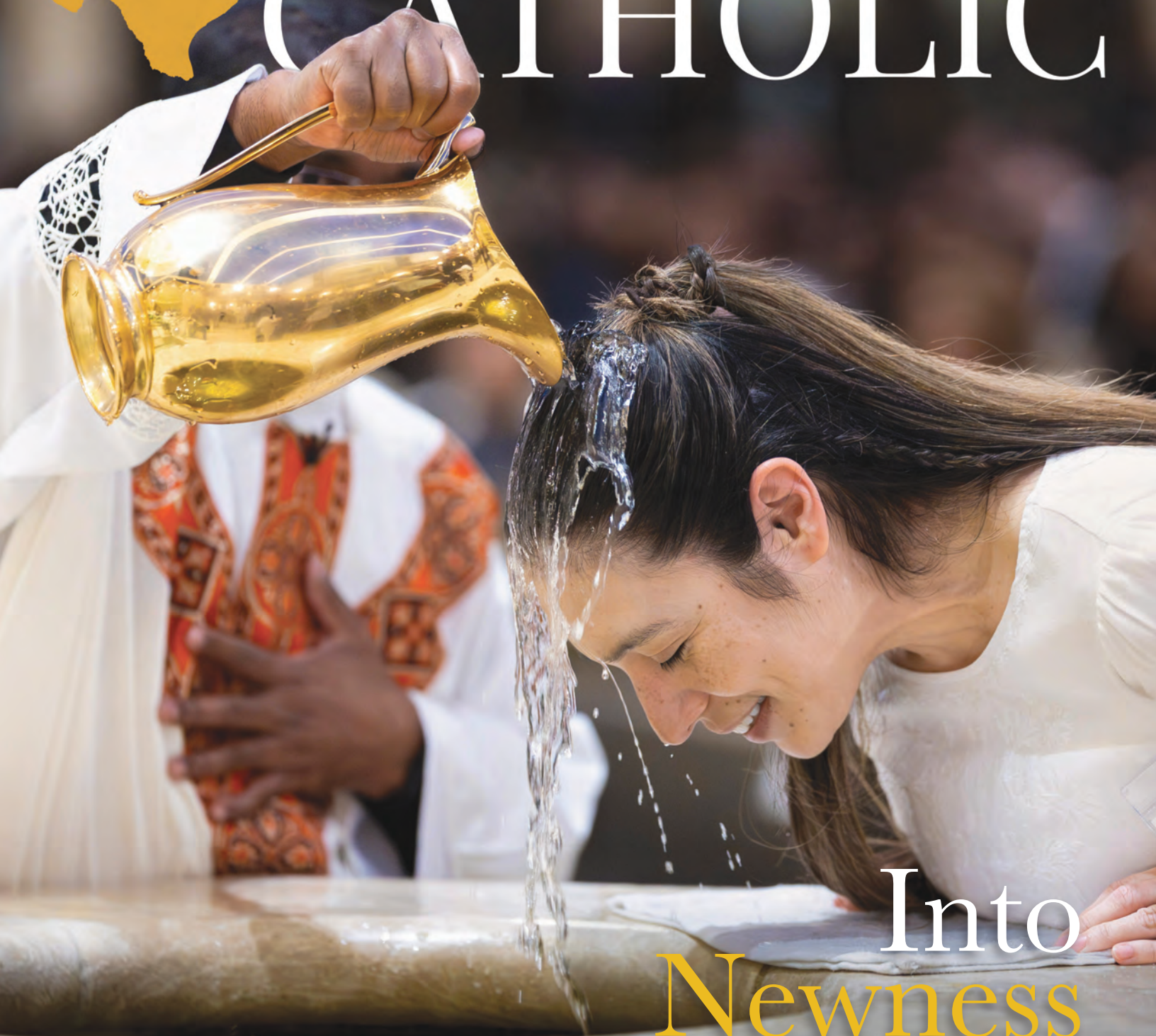


BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH



# NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC



Into  
Newness  
of Life

MAY - JUNE 2026  
VOL. 42 | NO. 3

# THE Holy Sepulcher

Treasures from the  
Terra Sancta Museum,  
Jerusalem

March 15–June 28

“Opulent. Sumptuous.  
Spectacular.  
Luxurious. Dazzling.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

Kimbell  
Art Museum



This exhibition is organized by The Frick Collection, New York.

It is supported in part by the Fort Worth Tourism Public Improvement District. Additional support is provided by Arts Fort Worth and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

Promotional support for the Kimbell Art Museum and its exhibitions is provided by American Airlines, NBC 5, and the *Fort Worth Report*.

*Monstrance* (detail), Naples, 1746, gold, rubies, emeralds, and diamonds. Terra Sancta Museum, Jerusalem. Photo by Joseph Coscia Jr.



## IN THIS ISSUE

May - June 2026

### 14 FIFTY YEARS

Founding families honored at St. Vincent de Paul's Jubilee Mass.

### 16 DIVINE MERCY

Relic of St. Faustina installed at Our Lady of Fatima Parish.

### 21 REFLECTING MARY

Local Marian art shows the Blessed Mother's importance to the faith.

### 24 YEAR OF ST. FRANCIS

There's no time like the present to rediscover St. Francis of Assisi.

### 34 BACKPACK HOMILIES

Fr. Mel Bessellieu's pack is stuffed with fun and lessons of faith.

### ON THE COVER

Photo of the Easter Vigil at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish  
(NTC/Kevin Bartram)

### FOLLOW US ONLINE

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### HAVE A STORY IDEA?

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

## 38 A GROWING FAMILY

At the Easter Vigil, the Diocese of Fort Worth welcomed 1,716 new Catholics into the local Church.



## 10 NEW DEACONS



## 18 SACRED OILS

# Nothing artificial here

I admit to being a little wary about artificial intelligence. A bit of the reluctance can be attributed to being old enough to understand that newer is not always better.

A quick skim of headlines raises other potential negative impacts of AI: massive job loss, accelerated hacking, deepfake videos, and students not mastering educational fundamentals, to name a few. Not to mention the data centers that consume energy like popcorn at a double feature.

(Brief aside here, I do recognize the benefits of artificial intelligence for automation, efficiency, and innovation.)

But for better or worse, artificial intelligence is here to stay and is rapidly integrating into more and more applications. AI has escaped from Pandora's box, and it won't be contained.

However, even though the impact of AI might prove to be one of the great revolutions in human history, that's not where our future lies. As Catholic Christians, our tomorrow lies with what's truly real — a Savior who is fully divine yet loved us enough to become fully human.

A Savior who became flesh in order to reconcile us with Him.

A Savior who became a little helpless baby to show us the size and strength of His love.

A Savior who became man to be our model of holiness.

A Savior who assumed human nature so that we could become sons and daughters of God.

“And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth” (*John 1:14*).

Now that's a reality on which to build your future.

And the reality of Jesus — Emmanuel, God with us — is still with us today, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church community, in prayer, in the poor and vulnerable, and in the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, where the Real Presence of Jesus is found, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

*Susan Moses*

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## PRIEST ASSIGNMENTS

BY MOST REV. MICHAEL OLSON

### REV. ENRIQUE SANCHEZ TORRES, CORC

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed **Parochial Vicar** of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Fort Worth, effective Feb. 19.

## IN MEMORIAM

### DEACON HARRY HEINZ

Deacon Harry Heinz, 92, beloved husband, father, grandfather, and steadfast servant of God, died Feb. 27 surrounded by his wife of 62 years, Millie, and his family.

Born April 26, 1933, in Guttenberg, N.J., Heinz served as a medical tech in the U.S. Army before graduating from college and working as an accountant and auditor for Prudential Insurance and

American Airlines. He and Millie raised two children and have four grandchildren.

He was ordained to the permanent diaconate for the Diocese of Fort Worth on Oct. 30, 1982. He served as a deacon at St. Michael Parish in Bedford for more than 40 years, where he was a “friend, teacher, and an inspiration to us all.”



Deacon Harry Heinz

### FATHER GARY GEURTZ

Father Gary James Geurtz, 76, a priest of the Diocese of Fort Worth, died March 30.

Born May 4, 1949, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Fr. Geurtz was the second of seven children born to Robert and Marjorie Geurtz.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from University of Texas at Arlington, Fr.

Geurtz entered seminary and was ordained Oct. 17, 1981, at St. Bartholomew Church in Fort Worth, where his parents belonged.

Fr. Geurtz served at many diocesan parishes, most recently St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller and St. Bartholomew



Father Gary Geurtz

Parish. In his final years he lived in an assisted living center.

## Pastoral, penitential, and intercessory



A man prays at the Mass of Reparation. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

**FORT WORTH** — On April 11 at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Fort Worth, more than 80 people gathered for the sixth annual Mass of Reparation.

Diocesan Director of Safe Environment Sandra Schrader-Farry said the purpose of the liturgy is multifold.

“Our hope is that all who gather for the Mass of Reparation leave with a deeper awareness of the suffering caused by abuse and a greater compassion for those who have been affected,” Schrader-Farry said. “We also hope that gathering for this Mass helps us to recognize our shared responsibility to stand with survivors in prayer and through our commitment to foster a true culture of safety and a deep respect for the dignity of every person.

“We pray that this time together inspires a renewed dedication in all of us to protect the most vulnerable and to make our communities places of healing, trust, and hope.”

The Mass, she said, is “pastoral, intercessory, and penitential.”

Bishop Michael Olson, in his homily, said, “We beg for His mercy that Christ would make us just and merciful. We contritely make a firm purpose of amendment, and trust that only through Him can we make satisfaction and experience healing with all who have been harmed by our disbelief in Christ’s triumph of mercy over sin, His triumph of life over death, His triumph of truth over deception.”

— John English

# A Week to Remember

## PALM SUNDAY

Father John Tinh Tran, CRM, celebrates Palm Sunday Mass at Vietnamese Martyrs Church in Arlington. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)



## CHRISM MASS

Bishop Michael Olson awaits the beginning of the Chrism Mass at St. Patrick Cathedral in Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



## HOLY THURSDAY

Symbolizing the suspension of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the altar is stripped following the Holy Thursday Mass at St. Peter Church in Lindsay. (NTC/Thomas Otto)





THERE'S  
MORE



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

## GOOD FRIDAY

Parishioners carry a crucifix for a silent procession after a Celebration of the Lord's Passion at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Fort Worth. *(NTC/Ben Torres)*



## EASTER VIGIL

Father James Flynn lights the Paschal candle to begin the Easter Vigil Mass at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Keller. *(NTC/Kevin Bartram)*



## EASTER SUNDAY

Deacon Gelasio García distributes candy after the Easter Mass at St. Mary Parish in Gainesville. *(NTC/Thomas Otto)*

# Purple power



TCU students, alumni celebrate second annual Purple Mass

**FORT WORTH** — A sea of purple, white, and variations thereof converged on Holy Family Church on March 7 for the second annual Purple Mass, offered for TCU students and alumni.

Fittingly, given that the celebration fell during the liturgical season of Lent, the priestly vestments were also purple.

Roughly 75 members of varying parishes, the local business community, and TCU Catholic — a campus outreach organization dedicated to supporting the TCU community

spiritually — congregated for the Purple Mass, followed by a catered lunch and opportunity for fellowship.

Though chants of “Riff, Ram, Bah, Zoo” were absent from the luncheon that followed, the atmosphere was festive and camaraderie ever-present, as students and alumni gathered for a meal served on tables adorned with purple tablecloths, cups that bore the TCU logo, and a giant, cowboy hat-shaped cake with purple frosting for dessert.

Father Jonathan Wallis, who serves as



NTC/Rodger Mallison

Father Brett Metzler distributes Holy Communion at the TCU Purple Mass.

vicar general and moderator of the curia, director of theologian seminarian formation, and chaplain and director of the TCU Newman Center, spoke about the new center for the student ministry and what it will offer the local community.

“The idea was to provide a place for students to gather together to learn about their faith,

to grow in their faith, and to meet others who are interested in what they’re interested in,” Fr. Wallis said. “It’s really to serve as a focal point for our service to Jesus Christ ... and it’s for anyone connected to the university.”

The center is on W. Berry St.

— John English



## Annual State Judicial Vicar Conference held at Montserrat



The tribunal staff at Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

### LAKE DALLAS —

The 50<sup>th</sup> annual Texas Catholic Judicial Vicar Conference was held March 10-11 at Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House in Lake Dallas. About 70 people, including the eight-member tribunal staff and two advocates from the Diocese of Fort Worth, attended. This is the first time the annual conference was held in the Diocese of Fort Worth, said Cheyenne Marrinan, director of the tribunal. The

proximity allowed several to attend, including the judicial vicar, Father Tim Thompson, JCL; tribunal judges Father Joy Joseph, TOR, JCL, and Father Sam Antony, SAC, JCD; and the tribunal staff.

The conference covered aspects of the nullity process and the care of tribunal employees.

Vicar General Father Jonathan Wallis welcomed attendees with a Mass on the first day of the conference.



The Kimbell Art Museum displays “The Holy Sepulcher, Treasures from the Terra Sancta Museum, Jerusalem” through June 28. The rare exhibition includes some of the finest sacred objects from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

## Sacred treasures

THERE'S MORE!



Learn more and see more photos of the Holy Sepulcher exhibition at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth at [NorthTexasCatholic.org/local-news](http://NorthTexasCatholic.org/local-news)

## Young adults focus and reflect

**FLOWER MOUND** — In a world that seldom settles down, young Catholic adults retreated to St. Philip the Apostle Church in Flower Mound, abandoning their cell phones and schedules for a day of reflection, repentance, and renewal.

Nearly 70 participants attended this year’s Lenten retreat, according to Victoria Ramon, director of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry for the Diocese of Fort Worth. The young Catholics spent the day hearing from guest speakers, enjoying fellowship, and attending Mass, Adoration, and confession.

“I sensed the Lord wanted our young adults to encounter Him in

His Word. This led to the overall theme of Encountering Jesus in the Gospel,” she said. “Within this theme, we focused on the three pillars of Lent. Through the practice of increased prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, young adults receive the grace to return to our Lord and conform their lives even more closely to His.”

Presentations included Lauren Sajewich, Nolan Catholic High School, on prayer; Deacon José Mateo, St. Francis of Assisi Church in Grapevine, on fasting; and Deacon Mike Waldon, St. Teresa of Calcutta Church in Roanoke, on almsgiving.

—Jennifer Johnson



Fiona Hotchkiss takes notes during the Young Adult Retreat.



Trent Barton, Jeffrey Ambreit Jr., and Paul Trinh lay prostrate during their ordination to the transitional diaconate on March 18 at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

# FOLLOWING THE Call

Trent Barton, Jeffrey Ambreit Jr. and Paul Trinh  
ordained as transitional deacons

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

Simon Edmiston, 24, and Brendan Garretson, 22, didn't know the three men ordained to the transitional diaconate March 18 at St. Mary of the Assumption Church.

"We're just young Catholics who want to stay connected and involved in the Church," said the Holy Family in Fort Worth parishioners who were among

the crowd of worshippers that filled the historic landmark on Fort Worth's Near Southside. "We enjoy, as laity, participating in Masses like this."

Enthusiastic members of the young Church, Garretson, a recent convert, and Edmiston, a cradle Catholic, believe other 20-somethings like them are searching for truth and structure in a world that is broken.

"I myself am drawn to the goodness, truth, and beauty of what the Catholic Church has to offer," Edmiston explained. "That's not available anywhere else. It's a unique grace God has given us."

The goodness, truth, and beauty of the Church were on full display as Bishop Michael Olson ordained Michael Trent Barton, Jeffrey Michael Ambreit Jr., and Paul John Trinh to the Sacred Order

Paul Trinh is assisted in vesting by two deacons during his transitional diaconate ordination at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Fort Worth on March 18. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



of the diaconate during a rite steeped in symbolic meaning and gestures. Concelebrating the Ordination Mass with the bishop were Father Jonathan Wallis, vicar general; Father John Perikomalayil, HGN, St. Mary pastor; and diocesan priests.

As transitional deacons, the men will begin their final year of formation before the priesthood. They also enter the clerical state by making promises for the first time of obedience, celibacy, and obligation to pray daily the Liturgy of the Hours.

The transitional diaconate is not only a preparatory stage but a profound sacramental expression of *diakonia* — service — which is essential to the priesthood. It imbues future priests with a deeply rooted understanding of service as a fundamental dimension of their ministry, mirroring Christ’s mission to serve.

Through the sacrament of holy orders, the deacon is ordained to baptize, officiate at marriages, conduct funeral services, proclaim the Gospel, preach, and assist priests and bishops in their pastoral and administrative duties.

#### FAMILY SUPPORT

In his opening remarks, Bishop Olson thanked the ordinands’ parents

for introducing their sons to Christ and encouraging a vocation to the priesthood.

“It’s in your homes where they first heard the Gospel, learned about the Church, and learned to follow the commandments as Christ taught us,” he said. “You set examples of generosity of heart that brought them here this evening to answer the call Christ gave them.”

Waiting for the Ordination Mass to begin, Holly and Michael Trinh said their son, Paul, 26, always had a spiritual nature. Even as a young boy, his room was filled with statues and pictures of Jesus, Mary, and the saints.

“At the babysitter, he would play priest and have the other kids there respond to him,” his mother remembered. “It’s been a long journey. We thank God and Bishop Olson for guiding him to this day.”

Trent Barton’s parents, Jerry and Margie Barton, his four brothers, and members of his extended family traveled from Seymour to witness the former football coach be ordained a deacon.

“He grew up in a very Catholic-oriented, faith-based family so those are his roots,” Margie Barton observed.

The 37-year-old was out in the world and held a job since junior high, and that will work to his advantage in

ministry, his mother said.

