

BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC

Reborn in Christ

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HOPE OR CLOSURE?

REFLECTION ON THE INADMISSIBILITY OF THE DEATH PENALTY

On May 11, 2018, the Congregation (now called the Dicastery) for the Doctrine of the Faith promulgated a reformulation of Canon 2267 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* regarding the morality of recourse to the death penalty. This new formulation was made as part of the teaching office of Pope Francis in consort with the teachings articulated by his most recent predecessors including Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Saint John Paul II. The relevant part of the new formulation reads: “Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that “the **death penalty is inadmissible** because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.”

While the use of the term “morally inadmissible” does not place the death penalty on the same level as sins like murder or abortion, which are “inherently evil” because the Church has always taught that circumstances can never justify their commission, the term “morally inadmissible” does convey that our understanding of human dignity and the common good of society has determined that the death penalty can no longer be utilized as an effective, just, and coherent means to honor the value of the human

life of those who have been murdered and whose surviving loved ones have been aggrieved by such sinful violence.

There is much for our ongoing prayer and consideration contained in the new formulation of Canon 2267. One point from the formulation that I offer you for your consideration is that “a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state.” Prior to the development of the secular state, the role of the civil government was understood as including the fostering of the spiritual dimensions of human dignity that rested upon the presuppositions of Divine judgment and eternal life. The imposition of the death penalty in cases of murder included the importance of the convicted murderer to seek forgiveness from God and from those harmed by his sin in preparation for Divine judgment that he be spared eternal damnation and to prevent the damage to the common good by individual revenge.

Without this Christian presupposition of Divine judgment and human dignity as recognized and upheld juridically on the part of the state, this moral significance of the action of the state is lost and is replaced by a mechanized form of vengeance that only promises a sense of closure to loved ones of murder victims still understandably angry at the injustice

of the murder perpetrated against their loved one.

Only the modern world and its post-modern residue with its removal of God to the private sphere of human society and the replacing of God with the state in the public sphere would be so bold as to suggest that the execution of a criminal would suffice to bring about the closure of the hole left in the lives of the loved ones by the violent and intentionally inflicted death of their loved one for the common interest of society. This offer is made with a bold presupposition that human life and its end merits human closure. Closure for whom? Closure promised by advocates for the death penalty suggests a finality that can only make sense on the basis that this world is all that there is, and the powers of this world have on this basis a conclusive say in the matter of giving and taking life: a responsibility that rests with God alone.

The closure of such a wound does not heal the wound. Only hope in God can bring such healing. Hope decries the injustice of murder. Christian hope acknowledges that human action alone cannot bring about the satisfaction that we desire, but only human action in cooperation with God’s creative plan for human life and who calls us to authentic justice both through the Natural Law and Sacred Revelation. 🇺🇸

Proven answers

Back before the age of spell-check, when assignments were handwritten and submitted on paper, I'd ask my mother, "How do you spell ...?"

She knew the answer, but her response was always, "Look it up in the dictionary," no matter whether I was 7 years old or 17.

Fast forward a few decades. When I've got questions about specific functions on the computer, I ask my son, who is majoring in computer science.

He knows the answer, but his response is always, "Look it up on Google."

Different generations, different subjects, but my mother and my son both wanted me to solve it independently. They pointed me to a resource, but I had to put forth some effort.

Fortunately, I've found reliable resources when it comes to my spiritual questions:

- How do I grow in holiness?
- How can I hear Jesus' voice?
- What is God calling me to do?

Certainly pursuing these answers on my own in Scripture is valuable and worthwhile, and often priests provide insights into these topics in their homilies.

I can also examine these questions in light of the saints.

By the examples of their lives and by their writings, they point me to tried-and-true resources: prayer, the sacraments, the holy Mass.

The arrival of the permanent relic of St. Padre Pio in the diocese has prompted my curiosity about this holy Franciscan friar, and I've been reading about his life, including several letters he wrote to his spiritual children.

His devotion to prayer, the 16-hour days he spent in the confessional, and the reverence with which he celebrated Mass all point to the grace the Lord pours out through prayer and the sacraments — a proven means to be strengthened in the faith.

The saints who have come before us reveal the answer to how to walk closely with God. With their intercession, may we follow their examples and avail ourselves of the graces God wants to bestow on us through the sacraments.

Susan Moses

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Views from the Pews

Ordinary Time makes for some extraordinary events and occasions in the parishes and schools of the diocese — more than what fits on these pages, so check our website and social media accounts frequently.

Catholic Bowl. Nolan Catholic High School and Muenster's Sacred Heart High School, plus their fans, bands, and cheer squads, traveled to The Star in Frisco to compete against Catholic schools from outside the diocese in Catholic Bowl IV on Sept. 14.

White Coat Mass. Each year, around the Feast of St. Luke, who was a physician, Bishop Michael Olson celebrates the White Coat Mass for health care professionals. In his homily, Bishop Olson said “a confident hope in God’s omnipotence” is foundational to care.

Beauty restored. On Oct. 12, Bishop Olson celebrated Mass at St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Fort Worth to mark the completion of ceiling murals which depict the Sorrowful and Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary for the 100-year-old church.

THERE'S
MORE



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NTC/Kevin Bartram



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To work and pray



Br. Hoffschwelle, OSB, takes first vows

courtesy photo/St. Joseph Abbey



Brother Rother Hoffschwelle, OSB, takes first vows on Sept. 3.

SAINT BENEDICT, LA. —

Newly professed Brother Rother Hoffschwelle, OSB, feels a kinship with the priest who inspired his new religious name: Blessed Stanley Rother, a martyr priest who preferred service to studies. “He went to Assumption Seminary where I was,” Br. Rother told the *North Texas Catholic*.

On Sept. 3, Br. Rother took his first vows as a Benedictine monk at St. Joseph Abbey in Saint Benedict, Louisiana. His journey began in the Diocese of Fort Worth, and he has been supported by his parents, his home parish of St. Andrew in Fort Worth, the St. John Paul II Shepherd’s Guild, and Bishop Michael Olson.

As a high school senior, (then Joseph) Hoffschwelle attended a “come and see” event at St. Joseph Seminary, located on the same property as the St. Joseph Abbey.

Supported by the diocese’s St. John Paul II Shepherd’s Guild, Hoffschwelle entered St. Joseph

Seminary. After graduating, he attended Assumption Seminary in San Antonio to study theology, pushing through the stressful academic work.

But, he felt that his prayer life “wasn’t where it needed to be” during that time. Like Blessed Stanley Rother, who also struggled with academics, “I really wanted to work and pray,” Br. Rother recalled.

