, how do we achieve this? Aren't we meant to fight against sin and rid ourselves of all attachments except for God?

Of course we are, but the ironic turn is that if we want to overcome sin and ourselves, our focus should actually not primarily be on ourselves but on God. Prayer, relationship, and friendship with God are the key to developing internal peace. To strive for virtue without an actual friendship with God is a misdirection of the spiritual life.

Even if you are able to will yourself to be virtuous through a disciplined program, if by the end you cannot look to God to see that His friendship and patience have brought you there, you have in the end, only served your own

purposes and not Him.

What then do we do? This Lent, use your fasting, discipline, and reordering of your life to seek more of God, rather than merely to get better for Him.

Many Lents in seminary I would come to my spiritual director with a long list of disciplines in order to make myself better. Instead he would offer me something small to help better direct my attention to the Father.

The best Lent I ever had was simply adding 30 minutes to my prayer time in the day to read St. Therese of Lisieux's *Story of a Soul*. This helped me engage with the normal fasting and penances of Lent with much greater peace, charity, and the childlike joy of being with Jesus in the desert.

Ultimately, we have to ask ourselves, do I actually know and love Jesus as a friend? Do I know and love God as a Father? Or do I merely believe those things in general, but don't know them for myself?

Any vocation or calling from God always takes place in the calm waters of this friendship, in which the Lord listens to us, guides us, forgives us, and takes us to Himself. ✚

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Father Brett Metzler serves as chaplain at Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth and as the vocations director for the diocese.

# Turn It Off

I heard a recent statistic I found somewhat disturbing: almost 90% of Texans live in areas with so much light pollution that it is impossible to see the Milky Way at night.

You may or may not have encountered the story of confused citizens of Los Angeles placing 911 calls during a blackout reporting the weird cloud in the night sky. This “cloud,” of course, was only the Milky Way, which some people were only then seeing for the first time in their lives.

I count myself privileged to be able to frequently travel to far West Texas, one of the increasingly precious regions of the country where the night is truly, completely dark. Standing outside at night with no flashlight, the darkness is void-like in its depth; a shade or two darker than black.

As time has passed, it has been impressed deeper and deeper into me how important this too often overlooked aspect of our experience is. Even more recently, I’ve realized how analogous the problem of light pollution is to the tyranny of sensation under which the majority of us are living.

Our society is perpetually “wired.” All of us, one way or another, find ourselves in an ever more cyborg-like relationship with technology. Naturally, a civilization as hopped-up as ours would find darkness inconvenient and uncomfortable. Everything from streetlamps to driveways

to skyscrapers to cars exists in a state of enforced quasi-day.

For the vast majority of Americans and increasingly the world, long gone are the days of going to sleep with the sun’s setting and waking at its rising. Why rely on the sun when you’ve got serviceable replicas all over your house and in your pocket? We have all but banished the shadowy threats that once lurked just beyond the firelight and repudiated the need to be in tune with the rhythms of days and seasons.



Walker Price

As I alluded earlier, I find the concept of light pollution to be a striking visual representation of something all us moderns struggle with mightily. If any of us were to so choose, we could live every second of every day suffused with external stimulation. Music, podcasts, audiobooks, videos, movies, soundtracks, white noise: all layers of fuzzily translucent paint which we’re continually slathering across our moment-to-moment existence.

This is not to argue any of these things are inherently harmful; the predicament in which we find ourselves is one of quantity, of omnipresence.

Are we actually enjoying the content to which we listen and watch? Is our listening and watching out of intention and purpose, or out of compulsion and boredom? Do I really need to leave that light on when I’m not there?

There is a real difference between

relaxing and merely inducing numbness. These are all ideas that I’ve found intensely edifying when applied to my own life. You’ll realize, perhaps with some surprise, how much your brain has become conditioned to an elevated baseline of stimulation once you do something as simple as driving home in silence instead of instinctively engaging your playlist.

Darkness and quiet are God’s as truly and as completely as light and music. An absence is not necessarily the same as a lack. Materialistic culture continually preaches against these truths, but I think some people have begun to reach their limit. Along with more interest in refilling our rapidly draining night skies, a proliferation of apps and programs can help you manage the amount of time you spend in front of a screen, also known as “mental light pollution” (a term of my own invention).

Let this be an encouragement to you: We can know simply by looking at creation that if there is truly a lack, God will fill it. Turn something off, whether that be unnecessary light or unnecessary noise. Who knows? At the risk of sounding saccharine, maybe you’ll find a strangely beautiful cloud that you never saw before. ✚

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



# Love and Lent

It's that time of year again, time for all of us to figure out what we are going to do for Lent. Of course, this year, Ash Wednesday falls quite close to Valentine's Day, which gave me an idea. I have decided to forward it along. Speaking specifically to married couples, how about making a sacrifice of love?

When the Lord made our first parents in the Garden, He made each of them for the other, making them fit for one another to be a "helper." This is significant, for the relationship the Lord creates in them is more than one of general complementarity. Rather, it is a relationship of specific cohesion, soul to soul. This is indicated by Adam's famous response to being given Eve: "This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (*Genesis 2:23*).