“Trent carries those experiences forward and will be able to relate to people,” she added. “God willing, he’ll be the first priest in our family. It’s wonderful to say the least.”

Haley Ambreit, the sister of ordinand Jeffrey Ambreit, 32, said her family prayed, “lots of Rosaries” for him over the years.

“We always felt this was his calling. It was his own decision, at his own pace, and in his own time,” she emphasized.

The eldest of nine children born to Begonia Quepons and the late Jeffrey Ambreit Sr., the seminarian began studying for the priesthood in 2012, left formation for several years, and returned to the seminary in 2023.

“He’s a good listener, very empathetic, and loving,” said the immigration paralegal, describing some of her brother’s notable qualities. “He’s someone parishioners can count on and trust.”

#### CALLED TO SERVE

After the candidates were accepted for ordination with rousing applause from the congregation, Bishop Olson continued the Rite of Ordination with a

Continued on Page 12



Bishop Michael Olson imposes his hands on the head of Jeffrey Ambreit Jr. as he invokes the gifts of the Holy Spirit at his ordination to the transitional diaconate. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

### From Page 11

homily that explained a deacon’s liturgical responsibilities and care of the poor.

“Tonight, we pray for these men who are to be ordained to the transitional diaconate for God’s blessing and mercy to come upon them,” he said. “In this liturgy of ordination, God calls them to service of others, especially the poor; God entrusts to them the responsibility of preaching the Gospel of Christ; and God appoints them as stewards and ministers of His mysteries.”

Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles called seven men of untarnished reputation to care for the needs of foreign widows and orphans who were often victims of abuse, neglect, and mistreatment.

“Like the Apostles, we too must recognize that the poor and vulnerable

among us are most in need of the Gospel as expressed in word and action,” the bishop explained. “It is the deacon’s responsibility to guard the poor and to ensure that they receive the authentic Gospel of Christ offered in sacrificial love.”

The celebrant advised the candidates to seek the intercession of St. Joseph in their ministry. St. Joseph is known as the protector of the unfortunate, the needy, exiles, the afflicted, the poor, and the dying.

The earthly father of Jesus is also an example of pure chastity for those ordained men who make a promise of celibacy. St. Joseph’s chastity is marked by wholeness, maturity, and integrity.

“His purity of heart is so directly focused upon God that he can let go of his own expectations, even around marriage,

and live with obedience and attentiveness to Jesus Christ,” the bishop said. “He lives an integrity of life that confounds the world possessed by its passions and the carnal drives of the human condition: fear, anger, and physical pleasure.”

In closing, Bishop Olson urged the men to seek God’s will and not their own.

“Trust God just as St. Joseph did,” he directed.

### HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

After promising respect and obedience to the bishop and his successors, the candidates lay prostrate in humble submission before the altar while the entire congregation prayed the intercessory Litany of Saints. Rising from prayer, the men once again knelt before the bishop, who imposed his hands on the head of each man as he invoked the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This ancient, traditional gesture dates back to the Apostles and is a central act of the ordination rite.

The new deacons then received the vestments of the office, the stole and dalmatic, from fellow deacons instrumental to their vocation. Entrusted with the responsibility of proclaiming and preaching the Gospel of Christ, the ordinands were presented with the Book of the Gospels by the bishop with the admonition, “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.”

### ENCOURAGING VOCATIONS

Carmen Garland, mother of 19-year-old diocesan seminarian Luke Garland, brought her two other sons, Jake, 17, and Matt, 15, to the Ordination Mass to show support for the new deacons and the vocation process. Luke Garland is a freshman at St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict, Louis.

The St. Mary the Virgin in Arlington




Bishop Michael Olson poses with Paul Trinh, Trent Barton, and Jeffrey Ambreit Jr. following their ordination to the transitional diaconate at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

and Holy Trinity in Azle parishioner encouraged her boys to attend the St. Andrew Breakfast, Come & See Weekend, Quo Vadis, and other discernment events hosted by the diocese.

“I think parents need to encourage a vocation if a boy is interested,” she said. “Use all the tools the diocese offers so he is able to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ with clarity. I want my sons to do what God wants them to do.” ✝️

**WATCH THE VIDEO!**



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Trent Barton promises obedience to Bishop Michael Olson during the diaconal ordination Mass. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

# FROM WAREHOUSE TO God's House

Founding families honored at St. Vincent de Paul's  
50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Jubilee Mass

By Matthew Smith

**A** Feb. 28 Mass celebrated by Bishop Michael Olson recounted Arlington's St. Vincent de Paul Parish's humble beginnings half a century ago as well as the parish's original families and subsequent growth into a dynamic community outreach resource.

Bishop Olson, during his homily, described the parish as one always dedicated to faith, service, and community.

Bishop Olson chuckled over that fact that the first Mass celebrated in the new parish occurred on Feb. 29, 1976, a leap year.

"Today we celebrate the same eternal sacrifices in this beautiful church, made beautiful in no small measure because of the beauty of the parishioners within," Bishop Olson said. "With gratitude for God's many blessings that have passed through the ministry of your pastors, deacons, and lay leadership through these past 50 years."

Arlington Mayor Jim Ross, during the reception after Mass, summed up

the parish as a source of "such loving outreach to the community." Ross noted that Arlington celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

"So your church has been serving this community for one-third of our city's life," Ross said.

Through that time, Ross added, St. Vincent de Paul ministry and outreach efforts aided more than 40,000 community members and supplied more than \$3 million worth of food, clothing, and other items.

Such was always the goal, Bishop Olson said.

"This parish community goes beyond simply being Catholics," Bishop Olson said. "Our mission and service to God guides us to serve others in the community, not because they are Catholic or not, but because we are Catholic. This is the heart of our faith."

## UNCOMMON START

The parish began not in its current location but in an Arkansas Lane

warehouse then leased by the Knights of Columbus.

"I can remember having Mass next to the beer tap and popcorn machine," said Jennifer Brett, one of the original parishioners.

The building's pool table area served as the nursery and parishioners helped set chairs out for Mass, said Ray and Pru Brett, Jennifer's parents.

"Sundays, we took up the entire front on one side," Pru Brett said. "Jennifer was 7. Her brother was 5 and, right before the parish opened, we had twin boys, so they were 2 months old. Then we had another son, and he got baptized here."

They named their last son Nolan.

"I was pregnant with our number five," Pru Brett said. "We drove by Nolan High School and I thought, 'That's a good name.'"

Original parishioner Marilyn Dietrich joked that the disco ball hung from the ceiling left her unsure what to expect when she attended that first Mass.

"The nursery was in the bar,"



Congregants celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Arlington with Bishop Michael Olson. (NTC/Andy Viganas)

Dietrich said. “It was a little crazy.”

A situation original parishioners John and Nicki Pearson confirmed.

“People used to bring toys from home so the kids had something other than pool balls to play with,” Nicki said with a laugh.

Initial misgivings aside, Dietrich said she quickly felt at home.

“Despite starting out in a warehouse, the spirit was there from the beginning,” Dietrich said. “The people, the music, liturgy was so good and so welcoming.”

Members of all three families spoke of how everyone joined in to do what needed doing to get the parish up and running. All praised the parish’s first priest, Monsignor Philip L. Johnson, for leading the way.

All became and have remained involved in numerous ministries and projects through the years and met lifelong friends along the way.

“John joined the choir immediately,” Nicki Pearson said. “Six months later he joined the Catholic Church. That came

as quite a surprise to Fr. Johnson as he’d been singing in our choir all that time.”

From the warehouse, the parish soon moved to its current location, experiencing several renovations and expansions most notably in 1977, 1984, and 2024. It was overseen by Father Thomas J. Craig, Father J. Michael Holmberg, and currently Father Philip Brembah.

### FLOURISHING AT 50

From its original 40 or so families, the parish has grown to more than 3,000 parishioners.

Members spoke of St. Vincent’s ongoing spirit of outreach both among fellow parishioners and beyond the church’s walls, including parishioner participation with Meals on Wheels, area retirement homes, and other organizations.

“Early on, it was easy to get plugged in because we were a small parish,” John Pearson said. “People would see a need and jump in to fill it.”

That spirit remains, Nicki Pearson said, even though St. Vincent is now one of the Diocese of Fort Worth’s larger parishes.

“We’re much larger now,” Nicki said. “But we’re definitely not a get-lost-in-the-shuffle parish. People are engaged and know each other and care. But we keep growing. I think there’s over 60 ministries now.”

Bishop Olson expressed gratitude for the parishioners’ outreach, ministries, and witness through the decades as well as the importance of their continuing example to the larger Arlington and surrounding community.

“In these challenging times, society very much needs us to be the Church,” Bishop Olson said. “A parish that speaks truth to charity especially in a society right now that seems to be intoxicated with rage, anger, and fear.

“The Lord has given us this time, and the Gospel. It’s our responsibility to carry that with dignity and confidence into a world that so needs to hear and see that.” 🇺🇸



# DIVINE MERCY, in the diocese

A relic of St. Faustina Kowalska is permanently installed  
at Our Lady of Fatima Church

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

**E**ntrusted with carrying a first-degree relic of St. Faustina Kowalska from Poland to Our Lady of Fatima Church in Fort Worth, Christina Hoang prayed for guidance.

“Please, Lord, tell me what to do to carry her home,” recalled the founder of the growing Divine Mercy movement in North Texas. “I knew I had to be very reverent and hoped the TSA [Transportation Security Administration] wouldn’t stop me.”

Nestled in a capsule, a piece of the saint’s bone was

safeguarded in a beautiful reliquary too heavy to carry across Europe and then Texas. Hoang decided to transfer the tiny vial into the burse she uses to bring Communion to the homebound and, protectively, placed it around her neck.

“I was in awe,” the Our Lady of Fatima parishioner said, reflecting on her role in bringing a relic of St. Faustina, known as the Apostle of Divine Mercy, to the diocese. “The relic was given to me on Oct. 5, St. Faustina’s feast day, so I see the Holy Spirit’s hand in this.”

Parishioners from across the diocese celebrated the installation of the relic inside Fort Worth’s Our Lady of Fatima Church on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 12. Father Jonathan

◀ Deacon Michael Hoang leads a procession to the chapel where the relic of St. Faustina will be kept. (NTC/Ben Torres)

Wallis, vicar general and moderator of the curia, presided at the trilingual Mass with Father Vinh Van Vu, CRM, pastor; Father Robert Strittmatter; and Father Lawrence Nguyen, CRM.

## AN EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL LIFE

Given the name Sister Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament when she entered the convent in 1925, the Polish nun grew up in a poor but devout Catholic family as the third of 10 children. One of the most beloved saints in the Church today, she led an extraordinary spiritual life shaped by her encounters with Jesus Christ. During His messages, the mystic was tasked with spreading His compassion and forgiveness to the world. As part of that mission, Sr. Faustina was also directed to recreate a vision she experienced in 1931 as a permanent reminder of God's Divine Mercy.

The painted image, showing Jesus with rays of red and white light streaming from His heart, is said to symbolize grace and blood. Jesus also instructed the nun to pray for mercy using specific words which became known as the Divine Mercy Chaplet. The prayer, traditionally prayed each day at 3 p.m., gained worldwide popularity after Pope John Paul II canonized St. Faustina in 2000 — the first saint of the new millennium.

## A REMINDER OF GOODNESS AND HOLINESS

Addressing the 700 worshippers attending the afternoon Mass, Fr. Wallis said God extends His mercy and compassion in a special way through St. Faustina, “especially through the holy relic we solemnly install today. We pray that through her intercession, our diocese and this parish may be blessed with many vocations to the priesthood.”

Relics of saints, he told the congregation, remind us of the goodness of God's creation and the holiness of someone who lives in God's presence and can pray for us.

“All of us are in need of mercy — the mercy of Jesus Christ through the holy relic of Sr. Faustina,” Fr. Wallis added.



Parishioners venerate the relic of St. Faustina after the installation Mass. (NTC/Ben Torres)

“Let us ask that through the intercession of St. Faustina, we may live and serve Jesus Christ in our families and our world.”

In closing, he asked his listeners to follow the example of the early Christians who devoted themselves to the teachings of the Apostles, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

“May our lives reflect the beauty and peace of Jesus Christ and be blessed through the intercession of St. Faustina,” Fr. Wallis urged.

Following the Mass, members of the Divine Mercy Movement from five Vietnamese parishes in the dioceses of Fort Worth and Dallas processed with Deacon Michael Hoang, who carried the relic of St. Faustina to its permanent home in the church's newly renamed St. Faustina Chapel.

Fr. Wallis blessed the reliquary before the relic was returned to the main sanctuary for veneration by parishioners.

## EXCEPTIONAL DEVOTION

“It's a great honor. I believe having a relic of St. Faustina in the diocese is the beginning of expanding love for Divine Mercy in this area,” said Huyen Tran, a Divine Mercy advocate since 2019. “I'm excited to see how many people will make a pilgrimage here.”

The Vietnamese Martyrs parishioner became acquainted with the Divine Mercy Chaplet when she witnessed her late

father, Kha Pham, recite it every night in the hospital.

“After he passed away, I made a commitment to learn about the Divine Mercy,” she said. “Seeing the comfort it brought to my father really affected me. Now, I'm spreading the word.”

Tran is one of the 54 Divine Mercy devotees Christina Hoang led on a pilgrimage to Poland and Rome in 2025. A month before the trip, Hoang petitioned St. Faustina's religious order, the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, for a first-degree relic. First-class relics are body fragments and are venerated to honor a saint's inspiring way of life and faith.

The Sisters of Mercy in Krakow became custodians of the tomb and relics of St. Faustina in 2003. A relic is granted by the convent's mother superior to parishes where Divine Mercy is the patron or where devotion is exceptionally strong. After a private meeting and completing paperwork, Hoang received the relic and a certificate of authenticity from the mother superior before a Mass in the Shrine of Divine Mercy.

“St. Faustina devoted her life to Divine Mercy and praying for souls to come back to Jesus,” she said. “People today carry a lot of pain, stress, and uncertainty. With Divine Mercy, no one is beyond hope. That message is needed more now than ever.” 🇺🇸



Before the Chrism Mass, seminarians, including Robert Weisberg, pictured above, carefully measure and fill the vessels with oil to be blessed. About 22 gallons of olive oil is blessed and distributed. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

# Three oils that unite and bless

At the Chrism Mass, the bishop consecrates the oil of catechumens, the oil of the sick, and the holy chrism, which each parish uses for sacraments

By Susan Moses

**C**an you imagine the Catholic Church without the sacraments or the priesthood? Both are tremendous sources of grace for the faithful, and both are emphasized in the liturgy of the Chrism Mass, which the Diocese of Fort Worth usually celebrates on the Tuesday of Holy Week.

The Chrism Mass derives its name from the blessing of the three holy oils used in all parishes across the diocese in the coming year.

At the Chrism Mass, Bishop Michael Olson blesses the oil of catechumens, used in baptism; the chrism oil, used for baptisms, confirmations, holy orders, and the consecration of altars and dedication of

Continued on Page 20



◀ Deacons carry vessels of oil to be blessed by Bishop Michael Olson during the Chrism Mass.  
(NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Bishop Olson stirs fragrant balsam into the sacred chrism to represent the "aroma of Christ."  
(NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Immediately after the Chrism Mass, teams of volunteers divide the oil into vials then box the vials for each parish, according to the size of the parish.  
(NTC/Susan Moses)



#### From Page 18

churches; and the oil of the sick.

After the Mass, a team of volunteers divide the oils and distribute them to the parishes for their sacramental use.

By using the oils blessed in this manner, this binds the sacraments at each parish to the universality of the Church through the bishop, explained Father Samuel Maul, pastor of St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington, who served as the master of ceremonies for the March 31 Mass at St. Patrick Cathedral.

Fr. Maul said, “The bishop is originally the chief baptizer, the chief confirmer of the Holy Spirit, and the one who ordains. It’s his blessing. So it’s his ministry that is operated by all of the workers in the vineyard.

“Ultimately, it’s Christ’s ministry, but it’s the bishop who grounds us in that universal reality and connects us to Christ through the Apostolic tradition of the Church. So [the Chrism Mass] is really important.”

Olive oil, which was used for lighting lamps, cooking, healing, and ceremonial anointing in the Bible, forms the basis for each of the three oils. “Olive oil was so ubiquitous in ancient life; now it’s the material that is used to formulate the sign that signifies the invisible grace” of the sacrament, Fr. Maul continued.

Balsam is added to the sacred chrisms to add a fragrance. “It permeates the scene when someone is baptized or confirmed or ordained, because it represents an indelible mark. ... You’re supposed to know a change,” Fr. Maul said.

Also during the Chrism Mass, more than 100 priests renew the promises they made at their ordination.

In blessing the sacramental oils and in renewing priestly promises, the Chrism Mass displays the unity of the Church in the diocese and across the world. 🇺🇸



Kathleen Mitchell of St. Peter Parish in Lindsay presents a sacramental oil blessed at the Chrism Mass to her parish during the Holy Thursday Mass. (NTC/Thomas Otto)



Our Lady of the Apocalypse stands in the apse of St. Patrick Cathedral in Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

# Reflections of Mary

Images of the Blessed Mother mark her importance in the Catholic Church

By Brenda Raney

The painting of a resplendent Virgin Mary being assumed into heaven immediately captures your attention when you walk into St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Fort Worth. The familiar depiction for many Catholics honors the role Mary plays in Catholic tradition.

According to artist and University

of Dallas theology professor Sister Mary Angelica Neenan, OP, Marian art has been prominent in Church history since the second century. She said, “One of the earliest depictions of Mary dates back to approximately 150 A.D. and is in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome.