Bishop Olson encouraged Br. Rother to discern monastic life. So Br. Rother attended another “come and see” event at St. Joseph Abbey — this time to learn about Benedictine vocation.

In spring of 2023, Br. Rother entered the Abbey as a postulant.

On Sept. 14, 2023, he was received into the novitiate. Then, on Sept. 3, 2024, he took his first vows and received the religious name Br. Rother, to work and pray like his namesake.

— Kiki Hayden

RCIA becomes OCIA



Program to enter the Catholic Church strengthened

FORT WORTH — Sometimes a name change signifies an entire transformation. Think of Saul changing his name to Paul. His entire life and mission converted along with his identity.

However, in the case of RCIA becoming OCIA, it’s not a conversion but a refinement — the purpose, the process, and the flow remain the same, but a few points have been honed.

Most bulletin-reading Catholics are familiar with RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, which has been the process for converts to join the Catholic Church since 1988.

Beginning this fall, the acronym has changed to OCIA, the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults. The name change from “rite” to “order” is a more accurate translation of the Latin *ordo*. Two years ago, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the name revision and updated the curriculum, to



Jason Whitehead leads a workshop for DREs about the change from RCIA to OCIA.

be effective Dec. 1, 2024, which is the first Sunday of Advent.

Jason Whitehead, diocesan director of evangelization and catechesis, explained how the change from RCIA to OCIA will manifest at parishes.

“The big picture is the same,” he said, but improvements are designed to help converts to Catholicism lay a strong foundation to understand and live more deeply their relationship with Christ and His Church.

NTC/Juan Guajardo

St. Francis of Assisi Parish celebrates 75th anniversary

GRAPEVINE — It's been seven decades, but Margaret Weddel still easily recalls the bake sales the founding families of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine conducted to raise capital to build the parish's first church in 1949.

"I was little, but I can remember running around the cake stands," she said. "They did a lot of little stuff to make money."

Fast forward to Oct. 5 and Weddel brought down the gifts at a special Mass to mark the 75th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi Church. The 82-year-old is believed to be the only original member of the congregation that has grown to approximately 3,700 families.

Father Sojan George, the pastor of St. Francis, has overseen a number of activities throughout the year to celebrate the parish's milestone. The pinnacle event was the

Mass and dinner afterwards that drew more than 650 people on the weekend of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

The local faith community is a lively, welcoming family, parishioners say, and it's also been a shining example of faith in action, according to Bishop Michael Olson.

"I think St. Francis of Assisi Parish has always taken seriously its Catholic faith and its responsibility to put that faith into action through good works," he said, "especially works of charity for the poor, works of teaching the faith to their young people, and caring for the elderly in their church, as well."

Fr. George said, "For 75 years this parish has been a place of comfort, hope and spiritual renewal for all who have entered these doors."

— *Mary Rampellini*



Margaret and James Weddel return to the pew after they carry up the gifts. Margaret is believed to be the only original member of the 75-year-old parish. (NTC/Scott Wagner)

New TCU campus minister and director of faith formation

NTC/Juan Cuajardo



TCU Campus Minister Catherine Zickert.

FORT WORTH — The Diocese of Fort Worth has recently named Catherine Zickert as TCU campus minister and Laura Nelson as director of faith formation.

Zickert previously served as a youth minister at St. Mark Parish in Argyle.

"Now that I'm here and able to minister to these students, I mean, I honestly feel like they are doing more in my life than I could ever do in theirs. It's just such a joy to be here," she said.

Nelson has nine years of experience on the front lines of catechesis: as director of children's catechesis at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grapevine and coordinator of children's faith formation at Good Shepherd Parish in Colleyville.

She plans to use her parish ministry experience to support parish DREs.



Director of Faith Formation Laura Nelson.

NTC/Juan Cuajardo



Swiss Guard Renato Peter leads a talk at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Keller. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Visitor from the Vatican



Swiss Guard member shares stories with diocesan ministries and schools

KELLER — Duty. Honor. Sacrifice. These words are often attributed to soldiers who pursue a call to serve their country. Members of the elite

military unit known as the Pontifical Swiss Guard understand this well. For them, there is also a deeper spiritual element at work that reflects

their devotion to Christ and His Church.

Renato Peter, 24, is a member of the Swiss Guard who recently made his first

visit to the United States through the invitation of Bishop Michael Olson.

While here, Peter visited several groups around the diocese including the Fort Worth Diocesan Guardian Ministry, the Diocesan Young Adult Ministry, and students from four diocesan Catholic schools.

Peter acknowledged his path was “a way to give back to God and His church.” As a result of choosing service and sacrifice, he said his prayer life and his faith have grown.

He noted the Swiss Guard is “an important link to the past” and that its relevancy today as “a living tradition, playing a modern role at the heart of the Catholic Church.

“The daily life of a Swiss Guard is guided by discipline, duty, and education,” he said.

— Jennifer Johnson

Teacher tops list



Dr. Boaz Goss recognized by *Fort Worth Magazine* as one of area’s top teachers

FORT WORTH — It wasn’t that long ago that Dr. Boaz Goss defended his dissertation to earn his doctorate from Saint Louis University in Missouri. Today, as he begins his second year at Cassata Catholic High School, he is being recognized by *Fort Worth Magazine* as one of the area’s Top Teachers for 2024.

He is the third Cassata teacher in three years to receive the honor. Kenneth Scagel made this prestigious list in 2023, and Brittany Ynfante in 2022.

When Goss learned of

the recognition, the science teacher said, “It made me thankful for Cassata specifically. It just made me realize, I’m in the right place at the right time with the right people.”

He explained, “In a single class period, I will have one student doing chemistry, one doing physics, and two others doing IPC. I have to be ready to take questions from any of the eight or nine syllabi that I’m responsible for. It’s a lot like tutoring college students. In my mind, the Cassata model works out perfectly; it’s the model that



Dr. Boaz Goss at Cassata Catholic High School. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

I’ve always wanted to do.”

Dr. Maggie Harrison, Cassata principal, said Goss “is incredibly intelligent, and

he’s got an incredibly big heart.”

— Brenda Raney



Bishop Michael Olson prepares to process into St. Patrick Cathedral with other priests prior to the Red Mass for elected officials and legal professionals on Sept. 26. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Faith, justice, ethics

ANNUAL
RED MASS
ARTICLE,
PHOTOS



Read about this year's Red Mass by scanning the QR code or visiting NorthTexasCatholic.com/local-news.

IN MEMORIAM

SISTER DOROTHY POWERS, SSMN

Sister Mary Dorothy Powers always remembered her first day as a Sister of St. Mary of Namur: August 12, 1954, at age 18.