As the Church declares, the very essence of matrimony is the "partnership of the whole of life" (*Code of Canon Law, 1055.1*). Of course, it should go without saying that a soul cannot enter such a partnership with just anyone. It takes someone quite special to fulfill this role in a person's life.

This becomes even more apparent when we take into consideration the fact that the harmony of the couple largely depends upon how the complementarity of the couple is lived out and the needs of the individual persons are met (*Catechism*

*of the Catholic Church 2333*).

The needs to which this partnership is inherently ordered are those associated with the "whole of life": meaning, those needs of body, soul, heart, and mind.

When such needs are met, there exists true harmony among the couple

which is a sign of the integrity of the partnership and their union.

This love of the couple necessarily involves the totality of each person, "in which all elements of the person enter — appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity

that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul" (*CCC 1643*).

Key to this union of one heart and soul is something inherent to matrimonial consent, the mutual giving and acceptance of one another. What is directly implicit in this mutual exchange is the giving of oneself which is total and complete, without reservation. One's reception of the other is total and complete as well; meaning, receiving them not as one imagines them to be or wishes they were, but how they exist in reality, as they are in themselves, unconditionally.

Living this out can be a challenge for the most compatible of couples, but it teaches us how to love in a truly unselfish, self-giving, unconditional manner. In

other words, loving as God wishes us to love — sacrificially.

So, this Lent, how about choosing one (or more!) sacrifices of love?

What would this sacrifice look like, you ask? Beginning with the nature of marriage in mind (a "partnership of the whole of life"), how about making a sacrifice of openness? How about one of deep communication with the aim of making a soul-to-soul connection? How about asking your spouse what their needs are and fulfilling them? How about laboring against what you know is sowing disharmony in your relationship? How about working toward something lacking in your relationship which is keeping your marriage from achieving the harmony to which it is designed? How about finally divulging the secrets which have kept your relationship bound in falsity?

Whatever your sacrifice is, it should address at least one of two things: something which is lacking in your marriage that you can fulfill, or something which needs to be addressed that hinders the flowering of your marriage. Taking this into consideration, what will your sacrifice be? 🇺🇸



Jason Whitehead

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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.



Vista de la Parroquia de St. Jude en Mansfield el Miércoles de Ceniza de 2026. (NTC/Matt Redden)

# Símbolos de la Cuaresma

Signos que nos llevan a comprender el sufrimiento de Jesús

**E**n el tiempo de Cuaresma vemos diversos signos y símbolos que nos conducen a la reflexión, espíritu de penitencia y preparación para la Pascua. Estos signos nos llaman a la conversión auténtica y nos recuerdan los 40 días de Cristo en el desierto, que nos enseñan cómo aprender de Su sacrificio, humildad y entrega a Dios Padre.

Uno de los símbolos más destacados de la Cuaresma es el color morado, presente en los mantos, las vestimentas y la decoración litúrgica que se utilizan. El color morado simboliza la penitencia y dolor por el pecado. Muchas iglesias simplifican

las decoraciones durante el tiempo de Cuaresma; se retiran las flores y se reemplazan con piedras, ramas y telas moradas. Durante la Cuaresma se suprimen en la Misa los cantos del Aleluya y el Gloria.

Otro símbolo muy conocido son las cenizas recibidas el Miércoles de Ceniza, que nos recuerdan nuestra fragilidad humana y nuestro deseo, como católicos, de purificación y de volver a Dios.

Las imágenes del pan y el pescado simbolizan el papel del ayuno. No sólo se trata de limitar los alimentos y abstenernos de carne el Miércoles de Ceniza, los viernes y el Viernes Santo, sino que además, a través del ayuno y despojo, podemos adquirir un mejor entendimiento de lo que nos aparta de Dios, del sacrificio de Cristo y del ayuno que nos solidariza con los pobres y quienes sufren.

Las palmas y los ramos de olivo del Domingo de Ramos simbolizan el deseo

de compartir el don de la paz de Jesús y Su invitación a seguir Su ejemplo como instrumentos de paz.

Al entrar en la Semana Santa, la parábola del vino nuevo en odres nuevos (*Mateo 9,17*) puede ayudarnos a comprender el fruto final de la penitencia y el sacrificio Cuaresmal, explicó el Diácono Rigoberto Leyva, si consideramos el odre como símbolo de nuestro corazón. El camino Cuaresmal impulsa a los fieles a enfrentar la tentación y acudir a la confesión y hacer penitencia, acto que vacía el corazón del pecado, para así prepararlo para recibir la revelación plena del misterio pascual y llenarse de nuevo con el amor de Cristo durante la Pascua.

Estos símbolos ayudan a los fieles a ver, oír y experimentar el sentido profundo de la Cuaresma. Al comprenderlos participamos más plenamente en este tiempo y preparamos nuestro corazón para el gozo divino de la Pascua. ✚



# El Color Morado

Los 40 días de la Cuaresma comenzando con el Miércoles de Ceniza

**M**arcando el inicio de la Cuaresma, el Miércoles de Ceniza es un día sagrado de oración y ayuno. Las cenizas sirven como un poderoso símbolo externo de arrepentimiento interior y conciencia de la necesidad de volver a Dios de maneras pequeñas y grandes.