“The *Theotokos* (Greek for ‘mother of God’) image of Mary holding the baby Jesus has been accepted as historic proof of the devotion to Mary as the mother of

God,” Sr. Angelica continued.

Step into St. Patrick Cathedral, and Mary is featured in several places, most obviously as Our Lady of the Apocalypse in the apse of the Fort Worth cathedral. The image is based on the description of St. John: “A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of

Continued on Page 22



- ▲ An image of St. Mary of the Assumption is painted in the dome over the altar of her namesake parish. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)
- ▶ St. Andrew pastor Father Dan Pattee, TOR, explains the painting by Jose Trevino which will serve as the inspiration for the parish youth center's stained-glass window. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

**From Page 21**

12 stars” (*Revelation 12:1*).

The cathedral also has a Marian altar, which features three different depictions of the Blessed Virgin. The altar is centered around a statue of Mary, Queen of the Angels. Mary is standing on a cloud, surrounded by the busts of angels with her heel crushing a serpent. To her right is an Our Lady of Guadalupe statue that is modeled after the sacred image of Our Lady as she appeared in 1531 on the cloak of an indigenous Mexican peasant named Juan Diego.

At the top of the altar, the image of the Virgin Mary is inlaid with a Russian



icon brought to this country in 1917. In her book “Cathedral Treasures,” the late author and cathedral historian Kathryn Fialho explains it depicts the face of the Madonna “with her arms and hands raised in supplication with the child Jesus resting on her heart.”

**MARY THROUGHOUT HISTORY**

History has played a powerful role in how artists depict the Blessed Virgin. “The Protestant Reformation definitely had an effect on the art world, and Catholic artists responded by painting Catholic themes about Mary,

re-emphasizing, what we always teach, that Mary is a big part of God's plan," Sr. Angelica said.

Images of Mary also changed as the Church grew and the outreach of the missionaries brought the teachings of Christ to other countries. Mary was often depicted with the ethnic features of the countries where Catholicism took hold.

"As artists, our own personal culture comes out in our paintings. In Vietnam, there's the Vietnamese Madonna, and then in Africa, there are many different images of African Madonnas," Sr. Angelica continued.

"If we believe God is our father, and Jesus, His son, then it is natural that the Virgin Mary would look like us as our mother," Sr. Angelica said. "When we're praying the Rosary or praying, just praying from [our] hearts, it's useful to have an image to pray with. And we've always done that throughout history, especially when people were illiterate."

The importance of Mary in history has sometimes provided fodder for legend and lore to explain the unexplainable. The Black Madonna of Czestochowa, Poland, the most famous of the Black Madonna images, has been the subject of various stories to explain the darker skin tone. Historical experts have said the coloring is soot because the painting was in close proximity to burning oil lamps and candles. Others theorize the original was painted on cedar wood, while others think the painting is reflective of Eastern Europeans. Pope Clement XI issued a pontifical decree of canonical coronation to the image in 1717.

As varied as the images are of Mary, so too are references to "Our Lady." According to Sr. Angelica, different depictions and names come primarily from two places.

"One is when Our Lady actually appears somewhere, like Our Lady of Lourdes or Our Lady of Fatima, that are very well known. But then there's also a smaller tradition, especially in Italy, and other countries, where they have their own Our Lady image, or their own statue, or stained glass, or church in honor of Our Lady for each little town."

References such as "Our Lady of the Lake," come from people who "want to show devotion and love for her. We ask her for special intercession," Sr. Angelica said. "It's like making it very personal, our devotion, our love for her, and then our trust in her intercession for us, her protection and prayers."

### MARIAN ART, LOCALLY

This devotion Catholics have for Mary often extends beyond church walls. Jose Trevino, the cathedral's communications director, said throughout his career, he has drawn over 100 images of Mary.

"I spent about 12 years as a tattoo artist and a lot of people wanted a Mary tattoo," he said.

Trevino has created custom works depicting Mary for several parishes and apostolates in the diocese. Among them is a framed image of a pregnant Mary which was created in support of the Fort Worth nonprofit Mother and Unborn Baby Care.

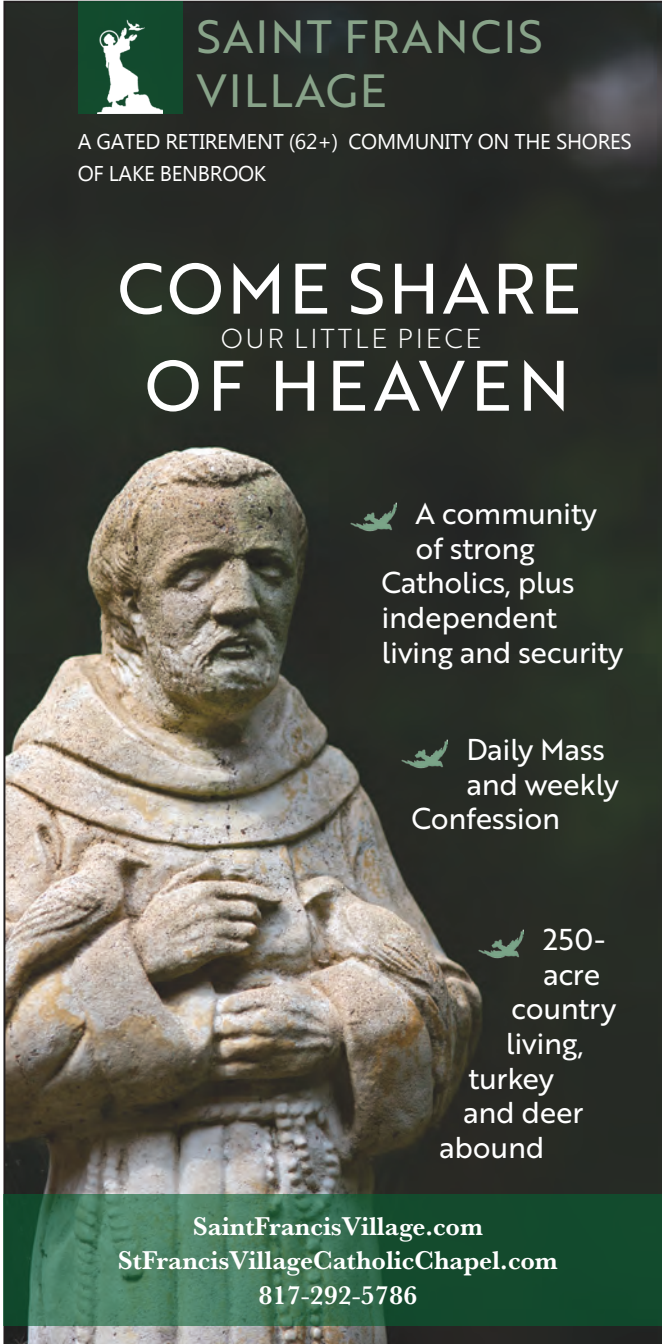
"I used gold leaf to show a radiant glow coming out of her belly [representing] Christ unborn," he said.

Trevino takes pride in creating paintings that reflect the Catholic tradition and his signature style. His portrayal of the

Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of the Sea (*Stella Maris*) places Mary over the water, calming the rough seas. In Trevino's painting, which will eventually be turned into a stained-glass window at St. Andrew Parish in Fort Worth, Mary is hovering over a ship, blessing it as it makes its way through a stormy sea.

Trevino said the painting shows "Mary has arrived and calmed the waters. The ship is coming out of a storm. The sails are not set. And the waves are still kind of heavy. But she's calming the sea for their travel."

Over 25 parishes in the diocese are named after Mary or her apparitions. The statues, stained-glass windows, and paintings are reflective of the story of Mary, but also continued acknowledgment of her importance to our Catholic faith. 🇺🇸



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Parishioners attend Mass before a stained-glass image of St. Francis of Assisi located in St. Francis of Assisi Church in Grapevine. (NTC/ Richard Rodriguez)

# Year of St. Francis

Jubilee year brings opportunity to rediscover St. Francis of Assisi

By Matthew Smith

**A**lthough he died Oct. 3, 1226, St. Francis of Assisi's life, works, and example resound still throughout modern day. Which is why Pope Leo XIV proclaimed 2026 as a special jubilee year with associated plenary indulgences in honor of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Francis' death.

"In this age, marked by so many seemingly interminable wars, by internal and social divisions that create mistrust and fear, he continues to speak," Pope Leo said of St. Francis. "Not because he offers

technical solutions, but because his life points to the authentic source of peace."

St. Francis' vision of peace, Pope Leo reminds, encompasses not only relations between people but also the entirety of nature and creation.

Born about 1181 to a prosperous family, St. Francis went on to found the Franciscan religious order. Associated with patronage of animals and the environment, St. Francis stressed the virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Pope Gregory IX canonized St. Francis on July 16, 1228.

In proclaiming celebration of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Pope Leo said he hopes St. Francis' "message of peace may find profound echo in the Church and society today."

Though eight centuries separated, our times are not that different than St. Francis', Pope Leo added.

"His teachings are perhaps even more valid and understandable today," Pope Leo said. "When Christian charity languishes, ignorance spreads like bad habits, and those who extol harmony among peoples do so more out of selfishness than out of a sincere Christian spirit; when the virtual takes precedence over the real, social discord and violence are part of everyday life, and peace becomes more unsure and distant every day."

Closer to home, several Diocese of Fort Worth parishes are marking the jubilee year.

"Of course, he's the patron of our parish," Father Sojan George of Grapevine's St. Francis of Assisi Parish said. "He represents a very simple and joyful way of living the Gospel through trusting God completely in a very humble way and through caring for all of God's creation."

Such appeals to his parishioners, Fr. George said, while at the same time inviting all to discover St. Francis anew.

"Our parishioners are drawn to his simplicity and his love for the poor and the environment," Fr. George said. "For them and everyone else, St. Francis' life reminds us that it's not that complicated. It's about living the Gospel in a real and concrete way."

Father Daniel Pattee, TOR, of Fort Worth's St. Andrew Parish agreed.

"St. Francis is the primary way I have for interpreting the Gospel of Christ," Fr. Pattee said. "His unique experience of the Gospel placed three mysteries of faith front and center: the crib, the cross, and the Eucharist. Each of these takes on meaning in light of St. Francis' understanding and experience of the poor and humble Christ."

Fr. Pattee spoke too of St. Francis' continued relevance.



A mural of St. Francis of Assisi with Jesus behind the altar at St. Francis of Assisi Parish. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

"St. Francis is a saint for our times due to having discovered the true meaning of freedom," Fr. Pattee said. "Which came only through his relationship with Christ. St. Francis was all about Christ, and there was no man who ever lived freer than him at the end of his life. Which is why so many saints, even our Church today, so admire and love him."

Fr. Pattee recommended several books on St. Francis, particularly "St. Francis of Assisi: A Biography" by Johannes Jorgenson.

Father Jose Francis, TOR, of Denton's St. John Paul II Parish shared St. Francis' impact on his life.

"To me, St. Francis is one who lived the Gospel in refreshing simplicity," Fr. Francis said. "I strive to follow his footsteps as he followed the footsteps of Jesus so deeply in his poverty and humility."

His parishioners, Fr. Francis said, recognize St. Francis as a "lover of nature and patron of ecology." Fr. Francis commented on the joy his parishioners receive from the blessing of pets on St. Francis' feast day and the fact that statues of the saint occupy many of their yards or gardens.

All three priests spoke of activities in

the planning to mark the jubilee year at their respective parishes.

Fr. Pattee outlined the guidelines for receiving a plenary indulgence for oneself or the souls of the dead for the faithful at St. Andrew Parish. They include visiting any church or place of worship anywhere in the world named after St. Francis or connected to him in any way. Also, making a sacramental confession eight days before or after visiting the church then attending Mass and receiving Holy Communion on the same day as the church visit. Then lastly, reciting the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be for the intentions of the Holy Father.

Several churches, groups, and individuals have made plans or inquired about pilgrimages to his parish for just such purpose, Fr. George said. He described the altar and murals in his parish which depict the church's namesake saint.

Fr. Francis added, "I think the spirit of St. Francis can be rediscovered in our time, especially his love for the Church and the Eucharist, his relationship of mercy for the poor, his fraternal spirit without power, and his approach to nonviolence and peace." 🇺🇸

# HONORING OUR CREATOR

Most Blessed Sacrament parishioners follow *Laudato Si'* to honor God's creation and apply its teachings to local community

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen  
Photography by Kevin Bartram

"Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue. There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions." — POPE FRANCIS, *LAUDATO SI'*

The purple coneflowers budding outside Linda and Tommy Woodson's Arlington home do more than indicate summer is on its way.

"It reminds us the mystical Body of Christ is alive and well in our parish," said Tommy Woodson, who received the perennial a couple of years ago at Most Blessed Sacrament Parish's free native plant and flower giveaway. "They come up every year in the same spot. It's beautiful."

Encouraging parishioners to use native vegetation in landscape projects is one of several initiatives embraced by members of Caring for God's Creation, a parish ministry inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* (On Care for Our Common Home). Addressed to all people, the encyclical asks the world's population to take better care of the natural environment and each other, especially the poor.

Founded at the Arlington parish on May 24, 2023, on the encyclical's eighth anniversary, the ministry hopes to protect and preserve the earth's resources for future generations through education, activities promoting a

sustainable environment, and prayer.

"When the ministry started, we weren't sure it would get traction, but people keep swarming to it," Woodson said. "This group of people have the passion and determination to make things happen."

Most Blessed Sacrament has the only parish-based Caring for God's Creation ministry in Texas enrolled in the Vatican's *Laudato Si'* Action Platform. The seven goals outlined in the platform include listening to the cry of the earth and the poor; ecological economics; sustainable lifestyles; education; ecological spirituality; and community empowerment.

Longtime parishioner Carol Stilley started the parish ministry after participating in a webinar sponsored by Catholic Climate Covenant in July 2021.

"It talked about *Laudato Si'* and, how five years after it was published, Pope Francis felt people were not responding to what he presented," she explained. "He wanted better care of the earth and the people in it."

The retired marketing and food science specialist drafted a proposal to start the ministry based on the Vatican's action plan and presented it to then pastor Monsignor Joe Pemberton.

"Thinking of my grandchildren made it real for me," Stilley mused. "I want to make sure they have an environment they could thrive in, which is what we had."

## PROMOTING NATIVE GARDENS

During the past three years, the ministry's steering committee and 100 volunteers who sign up for different projects have beautified the Mary garden and redesigned the church's entry islands with native perennials. Fall aster, muhly grass, autumn salvia, black-eyed Susans, purple coneflowers, sun drops, paprika yarrow, and daisies provide color throughout the year.

Twice a year, the ministry gives away free plants and seeds so



parishioners can create their own native and pollinator landscapes at home.

“Native gardens are good for the earth because they are drought tolerant, conserve water, and save money,” Stilley pointed out. “And native plants don’t need pesticides or fertilizers.”

Educating people about the impact a perennial wildflower, like milkweed, has on the environment is part of the mission. Monarch butterflies are the state insect of Texas and are an endangered species.

“They only lay their eggs on milkweed and when the eggs hatch, the caterpillars

feed on the leaves,”

Stilley said, citing how critical one native plant is to the environment.

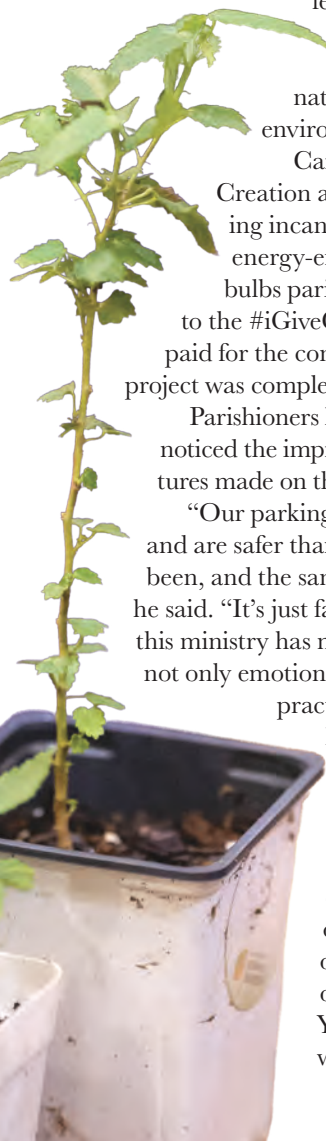
Caring for God’s Creation also advocated replacing incandescent lights with energy-efficient LED light-bulbs parish-wide. Donations to the #iGiveCatholic campaign paid for the conversion and the project was completed in 2025.

Parishioners like Tommy Woodson noticed the improvement LED fixtures made on the parish campus.

“Our parking lots have more light and are safer than they have ever been, and the same goes for the gym,” he said. “It’s just fabulous the impact this ministry has made. The impact is not only emotional and spiritual but practical. LED lights use less electricity.”

### PRAYER AND PRESERVATION

Spirituality is a critical component of the ministry and organizers plan to observe the Jubilee Year of St. Francis with special activities.



Plant giveaway hosted by the Caring for God’s Creation team at Most Blessed Sacrament Parish in Arlington on Sunday, April 12.

In the past, the parish’s religious education program partnered with the ministry to educate youngsters about the patron saint of ecology, the *Laudato Si’* encyclical, and what they can do to preserve nature.

“Last May, we had a pilgrimage around the parish starting at the Mary garden and ending at the Our Lady of Guadalupe statue during *Laudato Si’* week,” Stilley recalled. “There was prayer, reflections, songs, and fellowship. Walking to the children’s playground reminded us that what we do now will affect future generations.”