For the next 70 years, until her death on August 28 at the age of 88, Sr. Dorothy embraced her religious order's mission to serve God and others with a simplicity of heart.

Sister Dorothy's career as a school teacher/administrator spanned from 1957 to 1974 and included time as a Spanish teacher at Nolan Catholic High School, principal of Holy Name of Jesus School in Fort Worth, and principal of Our Lady



Sister Dorothy Powers, SSMN

of Guadalupe in Wichita Falls. Fluent in Spanish, the late sister spent a large portion of her years in ministry serving the Hispanic population along with Sister Gabriela Martinez, SSMN, in Zihuatanejo, Mexico.

In 1978, Sr. Dorothy became involved in pastoral ministry for the Diocese of Fort

Worth, serving first at St. Philip the Apostle where she trained formation teams for baptism and RCIA and then director of religious education at St. Maria Goretti Parish. She also worked as Director of Children's Catechesis and Catechist Formation for the diocese.

CLERGY ASSIGNMENTS

BY MOST REV.
MICHAEL OLSON

REV. CHRISTOPHER COLOMBUS, SAC

Previously Parochial Vicar of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Mineral Wells, has been appointed **Pastor** of Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Breckenridge and Jesus of Nazareth Parish in Albany, effective Oct. 1.

REV. SANDEEP LAKRA, HGN

New to the Diocese of Fort Worth, has been appointed **Hospital Chaplain and Priest in Residence** at St. Patrick Cathedral in Fort Worth, effective Oct. 7.



A HOLY HOME

A relic of Saint Pio makes a permanent home in Fort Worth and in the hearts of its faithful

By Susan Moses

For Jill Monostori, the installation of a relic of St. Padre Pio in the Diocese of Fort Worth is just another reminder of God's message, "I'm still here. I look out for you."

More than two years ago, St. Pio took on special importance for the Holy Redeemer in Aledo parishioner and her husband, Eric, after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Monostori remembered her husband, a retired U.S. Navy captain, began researching "everything he could find about Padre Pio" because he admired the saint's "high standards" and the strength and humility the Franciscan friar demonstrated as he endured suffering.

Throughout his illness, Jill and Eric saw "big signs or maybe little signs" that God is present, such as a statue of St. Pio at a church they popped into when they were at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston for surgery. During the procedure, his medical team discovered the cancer was not operable, leaving chemotherapy his only option.

Last year, on Sept. 23 — the feast day of St. Padre Pio — her husband passed away. "To me [the date] was like God is saying, Jill, I got you," she said.

When she learned a relic of St. Pio was being installed permanently in the diocese, "I see God's hand in all of it. ... I think God took [my husband's suffering and death] and made the best of it."

On Sept. 18, the day the relic was installed at St. Peter the Apostle Church, Monostori and about 2,000 other faithful visited the White Settlement parish.

The day began with daily Mass celebrated by Father Alexander Ambrose, HGN, pastor of the parish; continued with a temporary display of five first-class relics; and concluded with an evening Mass with



Bishop Michael Olson blesses the congregation at St. Peter the Apostle Church with the relic of St. Padre Pio on Sept. 18. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Bishop Michael Olson, who blessed and installed a permanent relic in the parish on S. Cherry Lane.

The evening closed with the premiere of a docudrama, *Saint Pio of Pietrelcina: Man of Hope and Healing*.

PLACE FOR A SAINT

The relic, a bandage stained with blood from the wound on St. Pio's side, now resides permanently in a reliquary in front of the church's altar. It is on display in the church daily, and three days per month the reliquary will be removed to allow pilgrims the opportunity to touch the relic.

A relic is a physical object associated with a saint, such as part of the body or a personal possession. The Catholic Church teaches that relics are venerated to help the faithful focus on the saint's life and virtues and to draw closer to God through prayer and intercession of the saint.

In a Guadalupe Radio Network interview on Sept. 16, Bishop Olson explained that a relic is "a tangible reminder and

devotion for our ongoing conversion to live our lives, both internally and externally, in accord with the Gospel."

Fr. Ambrose, pastor of St. Peter the Apostle, expressed that the parish is "blessed and happy" to be home to St. Pio's relic, which he hopes will "touch people's lives because he has been a great saint, an exemplary saint."

St. Pio, explained Fr. Ambrose, was devoted to the Holy Eucharist — "daily nourishment for us to grow as the children of God." The pastor hopes that pilgrims who visit the relic will grow in their love for the Eucharist.

In the days following the relic's installation, Fr. Ambrose observed a small but steady stream of pilgrims visiting the relic.

ABOUT ST. PIO

St. Pio was born in 1887 in Pietrelcina, Italy, and joined the Capuchin order at the age of 15. He was ordained a Franciscan priest in 1910 and served in the military as a friar during World War I.

In 1918, he received the stigmata, the five wounds Jesus suffered during His Passion, and the painful wounds remained for 50 years. He was also known for having visions and the gift of healing. His holiness and love for others drew many to seek him in the celebration of Mass and in the confessional, where he sometimes remained from sunrise to sunset.

He endured spiritual suffering and poor health with courage, obedience, and devotion to prayer.

St. Pio, said Bishop Olson, spent his life "focused entirely on the celebration of the Eucharist, on Christ's presence, on devotion to the Blessed Mother, and on service to the poor. Those are all messages that we really need to have today, especially understanding the cross is our only hope, and our share in the cross is not just suffering, but even more importantly, love."

After his death in 1968, Padre Pio's reputation for sanctity and miraculous

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Jill Monostori touches her late husband's wedding ring and a Padre Pio medallion to a relic of the saint. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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manifestations grew across the world. Pope John Paul II beatified Padre Pio in 1999 and canonized him on June 16, 2002.

A PILGRIM'S CROSS

The diocese obtained the relic in partnership with the Saint Pio Foundation, which is permanently placing a relic in the north, south, west, east, and center of the nation to form a giant cross. Fort Worth is the southern end of the cross and is the second location to receive a relic.

The idea originated with Luciano Lamorarca, who founded the Saint Pio Foundation 10 years ago and has made many tours with the relics of St. Pio across the U.S. and internationally.

In traveling with visiting relic exhibitions, Lamorarca routinely asks the thousands who come to venerate the contemporary saint how many have been able to make a pilgrimage to Italy to visit sites significant to his life. Only two or three percent, he found. He wanted to establish permanent locations for relics of St.

Pio "to allow the faithful to find a place where they can ask for intercession and have a spiritual encounter" with the saint that Lamorarca calls "my grandfather, my professor."