Fotógrafos de *NTC* visitaron cuatro parroquias en la diócesis, incluyendo Our Lady of Guadalupe en Wichita Falls donde Padre Xavier Silvadasan, HGN, marcó las frentes de los feligreses. (*NTC/Lisa Moore*)

Abajo el Padre José Francis, TOR, celebró una Misa del Miércoles de Ceniza donde marcó las frentes en la Parroquia de la Universidad de St. John Paul II en Denton. (*NTC/Kevin Bartram*)

Y abajo a la derecha, el Diácono Joel Rodríguez administrando las cenizas durante la Misa del Miércoles de Ceniza en la Parroquia de St. Jude en Mansfield. (*NTC/Matt Redden*) 🇺🇸



VER MÁS FOTOS



# De los ramos a las CENIZAS

El Padre Joseph Moreno y el Diácono Ken Coffey comparten su experiencia de la quema de las hojas de palma que se utilizaron para el Miércoles de Ceniza

Por Matthew Smith

El Diácono Muñoz preparó el 26 de enero, junto a varios feligreses, una fogata temporera en los predios de la Parroquia de St. Michael en Bedford; mientras el Padre Joseph Moreno hacía una oración por las diez personas.

“Dios de ternura y misericordia”, exclamó el Padre Moreno, “Nos formaste del polvo de la tierra y nos invitaste a seguir tu llamado evangélico”.

“Míranos con bondad mientras preparamos estas cenizas, que marcarán el comienzo de nuestro camino cuaresmal”. A continuación, el Diácono Muñoz encendió ramos de palma recogidos a lo largo de varios años, que los feligreses han ido llevando a la parroquia para que sean propiamente quemados.

El diácono y otras personas que lo asistían revolviaron la mezcla ardiente varias veces para que las cenizas quedaran bien distribuidas. La parroquia utilizó estas cenizas el 18 de febrero, fecha en que se celebró este año el Miércoles de Ceniza.

El Padre Moreno señala que hoy en día muchas parroquias compran simplemente paquetes de cenizas en las tiendas de artículos religiosos.

“Esto es algo digno de verse”, asevera el Diácono Muñoz. “Sabía que las cenizas del Miércoles de Ceniza provenían de ramos de palmas de años anteriores que son quemados, pero nunca lo había visto en persona”.

El Padre Moreno explica que organizó este evento, no sólo como algo entretenido, sino más importante, para destacar en su parroquia el Miércoles de Ceniza que inicia la Cuaresma.

“Hago un minuto de catequesis antes de cada homilía; y mi reflexión de la semana pasada fue sobre los ramos y la ceniza, y su origen, ya que estamos a punto de entrar en la Cuaresma”, comenta el Padre Moreno. “Decidimos quemarlas aquí después de la misa porque tenemos muchísimos ramos de años anteriores y porque hemos estado animando a los fieles a que trajeran las que tienen en sus casas”.

Algunos traen ramos de la Cuaresma pasada cada año. Otros feligreses conservan sus ramos año tras año.

“Eso está perfectamente bien”, apunta el sacerdote. “Pueden conservar los ramos todo el tiempo que deseen. Siempre y cuando los traten con reverencia y respeto”, el Padre Moreno añade.

“No se deben tirar”, expresa el Padre Moreno. “Eso es lo importante. Al estar



El Padre Joseph Moreno (izqda.), el Diácono Sangote Ulupano (ctro.) y los feligreses queman ramos de palma de la Semana Santa de 2025 para hacer cenizas para el Miércoles de Ceniza, en la Parroquia de St. Michael en Bedford el 2 de febrero. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

bendecidos, los ramos se convierten en sacramentales. Hay dos maneras de deshacerse de cualquier cosa bendecida: enterrarla o quemarla”.

Los feligreses pueden quemar los ramos ellos mismos o llevarlos a una parroquia para que sean quemados.

El Padre Moreno describe la quema como una especie de cierre de Cuaresma.

“Distribuimos ramos de palmas al final de la Cuaresma, y cenizas, al principio de la Cuaresma”, explica el Padre Moreno. “Así que, esa conexión entre los ramos y la ceniza nos muestra hacia dónde vamos en nuestro peregrinar de la Cuaresma”.

“Al comenzar la Cuaresma, recibimos cenizas de los ramos del año anterior. De este modo, nuestro destino ya está a la vista”.

El Padre Moreno se sonrió al preguntarle si las cenizas de esta quema serían suficientes para cubrir los servicios del Miércoles de Ceniza de St. Michael.

“Un poco de ceniza rinde muchísimo”, asegura el Padre Moreno. “Teníamos ramos recogidos a lo largo de varios años. Creo que

podríamos abastecer de cenizas a todo el decanato con lo que obtuvimos hoy”.

El Diácono Jack Gardner de la Parroquia St. Martin de Porres de Prosper bromea diciendo que suelen asistir más personas al Miércoles de Ceniza que en los días de precepto.