A few months later, parishioners joined Catholics from across the country by participating in a Pilgrimage of Hope for Creation. The 1.4-mile walk from River Legacy Park to the Most Blessed Sacrament chapel included prayers, hymns, and “being part of God’s creation,” she continued.

Avid gardener Karen Donnelly spearheads the ministry’s plant giveaways. Parishioners have the opportunity to choose from rock rose, milkweed, columbine, spiderwort, irises, and other selections.

“I’ve been with this since the beginning because it fits in with who I am and my interests,” said the Arlington homeowner who cultivated her own native, drought-tolerant yard and regularly shares seeds and cuttings with neighbors.

Environmental issues Pope Francis raised in his encyclical strongly tie

in with caring for the poor, she said.

Responding to that reality, Caring for God’s Creation received a plot in the Community Gardens at the University of Texas at Arlington. A portion of the vegetables grown in the raised beds are donated to Mission Arlington, the garden’s designated food bank program.

“Every year we review what we’ve done to see if we met the seven goals Pope Francis listed,” Donnelly added. “We reflect on whether we’re making progress and encouraging other people to become educated about the environment. The pope’s encyclical reminds Christians there are issues affecting the whole world relating to climate and caring for the poor on earth.” ✨





Goodwill Industries of Michiana begins introducing clients to Padua, a research-based program designed by Catholic Charities Fort Worth to move families out of poverty.

# A Vision Beyond

CCFW expands poverty-ending program to first national site with Goodwill Michiana

By Mary Lou Seewoester

Low-income families in South Bend, Indiana, are reaping the benefits of a Catholic Charities Fort Worth program that empowers families to move permanently out of and beyond poverty. Goodwill Industries of Michiana in South Bend is the first mission site to replicate Padua, the research-based, client-led, long-term case-management program that CCFW introduced in 2015.

Goodwill Michiana serves 19 counties in Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois with programs such as charter

high schools for adults, a maternal-child health program, a career and technical training academy, and workforce development.

Sara Brodzinski, chief people officer for Goodwill Michiana, said Padua is the agency's first long-term program focused on moving people beyond poverty. After months of in-person and virtual training with the Fort Worth Padua staff, Padua Michiana began serving clients on April 23.

"This is the focus we wanted for Goodwill — to have a long-term impact with truly life-changing opportunities for people," she said.

## RESEARCH BASED

Cindy Casey, head of CCFW Client Services, said replication was always part of the plan for Padua, named for St. Anthony of Padua, patron saint of the poor. She said Padua's original vision had three goals: to walk with families on their path out of poverty; collect data necessary to determine the best path forward out of poverty; and to advocate for change nationwide.

"That third goal that we established in 2015 was to advocate for change. That's what replication is all about," she said. "To take what we've learned and share this nationwide — that's *real* advocacy."

Data collection to measure Padua's effectiveness began with its first 192 clients when the agency partnered with the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities at the University of Notre Dame to conduct a randomized controlled trial.

Casey said with the benefit of research, Padua evolved from a mindset of relieving scarcity to one of empowering people to improve their own lives.

"That's where we really evolved," Casey said. "To take what we learned through all this research and really make a difference."

Results of the trial showed that Padua clients were 25 percent more likely to achieve full-time employment and earned a 46 percent higher income. Those who had been unhoused were 64 percent more likely to secure stable housing, while also reporting significant improvement in overall health and well-being.

## MINDSET SHIFT

"We move clients from a mindset of scarcity to a mindset of empowerment where they believe they are worthy and that they can do it. It's all done through building emotional resiliency," Casey said.

Brodzinski said emotional resilience is the element of Padua that resonates most with her.

"They get to be with us as they fall down and get back up again and maybe fall again and get up again," she said. "We all need that resilience. It's a human need to build that strength and perseverance within — that you believe and know that you can get back up."



A client learns about Padua, a research-based program designed to support families in overcoming poverty.

Padua supports clients with two-person teams consisting of a case manager and case worker.

"The case manager helps the client develop long-term goals," Casey explained, "and then coaches for emotional resiliency — the ability to put together a plan, cope with change, identify challenges, and hold yourself accountable to your goals."

The case worker helps clients with resource planning — identifying a resource need and developing a plan for it.

It's more than just paying a bill, Casey explained.

"If someone needs financial assistance, we shouldn't just pay someone's rent," she said. "There should be a plan put together."

"All of this coaching is client-led," she continued. "That means you are holding the client accountable to the goals they've told you they want to achieve."

Other key features of Padua include strategic, flexible financial assistance, a reduced case load of no more than 25 clients per case manager, and ongoing training and coaching for staff.

## 'A PERFECT FIT'

Brendan Perry, director of Padua National, said vetting for the first Padua mission site took two years, beginning with surveying 50 of the largest markets in the country to find which ones needed a program like Padua. The process also determined which communities have job markets that support a living wage, and which had networks of community

partners and service providers that could optimize Padua's impact.

Perry said South Bend, which has a poverty rate of 23 percent (double the national average), fits all the criteria.

"Once there, we wanted to find the right organization to work with and that brought about a whole new set of vetting with 114 organizations," Perry said, adding that the team used six criteria to decide which agency could successfully replicate Padua.

"We were blown away with Goodwill ... and the perfect fit they would be for Padua," Perry said. "They succeeded on all six of the criteria, but first and most important is their deep belief in the people they serve."

"Padua is data driven," Perry added, "but leads with the heart."

He said Goodwill Michiana has operated other research-based programs, so they understand a research-backed model, like Padua, and can follow it with fidelity.

Padua Michiana intends to serve 50 clients this year with plans to grow to four Padua teams serving 200 clients in coming years, Brodzinski said.

Perry noted that since its inception, Padua has served more than 1,000 North Texas families and now plans to grow steadily nationwide.

"Padua operates with a vision to become the new norm in reducing poverty across the country," Perry said. "Working with Michiana is the first step in that journey and we hope to have many more in years to come." 🇺🇸

# ETHICS

## behind the artificial tool

Virtue ethics approach to AI proposed

By Matthew Smith

**A**rguably more than other recent technological advances, artificial intelligence engenders twin responses of uneasiness and possibility. An emerging, albeit rapidly evolving, technology firmly rooted in the here and now whether welcomed or not, AI is one also mired in ethical concerns and uncertainty.

“We live in a world of AI and there’s no going back,” said Dr. Chris Malloy, University of Dallas theology professor. “But prudence is not easy because navigating uncharted waters gives us no ready-made answers. So, it requires intellectual and moral struggle.”

Referencing Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New World,” Malloy stressed the Second Vatican Council’s call for Catholics to engage in the world as it is. Which, with AI, requires concerted effort to “foster the marvelous and mitigate the monstrous.”

“It’s important too to remember that invention is the work of man and that God enables and calls for invention,” he said.

UD students likewise voiced mixed enthusiasm and unease over AI’s presence.

“What are your thoughts on AI?” a dry erase board in the lobby area of a UD building read.

One student wrote, “Yes, it can be helpful,” while another wrote, “Two thumbs up.” A third wrote that it can be helpful and, either way, is “not going away.”

“Destroy it with fire” and “trash” two other students weighed in on the opposite.

Another wrote it should be banned save for research, scientific, and weather forecasting uses. Another wrote that AI “should not be used to replace human connections and creativity.” Yet another said AI hampers critical thinking while promoting dependency. Another student labeled AI “bad for polar bears.”

“The notion of the individual dilutes to the degree that technology takes control of our acts,” author Juan Villoro warns in “Horizontal Vertigo: A City Called Mexico.”

Pope Leo XIV likewise weighed in during last year’s Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Corporate Governance.

“Your presence attests to the urgent need for serious reflection and ongoing discussion on the inherently ethical dimension of AI, as well as its responsible governance,” Pope Leo said. “AI has been used in positive and indeed noble ways to promote greater equality, but there is likewise the possibility of its misuse for selfish gain at the expense of others, or worse, to foment conflict and aggression.”

State Sen. Tan Parker of Flower Mound, who co-chairs the Texas Artificial Intelligence Advisory Council, discussed the need for guidelines and ethical consideration last year at Nolan High School.

“AI is a tool to augment human performance,” Parker said. “We need to always make certain that AI tools are just that, tools that augment, not replace human performance. We don’t want to see it used for detrimental and destructive things.”

In that spirit, Father Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, OP, a professor of biological sciences and sacred theology at the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines, presented a talk on AI titled “Towards a Thomistic Virtue Ethics for Artificial Intelligence” as part of UD’s Landregan Lecture series.

Fr. Austriaco said technology advances realized during earlier eras of the Industrial Revolution initially unsettled many, much as still-developing AI technology does today. Fr. Austriaco also referenced the Church’s response to earlier social revolutions tied to emerging technology.

The point of his talk, Fr. Austriaco said, is to focus on AI ethics from a spiritual approach.

“AI is a system with the ability to process data in a way that resembles cognizant behavior,” Fr. Austriaco said.

He detailed the logistics and various systems and uses of AI from its current algorithm applications to Netflix, TikTok, virtual companions, self-driving cars, biological research, and more. Along the way, Fr. Austriaco highlighted AI’s benefits and potential drawbacks. Of the latter, he spoke of AI’s addictive nature shown in social media content recommendations as well as the potential for spread of misinformation, bias from programmers, and other dangers.

Virtual AI companions, for example, can be used to remind people to take their medicine, feed their pets, etc. On the other hand, they can distract people from the real world into a “bubble of fantasyland,” Fr. Austriaco said, mentioning a recent



An image capturing St. Thomas Aquinas, God, and an artificial agent, symbolizing the dialogue between faith, reason, and technology. This image was created using artificial intelligence by Microsoft Copilot, which is powered by OpenAI's GPT models.

story of a woman who wanted to marry her AI companion.

Fr. Austriaco spoke of copyright implications such as determining ownership of AI-generated photos, art, and poetry. While the need for AI guidelines is clear, consensus on such guidelines — given cultural and legal differences throughout the world — remains a moving target.

Fr. Austriaco suggested a path forward taking into account Catholic virtues and ethics.

“Through God’s grace, that involves dealing with authentic good as opposed to some random, made-up good, which takes into account that which perfects our nature, which makes us good human beings,” Fr. Austriaco said.

Approaching the question from the Thomistic, that is, St. Thomas of Aquinas, view requires consideration of the individual, common, and ecological goods in

assessing AI applications, Fr. Austriaco said.

“The individual good perfects the individual human agent while the common good perfects the human community,” Fr. Austriaco said. “The ecological good perfects the environment.

“What’s important to remember is that they are entangled. You can’t say, ‘My individual good is good in a way that’s completely divorced from the common and ecological goods.’”

Such considerations should apply to all AI uses and advances, Fr. Austriaco said, as well as all developers, users, and regulators of AI.

It’s imperative inasmuch as possible to limit AI functions from exploiting the vulnerable or the environment or replacing genuine human interaction with each other and God.

“The individual good cannot be

realized apart from the common good,” Fr. Austriaco said. “But the modern view is that you can become you without us. The Thomistic view is that there is no you without us.

“AI should be used to promote human virtue. Be the author of yourself. Do not let an algorithm write your story.”

UD graduate student Lily Matula colored herself an outlier in her age group given her skepticism of AI.

“Which is why I was curious to hear Fr. Austriaco’s thoughts on a Thomistic view of an ethical framework for AI,” Matula said. “I hadn’t heard a compelling Catholic take on this yet, so it was fascinating to hear what someone so knowledgeable on the subject had to say.

“I don’t know I’d say I’m in favor of AI now. But I do like the notion of approaching it from a classical ethical framework informed by higher principles.” 🇺🇸



Spanish teachers Maria and Arturo Beltran laugh together at Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth. (NTC/Matt Redden)

# TEACHING TOGETHER

Spanish teachers Maria and Arturo Beltran reflect on their path, impact at Nolan Catholic High School as they prepare for retirement

By Jennifer Johnson

It is said that a good teacher will plant seeds of knowledge that bloom forever. With a combined 44 years of teaching at Nolan Catholic High School, Arturo and Maria Beltran not only planted seeds, they have nurtured a forest.

Born in Del Rio, Arturo remembers having a “wonderful childhood.” His father’s role as disciplinarian was balanced by his mother who nurtured their faith by ensuring the children attend Mass and Sunday school.

Maria’s childhood was very different.

She describes her early years in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, as “tumultuous.” At 9 years old, she immigrated with her family across the Mexican border to Eagle Pass. She recalled, “My mother’s faith was strong. She taught us very young that God is the center of our lives.”

Maria and Arturo were undergraduate students at Texas State University in San Marcos who met in Spanish class. In addition to their passion for Spanish culture and language, they also discovered a shared love of their Catholic faith.

Maria graduated with a double major in Spanish and psychology in May 1985

followed by a master’s degree in Spanish in 1987. Arturo graduated in December 1985 with aspirations to become an interpreter.

On Sept. 13, the Beltrons will celebrate 40 years of marriage, a milestone they attribute to their “faith in God to guide us the right way,” Maria said. “Our faith has grown in different ways but has taken us to the same place.”

Arturo enlisted in the U.S. Air Force upon graduation and the couple spent three years in Guam where Maria became a substitute special education teacher, a move that “changed her life” and steered her career path toward education.

In 1992, after moving to Fort Worth, Arturo thought about teaching, a career shift he attributes to Maria. “My inspiration was her, with the twist of an arm,” he teased.

After teaching Spanish at a Fort Worth high school for three years, Arturo was hired to teach Spanish at Nolan in 2001. Maria went to Nolan in 2007 after teaching 11 years at a Fort Worth elementary school, followed by two years at North Crowley Ninth Grade Campus.

### NOLAN LEADERS

For nearly two decades, the Beltrams have worked alongside one another, and their partnership has helped students transition from beginner to advanced Spanish classes. “We both care deeply about Spanish, students, and our faith. I think that’s what makes us successful,” she said. “We are very much alike in our interests but have different personalities. It shows in our teaching style.”

The couple’s complementary approach is purposeful. As a Level 1 Spanish teacher, Arturo’s encouraging, fun-loving nature builds up students’ confidence in learning a new language. “I try to mold the freshman kids to get them ready for what she’s going to show them and what her expectations are going to be,” he said.

Maria, who teaches advanced level Spanish, builds on the foundation that Arturo has established. “Where one ends, the other starts,” she said. “I get them ready for what’s coming in college and focus on skills that will make them succeed in life and their faith — responsibility, honor, and honesty.”

Geoffrey Calvin, Latin teacher and modern and classical languages chair, has been teaching alongside the Beltrams for the past 10 years. “I admire the relationships they form with their students,” Calvin said. “The Beltrams teach more students in their classes than any of the other world languages, and still manage to make personal connections to each of their students. It takes an exceptional teacher to simultaneously hold students accountable and communicate such strong affection and care.”



Arturo Beltran sits at his desk in his classroom at Nolan Catholic. (NTC/Matt Redden)

▼ Maria Beltran stands in her classroom at Nolan Catholic. (NTC/Matt Redden)



### MORE THAN WORDS

In addition to teaching, the Beltrams have served as modern and classical languages chairs and moderators for Spanish Club, Spanish Honors Society, and the award-winning Ballet Folklorico, La Vikina. The latter club started with six students in 2018 and has nearly tripled in size under the Beltrams’ charge. “It takes a lot of time, but is extremely rewarding,” Maria said. “Being a role model for students that come from minority or diverse backgrounds allowed me to [help them see that] through faith and hard work, they can have their dreams come true.”

“When Maria and Arturo began the Ballet Folklorico program, they did so because they believed in a student with a wonderful idea,” said Cindy Jung, assistant principal for Student Affairs. “Watching them nurture that idea into something lasting taught me an important lesson: when we truly listen to students and walk alongside them, amazing things can grow.”

The Beltrams’ legacy has impacted hundreds of students and will be felt for generations at Nolan. “[They] serve as examples of Christ’s love to our students, faculty, and staff through their tireless efforts inside and outside of the classroom, the care and attention they show to their students, and the love they so clearly have for one another,” Calvin said.

Arturo and Maria are parishioners at St. Ann Parish in Burleson where they have helped establish a weekly Spanish Mass. Their retirement plans include traveling and spending quality time with their three children and four grandchildren.

With a new season of life around the corner, the Beltrams will always have a special place in their hearts for Nolan. Arturo said his reward is “the love of the students, a passion for the kids. I wouldn’t want to go anywhere else.”

Maria agreed, adding, “We have been blessed. It’s really a blessing to be here, and I’m going to miss it.” 🇺🇸

# A childlike heart

Father Mel Bessellieu's Backpack Sundays engage children with the Gospel

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

What does a 35-year-old satchel, a cache of dime store trinkets, and some innovative props have to do with spreading the Gospel message?

The answer is obvious if you have ever attended Mass at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Grapevine or St. Teresa of Calcutta Church in Roanoke on the second Sunday of the month. That's when Father Mel Bessellieu treats the youngsters in the congregation to a homily designed especially for them.

His invitation, "It's Backpack Sunday," spoken after the Gospel, sends dozens of eager children racing up the aisle to find a seat in front of the altar. Once there, they may find Fr. Bessellieu using water-filled squirt guns to explain baptism or a newborn goat to tell the story of the Good Shepherd. At the end of Mass, the young listeners return to the altar to receive their bulletin and a small toy, purchased to reinforce the day's Scripture and distributed from a backpack the celebrant has used since his seminary days.

Thirteen-year-old Maisie Russell always looked forward to Backpack



Father Mel Bessellieu delivers one of his famous "backpack homilies" at St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish in Roanoke. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Sunday when Fr. Bessellieu served St. Francis as parochial vicar.