He and his wife grew in devotion to the saint after their first child was stillborn. "Through that hardship, that experience of sorrow, we got closer to St. Pio," he said. "This humble man, in his poverty, in his humility, has changed lives."

Having the relic of a saint nearby, said Bishop Olson, "is a reminder to ask that saint's help to get us where we're supposed to be going."

For Monostori, the presence of St. Pio's relic "20 minutes from my house" confirms her conviction that "God is going to be with us through the hard things. And I just firmly believe that it was Padre Pio who escorted my husband through the pearly gates." 🇺🇸

Veneration hours can be found at StPeterFW.com/visitation-hours-and-pilgrimages. The church is located at 1201 South Cherry Lane in White Settlement.

WATCH
THE VIDEO



The pastor of St. Peter the Apostle Parish shares his thoughts on housing a relic of St. Pio.
NorthTexasCatholic.org/videos





A cohort of wives of third-year deacon candidates attend a retreat at Nazareth Retreat Center in Grand Prairie. (NTC/Matthew Redden)

A SIMILAR JOURNEY

Wives of deacon candidates receive formation
for spiritual growth and stronger marriages

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

When Cindy Mosco's husband, Al, began studying to become a permanent deacon in 2018, she joined him in the required discernment classes, then participated in a separate formation process. The monthly meetings spent talking, praying, and sharing observations with the wives of other candidates helped her grow spiritually as a person and supportive spouse.

"My husband and I became more in union with each other," Mosco said, describing the five years of preparation that culminated with his ordination in 2022. "We're called to serve and not be served. Formation opened our eyes to

seeing Christ in others."

But the path to God "doesn't come without challenges," she quickly admitted. After tearing tendons in her ankle, the once active Good Shepherd parishioner didn't walk for six months. While in Nevada to see an orthopedic surgeon, her house flooded. Then two beloved pets died.

Spiritual guidance gleaned from the formation classes helped her cope with the string of emotional and physical setbacks.

"I learned to be patient and to trust," explained Mosco, a board member for the North Texas Catholic Women organization. "Nine months later I'm walking, the house is ready, and we adopted two dogs. You go through this journey with your

husband, and you learn about service, but you're also discerning what God is calling you to do — your own vocation."

A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

The spiritual formation that sustained Mosco during her health crisis is different from the program wives experienced when Pope Paul VI reinstated the permanent diaconate for men after the Second Vatican Council in 1967.

When the first groups of men began studying for the diaconate in the United States, their wives were expected to attend academic classes with them. Decades later, revisions to the "National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of

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Permanent Deacons in the U.S.” changed formation for spouses.

“We don’t have to form women in theology and philosophy like before,” explained Paola Quintero-Araújo, assistant director of pastoral formation of deacons for the diocese. “We need to form them for two things. They must know what their husband is wanting to devote his life to, and we want them to find their own vocation within their husband’s vocation.”

Unlike a transitional deacon, permanent deacons are ordained members of the Catholic Church who are not studying for the priesthood. A deacon’s ministry involves preaching and teaching God’s Word, assisting the bishop and priest at Mass, presiding at funerals, ministering to the sick and dying, leading the community in prayer, baptizing, witnessing marriages, and exercising administrative leadership in the Church.

By some estimates, as many as 93 percent of today’s active deacons are married. Because the Church considers the marital union a priority, a wife must give written consent for her husband to enter a diaconal program. While the female spouse is not being called to ordained ministry in the Church, her role includes providing support and integrating the changes that may affect their marriage and family life.

Led by a team of certified spiritual directors, the monthly formation meetings for women concentrate on sacramental growth and the spousal relationship.

“Being the wife of a deacon is a unique experience and formation gives her an opportunity to understand and develop her own personal relationship with God,” added Quintero-Araújo, who meets with the couples during the discernment and orientation process.

Because men ordained to the diaconate make a radical vow of availability and obedience, “the couple has to become more intentional in finding time to grow and nurture the marital relationship,” she said. “Sometimes couples drop out of formation because they see how much of the husband’s time is consumed.”



Victoria Tanco leads monthly spiritual enrichment. (NTC/Matthew Redden)

SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Victoria Tanco likes to refer to the work she does with the wives of deacon candidates as “enrichment” rather than formation. The founder of Reditus, a spiritual accompaniment ministry, she developed the curriculum used during monthly meetings.

Wives must be ready and willing to help their husbands in their vocation, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops recognizes the need to support that effort.

“The USCCB wants them to have their own appropriate times of gathering for learning, enrichment, and spiritual practices,” Tanco said. “It’s part of discernment. Wives have to be very sure they want their husbands to do this ministry.”

Time constraints and scheduling conflicts can make the formation period very intense for a family. During the five years from aspirancy to ordination,

men are busy with classes, retreats, and pastoral internships while juggling jobs and other responsibilities. Wives are often left to deal with children and household chores alone. They find understanding and companionship during the monthly formation sessions.

“Our meetings are not a discussion, study, or support group,” explained Tanco, who oversees the program with help from spiritual directors Catherine Bartley and Clara Pitman. “It’s more spiritual companionship. Using a theme chosen for the year, there is time for Scripture, reflection, journaling, and sharing.”

Getting or giving advice is never part of the conversation.

“People respond by saying how they feel God spoke to them about what their ‘sister’ shared,” she continued. “We talk about the changes ordination will bring. Most of the time, they are very excited and open to what God is doing in their life.”



Connie Coffey and Barbara Mateo, whose husbands are in diaconal formation, attend a retreat at Nazareth Retreat Center in Grand Prairie. (NTC/Matthew Redden)

Semester retreats promote prayer, fellowship, and relaxation. “They are on a parallel journey with their husbands, but we ask them to recognize their own individuality,” the facilitator added. “They are not just a deacon’s wife. We encourage them to be aware of their gifts and how God is calling them personally.”

SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY

After Mike Waldon went to a “Come and See” discernment event in the Diocese of Fort Worth to learn about the permanent diaconate, his wife, Maribel, never doubted he would apply for the ministry. While her husband continues to study and prepare for ordination in 2025, the busy mother of three young children finds the formation meetings a blessing.

“We knew it was a big commitment and that’s the beauty of being in a group like this,” she said. “I’m with other women who are walking the same journey,

and we all have different strengths and weaknesses. You find out you’re not alone, and that’s a big comfort.”

When her father passed away, Waldon received support from other women in the program.

“It was nice knowing there were people praying for our family and had our back spiritually,” she recalled. “There have been a lot of helpful things in this process that bring peace and center you a bit.”