A pesar de que el Miércoles de Ceniza no es un día de precepto, es un día en el que todos los católicos deberían participar, añade el Diácono Gardner. “Porque es una manera física de honrar a Dios y de recordar nuestra mortalidad al comenzar la Cuaresma”, afirma el Diácono.

El Diácono Gardner señala que el ministro dice: “Recuerda que eres polvo y al polvo volverás” o “Arrepiéntete y cree en el Evangelio” al aplicar la ceniza en la frente de los feligreses.

“Éstas son palabras muy poderosas”, exclama el Diácono Gardner. “Por lo que el acto físico y la imagen de tener la ceniza en la frente ayudan a recordarlas. Luego, llevas la marca y las cenizas contigo todo el día, lo que te hace consciente de que eres católico”. 🇺🇸



## AMBIENETE SEGURO

En caso de presunto abuso por parte de clérigos o personal de la Iglesia, contacte con la Línea de Asistencia a Víctimas, la Oficina de Entorno Seguro, o con el Vicario General:

- **Línea de Asistencia a Víctimas**  
817.945.9345
- **Director de Ambiente Seguro**  
817.945.9334
- **Vicario General**  
817.945.9315

### Para denunciar abuso o sospechas de abuso:

Llame a CPS (800-252-5400)

Y/O

Llame a la policía o al 911

### Consejos para comunicarse:

- Utiliza un lenguaje claro y objetivo: describe lo que se vio o escuchó sin suposiciones o especulación.
- Refiere a comportamientos concretos en lugar de juicios personales.
- Cuando utilice formularios escritos, como un informe a CPS en línea o a la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro, llene todos los campos requeridos con el mayor detalle posible.
- Por favor, incluya los números de informe de CPS o de las Autoridades Civiles en los informes enviados a la Diócesis.

Para más información sobre nuestras políticas y programas de prevención del abuso, visite

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





*hermosa*  
**'CASITA DE  
GUADALUPE'**

Niños corren hacia una estatua de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la parroquia que lleva su nombre en Fort Worth el 11 de diciembre de 2025. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

## Feligreses celebran 25 años de su nueva iglesia en Fort Worth

Por Violeta Rocha

**M**ientras arreglaba con esmero cientos de rosas coloridas que los fieles comenzaron a llevar desde el 11 de diciembre, víspera de la fiesta en honor a la Virgen de Guadalupe, Juanita Venegas, originaria de Zacatecas, México, recordó el primer 12 de diciembre celebrado hace 25 años en su vibrante Parroquia de Our Lady of Guadalupe de Fort Worth. Fue precisamente en abril del 2000 que la nueva iglesia se había construido en la Avenida Blue Mound.

“El primer año de celebrar la fiesta aquí en un lugar más grande, fue de mucha alegría y satisfacción para todos”, dijo Venegas, que lleva treinta años como feligrés de la parroquia, que en ese entonces estaba ubicada en la Avenida Clinton. Ella señala que ha sido una mayor “alegría ver cómo año tras año hemos ido creciendo y todos unidos estamos felices ofreciendo nuestro servicio para alabar a Nuestro Señor, especialmente en el día dedicado a Nuestra Madre”, afirmó. Desde hace 7 años ella se encarga de coordinar los arreglos florales para la Virgen Morena.

Los Hermanos Menores Capuchinos están a cargo de la parroquia, que concluirá pronto el año de su 25º aniversario. Ha sido además un lugar de peregrinaje por el Año Jubilar de Peregrinos de la Esperanza, durante el cual se han recibido grupos de “hasta dos mil peregrinos”. La fiesta del pasado 12 de diciembre fue un ‘espejo’ del amor fraterno que se vive en la Parroquia de Our Lady of Guadalupe. Se reunieron cerca de 20 mil fieles, que con oraciones, flores, cantos y ofrendas demostraron su devoción a Santa María de Guadalupe.

“El mismo milagro que ocurrió en el Tepeyac, puede ocurrir, debe ocurrir también en cada uno de nosotros”, aseveró Fray Juan Miguel Subiza, OFM Cap, en su homilía de la primera Misa de Vísperas. Exhortó a los fieles a “escuchar a María” y a recibir a Cristo como salvador.

“Juan Diego, humilde como nosotros, acogió ese mandato de María, fue bendecido y se convirtió en evangelizador. Cada uno de nosotros podemos también recibir esa fuerza de Dios para transformar nuestra vida; Él viene para salvar”, agregó Fray Subiza, sacerdote capuchino que fue invitado a la parroquia durante la novena.

Fray José Feliciano Castro, el párroco, describió a su comunidad como una “migrante y trabajadora” y destacó la importancia de que “encuentren espacios de oración y sepan que no llegan a cualquier casa, sino a la casa de Dios”; y en donde encuentren también “cariño y respeto”. Como sacerdotes “estamos aquí de corazón, pero para servir”, dijo y aseguró que el trabajo de la comunidad, unido al trabajo de sus hermanos capuchinos, Fray Roberto Viveros Rosales y Fray Juan Pérez Montoya, “es fruto de la bondad de Dios”.