"In that short period of time, when Fr. Mel calls the kids up, we learn so much," gushed the eighth grader. "I love it. It's not just like sitting in a classroom with a teacher. Fr. Mel gets us involved.

He makes it fun."

Her younger brother, Alistair, doesn't get excited about going to church but he loves Backpack Sunday.

"He zones out during catechesis but when Fr. Mel talks, he listens to every word," Russell said.

## ENGAGING YOUNG SOULS

Fr. Bessellieu began developing the concept for Backpack Sunday when he was pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Pilot Point and perfected the idea while shepherding St. Ann Parish in Burleson from 2007 to 2022.

"I noticed the kids were not fully attentive at Mass because there was nothing to engage them," explained the Catholic convert who was ordained a priest in 1997. "I thought, 'What if we set aside one special Sunday a month where the kids could have their own homily and receive a little gift that relates to the Gospel?'"

It was scary at first and Fr. Bessellieu worried he wouldn't hold the young crowd's attention.

"But it started to take off. The kids loved it and so did the parents," he said.



Father Mel Bessellieu, sacramental minister at St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish, explains living water on the Third Sunday of Lent, March 7, at the Roanoke church. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

“I knew they were learning a lot because I would ask them questions during the homily and the children would answer and give me their thoughts.”

One of the pastor’s more inventive homilies required several cases of bottled water, a clear plexiglass cover, and foam pool noodles. The Gospel that week was about Jesus walking on water.

“When St. Peter walked on water, he took his eyes off Jesus because of the wind,” Fr. Bessellieu explained, recalling how the children had waved pool noodles to represent the wind. “So as I’m walking across the plexiglass on top of the water bottles, the kids were just hammering me with the noodles, but I told them, ‘I didn’t take my eyes off of Jesus!’”

To come up with thought-provoking ideas, the homilist prays to God for inspiration and relies on his optimistic approach to life.

“It helps that I have a childlike mind, too,” chuckled Fr. Bessellieu, who sees a marked increase in Mass attendance on Backpack Sunday. “It’s a joy to know

they’re excited about coming to Mass and taking a little kernel of the Gospel with them. That’s great because Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me.’”

### REACHING THE UNCHURCHED

Thanks to social media, Backpack Sunday is now reaching more people than just a local parish audience. Many of Fr. Bessellieu’s videos are available on YouTube and can be viewed by families across the country.

He shies away from watching his own recorded homilies but believes the availability of Backpack Sunday allows others to see how children can be a vital part of the Mass.

“The fact that someone gets on YouTube and sees that once a month children get the spotlight sends a very positive message for the Church,” Fr. Bessellieu pointed out. “Children can be a vital part of the Mass. It’s not just for adults. It’s for everyone.”

Pat Morrison helps produce the YouTube videos by raising funds and

managing the organizational details of the project.

“We’re not only reaching kids that go to church, but we’re also hoping to reach children who don’t have a church experience,” the St. Francis parishioner suggested. “Being on YouTube gives us a broader audience. People everywhere can access the Backpack Sunday homilies and let their children see the excitement and truth of our faith.”

Fr. Bessellieu, who is now the sacramental minister at St. Teresa of Calcutta, plans to continue his backpack outreach until retirement. Every Sunday gathering with the children is an epiphany and the questions they ask during his talk always amaze him. Adults are also learning something.

“Jesus tells us in order to understand the Gospel you have to have a childlike heart,” he said. “When adults see children are understanding a Gospel passage because they’re seeing it through a child’s eyes, it speaks volumes. You can’t get into heaven unless you become like a child.” 🇺🇸

# Reverence and Respect

Reflections from a local Catholic on representing the U.S.  
at international Catholic Indigenous conference

By Norma Váldez

Norma Váldez, a former youth minister at St. Peter the Apostle Church in White Settlement and community engagement manager at Catholic Relief Services, recently represented the U.S. at the International Conference on Catholic Indigenous in New Zealand in March.

Váldez, a member of the Pueblo del Sur Nation, serves as interim director of the Tekakwitha Conference National Center and is completing a Ph.D. in psychology.

Here she shares her experiences with the conference and common challenges in Indigenous Catholic cultures.

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**F**ive countries came together for the International Conference on Catholic Indigenous, creating a unique space for the exchange of culture, shared histories, languages, spirituality, and the enduring strength of Indigenous Catholic faith. Representatives from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and the Vatican gathered to reflect on their common experiences, including the legacy of historical trauma, while also celebrating the richness and resilience of their Indigenous traditions within our Catholic Church.

The humility and love present throughout the gathering were deeply moving. It was evident not only in the words that were spoken, but also in the

spirit shared among all who were present. There was a sense that this unity and compassion flowed from God Himself, drawing us together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Although each of our communities carries its own history and experiences of trauma, we were reminded that we do not carry these burdens alone. In prayer, conversation, daily Mass, and fellowship, we felt the love of God among us and the strength He provides to continue living out and proclaiming His word.

Together, the gathering highlighted the importance of dialogue, mutual support, and shared faith among Indigenous Catholic communities.

## WARM WELCOME

On our first day in New Zealand, we were introduced to the Māori language and began building friendships with brothers and sisters from many different countries. We also learned about Māori culture, their history, the trauma of colonization, and the treaties that shaped their nation. Alongside these realities, we were given a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith as it has taken root among the Māori people.

What struck me most was the depth and perseverance of their Catholic faith. Despite the hardships and disruptions brought on by colonization, many Māori communities remained eager to learn about and embrace the Gospel.

We were bused to the Ngāti Whātua

Ōrākei Marae, a cultural hub located on the grounds of the University of Auckland in the heart of beautiful downtown Auckland. There we were received with a pōwhiri, the traditional Māori ceremony of welcome. This formal greeting marked our entrance not only into the physical space of the Marae but also into a moment of cultural encounter, hospitality, and mutual respect.

Following this beautiful cultural welcome, we sat in a circle for introductions. What stood out most during this time of sharing was, once again, the close relationship between Māori culture and the Catholic faith. For many of the Māori present, their cultural identity and their Catholic beliefs were not separate realities but deeply intertwined. Their stories reflected a living faith that has taken root within their traditions, revealing how the Gospel has been embraced and expressed within the richness of Māori culture.

## VISITORS SHARE STORIES

On the second day, the Australian delegation gave a presentation on their culture, the history of treaties with Indigenous peoples, and the role of faith within the Catholic Church in their communities. They also shared about the significant work being done within their education system to preserve and strengthen Indigenous culture.

The Australian presenters demonstrated a strong awareness of their history and a clear commitment to moving forward



Norma Váldez, who recently represented the U.S. at the International Conference on Catholic Indigenous in New Zealand, stands outside the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth. (NTC/Matt Redden)

with God at the center of their lives and communities.

Their efforts prompted reflection among members of the U.S. delegation. As we listened, we began discussing among ourselves how similar approaches might be fostered within the American education system. In particular, we considered ways to better honor and protect Indigenous cultures while remaining firmly rooted in Catholic identity.

In my presentation on Catholic

Indigenous communities in the United States, I offered a historical overview of the Tekakwitha National Conference, tracing its development from its founding in 1939 to its continued mission today.

I also addressed the intergenerational trauma experienced by our Nations, reflecting on the deep-rooted anger that persists across generations. In particular, I examined the emerging understanding of epigenetics and its impact on our youth, highlighting how historical injustices

continue to shape both the spiritual and emotional well-being of younger generations.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Day three, Most Rev. Richard Smith, Archbishop of Vancouver, offered a moving reflection on the visit of Pope Francis to Canada, when the Holy Father came to offer an apology for the suffering associated with the Indigenous residential school system.

Archbishop Smith spoke thoughtfully about the significance of this moment for both the Church and Indigenous communities. He reflected on the humility and pastoral concern with which Pope Francis addressed the painful legacy of the schools, seeking a path toward healing and reconciliation, even as the Holy Father himself was experiencing declining health in the months that followed.

Another point that stood out to me was the important work carried out by the USCCB, and the support it provides to the Church across the country. Much of this work often goes unnoticed. In the United States, there are 575 federally recognized Native Nations, each with its own rich culture, history, and traditions.

Recognizing this reality, the bishops have developed a pastoral resource specifically focused on ministry with Indigenous peoples. Titled “Keeping Christ’s Sacred Promise: A Pastoral Framework for Indigenous Ministry,” the document seeks to guide the Church in accompanying and supporting Native American communities in faith.

The task before us now is to help ensure that this framework reaches both clergy and the faithful in the pews. Most Rev. Chad W. Zielinski, Bishop of the Diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota, and former chairman of the Subcommittee on Native American Affairs, has noted, “This document is written not just for the benefit of Catholic Native American communities but for the benefit of the entire Church in the U.S.” 🇺🇸



# Holy Spirit at work

Parishes and campus ministries prepared a record number of converts to enter the Church

By Christina Benavides

Father Benjamin Grothouse baptizes a new Catholic during the Easter Vigil at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Keller on April 4.  
*(NTC/Kevin Bartram)*

# A t the Easter Vigil, the Diocese of Fort Worth welcomed 1,716 new Catholics into the local Church.

Bishop Michael Olson reflected on the “remarkable number” during the Chrism Mass on March 31, telling the priests of the diocese that “this is due in part to our own transparency in allowing Christ to shine through you in our ministry and in every part of our lives.” He added that such an increase should invite gratitude and deeper reflection on the work of the Holy Spirit among God’s people.

According to Laura Nelson, diocesan director of faith formation, the Holy Spirit has indeed been especially active over the past year, as reflected in the 37 percent increase from 2025 in new Catholics. Nelson noted the numbers may also point to a broader cultural fatigue of living without direction.

“They’re looking for a known truth, something that’s real, that’s consistent and unwavering because the world changes all the time. What’s good and bad in the world is different day to day,” she said.

Parishes “across the board” have reported larger numbers participating in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, Nelson shared.

## COME AND STAY

On the evening of April 4, the faithful at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish saw 64 Elect and candidates enter the Church.

“The Holy Spirit is busy just stirring things up; I never cease to be amazed,” enthused Tammy Sandoval, director of religious education at the Keller parish. “Different people are showing up from all over — every religion, every background:

Mormon, non-denominational, Eastern Orthodox. I mean, they’re just coming in droves and the beauty that I’m seeing is that, particularly in the last four years, they’re staying in the Church.”

Sandoval noted that while popular statistics often claim seven out of 10 people will leave the Church, “That’s not the case. They’re staying and they’re getting involved in the life of the parish — that to me is true fruit.”

The director pointed to the success of the parish’s many ministries, the outreach work they do, as well as the easy availability of “Catholicism on demand,” listing the many resources available for Catholics and non-Catholics alike, including Bishop Barron’s Word on Fire media apostolate and Father Mike Schmitz’s Bible and Catechism in a Year podcasts.

“So many of the people who are coming are well read,” she observed. Previously, many had practiced a faith with a form of liturgy “where they don’t really have an altar, they have a stage, and it’s really more about entertainment than worship. I think when they first come to the Mass, those are the people that are calling me, asking, ‘What is happening? We want what’s here.’”

Sandoval oversees the OCIA program alongside her husband, Deacon Larry Sandoval, who has served at SEAS for more than 15 years. Since recently retiring from his career as a Southwest Airlines pilot, the deacon has taken on a larger role in the ministry. With his leadership, the program has placed an even stronger emphasis on pastoral care for everyone who enters the process.

Classes are designed to ensure each candidate feels genuinely accompanied in their journey — starting from the moment they sign up for class.

“They’re transferred to me or one of our OCIA admins, and we get their whole story. We listen and simply try to journey with them. I feel like there’s a lot of accompaniment and mentorship that happens,” Tammy Sandoval said.

At the start of the 10-month program, candidates and catechumen are placed in



table groups that will accompany them in their learning. For 2026’s incoming class of new Catholics, about 19 tables of eight candidates came together each Sunday for learning.

“Each table has a table leader that journeys with the [candidates and catechumen] for the whole year and then on. That means they meet their table for Mass; they meet their table for a Bible study; they go to Fish Fridays — whatever.

“I drop by some of the leaders’ houses on Friday nights and their whole table is there,” Sandoval said. “They are a huge



Father James Flynn confirms a woman during the Easter Vigil at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Keller on April 4. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

extension of the success because we can't possibly care for everybody, but we have a team of 30 well-trained catechists that love the faith and pray for these people."

Table leaders sometimes serve as sponsors, and group members often stay in touch with each other long after the Easter Vigil.

"If it was just a class, just a program, there's no growth there," she explained. "I think every year when I talk to them one-on-one, the [formation] never falls off. They still keep coming."

### FOR THE INTELLECTUALLY SPIRITUAL

At St. Maria Goretti Church in Arlington, two University of Texas at Arlington students joined 32 Elect and 21 candidates entering the Church this Easter.

Jeff Hedglen, UTA campus minister, believes these two students — and the eight who will enter the church on the Feast of Christ the King — reflect a growing trend among young adults, especially young men, who are drawn to

Catholicism through intellectual curiosity and a great appreciation for the Church's long history.

Of the two students entering the Church this Easter, one is converting from Hinduism and the other is a doctoral student from Peru who began exploring the Catholic faith after becoming engaged to a devout Catholic. Among the young men expected to enter the Church this November, several come from Protestant

Continued on Page 42



About 150 people attend Order of Christian Initiation for Adults classes each week at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

### From Page 41

and evangelical backgrounds, Hedglen said.

“These guys all have varying stories of why they’re turning to the Church, but it tracks with what seems to be happening among Gen Z men who are coming from evangelical to apostolic religions, meaning us and the Orthodox churches,” the campus minister observed. “They’re finding that evangelicalism is not enough and they’re wanting something deeper, something with more roots, something with a deeper and richer theology, and they are starting to investigate beyond the Reformation — what was the Church in the beginning?”

Hedglen mentioned easy online access to the Church Fathers has been key for this demographic. “If you want to Google the early Church, you can easily find the writings of Irenaeus and all these people from the first and second century, and that has got people thinking, ‘Huh, that Church doesn’t look anything like my church. Maybe I need something that looks more like the original Church.’”

Many of his students found their way to the UTA Newman Center out of their

own initiative, searching for more knowledge than what they’d already encountered online.

“In this case, the algorithm is working in their favor because if they start researching, they’re going to start seeing more Catholic content,” Hedglen said.

### FROM TEACHER TO STUDENT

A well-trained catechist is an invaluable contributor to the continued growth of the Church. In the diocese, there are 258 certified catechists who have completed the diocesan Catechetical Institute, which was established in 2017.

OCIA teacher Jose Rueda of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Wichita Falls is currently attending the three-year certification program in hopes of providing stronger formation for his collective 18 students.

“It’s like building a house,” he said. “You have to start with the right foundation, and that’s what I’m learning this year in the class.”

When Rueda first began teaching OCIA in 2023, “I didn’t know what I was doing,” he admitted. At the time, classes were primarily lecture-based and there



Campus Minister Jeff Hedglen addresses young adults at a diocesan event.

wasn’t a consistent rapport established with the students, who would sometimes leave the two-year OCIA program because of differing schedules or disruptions from work, family, or sports obligations.



Jose Rueda teaches OCIA at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Wichita Falls. (NTC/Bertha Salazar)



NTC/Richard Rodriguez

A former Air Force instructor and confirmation teacher of nearly 15 years, Rueda felt the need for change in the parish program. At first, he took to the web for supplemental programs, but he

found the help he was really looking for in a local catechist class, where he learned of the Catechetical Institute.

“I didn’t know how important it was until I went to that class and, out of curiosity, decided to take it,” he said. Rueda now regularly engages with his students, building authentic relationships, and allowing them space to ask and answer questions as they journey through the stages of initiation and become well-informed and inspired Catholics.

“There’s a process for that to happen,” Rueda shared. “First, we’ve to gain their trust. They have to trust us. And how will they trust us? By opening up to them and opening up our homes.

“In reality, we’re supposed to build a community, be a family.”

Rueda prays both for more students — and for more catechists with a heart to reach souls. “It’s a beautiful experience,” he said, encouraging Catholics and non-Catholics alike to “come in and sit down and see if you like it.”

### FRUIT OF DISCIPLESHIP

When Sophia Carranza arrived at Texas Christian University in the fall semester of 2024, becoming Catholic wasn’t on her agenda.

However, the now-sophomore has not only entered the Church, but she is also

contributing to its growth as co-lead of the TCU Catholic OCIA program.

“If you told me a couple years ago that this is what I’d be doing in college, I would have laughed and thought that, no, that would never happen,” Carranza said.

“It’s been a huge blessing to get to be on the leader’s side of it,” she continued. “I went through OCIA last year and entered the Church at Easter last year. To come full circle and be preparing for Easter has been just a crazy experience.”

Carranza and co-leader Javier Avila began leading the OCIA classes at the start of the fall 2025 semester while Campus Minister Catherine Ochoa was on maternity leave.

“They stepped into this role of mentorship and very quickly took on leading the class,” Ochoa said, remarking how the student leadership has borne significant fruit and will remain a permanent part of the TCU OCIA program.

“I’ve seen so much fruit of this discipleship because at the end of the day, that’s what our faith calls us to do,” she said.

Together with TCU Chaplain and Vicar General Father Jonathan Wallis, who attends each class session and enriches the lessons with added clarity and pastoral insight, the two student leaders

Continued on Page 44



### From Page 43

saw 17 students receive their sacraments this Easter.

If not for scheduling issues, the class size would be bigger, Ochoa added. “We already have a roster of seven or eight students for this next OCIA class, and we haven’t even advertised yet.”

Avila, who will graduate at the end of this semester, reflected on the growth of the OCIA program since his freshman year when he entered the Church.