In addition to group gatherings, Waldon benefits from one-on-one time with a certified religious director — a service offered to wives during formation and encouraged after the husband is ordained.

“It’s been helpful to me personally to have someone that I can parse out questions about my own spirituality and personal journey,” said the Franciscan University and University of Dallas graduate. “Some of it has to do with the diaconate process but also my journey as a wife and mom.” ✨



Clara Pitman leads a deacons’ wives retreat. (NTC/Matthew Redden)

Growing in Faith

Opportunities for religious education abound through learning and serving for all ages and backgrounds

By Sandra Engelland

Brandee Beal knew something was missing in her life, and she discovered what would fill the void through the religious education programs at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller.

Born and raised Methodist, Beal developed a desire to study the Scriptures which, through a friend, led her to a Bible study at SEAS.

Program organizers and other women in the “Walking with Purpose” Bible study welcomed her with kindness and warmth. As she began to learn more about the Bible, she also learned about the Catholic faith.

She began attending Mass every Wednesday evening, then Bible study, and she concluded the evening with Adoration.

“I felt like I was missing something, and that something was the Eucharist,” she said.

She made the decision to go through RCIA in 2022.

Her husband, Joe McCullough, was a cradle Catholic but had attended Methodist churches with Beal and their three children, now young adults.

Alongside Beal’s faith journey, her husband rediscovered his faith. Now both are active in various SEAS ministries. She’s a table leader in both RCIA and in “Walking with Purpose.”

“One of the things I really noticed at RCIA and Bible study is I’m constantly learning,” Beal said. “We always need to be growing in our faith.”

RAPID GROWTH IN FAITH FORMATION

In recent years, more and more people in the region are drawn to the Catholic faith, said Jason Whitehead, diocesan director of evangelization and catechesis.

In the past, about 800 adults on average each year were baptized or made professions of faith. Last year, there were 1,544.

He attributed the increase to both the growing population of North Texas and the increased quality of catechesis across the diocese.

As more and more adults convert to Catholicism, the diocese and parishes offer religious education to everyone, from young children to adults.

For adults, the St. Junipero Serra Institute and the St. Francis De Sales program offer what Whitehead calls “RCIA for Catholics,” taking them through the pillars of the Catholic faith.

“I hear it all the time,” he said. “They say, ‘I’ve been a Catholic my whole life, and I’ve never heard any of this.’”

As for children, some 30,000 from preschool through high school attend religious education classes.

About 4,000 volunteers are needed to make all those classes happen.

“There’s no way we can do that with paid parish staff,” Whitehead said. “The Church absolutely depends on volunteer catechists.”

When you help teach others about the faith, you’re helping fulfill the Great

Commission, he said.

“When you volunteer for the sake of serving Jesus Christ, you’re laying up treasures in heaven,” Whitehead said. “If someone wants to serve the Church, you’d be hard-pressed to find a better way than serving as a volunteer catechist.”

‘I WAS LEARNING AS MUCH AS THE CHILDREN’

Ines Roach is one of those volunteer catechists. She and her husband, Jason Roach, teach their daughter’s sixth grade religious education class at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Arlington. Their older teenage sons also help with the class, making it a true family effort.

She said sharing her knowledge of the faith with kids and hearing how they are learning and growing have “been a blessing.”

This is the fourth year that the couple has taught their daughter’s class.

“It’s been such a good experience,” Roach said. “We have several of the same kids over the years and build relationships and get to know them and their parents.”

Michal Tincup, director of religious education at St. Vincent de Paul, said volunteering can be just as much a gift to the teacher as it is to the student.

“When you teach you get just as much, if not more, than you give. It’s blessing upon blessing,” she said.

Tincup got her start in religious education by helping teach kindergartners.

“What motivated me most was I was



Students in grades 6-8 meet weekly for Middle Ministries faith formation program at Good Shepherd Parish. (NTC/Annette Mendoza-Smith)

learning as much as the children,” she said. “God helped me understand I didn’t need to know all the answers.”

After a number of years teaching a variety of ages, Tincup felt called to leave her full-time job as a landscape architect and work in ministry to direct religious education at SVdP, first for children and now for adults.

At St. Vincent de Paul, more than 250 children are regularly involved in programs, ranging from the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for preschoolers and early elementary to high school youth group.

For adults, in addition to RCIA, there are several weekly Bible studies and a twice monthly “Ask me Anything” with Deacon Kevin Bagley.

MAKING LIFELONG DISCIPLES

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish also has plenty of classes for children and adults.

Tammy Sandoval, SEAS director of religious education, said about 1,000 children and youth have participated in classes this year.

Options for adults, in addition to the “Walking with Purpose” study, include Catholicism 101 for learning the basics of the faith, *lectio divina* to learn to meditate



Second graders attend religious education to prepare for their holy Communion at Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Hillsboro. (NTC/Matthew Redden)

and pray over Scripture, and a class learning more about Jesus with discussions about the TV series “The Chosen.”

RCIA also is a big emphasis, Sandoval said.

Sandoval said SEAS leaders are trying to combat the current statistic that 70 percent of people who grew up in church leave it as adults. Some of them return; some don’t.

Father James Flynn, SEAS pastor,

emphasizes helping people become lifelong disciples, Sandoval said.

“How do we make them never want to leave?” she said.

Key elements of the solution are both learning about faith and serving others. Teaching faith formation combines the two.

Sandoval said, “When I volunteer in the Catechism of the Good Shepherd, I learn something every single time that strengthens my faith.” ✝



Darlene Lefever and Peggy Hoenig administer holy Communion to a homebound parishioner. (NTC/Thomas Otto)

Jesus, delivered

Extraordinary ministers of holy Communion
bring the Body of Christ to the homebound

By Matthew Smith



Darlene Lefever and Peggy Hoening stand in front of St. Mary Parish in Gainesville. (NTC/Thomas Otto)

It's about the Eucharist's centrality to the faith overcoming challenges faced by Catholics unable to attend Mass because of illness, age, or poor health, said Deacon Tom Doran during a Sept. 14 Sick and Homebound Ministry retreat at his home parish, St. Michael in Bedford.

"It's about bringing Jesus to those who cannot join us here in the church themselves," Dcn. Doran said.

Several extraordinary ministers of holy Communion attended the session joined by several more interested in learning about the ministry.

St. Michael parishioner Kathy Webster described the satisfaction she derives from bringing Communion to the homebound.

"Because they can watch Mass on TV or online, but they still don't get the Eucharist," Webster said. "But, as Catholics, the Eucharist is everything. The people I bring Communion to each week are so appreciative, and that makes

me feel so good to be able to do that for them."