“Nos ha dado mucho esta parroquia”, señaló Elvia Grimaldo, originaria de Guanajuato, quien, junto a sus siete hermanos, quisieron honrar la memoria de su madre, que falleció hace varios meses, repartiendo 700 gorditas que cocinaron de diferentes guisos. “Nuestra madre nos enseñó a venir a darle gracias a la Virgen desde que llegamos de México”, añadió y aseguró sentirse feliz de unirse a su comunidad porque “comparte la misma devoción que nosotros y se les ve la felicidad en sus caras”.

### UNA CASA PARA TODOS

Fray Roberto Viveros Rosales, el vicario parroquial, señaló que “ha sido un año de mucho trabajo, de muchos signos que hablan de construir comunidad y de sentirnos corresponsables”; y afirmó que “todos somos constructores”.

“Es cumplir con el cometido de ‘La Morenita’, porque ella quiere una casa donde entren todos, que todos puedan encontrar alivio y donde haya posada para convivir todos”, aseveró. Resaltó, además, que la invitación de la Virgen María toma mayor prioridad siendo una comunidad

migrante, “María nos invita a reconocer que hemos de acogernos y a enriquecernos los unos a los otros con nuestra presencia y con nuestro cariño”, apuntó.

“Los jóvenes siempre encontramos un espacio en nuestra parroquia”, expresó Celene Sánchez, 23, que participó en la representación de las apariciones de la Virgen de Guadalupe a San Juan Diego.

Nancy Almedia, la coordinadora de la “Danza Reina del Tepeyac”, integrada por 20 mujeres, asegura que desde hace 4 años “es un honor que nos den un espacio para venir a venerar a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, pues, a pesar de no ser miembros, “siempre nos hemos sentido bienvenidas”.

Olga Corrales, que es originaria de Durango y pertenece al Grupo de Guadalupanas, asegura que su fe se avivó hace cinco años cuando llegó a esta parroquia “donde encontré gente buena, y tantos ángeles como nuestro párroco y nuestros otros sacerdotes”. Ha aprendido aquí a “ayudar a la comunidad y a ser más caritativa y empática”, expresó, y señaló que se siente “amada, feliz y muy bendecida”.

### UNA COMUNIDAD EVANGELIZADA EN EL HORIZONTE

El Padre Feliciano manifestó que con la futura construcción de un oratorio para que los fieles puedan hacer una oración más íntima ante el Santísimo, además de la remodelación del retablo y el nuevo ambón que se lograron este año, esperan seguir creciendo, no sólo en números, sino también espiritualmente, para “que la gente sea más buena” y vea que “todos los frutos buenos son de la bondad de Dios y porque verdaderamente Dios ha entrado en el corazón de las personas que vienen a Guadalupe”. Destacó también que espera que las “celebraciones evangélicas” puedan llevar a acciones sociales desde el Evangelio, “no por paternalismo, ni por filantropía”, sino para ponerlo en práctica y sentir el “Evangelio viviente, porque Dios los ama y porque nosotros también los amamos”, aseveró. 🇺🇸



## Servidora del Pueblo DE DIOS

La pasión de Deicy Martínez por encontrar a Dios lleva a otros jóvenes a discernir su propia vocación

Por Violeta Rocha

**E**l afán de Deicy Martínez de “encontrar a Dios” la dirigió como joven migrante a descubrir el valor del servicio y a decidir “entregarle su corazón a Dios”. Por eso, se esforzó en forjar una jornada de fe profunda, que la llevó a ayudar a cientos de jóvenes a acercarse a Dios y discernir su propia vocación.

Deicy Martínez, 34, es la asesora de la Pastoral Juvenil de la Diócesis de Fort Worth, luego de trabajar como coordinadora por tres años y comenzar una etapa “de apoyo”, en que, además de proporcionar consejo y guía, “lo más importante es escuchar, compartir y comprender a cada joven,” explica Martínez.

Originalmente de su natal Pachuca, Hidalgo, Martínez se integró a los 23

años al Grupo de Jóvenes “Juntos con Jesús” de la Parroquia de St. Matthew de Arlington. Según ella lo describe, “buscaba a Dios para comprender lo que quería hacer en mi vida”, y es así cómo encontró más tarde “una familia” en los ministerios en que ha trabajado. Tras ser coordinadora de su grupo juvenil por 4 años, “inició” su etapa de liderazgo a nivel diocesano en la Pastoral Juvenil, trabajando primero como

◀ La ministra Eucarística Deicy Martínez distribuye la Eucaristía durante la Misa dominical en la Parroquia de St. Matthew en Arlington el 8 de febrero. (NTC/Ben Torres)

subcoordinadora y, más tarde, como coordinadora. Nunca dejó de servir en su Parroquia de St. Matthew, en la cual, además de ayudar en el grupo juvenil, sirve como Ministro Extraordinario de la Eucaristía.

“Lo más importante ha sido el encuentro que he tenido con Dios”, y “encontrarme a sí misma como persona”, resalta Deicy. Al reconocer “lo que puedes dar, es cuando te sabes amada por Dios y conoces Su misericordia”, agrega.