“It’s really great to be on the other side of things, being able to look at students who were in my place a couple years

ago,” he said. “It’s really interesting, and Catherine, Sophia, and Fr. Wallis have done a great job growing it because it’s transformed a lot since I was there.”

The vicar general’s presence has been a great blessing for Carranza and Avila, both during their time as participants in the classes and now as leaders.

“It’s a privilege to have him be our priest because he has a very important job in the diocese, but when he comes to us, he’s just Fr. Wallis,” Carranza said. “He’s a convert himself, and that’s a beautiful way he can relate to students and share in that experience. It was comforting to know, when I was going through the

process, that the priest helping me become Catholic had once been in my shoes.”

Avila said TCU Catholic is the largest faith-based organization at the university.

“TCU is a big Greek life campus, and there’s been plenty of students who have reached out to me, saying, ‘Hey, I really need to go to confession today,’ or ‘I really need to go to Mass this week. Could you help me? What’s the schedule like?’” Avila said. “There are a lot of students who I feel are reverting back to the faith, deepening their roots into Catholicism.”

Carranza said a music leader at a popular Protestant retreat she had attended as a freshman is now enrolled in OCIA.



◀ TCU students pray during a Purple Mass at Holy Family Church in Fort Worth. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

Candles held by the faithful at the Easter Vigil, pictured here at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, represent receiving and sharing the light of Christ. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)



“I think our generation and in the college student community, there’s a desire for truth and for greater purpose, and the more you search for that, the closer you’re going to come to the Church.”

Ochoa said students seeking answers to their questions are sometimes turned away from clear answers in other denominations and religions. However, when they seek out the Catholic Church, they will always encounter an answer. “Maybe you don’t even like the answer, but we have an answer,” the campus minister said. “They’re seeking truth and meeting the person of Christ.” 🇺🇸



# FAMILY BUSINESS

By valuing Catholic schools, the Kolker family raised Catholic educators and an SMU chaplain

By Mary Rampellini

Catholic education has been a constant in the lives of Don and Fran Kolker since meeting in high school at St. Mary's Catholic School in Lawton, Okla. Now some 69 years into their marriage, the parishioners of St. Francis of Assisi in Grapevine head a family that is deeply invested in Catholic education in North Texas.

One of the couple's daughters, Karen Ullman, is the principal of Holy Trinity Catholic School in Grapevine.

Another daughter, Theresa Thompson, is the head of the English Department at Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth. A son, Michael Kolker, is a past school board member for a Catholic school in Irving. And one of his sons, Father Kevin Kolker, is the chaplain and director of Catholic Campus Ministry at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

It's become a family legacy, built over decades.

"My parents were always faithful Catholics, and they believed in Catholic education," Don Kolker said. "My brothers and sisters all went to St. Mary's and I followed along.

◀ Fran and Don Kolker pose with some of their family members at their parish, St. Francis of Assisi Church in Grapevine. From left to right: Eli Gallegos, Ethan Thompson, Emma Thompson, Chris Thompson, Patrick Thompson, Theresa Thompson, Noah Thompson, and Kate Thompson. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

But I've always believed very strongly in Catholic education. I feel it's very, very important, not just to the kids who are getting that education, but it's very important to the Church, for the growth of the Church."

Don Kolker's faith life — he and Fran are regulars at daily Mass, the Rosary, and Adoration — was in many ways influenced by a special grandparent.

"My grandmother on my father's side was a very holy woman," he said. "She lived to a ripe old age. St. Mary's was about two blocks away from the home where she lived. After school I would frequently go over there and spend the afternoon. She always had her rosary in her hand."

## A FUTURE SPOUSE

Fran Kolker landed at St. Mary's while her father, who was in the Army, was stationed in Oklahoma.

"My father, who was not Catholic — my mother was, but my father wasn't — insisted that I was going to go to Catholic school," she said. "And so I went to St. Mary's and that's where I met Don."

But the Army called for Fran Kolker's father to be transferred again, first to Bangkok and then back to her native California. The constant that remained was Catholic education.

"My father went to the nuns that had taught us in grade school and said, 'Where am I going to send her in California?' and they said, 'We have a high school.'"

Don and Fran kept in touch through letter writing and later, visits. They were married in 1957.

"My parents have been a beautiful example of how to live in faith," said daughter Linda Kolker. "They taught me to live my faith no matter what else is happening in my life. They showed me

how to stay centered in Christ through every storm. My parents did not tell me what to do — they showed me what to do by living their lives as living, faithful servants of God."

## SMART START

It's an upbringing that always included a component of Catholic education.

"My parents sent all of us to Catholic elementary and high schools," Karen Ullman said. "Having received a strong Catholic education myself, I knew upon graduating from college that I wanted to help provide that same foundation for young students. The ability to infuse every subject with our faith is very important to ensure that my students can see the world through the lens of Catholicism."

Michael Kolker said his sisters, and others, have answered a special calling as Catholic educators.

"Catholic school teachers are dedicated," he said. "They're not in it for the money. They could go to the public schools and earn more, but they're choosing not to. So, there's more of a mission-driven faculty at the Catholic school versus the public school. I always felt [I was] in a good place when I was in the Catholic school, and I felt like our kids were in a good place."

Michael Kolker, like his parents, met his wife Cathy in Catholic school.

"I met her in third grade," he said. "All our best friends are families we met during the education of our kids. When I think of my sisters teaching, I just think of the community aspect of Catholic schools and what it develops, because I could go down a list of our top 10 friends we stay in touch with and they're all friends we met at [Catholic school]."

"And that's important when you look for support from friends. You know that

they've got similar values and you can go back and count on a multi-decade relationship."

## GOALS AND GRANDCHILDREN

A crowning jewel came two years ago, when Fr. Kolker was ordained in the Diocese of Dallas.

"It was a waterfall — all of us were crying, even Kevin," recalled Fran Kolker. "We've gone to Mass several times when he says Mass at SMU and even that just makes me tear up. It's just beautiful."

For Fr. Kolker, his faith journey began with his family.

"Throughout my formative years, I was surrounded by models of the Catholic faith," he said. "The whole family took it seriously, and the witness of my parents and grandparents was particularly powerful in showing me how important the faith is. Without a doubt, family was a major influence in cultivating my priestly vocation."

For Don and Fran Kolker, seeing their family so steeped in the Catholic faith is exactly what they hoped life would be when they married.

"We can't describe it," Don Kolker said. "We spend a lot of time thanking the Lord for all the blessings He has given us as our immediate family, and then as we see the further family, how they've all turned out. It's been an absolute blessing to us."

Catholic education, both agree, has been one of the tools helping to lead their family to the faith's ultimate goal.

"We want to see them in heaven," Fran Kolker said. "Hopefully, we'll go there. And we want to see them there, too."

The objective is the same for Don Kolker.

"We would like to have our entire family with us in heaven," he said. 🇺🇸



# Quiet Devotion

By Lisa Moore

Without fail, Russell and Bridgett Lofgren and their adult son, Logan, walk through the doors of Sacred Heart Church in Wichita Falls every Sunday. And while parishioners might have noticed the Lofgrens sitting in the first pew in view of the American Sign Language interpreter, they might have missed the sack of donation groceries the Lofgrens bring to the parish every week — a practice they’ve committed to for over a decade.

The sack points to the quiet devotion that is central to the Lofgren family’s practice of faith, which they shared with the *North Texas Catholic*.

“Russell is our faith leader, but he keeps to himself because that’s what he knows God wants you to do: to not brag,” Bridgett said. “Logan’s the same way.”

**HOW THEY MET:** Bridgett and Russell met as teenagers, marrying in 1983 before Bridgett was Catholic. Bridgett remembers her initial frustration with the church’s Pre-Cana requirements, but she credits the Catholic marriage prep for the strong marriage they enjoy today.

“We always tease and say, ‘That’s why we’ve been married so long, because we had to go through so much just to get married,’” she said, adding her gratitude to Russell’s insistence for the classes.

Even little things like the finance lessons in marriage preparation

enhanced their relationship: “Everybody should go through [that part of] it because it brings up stuff that you don’t think to talk about, so it taught us communication,” Russell said.

**ALL IN:** Bridgett entered the Church in 1992 when Logan was 4 and their daughter, Taylor, was 6. She’s been all in ever since.

“I knew that I wanted to be like Russell,” she said. “I wanted our family to do everything together. The very first time, when we walked into the church after we visited all those other churches, it was like I took a sigh of relief. I knew what I needed to do.

“I wouldn’t do it any other way now because I would miss it,” she added.

◀ Russell and Bridgett Lofgren and their adult son, Logan, of Sacred Heart Church in Wichita Falls. (NTC/Bertha Salazar)

They make Mass a priority because “it’s just something we want to affect us.”

**A TURNING POINT:** Their faith practices deepened significantly after attending a local Christ Renews His Parish retreat. Russell’s first retreat was after he helped a family member through domestic abuse.

“That took a toll on all of us, especially him,” Bridgett nodded. “He’s got such a tender soul, and so Godly. That next Sunday, they were talking about Christ Renews His Parish. Right there was a turning point for all of us.

“That’s really when we started as a family acknowledging how important prayer was for us,” she continued. “That was a big part of our coming to a closer relationship with the Lord.”

After the retreat, Russell joined the Knights of Columbus and began his weekly habit of donating canned food and the family became more reverent during Mass. Most importantly, Bridgett noted, they stopped leaving Mass early.

**WORKING LIVES:** For over 45 years, Russell has been a machinist, welder, and fabricator, while Bridgett has been with Blue Cross Blue Shield since 2004.

Logan took the creative route, receiving his BFA in illustration from Rochester Institute of Technology. His ink art is fluid, psychedelic, and densely expressive while precise and stark in his signature black-and-white style, “simple for the eye,” he explained. “It’s a clear line.”

In addition to expressing himself on paper, he also appears on stage in comedic and dramatic roles. His ASL improv group, Dangerous Signs, even tried out for “America’s Got Talent.”

**FAMILY TIME:** Though Logan stopped attending Mass in college, he never misses a Sunday now. His advice to parents and adult children is “put God first and do not let things get in the way.”

Spending time as a family is important to the Lofgrens.

“Adults have a lot of worries,” Logan said, advising families to “come together and leave all the worries outside. Go with the flow.”

**TALK ABOUT GOD:** Russell and Bridgett raised their kids having constant conversations about God, watching their faith develop in time.

“It needs to be in daily conversations — have a prayer time together and discussion — then it’s in everybody’s mind, regardless of age,” she said. “Do some sort of educational materials where they can look forward, like a timeline: ‘Pretty soon you’re going to be old enough to do this.’ That’s what kids look forward to. Definitely when they get older, you need to advance on your thinking and teaching.”

**AN OPEN INVITATION:** While Bridgett and Russell’s daughter, Taylor, attends protestant services, she allows her children to accompany their grandparents.

“My oldest granddaughter, when she was with me a few times in Adoration, leaned over and whispered, ‘Are we getting ready to pray the necklace?’” Bridgett recalled with a laugh. “She would see me with [the rosary], and say, ‘I want to pray the necklace!’ We want everybody in our family to know God and come to Christ, but we would love it if they’d come to the Catholic faith.”

**SHARING A QUIET DEVOTION:**

The Lofgrens don’t cite specific devotions or saints that shape their worship. If they follow anything, it’s Russell’s lead, a quiet devotion his mother instilled in him.

“When you see us bring [donation] cans, that’s Russell. You see us with our butts in the pew, that’s Russell,” Bridgett said. “He is the oak of our family. He is the faith leader completely.” 🇺🇸



## 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)



# Striving for holiness

NTC/Kevin Bartram

**HE IS:** Father Zachary Burns, TOR, parochial vicar of Good Shepherd Parish in Colleyville.

**GROWING UP:** The oldest of three children, Fr. Burns was raised in Northeast Pennsylvania.

His great uncle Johnny was a priest for the Archdiocese of New York, and he frequently visited the family and took the children to movies and other activities.

“Obviously there was something really awesome about what [priests] were doing, but as people, as men, I saw them as normal. I never felt intimidated by priests.”

**OF MASS IMPORTANCE:** “Our Catholic faith was very important to us, but we weren’t particularly well catechized,” he recalled. However, his parents emphasized the importance of Mass. “We never missed Mass; we’d drive to Mass in the snow. That foundation was very helpful.”

He encourages parents of reluctant teens, “As long as they’re in your house, try to get them to Mass.”

**COLLEGE YEARS:** Fr. Burns studied education at St. Francis University in Loretto, Pennsylvania, on a cross-country scholarship. “My parents, aunts, uncles — literally everybody in my family is a teacher.”

**AN AWAKENING:** After graduating, he worked for a year as a kindergarten and special education teacher at his home school district. He loved teaching and felt “well ordered” in his career, but every weekend he partied with friends and felt a “misaligned purpose.”

Lying in bed on a Sunday night in February 2013, he was prompted by Pope Benedict XVI’s resignation to think about holiness. “I remember having this very strong sense of God’s love for me, apart from all the things that I had based my identity on,” like academic, athletic, and professional achievement. “I felt like a disappointment to myself, but I felt this sense that God did not see me that way and He had something in store for me.”

“I woke up the next morning 100 percent sure I was going to be a Franciscan.”

Within a few days, Fr. Burns reached out to his university cross-country chaplain, a Franciscan friar.

**ROAD MADE CLEAR:** Fr. Burns followed the friar’s advice to attend Mass more frequently, find a spiritual director, get involved in his parish, and attend a discernment weekend. He was a postulant Franciscan by August.

“Every way was made straight; every valley made level; every hill brought low. It was a weird experience to have everything like, ‘Here it is. This is the way.’”

**PERSONAL CALL:** Fr. Burns admitted his vocation experience is very different from those who discern for years.

“God calls us in different ways. I always say God knows who each of us are; He knows our personalities; He knows everything, so He’s going to call us in a way that makes sense for us.”

**HOLY HABITS:** “You have to be disciplined in a way that even as an athlete, I’m not quite at the level of discipline that you need. You have to fight for your prayer time as the first thing.”

**FATHERHOOD:** “Celibacy is so integral to this call because it makes you able to be called father, because you’re really a father to the whole parish.

“My dad was very present growing up, very present. That was overwhelmingly positive. So I want to be a present father — not just the spiritual lives, but the day-to-day lives.”

**TEXAS TIME:** Fr. Burns arrived at Good Shepherd Parish on June 1, 2020, when he was still a deacon. He was ordained to the priesthood on July 11, 2020.

“I’ve found the people to be so down-to-earth, so receptive, so generous. As much as I try to take care of the people here, they take care of me.” 🇹🇽

# Rays of Hope

St. Joseph Seminary College/Fr. Augustine Foley, OSB

As the vice-rector of St. Joseph Seminary College in Covington, Louis., where many of our Fort Worth seminarians study to be priests, I would like to share what I have seen here that makes me hopeful for the Church.

Currently, St. Joseph Seminary has 100 seminarians, and the men come from many different backgrounds and dioceses. Some are cradle Catholics, others converts. Some come from Catholic schools, others from public schools or homeschool. Some are right out of high school, others in their late twenties.

We are a community of Catholic men who want to serve Jesus Christ and His Church and discern His will. Many will go on to become priests and many will recognize they are called to marriage and family life. Every one of them has unique gifts and talents to serve the People of God.

One of the things that gives me hope is seeing seminarians recognizing the challenges in the world and in the Church and allowing themselves to be formed by Christ, the Good Shepherd, to meet these challenges. They recognize the Church needs unity, good leadership, catechesis, and growth in love of Jesus Christ. They recognize cultural, political, social, and economic challenges can make it difficult to share the Gospel. And they are well aware that we live in a culture that is becoming increasingly antagonistic toward those who uphold the



Fr. Maurice Moon

perennial teachings of Jesus Christ.

The education the seminarians receive helps give them a foundation to address these important issues using faith and reason. The men receive a liberal arts education that fosters in them critical thought and equips them with the ability to hand on the truths of God and creation in a clear and effective way. Their education introduces them to the history of Western Civilization, literature, foreign languages, rhetoric, art, music — important subjects to understand the modern world and evangelize it. Moreover, the philosophical courses they take help them to understand the philosophical issues as they have developed in the Western philosophical tradition; to develop their critical and analytical abilities; and to become clearer thinkers who can present and defend the truths of the faith. For me, it is inspiring to see these men dedicating themselves to their studies daily in preparation for pastoral ministry in our contemporary world.

Also foundational in the formation of a priest is his spiritual development as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, “Without me you can do nothing” (*John 15:5*). The seminarians here are intentional about growing in their knowledge and love of Jesus Christ through prayer and the sacraments. We have daily Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, daily Mass, meditation on sacred Scripture, spiritual direction, and

many other ways to encounter the grace of God. They understand that we can only grow in our love for Jesus Christ by spending time with Him.

The seminarians also have many opportunities to grow in becoming Christ the servant. They enjoy visiting their pastoral ministry sites, like nursing homes, working with inner city kids, going on mission trips at home and abroad, and helping at nearby parishes. They will have many opportunities later at their theological seminary to practice preaching and offering the sacraments, but while here, they focus more on living a simple and austere lifestyle that cares for and is in solidarity with the poor.

So, it is encouraging to see these men giving of themselves on a daily basis, growing in virtue, and discovering the personal love of Jesus Christ. The seminarians are challenged daily in this regard, but they discover the joy of understanding these words more deeply: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness” (*2 Corinthians 12:9*).