Webster, at her previous parish in Abilene, delivered Communion to hospitalized Catholic patients. She now, having relocated to Euless, delivers to homebound residents at Oaks 55, an independent living apartment complex for seniors.

"It's not like delivering a pizza, which is nice," Webster said. "This is bringing them the Body of Christ, which is far more important. ... So it's nice to be able to help them receive Christ each week."

In addition to extraordinary ministers of holy Communion — those who help distribute Communion during Mass — others take Communion to parishioners confined to their homes, the hospital, or a nursing home. The ministers serve those facing short-term situations, such as rehabilitation or a hospital stay, as well as those permanently unable to attend Mass.

"This is not the convenience of the 20th century," Dcn. Doran said of

homebound ministries. "This is from the very beginning of the Church, and we know that from the earliest writings of the Church fathers."

That means working to ensure that parishioners in need receive Communion.

"As homebound ministers, we follow our people where they go," Dcn. Doran said. "They may be home for years with hospital stays in between. Then they may go to a nursing home or hospice."

Demand for homebound delivery is high. St. Michael parishioner Brittany Boudreau, who leads the parish's homebound ministry, said she receives new requests for homebound service weekly.

"We currently have around 20 ministers serving about 35 homebound folks," Boudreau said. "We keep our ratios tight so our ministers can spend time with our homebound people getting to know them, maybe relieving some of

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their loneliness sometimes. Through that we really build beautiful relationships with the people we serve.”

Boudreau added that her two young children frequently accompany her.

“They’ve gotten to have a lot of surrogate grandparents through this ministry, and it’s been really wonderful,” Boudreau said.

Peggy Hoenic, a parishioner at St. Mary in Gainesville, became involved in homebound ministry shortly after she converted to the faith in 2012.

“I get the love of these people,” Hoenic answered when asked how the ministry bolsters her faith. “I’ve seen many of these same people for years and, when I’m through bringing them Communion for the day, my heart is just so happy.”

Hoenic and others spoke of the social aspect as well.

“Many have other family members,” Hoenic said. “But a lot don’t get to see anybody too often. They’re just by themselves.”

Hoenic spoke of a 97-year-old parishioner she originally befriended while entering the Church and now delivers Communion to.

“She’s become like my grandmother,” Hoenic said. “She’s just super special to me.”

Hoenic will switch roles soon.

“I’m having surgery and will be off my feet several weeks,” Hoenic said. “So my Eucharistic ministers will be bringing Communion to me for a while, which is really cool.”

Bob and Rebecca Bartush, lifelong parishioners at Muenster’s Sacred Heart Parish, began delivering to homebound parishioners after COVID restrictions eased.

Rebecca also observed the added social aspect of visiting homebound parishioners. “They cherish pretty much every visitor they have. Being able to bring the Blessed Sacrament to them is a big thing. It really lights up their day.”

Of the ministry, Rebecca said she initially joined in simply to help out, with



Eucharistic ministers receive a pyx at St. Michael Parish in Bedford on Sept. 29. (NTC/Kevin Bartram)

the impact of what she and her husband were doing hitting later.

“It soon became so motivating to see the joy receiving Communion brought these people and how reverent they are,” Rebecca said.

Bob agreed.

“I also love just to sit and visit, catch up with them and talk about news around town,” Bob said. “The chance to make friends we may not otherwise have.”

The couple bring their children along as well.

“We explain to them that this is Jesus and we’re bringing Jesus to these people,” Rebecca said.

They hope, Bob said, through accompanying their parents, their young children will learn the importance of faith and serving as the hands and feet of Jesus.

The Bartushes bring Communion to fellow parishioners Tommy and Virgella Herr, a stroke and other medical issues having left Tommy unable to attend Mass.

“It’s wonderful,” Virgella said. “We’ve been parishioners there all our lives. My husband just can’t get to Mass anymore, but it’s very important to him to still receive the Eucharist.”

Susan Urbanek serves as a homebound extraordinary minister of holy Communion at St. Francis Village in Crowley, a Catholic senior independent living community.

“It’s one of my greatest honors to be able to bring Jesus to people who wouldn’t

be able to get Him otherwise,” Urbanek said. “I get as much pleasure out of it as they do, and I also get to check on them to make sure they’re doing okay.”

St. Michael parishioner Jim Black joined the parish’s homebound ministry about 15 years ago, and his wife, Mary Pat Black, accompanies him each week.

Homebound ministry, Mary Pat said, affords opportunity to bring the Body of Christ to others and make friendships as well as help their homebound parishioners with small chores and errands from time to time.

“It’s so joyous to do this because they’re so grateful,” Mary Pat Black said.

It’s a ministry always in need of volunteers, several homebound ministers said, a ministry requiring not much time commitment but also one that brings huge outreach and spiritual benefits.

“When I stand up in front of the church to get volunteers, I always tell them that, ‘This could be your mom needing Communion,’” Hoenic said. “It could be your dad, your grandma. It could be you, and it’s just a very good, rewarding thing to do.”

Boudreau joked that she stumbled into homebound ministry about a decade ago while perusing different tables at St. Michael’s annual ministry fair.

“I met a lady at [the homebound ministry table] who was just so warm and inviting and explained to me what it is. I loved the idea of serving God’s people wherever they are. That’s how I started.” 🇺🇸



NTC/Juan Guajardo

preparing for a BEAUTIFUL DEATH

Catholic faithful and ministries provide ample end-of-life measures and opportunities for the aging

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

Death can be beautiful. That's the lesson Annice Barber learned during the last year of her mother's life.

"It was just the wonderful way we approached things and found joy in all of the moments," explained the caregiver. "When life gets short, you notice everything. The last few months of my mom's life were the most deeply meaningful time in my own life."

To make Angeline Barber's remaining days special, Annice and her siblings started a "carpe diem" fund. When friends and relatives asked how to help the family, they could donate to the fund

rather than send meals or flowers.

"We used that money to do whatever she wanted — like getting her nails painted — something she'd never done," said the St. Mary in Dublin parishioner. "We tried to elevate her days."

More significant adventures involved planning a surprise birthday party in her mother's native Michigan with extended family and high school friends she hadn't seen in years. A hot air balloon ride over the New Mexico desert with her children was another splurge.

When Barber's mother passed away at age 74 from lung cancer, the end came peacefully surrounded by loved ones.

"She had this vision of heaven that sustained her," the daughter continued.

"Her very deep faith carried her. It carried us all."

But when Barber described her mother's death as "beautiful" to a bereavement support group, the therapist dismissed the observation as denial — a stage of grief.