El ayudar a otros jóvenes y compartir su testimonio de ser una joven migrante, “con los mismos retos que muchos más, incluidos la nueva lengua, abrirse camino en un país ajeno donde hoy es pequeña empresaria, pero sobre todo, aferrarse a su fe, profundizar en ella y “servir”, es lo que ha ayudado a Deicy a ver “el rostro de Dios en cada joven”.

La Pastoral Juvenil atiende a alrededor de 150 jóvenes y sirve de guía de los grupos juveniles en 6 diferentes parroquias de la Diócesis de Fort Worth.

Consciente de que “Dios nos va moldeando” y de que “desde nuestra juventud podemos hacer cosas para la Iglesia,” Martínez afirma que su llamado va más allá de su periodo como asesora de Pastoral Juvenil. “Siempre que me necesiten voy a estar cerca de los jóvenes”, pues asegura que “el servicio no tiene fecha de caducidad”.

“Deicy deja un sello de disciplina,” afirma el Diácono Rigoberto Leyva, el Director del Ministerio Hispano de la Diócesis de Fort Worth, resaltando que ahora como asesora “es indiscutiblemente una guía”, pues, pone el ejemplo en su misma persona, sabe escuchar, conectar y estar en medio de la gente. “Deicy no tiene ningún problema en corregir pastoralmente lo que se tiene que corregir dentro de un grupo; y eso, se valora mucho,” apunta y agrega que su liderazgo será recordado como el de “una madre amorosa que los corregía y explicaba el por qué”.

“La Pastoral Juvenil ha tenido éxito por el tipo de liderazgo como el que Deicy ha puesto,” señala y destaca eventos como el Rosario por la Paz, que anualmente



La ministra Eucarística Deicy Martínez después de servir una Misa dominical. (NTC/Ben Torres)

reúne a cientos de jóvenes en un parque público; así como el retiro vocacional de un día, que el año pasado recibió a más de 20 hombres y 20 mujeres respectivamente, “marcando la vida de muchos jóvenes,” describe el diácono Leyva emocionado de que en agosto se planea el mismo retiro, pero esta vez será de dos días.

### EJEMPLO E INSPIRACIÓN PARA TODOS

Si algo define bien el servicio y la espiritualidad de Deicy es su tenacidad de buscar a Dios y seguir mejorando, asegura Karla Silva, actual coordinadora de la Pastoral Juvenil y quien compartió con Deicy en el grupo “Juntos con Jesús” y, más tarde, como subcoordinadora de la Pastoral Juvenil.

Deicy “es un ejemplo de constante conversión”, comenta Silva y destaca su tesón por la formación y el “gran amor al ministerio y a lo que hace el ministerio, que es ayudar a los jóvenes a tener esa comunión con Dios y con los demás”. Elogia su servicio ininterrumpido y que ha sabido superar “los obstáculos que

encuentra con Dios y con las personas que Dios le pone en el camino,” apunta.

Además de su alegría, dedicado compromiso y humildad, Deicy “sabe motivar a los jóvenes a participar de su fe”, señala Karla. Declara que “eso me inspira a tratar de lograr lo mismo”, pues “nos recuerda cuál es nuestra misión”, y “nos ayuda a recordar que servimos a los jóvenes, pero nuestra última misión de servicio es para Dios.”

### UN HORIZONTE DE EVANGELIZACIÓN Y SERVICIO

Los verbos “Servir” y “Evangelizar” se escriben para Deicy con letras mayúsculas, pero en su vivencia se realizan, “desde el corazón”, por eso, ella quiere continuar siendo Ministro Extraordinario de la Eucaristía en la Parroquia de St. Matthew y seguir su formación tomando clases de Biblia. “Ella va a saber escuchar la voz de Dios”, destaca Karla Silva, confiada de que Deicy seguirá su camino de fe y servicio, pues como lo asegura el Diácono Leyva, “Deicy es una servidora del pueblo de Dios.” 🇺🇸



Raúl y María Cerda posan en la Parroquia de Our Lady of Guadalupe. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

# servir, soltar y confiar

El Diácono Rigoberto Leyva y dos parejas del ministerio Jornada Familiar hablan sobre el ciclo del liderazgo cristiano

Por Karla Silva

“**U**n buen líder recuerda que el ministerio que dirige no es suyo, sino que, al ejercer su servicio, está consciente de que va de paso”. El Diácono Rigoberto Leyva, Director de la Oficina de Ministerio Hispano, describe así los pasos transformadores del ciclo del liderazgo en los ministerios parroquiales.

El diácono señala que, al asumir un cargo, el líder pone sus talentos al servicio de la comunidad, construye sobre lo que ya existe y mejora lo que sea necesario en su ministerio. Cuando un líder llega al término de su responsabilidad, el verdadero líder permite que otros cosechen los frutos para que el ciclo siga su marcha.

El Diácono Leyva indica que un gran ejemplo de este proceso de transición del liderazgo es el matrimonio de José y María Reyes, que llevan realizando con gran dedicación el ministerio de Jornada Familiar desde septiembre del 2010. Tuvieron la oportunidad de trabajar como coordinadores de dicho ministerio por tres años, concluyendo su servicio en el 2025. Ellos describen ese tiempo como una etapa de crecimiento, tanto para el ministerio, como a nivel personal. Expresaron que, aunque hubo momentos de turbulencia,

siempre procuraron servir con mucha devoción y alegría.