Many challenges face the world and the Church today; however, I find hope in seeing these men dedicating themselves to meet these challenges head-on and lead others to the Truth that will set them free. 🇺🇸

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

# La Lucha espiritual

Reconocer y resistir la tentación y abandonarse en el Señor

Por Karla Silva

**A**l examinar nuestra vida espiritual nos damos cuenta de que la tentación nunca está demasiado lejos, sino que es una realidad constante a la que se enfrenta todo cristiano. Aprender a reconocer las tentaciones y resistirlas fue el mensaje principal de las pláticas y el retiro cuaresmal, que se llevó a cabo del 26 al 28 de marzo en la Parroquia de St. Joseph de Arlington.

“Es importante que nos conozcamos a sí mismos, a Dios y a nuestro enemigo. Saber cuáles son nuestras debilidades y siempre decir un ‘no’ firme cuando se nos presenten las tentaciones”, así lo resume María Chávez, feligrés de la Parroquia de All Saints, tras concluir estos días de meditación. Esta oportunidad para reflexionar durante la Cuaresma fue organizada por la Oficina Diocesana del Ministerio Hispano y asistieron entre 250 a 300 personas por día. El Padre Ernesto María Caro, sacerdote visitante de la Arquidiócesis de Monterrey y de Evangelización Activa, sirvió como su orador y predicador.

Las pláticas cuaresmales, tituladas “Jesús y las tentaciones”, se impartieron a lo largo de dos tardes y tuvieron como objetivo “aprender a reconocer cómo el enemigo trabaja sin parar, a través de

las cosas que nos rodean y en nosotros mismos, para tentarnos, así como tentó a Jesús”, comparte el Diácono Rigoberto Leyva, director de la Oficina del Ministerio Hispano.

El Padre Caro afirmó al comenzar sus pláticas que “todos tenemos un enemigo para toda la vida, el cual es terrible y está buscando sin cesar el echar a perder nuestra vida. Por lo tanto, es importante conocerlo y ver cómo lo hace, ya que, si no lo conocemos es muy fácil que logre su objetivo”.

El sacerdote subrayó durante sus reflexiones que estamos en una continua guerra: el ejército de Satanás contra la humanidad. En este combate, explicó, el enemigo es muy hábil para engañarnos y utiliza dos aliados, nuestra tendencia a pecar y el mundo. Nos hace creer que nuestras pasiones desordenadas son necesidades; de esta manera, nos tienta y, como resultado, nosotros mismos decidimos caer en el pecado.

“Para destruir tu vida, el demonio necesita una sola cosa: que tú quieras; él no va a hacer nada si tú no accedes”, apuntó. Asimismo, advirtió que el enemigo busca dividir, enredar y mentir sobre las consecuencias del pecado, con el fin de alejarnos de Dios.

Denisse De Reza, una de las asistentes

a las pláticas y el retiro, compartió que una de las cosas que más le impactó fue saber lo sutil que es el enemigo para hacernos caer en el pecado.

“El enemigo es un vendedor muy eficaz; al ser un ser espiritual, conoce todo de ti desde que naciste. Utiliza esto para convertir tus debilidades en necesidades y busca la forma de ofrecerte eso que tanto quieres, y una vez que aceptas, te pasa la factura”, explicó el Padre Caro. Añadió que el demonio quiere mostrarse como el único que puede dar felicidad plena y refuerza la idea falsa de que la felicidad del hombre está en tener más. “La realidad es que somos insaciables porque estamos hechos para la eternidad, una eternidad con Dios”, explicó y añadió una cita de San Agustín: “Mi corazón está inquieto hasta que descansa en ti”.

“El enemigo es muy astuto; convenció a la tercera parte de los ángeles a seguirlo. Imagínense qué no podría hacer con nosotros”, señaló. Por ello, invitó a todos a resistir, estar alerta y tener disciplina, apoyándose en cuatro herramientas fundamentales: la oración, el ayuno constante, la Palabra de Dios y la comunión.

Enfatizó además la importancia de la reconciliación con un arrepentimiento verdadero: “No justifiques tu pecado. El



María Islas Terrazas reacciona con una sonrisa mientras escucha el Padre Ernesto María Caro durante un Retiro Cuaresmal el 28 de marzo en la Parroquia de St. Joseph's en Arlington. (NTC/Ben Torres)

demonio odia tanto a Dios, que quiere echar a perder nuestra vida e incluso lograr que perdamos nuestra eternidad con Él, porque sabe que eso lastima a Dios. Así que pidamos perdón y refugiémonos en la misericordia del Señor”.

Por su parte, Javier y Nicole Moreno comentan que entienden que Dios no castiga, sino que son las consecuencias de nuestras propias decisiones las que nos alcanzan. “Por eso es muy importante nunca cansarse de pedir perdón, no darse por vencidos y seguir luchando”, expresan con firmeza.

El Diácono Leyva explica que, una vez que hemos entendido y comprendido las tentaciones, reconocido y confesado el pecado, quedamos limpios; pero eso no significa volver a lo que hacíamos antes, sino que hay que empezar a llenar nuestro corazón con cosas buenas para nuestro ser y nuestra vida, que es el significado de ser “odres nuevos”. Éste fue precisamente el enfoque y título del retiro cuaresmal que se llevó a cabo el tercer día.

El Padre Caro explicó que para convertirnos en “odres nuevos”, que reciban el vino nuevo, que es el amor de Dios, se necesita vivir con sencillez y humildad, confesarse, comulgar y obedecer con alegría; y dejar la soberbia, el orgullo y la vanidad a un lado.

“Una frase que se quedó con nosotros durante el retiro fue: ‘El cristianismo hay que asociarlo con el verbo “ser”, no “hacer”, ya que soy cristiano porque soy y actuó como uno, no sólo por lo que hago”, asevera el matrimonio Moreno. “El Padre Caro hizo énfasis en no ser como los fariseos, quienes eran “personas muy religiosas, pero con prácticas vacías, que ponían la ley antes de la misericordia”, sino que “debemos de obedecer al Espíritu Santo, que va transformando todo, y



El Padre Ernesto María Caro dirige el Retiro Cuaresmal: Un tiempo de contemplación y reflexión tranquila en la Parroquia St. Joseph en Arlington. (NTC/Ben Torres)

dejar que el amor de Dios guíe nuestras vidas, para así vivirla con congruencia entre lo que predicamos y cómo actuamos”.

El Padre Caro espera que estas jornadas hayan sido luz para ayudar a los fieles a convertirse en verdaderos “odres nuevos”, capaces no sólo de recibir el amor de Dios, sino de dejar que Él transforme sus vidas. Además, recordó que esta transformación no es inmediata, sino constante: “Jesús dice: ‘Sean perfectos como el Padre es perfecto’, y nunca alcanzaremos la total perfección, porque mañana podemos ser más perfectos que hoy”.

Los días de reflexión concluyeron con un mensaje contundente y un fervoroso llamado a: perseverar, levantarse después de cada caída y confiar en que, con la gracia de Dios, es posible vencer toda tentación. 🇺🇸

# De la sala de clases a la CRUZ

Cómo las escuelas católicas diocesanas  
preparan a sus alumnos para la Semana Santa

Por Christina Benavides

**L**as escuelas católicas diocesanas ofrecen una variedad de actividades y oportunidades para conmemorar la semana más importante del año y reflexionar sobre el don de la muerte y resurrección de Cristo.

En este artículo se explora cómo tres escuelas, All Saints Catholic School de Fort Worth, Immaculate Conception Catholic School de Denton y St. Peter Catholic School de White Settlement, ayudan a sus alumnos a vivir la Semana Santa en un estado de gracia.

## CORAZONES CHIQUITOS Y SANTOS

La maestra Rosa Ortiz inicia la Semana Santa con sus estudiantes de Pre-K3 en All Saints Catholic School mediante las lecturas bíblicas del Triduo, una procesión del Domingo de Ramos por los pasillos mientras sus estudiantes recitan: “Hosanna, Hosanna, el Hijo de David, Bendito el que viene”, para ayudarlos a recibir a Cristo como el Rey Salvador. El Lavatorio de los Pies se realiza con los alumnos el Jueves Santo para que “entiendan que todos somos iguales y que estamos aquí para ayudar y servir a nuestro prójimo”.

Ortiz enfatiza que la idea del servicio no debe limitarse sólo a los días santos, sino que debe convertirse en una práctica diaria.

“Yo les digo: lo que haces por otros, lo haces para Jesús. Como miras a tu amiguito, así miras a Jesús. Tienes que mirar a Jesús en cada uno de tus amigos”, afirma. “Son chiquitos, de tres años, pero lo entienden perfectamente bien”.

La maestra de educación bilingüe también prepara a sus pequeños estudiantes para la muerte de Cristo en el Viernes Santo, recordándoles: “El viernes a las tres de la tarde nos vamos a quedar solitos. No va a haber nadie que nos cuide. ¿Pero por qué, Mrs. Ortiz?”, me preguntan. Porque es cuando Jesús muere.

“Necesitamos poner mucha atención en qué es lo que hacemos, a dónde vamos y con quién estamos, porque no hay nadie que nos cuide. Jesús ha muerto a las tres de la tarde y va a volver al tercer día”, ella explica.

Ortiz comenta que anima a los padres a asistir a la gran representación anual de la pasión que se realiza el Viernes Santo en Marine Park. Pide también a los estudiantes que compartan un mensaje especial con sus padres.

“Vayan a casa, díganle a papi, díganle a mami que Jesús nos ama y que nos espera cada domingo en la iglesia”.

Cuando los estudiantes regresan a clases el lunes después del Domingo de Pascua, Ortiz celebra con ellos la Resurrección de Jesús.

No debemos subestimar lo que puede comprender un niño de tres años, apunta la maestra.

“¡Tan chiquito su corazón y cómo se llena de cosas buenas!”

## SER COMO JESÚS

Los estudiantes comienzan a prepararse para la Semana Santa en St. Peter Catholic School mediante la práctica de la caridad desde el mes de agosto, explicó la Hermana Vinh Ti Nguyen, OP, que enseña educación religiosa en el colegio de White Settlement.

Cada alumno recibe una pequeña alcancía de cartón Rice Bowl de Catholic Relief Services y se le anima a ahorrar monedas durante todo el año con la meta de reunir al menos 10 dólares al final de la Semana Santa. Durante la Misa que se celebra el viernes de la semana de Pascua los estudiantes llevan sus donaciones al altar y las colocan en una canasta.

“Sólo quiero animarlos — siempre tenemos algo que podemos compartir”, explica la Hermana Vinh. “No importa cuánto tengamos. Podría ser un centavo, un dólar, 10 ó 20 dólares. Animamos a los estudiantes a compartir lo que tenemos, a ser agradecidos con lo que recibimos y a dar gracias por ello”.

La Hermana Vinh también ha supervisado durante varios años la representación de la Pasión del Señor que la escuela realiza el Jueves Santo. Este año, una maestra jubilada, Diana Soto Yandell, dirigió la producción. Según la Hermana Vinh, la asignación de los papeles — especialmente el de Jesús — ofrece a los



Estudiantes de intermedia de Immaculate Conception Catholic School en Denton representaron un Vía Crucis viviente para los alumnos más pequeños el Jueves Santo, el 2 de abril. (NTC/Michael Madsen)

estudiantes una valiosa oportunidad de aprendizaje auténtico y crecimiento personal.

“Elegimos a los estudiantes basándonos en si actúan como Jesús en el salón de clases todos los días”, expresa.

Uno de sus recuerdos favoritos se trata de un estudiante que no fue seleccionado para el papel. Él se le acercó y le preguntó: “¿Qué puedo hacer para llegar a ser Jesús?” Entre risas, la hermana Vinh cuenta que le respondió con compasión y con un mensaje aplicable a todos los cristianos: “Esfúérzate más por parecerte a Jesús el próximo año. Tenemos que ser coherentes no sólo durante eventos especiales, sino en nuestra vida diaria. Debemos practicar las virtudes durante el Tiempo Ordinario y no esperar únicamente a la Cuaresma”.

## OPORTUNIDADES PARA APRENDER

Ana Najarro ha ayudado durante los últimos cinco años a estudiantes desde el Pre-K hasta octavo grado a desarrollar el dominio del idioma español en Immaculate Conception Catholic School.

La escuela católica de Denton prepara a los estudiantes para la Semana Santa de diversas maneras, incluidas dos oportunidades para presenciar



Ana Najarro les enseña a sus estudiantes de Immaculate Conception Catholic School en Denton sobre el Triduo Pascual durante la clase de español. (NTC/Michael Madsen)

visualmente el recorrido final de Cristo, describe Najarro.

“Un Vía Crucis en la iglesia, yendo por las estaciones, y el otro es lo que llamamos el Vía Crucis Viviente, que los niños ven representado por los estudiantes de escuela intermedia”, explica la originaria de El Salvador.

Si bien las representaciones están dirigidas por la maestra de teatro y arte de Immaculate Conception, otros maestros incorporan sus propias tradiciones y enseñanzas dentro de sus respectivas materias. Los estudiantes de grados

menores aprenden en la clase de Najarro nuevo vocabulario en español relacionado con la Cuaresma y la Pascua, mientras que los alumnos de grados superiores memorizan el Acto de Contrición en su segundo idioma.

Tras celebrarse el Vía Crucis del Jueves Santo, los alumnos salen temprano de la escuela para observar el Triduo Pascual.

“Recuerda que Él sacrificó toda Su vida por ti, por mí y por tus compañeros”, les dice Najarro a sus estudiantes. 🇺🇸

# MAESTROS Y TAMBIÉN ESPOSOS

Los profesores de español María y Arturo Beltrán reflexionan sobre su trayectoria y su impacto en Nolan Catholic High School

Por Jennifer Johnson

**S**e dice que un buen maestro siembra semillas de conocimiento que florecen para siempre. Arturo y María Beltrán cuentan con 44 años de experiencia docente combinada entre los dos en Nolan Catholic High School; y no sólo sembraron semillas, sino que cultivaron un hermoso bosque.

Arturo nació en Del Río y recuerda haber tenido una infancia maravillosa. El papel de disciplinario de su padre se complementaba con el de su madre, que cultivó la fe de los niños asegurándose de que asistieran a misa y a la escuela dominical.

La infancia de María fue muy diferente. Ella describe como turbulentos sus primeros años en Piedras Negras, Coahuila. A los nueve años, emigró con su familia a través de la frontera mexicana hasta Eagle Pass. Recuerda que “la fe de mi madre era fuerte. Nos enseñó desde muy pequeños que Dios es el centro de nuestras vidas”.

María y Arturo eran estudiantes de bachillerato en Texas State University en San Marcos y se conocieron en una clase de español. Además de su pasión por la cultura y el idioma español, descubrieron también que compartían la fe católica.

María se graduó con una doble licenciatura en español y psicología en mayo del 1985; y obtuvo una maestría en español en el 1987. Arturo se graduó en



Los profesores de español María y Arturo Beltrán en Nolan Catholic High School en Fort Worth. (NTC/Matt Redden)

diciembre del 1985 con la aspiración de convertirse en intérprete.

El matrimonio Beltrán celebrará 40 años de matrimonio el 13 de septiembre del año en curso; un hito que atribuyen a su fe en Dios, que los ha guiado por el camino correcto, expresó María. “Nuestra fe ha crecido de diferentes maneras, pero nos ha llevado al mismo lugar”.

Arturo se alistó en la Fuerza Aérea de los Estados Unidos al graduarse y la pareja pasó tres años en Guam, donde María se convirtió en maestra suplente de educación especial, una experiencia que le cambió la vida y la encaminó hacia la enseñanza.

Tras mudarse a Fort Worth en el 1992, Arturo consideró la posibilidad

de dedicarse a la enseñanza, un cambio de carrera que atribuye a María. “Fue ella quien me inspiró, con un simple empujón”, dijo en broma.

Luego de enseñar español en una escuela secundaria de Fort Worth por tres años, Arturo fue contratado para impartir clases de español en Nolan High en el 2001. María llegó a Nolan en el 2007 tras enseñar durante 11 años en una escuela primaria de Fort Worth, seguidos de dos años en el campus de noveno grado de North Crowley.

## LÍDERES DE NOLAN

Durante casi dos décadas, los Beltrán han trabajado juntos y su colaboración ha ayudado a los



María y Arturo Beltrán posan juntos en Nolan Catholic High School. (NTC/Matt Redden)

estudiantes a pasar de las clases de español para principiantes a clases avanzadas. “A los dos nos apasiona el español, los estudiantes y nuestra fe. Creo que eso es lo que nos hace exitosos”, explicó ella. “Tenemos intereses muy parecidos, pero personalidades diferentes. Eso se refleja en nuestros estilos de enseñanza”.

El enfoque docente complementario de la pareja es intencional. Como profesor de español de nivel 1, la naturaleza alentadora y divertida de Arturo fortalece la confianza de los estudiantes en el aprendizaje de un nuevo idioma.

“Intento preparar a los alumnos de primer año para lo que ella les va a enseñar y para las expectativas que ella tendrá”, Arturo añadió.

María, profesora de español de nivel avanzado, se basa en los cimientos establecidos por Arturo.

“Donde termina uno, empieza

el otro”, afirmó. “Los preparo para la universidad y me centro en las habilidades que les permitirán triunfar en la vida y en su fe: responsabilidad, honor y honestidad”.

Geoffrey Calvin, profesor de latín y director del departamento de lenguas modernas y clásicas, lleva diez años impartiendo clases junto a los Beltrán.

“Admiro la relación que establecen con sus alumnos”, comenta Calvin. “Los Beltrán tienen más alumnos en sus clases que cualquier otro profesor de lenguas extranjeras, y aun así logran conectar personalmente con cada uno de ellos. Se necesita un profesor excepcional para, al mismo tiempo, exigir responsabilidad a los alumnos y transmitirles tanto cariño y atención”.