Twenty years later, that reaction led the former university professor to seek training as an end-of-life doula — a relatively new profession that provides companionship, comfort, and guidance to those facing a terminal illness or death.

"I always knew death could be more than what I was seeing in the media and society — something that needed to be avoided at all costs," she explained. "It's

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End-of-life doula Annice Barber accompanies a client on bed rest. (courtesy photo/Annice Barber)

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nothing you're rejoicing in, but it can be beautiful at the same time because you find this amazing quality of life that's precious."

A doula does not provide medical care but focuses on creative, holistic support. That may involve empowering the client to work through unresolved feelings or regrets.

"I spend time with my clients in deep conversation and sometimes they tell me things they won't tell their families," said Barber, who was trained by the International End-of-Life Doula Association. "They may have regrets or unfinished business. It's hurting them and they need to process through it."

She also helps with advanced care planning, legacy projects, and bereavement support for surviving family. An end-of-life doula complements other services a person may receive like hospice care.

"You follow a client's desires and needs," Barber emphasized. "I met with a family one time to help them choose a hospice, but another client wanted to talk every day. You meet people where they are [emotionally]."

The cradle Catholic considers her ministry one that brings healing and peace. Although she doesn't share religious beliefs, the doula will pray with people if they ask.

"It's such a sacred time to be this close to the veil — the path between this world and the next," stressed Barber, who serves clients within 30 miles of her Bosque County home. "It's a new field, and I feel this is what God is calling me to do. There's no greater reward than that."

MAKING A DIFFICULT DECISION

As a cardiologist and then hospice/palliative care physician, helping patients deal with end-of-life issues became a familiar task for Brad Samuelson.

"Unfortunately, when I was in medical school, there was no class on end-of-life issues or dealing with grief," explained the retired doctor who relied on his Catholic faith to fill the gaps. "It was a lot of on-the-job training."

Ordained a deacon for the diocese in 2020, he now uses his combined experiences in medicine and diaconate training to help people understand what the Church teaches about medical decisions and treatment during Aging

with Grace workshops, which address spiritual, medical, and legal end-of-life concerns from a Catholic perspective.

Making decisions for an incapacitated loved one is always difficult. That's why Dcn. Samuelson encourages people to plan ahead.

"When it comes to medical issues, we have to make sure the people who care for us understand what our desires are," said the Catholic convert who presents a talk on medical ethics at the workshops. "No one wants to live on life support for their remaining time. But, if it's going to tide us through until we get better, that's a different issue."

When discussing end-of-life situations, the Church divides circumstances into ordinary and extraordinary care.

"We have the obligation to use ordinary care to preserve life if, in the judgment of the patient or loved one, there is reasonable hope of benefit and doesn't entail excessive burden or expense on the family," the deacon explained.

When a treatment becomes onerous, the Church teaches it may be considered "extraordinary care" and not morally obligatory.

"That could lead to making other decisions," he added.

A cardiologist for 26 years, the former Wichita Falls doctor frequently helped families decide whether continuing treatment would leave a patient significantly impaired. Finding the right answer required a lot of prayer and discernment.

"Making those types of decisions about a parent is always a difficult task for children," Dcn. Samuelson pointed out. "That's why planning ahead is so important."

PROACTIVE FUNERAL PLANNING

Making funeral arrangements for a loved one has become another generational issue — especially in Western culture. There's little proactive interest in funeral planning and most of those conversations happen only after a family member has died.

"The majority of people, when they pass, are older and many of their children have not carried on the faith," Father



NTC/Juan Guajardo

End-of-life doula Annice Barber talks with Jaye Beck (right), who is diagnosed with heart failure, during a Sept. 27 visit to Beck's home in Bluff Dale.

Stephen Hauck explained. “It makes for a confusing time if there aren’t explicit instructions left by the deceased parent.”

The pastor of St. Martin de Porres Parish tries to simplify the Catholic theology of the funeral rite for someone who is unfamiliar with the faith and is grieving. He helps them select the readings and advises them further depending on whether there is a cremation or funeral with a body.

“Most of our faithful don’t know we still have a preference for a funeral with a body and regular burial,” he noted.

To explain the “why” behind that preference, Fr. Hauck discusses funeral preparations and answers other end-of-life questions twice a year during the parish’s monthly adult formation lecture series.

“There are a lot of theological implications for why we do what we do at a funeral,” the priest pointed out. “The funeral itself is a mirroring of baptism within the context of the Mass. You’re dying in your baptism to be reborn in Christ.”

A casket is draped in a white pall symbolizing the white garment of baptism and sprinkled with water, the same ritual used in baptism. The paschal candle, the light

of faith, that once lit the godparent’s baptismal candle, is placed next to the body.

“When a person opts to be cremated, half of those options go away because there is no body there,” Fr. Hauck explained. “You lose the visual reference and all the aspects and symmetry of baptism.”

The pastor recommends contacting the parish to plan your funeral instead of leaving it for someone else to do.

“There’s a booklet with a menu of options. Spend time with the readings and choose ones that speak to you,” he suggested. “Keep a copy of [the booklet] with your will or legal documents and then your children, or whoever executes your will, will know what you want upon your death.”

AGING WITH GRACE AND INFORMATION

The Catholic Church believes in the sanctity of life from conception to natural death.

“Only God has the right to end a life that has begun,” asserted Terri Schauf, diocesan Respect Life coordinator. “We offer Aging with Grace events to help people understand the Church’s teaching on

end-of-life care, whether that’s for an older person or someone facing a serious illness at a younger age.”

In previous years, the diocese presented talks focused on bioethics, but the material was more academic.

“What we’re doing now is at a more basic level of what the Church teaches on medicine, law, and pastoral care when it comes to aging,” Schauf continued.

Attendees are particularly interested in hearing legal experts address estate planning and the importance of wills, power-of-attorney documents, advanced directives, trusts, and beneficiary designations.

Answers to questions posed by the audience add another layer of information.

More guidance and resources about end-of-life issues is available on the National Catholic Bioethics Center website, nbccenter.org, and the United States Council of Catholic Bishops website, uscbb.org.

“Attending Aging with Grace can help bring an understanding of the Church’s teaching and peace to what can be a difficult time as we prepare for the end of life, whether our own or that of a loved one,” Schauf said encouragingly. 🇺🇸



'TIS THE
SEASON
FOR
reflecting

Columnists reflect on the four Sundays of Advent
as the faithful prepare for Christ's birth

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalms 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

I grew up in Michigan and my grandmother lived in South Dakota, so we did not see her very often. This made these visits super special. I vividly remember the year my little brother was born for lots of reasons, but chief among them was that Grandma was going to come live with us for a while, as Matthew was the fifth, and Mom was going to need some help.