“Pero sabemos que todo lo que tiene un principio también tiene un fin, y aunque nos hubiera gustado seguir sirviendo como coordinadores, entendemos que hay que darles paso a las demás personas. Es decir, en el caso de nuestro ministerio, se trata de darles paso a las demás parejas”, comenta el matrimonio Reyes. Conscientes de esto, iniciaron el proceso de elección de la siguiente junta directiva en mayo del 2025.

Explican que cada ministerio cuenta con una junta directiva integrada por distintos miembros que desempeñan diversos cargos para que el ministerio funcione bien. En el ministerio de Jornada Familiar la junta directiva se compone de dos parejas que dirigen la inscripción de los miembros, dos parejas a cargo de la cocina, una pareja de coordinadores y una pareja de subcoordinadores.

Asimismo, aseveran que el proceso de elección varía de ministerio a ministerio. Por lo general, en este ministerio el proceso se inicia ocho meses antes del término de su cargo: “Como miembros, empezamos a observar e identificar qué parejas podrían hacerlo; quiénes han cumplido con todos los temas de nuestro retiro; quiénes muestran mayor

José y María Reyes posan frente a una imagen de San José y el niño Jesús. (NTC/Matt Redden)

perseverancia, responsabilidad, entrega y, sobre todo, amor al ministerio”. El Diácono Leyva afirma también que estas cualidades son muy necesarias y añade: “Un buen líder cristiano debe conocer el ministerio, amar al prójimo y enamorarse del servicio, para así darse de la mejor manera a la comunidad”.

Sin embargo, tanto el matrimonio Reyes como el Diácono Leyva, señalan que este proceso no lo deben realizar por sí solos; sino que, primeramente, hay que ponerse en manos del Señor y pedirle que sea Él quien guíe el proceso de selección para que la nueva junta directiva quede formada.

El matrimonio de Jesús y María Cerda fue seleccionado este año para el cargo de coordinadores del ministerio. El señor Cerda contó que hace un tiempo le dijo a su esposa que él no asumiría el cargo de coordinación, si eso se planteara; pero confiesa con una sonrisa que: “Dios tenía otros planes. Cuando llegaron a hacernos la propuesta del cargo, sin pensarlo dije que ‘sí’; hasta mi esposa se sorprendió. Reflexionando, le dije: ‘Yo sólo sé que, gracias a este ministerio, he crecido tanto a nivel personal como en mi matrimonio y en mi familia; y hemos podido ayudar a otros matrimonios también. Por lo tanto, aceptar este nuevo cargo es una de las maneras en que le podemos pagar a Dios por tanta misericordia’”.

El Diácono Leyva destaca que, una vez elegida la nueva junta directiva, el proceso continúa con un periodo de asesoramiento: “Antes de que entren por completo a su nuevo cargo, hay un período de introducción de tres meses, en que la pasada junta directiva se



reúne frecuentemente con la nueva para acompañarlos, asesorarlos y prepararlos para asumir el cargo por completo”.

El señor Reyes subraya la importancia de permanecer en el servicio aún después de dejar un cargo: “No por salir de un cargo la responsabilidad se termina. De hecho, implica aún más responsabilidad y nos lleva, con humildad, al discernimiento para poder escuchar hacia dónde nos va dirigiendo el Señor. No se trata de dejar de servir, sino de servir de manera diferente”.

Por su parte, el matrimonio Cerda asegura que, aunque están un poco nerviosos, empiezan su cargo de la mano de Dios: “Ahora, más que nunca, es

momento de estar en oración, para poder dar nuestro servicio de la mejor manera, manteniendo los valores del ministerio, estando en constante comunicación tanto entre nosotros como con los demás miembros y seguir contribuyendo a la misión de formar iglesias domésticas”.

El matrimonio Reyes comparte un consejo adicional para todos los servidores: “El Señor nos manda a ser luz del mundo con nuestro testimonio en todo lugar, tengamos o no un cargo dentro de un ministerio. Por eso, estemos en oración constante y no nos cansemos de anunciar la Palabra viva del Señor a donde Él nos vaya guiando”. ✝

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La Oficina de Escuelas Católicas ofrece una guía paso a paso y otros recursos en su sitio web: [catholic-schools-fwdiocese.org](http://catholic-schools-fwdiocese.org).

## ¿CUÁNDO DEBO PRESENTAR LA SOLICITUD?

Las solicitudes se aceptan hasta el 17 de marzo, y la fecha en que se envíe no afectará la elegibilidad ni la prioridad.

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Los padres recibirán una notificación en abril.