### MÁS ALLÁ DE LAS PALABRAS

Además de la docencia, los Beltrán han sido coordinadores de lenguas modernas y clásicas, así como

moderadores del Club de Español, la Sociedad de Honor de Español y el galardonado Ballet Folklórico La Vikina. Este último club, que comenzó con seis estudiantes en el 2018, casi ha triplicado su tamaño bajo la dirección de los Beltrán. “Requiere mucho tiempo, pero es sumamente gratificante”, aseveró María. “El ser un modelo que seguir para estudiantes de minorías o de entornos diversos me ha permitido ayudarles a comprender que, con fe y esfuerzo, pueden hacer realidad sus sueños”.

“Cuando María y Arturo iniciaron el programa de Ballet Folklórico, lo hicieron porque creyeron en una estudiante que tenía una idea maravillosa”, dijo Cindy Jung, subdirectora de Asuntos Estudiantiles. “Ver cómo cultivaban esa idea hasta convertirla en algo duradero me enseñó una lección importante: cuando realmente escuchamos a los estudiantes y los acompañamos, pueden surgir cosas increíbles”.

El legado de Arturo y María ha impactado a cientos de estudiantes y se sentirá por muchas generaciones en Nolan. “Ellos son un ejemplo del amor de Cristo para nuestros estudiantes, profesores y el personal a través de sus incansables esfuerzos dentro y fuera del aula, el cariño y la atención que brindan a sus estudiantes y el mutuo amor que tan claramente se tienen”, manifestó Calvin.

Arturo, de 65 años, y María, de 62, son feligreses de la Parroquia de St. Ann de Burluson, donde ayudaron a establecer una misa semanal en español. Sus planes de jubilación incluyen viajar y pasar un amoroso tiempo con sus tres hijos y cuatro nietos.

Con una nueva etapa de la vida a la vuelta de la esquina, los Beltrán tendrán siempre un lugar especial para Nolan en sus corazones. Arturo dijo que su recompensa es “el amor de los estudiantes, la pasión por los niños. No querría ir a ningún otro lugar”.

María está de acuerdo con su esposo y agregó: “Hemos sido bendecidos. Ha sido una verdadera bendición estar aquí; y lo voy a extrañar”. 🇺🇸

# Peregrinación a MÉXICO

El Padre Joseph Moreno experimenta gracia y mayor profundidad espiritual al dirigir a peregrinos a lugares santos en México

Por Christina Benavides

**S**egún nos dice Papa León XIV, todo católico debería dedicar tiempo a una peregrinación, ya que “desempeña un papel vital en nuestra vida de fe”.

“Es un recordatorio de que el mundo es más grande que nosotros y que Dios es Dios. Dios quiere ser visto. Dios quiere que lo experimentemos. Él quiere que lo conozcamos; y debemos hacerlo saliendo al mundo”, manifestó el Padre Joseph Moreno, refiriéndose al mensaje del Papa emitido el 5 de julio de 2025.

El párroco de St. Michael de Bedford puso recientemente en práctica el mensaje del pontífice, al servir como director espiritual de una peregrinación de cuatro días a México del 19 al 23 de febrero.

Si bien esta fue la cuarta vez que el Padre Moreno visita a México, fue la primera como sacerdote en una peregrinación.

“Nunca se puede llegar a comprender toda la profundidad de las Sagradas Escrituras. Lo mismo ocurre cuando uno emprende una peregrinación. El Espíritu Santo te guía a un lugar un poco diferente y a una mayor profundidad cada vez”, afirmó el sacerdote.

## ROSTROS VALIENTES DE FE

Una de las primeras paradas de la peregrinación fue la Iglesia de la Sagrada Familia en la Colonia Roma de Ciudad de México. La iglesia alberga las reliquias del

Beato Miguel Pro, un sacerdote mexicano mártir que desafió al gobierno mexicano y se disfrazó para celebrar la misa y administrar los sacramentos durante la Guerra Cristera.

“Mientras era fusilado, extendió los brazos, con la Biblia en una mano y el rosario en la otra, y gritó: ‘¡Viva Cristo Rey!’”, explicó el Padre Moreno. “Fue absolutamente asombroso. No había visto este santuario antes”. El sacerdote manifestó lo mucho que le impacta la historia detrás de las imágenes del martirio del beato en el 1927.

Su grupo visitó también ese día el santuario y la cripta de la Beata Concepción Cabrera, conocida popularmente como “Conchita”.

“Era una laica: esposa, madre, viuda, abuela, pero fundó además cinco órdenes religiosas con sus escritos sobre el Espíritu Santo”, indicó el Padre Moreno. La beata fue la primera laica mexicana en ser beatificada y es conocida por su amor a la Iglesia y la amplitud y profundidad de sus escritos.

“Escribió casi tanto como Santo Tomás de Aquino”, comentó el Padre Moreno.

## SANTUARIO DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE GUADALUPE

Si uno viaja a México en peregrinación, por supuesto, la visita al Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe es imprescindible, ya que es el lugar de peregrinación católica más popular del mundo.

Mientras que los peregrinos de su grupo que iban al Santuario por primera vez aprendían sobre Juan Diego y la tilma con un guía local, el Padre Moreno reflexionó más profundamente sobre la belleza de la unidad al contemplar las Cascadas de Guadalupe en el Jardín del Tepeyac, donde “La Ofrenda”, una colección de 17 estatuas de bronce que representan a indígenas llevando ofrendas de comida, artesanías y animales a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, simboliza la unión de los españoles y los indígenas aztecas y mayas.

“Todos se mezclaron en una sola poza en el fondo, mostrando: ‘Así somos en México. Somos descendientes de la mezcla de todos ellos’”, señaló el Padre Moreno.

El sacerdote conversó también sobre un nuevo aspecto del misterio de Guadalupe cerca del final de su peregrinación al Santuario de la Quinta Aparición de Guadalupe en Tulpetlac.

El santuario conmemora la curación que la Santísima Virgen le hizo en su choza a Juan Bernardino, tío de Juan Diego. Fue a Bernardino a quien ella le reveló su nombre como Santa María de Guadalupe. En el altar del santuario hay un grifo que conecta con un pozo ubicado debajo de la iglesia, conocido como el manantial sanador de Juan Diego, donde Santa María de Guadalupe continúa otorgando gracias.

“Esto fue completamente nuevo para mí”, admitió el Padre Moreno. “Nos detuvimos junto al pozo y reflexionamos sobre cómo María se aparece a lo largo de la historia y trae sanación y consuelo”.



El Padre Joseph Moreno eleva la hostia consagrada mientras celebra la Misa el 23 de febrero en el Santuario de la Quinta Aparición Guadaluana en Tulpetlac, México. (foto cortesía/Kim Guidry Speirs)

## RECUERDOS DE PUEBLA

El grupo de peregrinos viajó aproximadamente dos horas y media el domingo desde Ciudad de México hasta Puebla.

“Es la ciudad donde me enviaron durante seis semanas para aprender español, así que me comporté como un niño pequeño, correteando por todas partes”, explicó el Padre Moreno. “Mi querida Puebla”.

Al recordar la visita que hiciera el grupo a la Iglesia de Santo Domingo, “donde hay una capilla dedicada a Nuestra Señora del Rosario construida en 1690”, el sacerdote se maravilló de la arquitectura barroca, el “increíble uso de la talla en madera” y el espléndido uso del pan de oro.

“Es sencillamente asombrosamente hermosa”, el prelado añadió emocionado.

## UNA CULTURA DE FE

Un peregrino no es un turista, recalco el Padre Moreno. Su buena amiga Joan Watson publicó recientemente

el libro *“Haciendo una peregrinación”*, que detalla cómo adoptar la mentalidad de un peregrino dispuesto a recibir a Dios.

“Un turista va a ver qué hay por ahí, visitar diferentes lugares, tomar muchas fotos y selfies, comprar muchos recordatorios y a probar toda la comida del lugar. Un peregrino podría también hacer algunas de esas cosas, pero un peregrino busca a Dios, no unas vacaciones”, explicó el sacerdote. “Una peregrinación es un encuentro con Dios”.

La diferencia radica en la conversión interior que busca el peregrino, “un crecimiento en santidad”, declaró el Padre Moreno.

Lo cual es fácil de lograr en México, ya que “la presencia de María impregna la mayor parte de la cultura mexicana”, agregó.

El guía local de su grupo les dijo: “Todos los mexicanos somos guadalupanos. Todos tenemos algún tipo de



Una vista de las Cascadas de Guadalupe y la colección de estatuas “La Ofrenda” ubicadas en el Jardín del Tepeyac en la Ciudad de México.

devoción a María, y a ella le debemos nuestra existencia”, apuntó el Padre Moreno.

Esta peregrinación le ayudó a comprender el poder de la gracia de la Santísima Virgen en el país.

“Lo que más me impactó fue que la Iglesia en ese tiempo no había logrado convertir a muchos. Los indígenas y los españoles, en general, no se

llevaban bien ni se entendían. Y entonces apareció María”.

A pesar de las diferencias lingüísticas, la Santísima Virgen unió al pueblo.

“María, con su imagen en la tilma, usó un simbolismo que los indígenas comprendían, y de inmediato comenzaron a convertirse, incluso si aún no habían oído hablar de Jesús”. ✚



# SIGUIENDO SU llamado

Trent Barton, Jeffrey Ambreit Jr. y Paul Trinh se arrodillan en oración durante la Misa de ordenación en la Parroquia de St. Mary of the Assumption el 18 de marzo. Los tres hombres fueron ordenados al diaconado transicional. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

## Trent Barton, Jeffrey Ambreit Jr. y Paul Trinh son ordenados diáconos transitorios

Por Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

**S**imon Edmiston, de 24 años, y Brendan Garretson, de 22, no conocían a los tres hombres que fueron ordenados el 18 de marzo al diaconado transitorio en la Parroquia de St. Mary of the Assumption.

“Somos jóvenes católicos que queremos mantenernos conectados e involucrados en la Iglesia”, dijeron los feligreses de Holy Family, que se encontraban entre la multitud de fieles que llenaban este histórico lugar al sur de Fort Worth. “Como laicos, disfrutamos de asistir a misas como ésta”.

Garretson, un converso reciente, y Edmiston, católico de nacimiento, son miembros entusiastas de la nueva parroquia. Creen que otros jóvenes de veintitantos años como ellos buscan la verdad y la estructura en un mundo quebrado.

“Me siento atraído por la bondad, la verdad y la belleza que ofrece la Iglesia Católica”, explicó Edmiston. “Eso no se encuentra en ningún otro lugar. Es una gracia única que Dios nos ha concedido”.

La bondad, la verdad y la belleza de la Iglesia se manifestaron plenamente cuando el Obispo Michael Olson ordenó a Michael Trent Barton, Jeffrey Michael Ambreit Jr. y Paul John Trinh al Sagrado Orden del Diaconado durante un rito empapado de simbolismo y gestos. El Padre Jonathan Wallis, Vicario General, el Padre John Perikomalayil, HGN, párroco de St. Mary, y varios sacerdotes diocesanos concelebraron la misa junto al Obispo.

Como diáconos transitorios, estos hombres inician su último año de formación antes de ser ordenados al sacerdocio. Ingresan además al estado clerical al hacer por primera vez promesas de obediencia, celibato y la obligación de rezar diariamente la Liturgia de las Horas.



El Obispo Michael Olson impone sus manos sobre la cabeza de Jeffrey Ambreit Jr. mientras invoca los dones del Espíritu Santo en la Misa de ordenación al diaconado transicional. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

El diaconado transitorio no es sólo una etapa preparatoria, sino una profunda expresión sacramental de la *diakonia* — el servicio — que es esencial para el sacerdocio.

El diácono es ordenado mediante el sacramento del Orden Sagrado para bautizar, officiar matrimonios, celebrar funerales, proclamar el Evangelio, predicar y asistir a los sacerdotes y obispos en sus deberes pastorales y administrativos.

### APOYO DE LA FAMILIA

El Obispo Olson expresó su agradecimiento a los padres de los

ordenandos por haberle presentado a sus hijos a Cristo y haberlos animado a la vocación sacerdotal.

“Fue en sus hogares donde escucharon por primera vez el Evangelio, aprendieron sobre la Iglesia y aprendieron a seguir los mandamientos tal como Cristo nos enseñó”, señaló. “Ustedes dieron ejemplo de generosidad de corazón, lo que los trajo aquí esta noche para responder al llamado que Cristo les hizo”.

Mientras esperaban el comienzo de

Continúa en la Página 62



Paul Trinh promete obediencia al Obispo Michael Olson durante la Misa de ordenación al diaconal transicional. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

### De la Página 61

la Misa de Ordenación, Holly y Michael Trinh comentaron que su hijo, Paul, de 26 años, siempre había tenido una naturaleza espiritual. Incluso de niño, su habitación estaba llena de estatuas e imágenes de Jesús, María y los santos.

“En la guardería, jugaba a ser sacerdote y hacía que los demás niños le respondieran”, dijo su madre. “Ha sido un largo camino. Damos gracias a Dios y al Obispo Olson por haberlo guiado hasta este día”.

Los padres de Trent Barton, Jerry y Margie Barton, sus cuatro hermanos y otros miembros de su familia viajaron desde Seymour para presenciar la ordenación al diaconado del exentrenador de fútbol americano.

“Creció en una familia muy católica y de profundas convicciones religiosas; así que esas son sus raíces”, expresó Margie

Barton. Trent, de 37 años, comenzó a trabajar desde la intermedia, lo que le será muy beneficioso para ejercer su ministerio, Margie agregó.

“Trent lleva consigo esas experiencias y podrá conectar con la gente”, añadió. “Si Dios quiere, será el primer sacerdote de nuestra familia. Esto es maravilloso, sin duda”.

Haley Ambreit, hermana del seminarista Jeffrey Ambreit, de 32 años, dijo que su familia rezó “muchos Rosarios” por él a lo largo de los años.

“Siempre sentimos que ésta era su vocación. Fue su propia decisión, a su propio ritmo y en su propio tiempo”, enfatizó.

Jeffrey es el mayor de nueve hijos de Begonia Quepons y el difunto Jeffrey Ambreit Sr. El seminarista comenzó sus estudios para el sacerdocio en el 2012, interrumpió su formación durante varios años y regresó al seminario en el 2023.

“Sabe escuchar y es muy empático y cariñoso”, dijo la asistente legal de inmigración al describir algunas de las cualidades más destacadas de su hermano. “Es alguien con quien los feligreses pueden contar y en quien pueden confiar”.

### HERALDOS DEL EVANGELIO

Tras prometer respeto y obediencia al obispo y a sus sucesores, los candidatos se postraron humildemente ante el altar mientras toda la congregación rezaba la Letanía de los Santos. Al terminarse la oración los hombres volvieron a arrodillarse ante el obispo, que impuso las manos sobre la cabeza de cada uno mientras invocaba los dones del Espíritu Santo. Este antiguo gesto tradicional se remonta a los Apóstoles y es un acto central del rito de ordenación.

Los nuevos diáconos recibieron entonces las vestiduras propias del oficio,



Trent Barton escucha atento durante la Misa de ordenación diaconal transicional en la Parroquia de St. Mary of the Assumption en Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

la estola y la dalmática, de manos de otros diáconos que les guiaron en el camino de su vocación. Como tienen el compromiso y deber de proclamar y predicar el Evangelio de Cristo, el Obispo les entregó el Libro de los Evangelios mientras pronunciaba la exhortación: “Reciban el Evangelio de Cristo, del cual se han convertido en heraldos. Crean lo que leen, enseñen lo que creen y practiquen lo que enseñan”.

## FOMENTANDO LAS VOCACIONES

Carmen Garland, madre de Luke Garland, seminarista diocesano de 19 años, llevó a sus otros dos hijos, Jake, de 17, y Matt, de 15, a la Misa de Ordenación para mostrar su apoyo a los nuevos diáconos y al

proceso vocacional. Luke Garland cursa su primer año en St. Joseph Seminary College en St. Benedict, Louisiana.

Esta feligresa de la Parroquia de St. Mary the Virgin de Arlington y de Holy Trinity de Azle animó a sus hijos a asistir al Desayuno de San Andrés, al Fin de Semana de Orientación Vocacional Come & See, a Quo Vadis y a otros eventos de discernimiento organizados por la diócesis.

“Creo que los padres deben alentar la vocación si su hijo está interesado”, manifestó. “Utilicen todas las herramientas que ofrece la diócesis para que pueda decir “sí” o “no” con claridad. Quiero que mis hijos hagan lo que Dios quiere que hagan”. 🇹🇽



## AMBIENTE 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 de abuso, visite

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

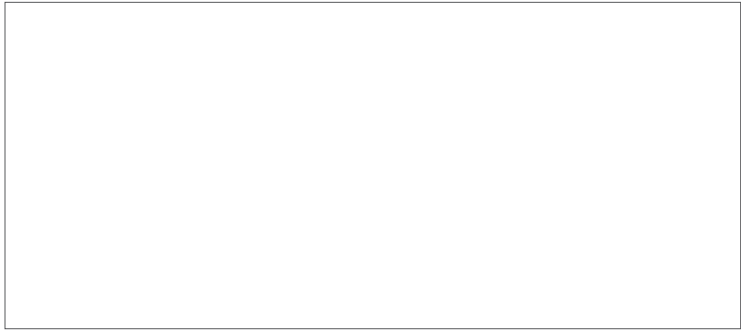


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ST. JOHN PAUL II  
SHEPHERD'S GUILD

DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

Engaging Lay Catholics  
in the Pastoral Work  
of Fostering Priestly  
Vocations in the  
Diocese of Fort Worth

*"Ask the master of the harvest to  
send out laborers for his harvest."*

Matthew 9:38



Advancement Foundation  
CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

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