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# JORNADA HACIA LA PASCUA

El Ministerio Hispano organiza pláticas y un retiro de formación Cuaresmales

Por Christina Benavides

**E**l Miércoles de Ceniza, celebrado el 18 de febrero, marcó el inicio de los 40 días de la Cuaresma.

Durante ese tiempo “Sufrimos la miseria del pecado” explicó el Diácono Rigoberto Leyva. Al acercarnos hacia el final de la Cuaresma, que concluye el primer día del Triduo, el Jueves Santo, 2 de abril, y, “a través de la confesión, el arrepentimiento y el sufrimiento de mi pecado, de mi miseria, mi corazón queda limpio”, aseveró el diácono. “Entonces, ¿cómo lo voy a llenar?”

Para ayudar a los fieles a llenar su corazón y prepararse para la Semana Santa, el Ministerio Hispano diocesano, dirigido por el Diácono Leyva, organizó pláticas y un retiro que serán impartidos por el Padre María Ernesto Caro, sacerdote visitante de la Arquidiócesis de Monterrey y de Evangelización Activa.

Las **Pláticas Cuaresmales**, que se ofrecerán por dos días, se enfocarán en el pecado. “Cómo nos afecta el pecado y cómo debe vivir un cristiano atento a una realidad que continuamente nos amenaza”, describió el Padre Caro. Las pláticas se llevarán a cabo el 26 y 27 de marzo, de 7 p.m. a 9 p.m. Puedes registrarte aquí: <https://fwdioc.org/Platicas-Cuaresmales>

El **Retiro Cuaresmal** se realizará el 28 de marzo, de 9 a.m. a 5 p.m. Este retiro preparará a los fieles para

la Semana Santa y se basará en las enseñanzas de Jesús de “Los Odres Nuevos”, que nos invitan a transformar completamente nuestra vida para ser cristianos auténticos. Puedes registrarte aquí: <https://fwdioc.org/Retiro-Cuaresmal>

El objetivo de estos dos eventos, afirmó el Padre Caro, es ayudar a los fieles a prepararse para la Semana Santa, pero “la idea no es para la semana, es para la vida”, manifestó. Subrayó además la importancia de vivir la Semana Santa más allá de asistir al Domingo de Ramos y, luego, al Domingo de Pascua. Exhortó a los fieles a participar también en el Triduo Pascual: el Jueves Santo, el Viernes Santo y la Misa de la Vigilia Pascual. “La espiritualidad de la Semana Santa está basada en la muerte de Cristo para esperar la resurrección”.

Uno de los elementos característicos del Jueves Santo es el lavado de los pies; y el Viernes Santo, recordamos la Pasión de Jesús. Se llevarán a cabo Vía Crucis vivientes y la conmemoración de la Pasión del Señor.

En nuestra diócesis los fieles pueden asistir a las representaciones de la Pasión



NTC/Rodger Mallison

al aire libre en la Parroquia de All Saints de Fort Worth y en la Parroquia de St. Francis Xavier de Eastland, que se celebran en conjunto con las comunidades parroquiales de Our Lady of the Holy Rosary de Cisco, St. John de Strawn y St. Rita de Ranger.

El Diácono Leyva ora lleno de esperanza para que los fieles “puedan vivir el tiempo Cuaresmal y que se pueda entender la importancia de por qué la Iglesia separa este tiempo para que nosotros hagamos una pausa en nuestras vidas y empecemos a contemplar nuestra propia vida”. ✝

# NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC

The Official Publication of the  
Diocese of Fort Worth

March/April Issue 2026

800 West Loop 820 South  
Fort Worth, TX 76108



Every Catholic has a story behind their gift to the Annual Diocesan Appeal—an inner “why” that moves them from thought to action.

This Lent, pray that God will help reveal this answer to you.

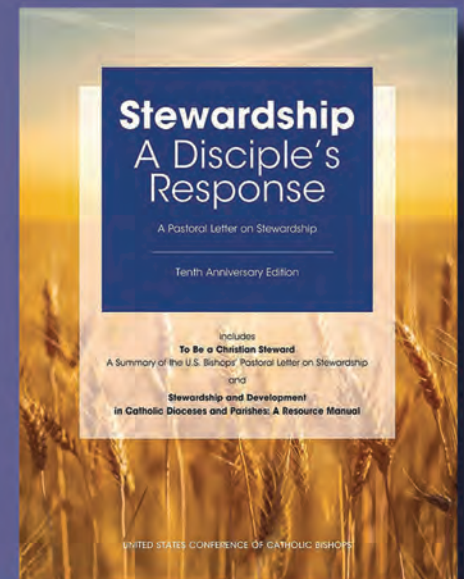
Through the Appeal, every gift meets urgent human needs through **poverty intervention, Respect Life initiatives, parish food pantries, and correctional ministry**—while sustaining **evangelization, youth ministry, marriage and family life programs, marriage support, campus ministry**. It fuels a wide range of ministries, supports **Catholic education** and provides **general operating support** for under resourced parishes and ministries across the diocese.

A sacrificial gift is an act of faith, hope, and charity that will be shared with others and multiplied in impact.

**What is your “Why?”**

ANNUAL  
DIOCESAN APPEAL  
CATHOLIC *stewardship* IN ACTION

This Lent  
consider reading, discerning  
or reflecting with a small  
group at your parish the  
USCCB’s pastoral letter  
on stewardship.



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