When I heard she was coming, all I could think about was her smile, her cookies, her homemade bread, her twinkling eyes, and her love for all of us kids. Having to wait weeks for her visit was excruciating.

The more I thought about it, the

more I longed to see her. The longer it took, the more impatient I became. But then, she was here and all the things I was hoping for came true, plus a lot more. Like the time she made fresh bread and “accidentally” made too much dough and declared, “I guess I’ll just have to make cinnamon rolls for breakfast.”

The first Sunday of Advent speaks to similar realities, albeit with less sugar and gluten. We hear in the readings about the long-promised Messiah — this promise fulfilled in the personification of God’s love, Jesus, and a new promise: Jesus coming again “in a cloud with power and great glory” (*Luke 21:27*).

Like my grandmother living in faraway (to a kid) South Dakota, we can often lose sight of the wonder of Jesus’ presence and forget to savor the promise of His coming again. For this reason, the Church gives us Advent. Every year, we spend four weeks lighting a candle-filled

wreath, remembering that God kept His promise to send a savior, and one more promise awaits fulfillment.

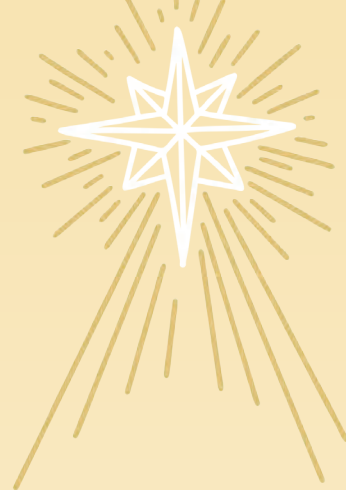
Implicit in this yearly vigil is our need to keep the eyes of our hearts on the horizon. Jesus is coming again, and just like my grandma did all those years ago, He will be fulfilling all our hopes while at the same time exceeding our wildest expectations.

REFLECT ON THIS:

🔍 What was a time you longingly awaited something? What was it like when the waiting was over?

🔍 What is something you plan to do this year to help Christmas be more spiritually meaningful for you and your family?

By Jeff Hedglen, the campus minister at University of Texas at Arlington.



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Baruch 5:1-9

Psalms 126:1-6

Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

Luke 3:1-6

Our reading today from the Gospel of St. Luke centers on John the Baptist as “the voice of one crying out in the desert” in fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah (40:3). To offer some background, Isaiah is writing the Jewish people a promise of consolation and hope which will follow their captivity in Babylon. This parallels the context of our first reading from the fifth chapter of Baruch which offers the comforting reminder that, while in exile, Jerusalem is remembered by God.

Today’s readings speak to the deliverance offered to Jerusalem (and through them, the world), for the true end of their exile was not to be found in leaving Babylon, rebuilding their city, or in any material thing, but in Christ.

It is in God coming to meet His people in the person of His Son that the good news of our emancipation resides, and our salvation is seen.

The first advent of our Lord, in the fullness of time, arrived after the coming of our Lord’s precursor, one who would “make straight” the way for people to find Jesus. To ensure his realization of the prophecy, the forerunner of our Lord was equipped for the task. We see this occur at the Visitation when “John was ‘filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb’ by Christ Himself” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 717). So arrayed by the Holy Spirit at the hands of the preborn Jesus, the Baptist was made the greatest born of woman (*Matthew 11:11*), a “burning and shining lamp” (*John 5:35*), and “more than a prophet” (*Luke 7:26*). It is in John that the Holy Spirit “concludes his speaking through the prophets” (*CCC* 719), bringing all preparation for the Messiah to an end.

During John’s ministry, much like

Jesus’, his identity was questioned. When confronted by the priests, he denied messiahship, as well as being Elijah or the Prophet.

Rather than make false claims, he confesses: “I am ‘the voice of one crying out in the desert. Make straight the way of the Lord’” (*John 1:23*).

One cannot help but notice the close relationship between his very identity and the task ahead of him.

REFLECT ON THIS:

❓ How closely do we align our very being with the task ahead of us?

❓ How consumed are we, in our own way and within our state in life, by answering the call to “make straight” the way for people to find Jesus?

By Jason Whitehead, the diocesan director of evangelization and catechesis.

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THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Isaiah 12:2-6

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:10-18

“**S**hout for joy, daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, Israel! Be glad and exalt with all your heart, daughter Jerusalem” (*Zephaniah 3:14*). It’s fitting that the readings for this Sunday, known in the Church as *Gaudete* Sunday, should touch on the theme of joy.

Gaudete is Latin for “rejoice.” Similar to *Laetare* Sunday, which is celebrated on the third Sunday of Lent, *Gaudete* Sunday serves as a reminder for us, the faithful, of the true nature of the events we are about to be commemorating; these being Christmas and Easter, respectively.

While the secular world may be far from viewing the build-up to Christmas as an appropriate time for reflection and penance (rather for the polar opposites of these things), the Church has always seen it this way.

To use a common metaphor, why wouldn’t we take the trouble to make our homes as clean and inviting as possible for a guest, especially if the guest were to be Christ, Himself?

But, lest we become overwhelmed by the drudgery of housekeeping tasks, and even begin to perceive the looked-for occasion as bringing undue burden upon ourselves, it is vital that we pause, take a breath (or many), and remind ourselves of the joy that is sure to come.

After all, we’re never meant to have anxiety in matters of faith; as St. Paul urges the Philippians in the second reading: “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God” (*Philippians 4:6*).

This time of year is an unfortunate

source of anxiety for many people.

Whether it be due to the stress of buying presents, or the stress of uncomfortable family situations, anxiety frequently makes an appearance around Advent.

So, why wouldn’t we wear rose this week? Why wouldn’t we make it a point to re-emphasize the unimaginable joy that is inherent in the *celebration* of Christmas, where God becomes incarnate for our sake?

This reality alone should be enough to outweigh whatever cares and worries we might find ourselves assailed by this season, in the end.

We should indeed rejoice this week, for not so long from now, we will be, in the words of St. John the Baptist, baptized “with the Holy Spirit and Fire” (*Luke 3:16*).

REFLECT ON THIS:

🔍 What are some ways you could remind yourself not to let anxiety distract you?

🔍 When will you carve out time to pause, reflect on His coming, and rejoice for the joy to come?

By Walker Price, an award-winning columnist for the *North Texas Catholic*.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Micah 5:1-4a

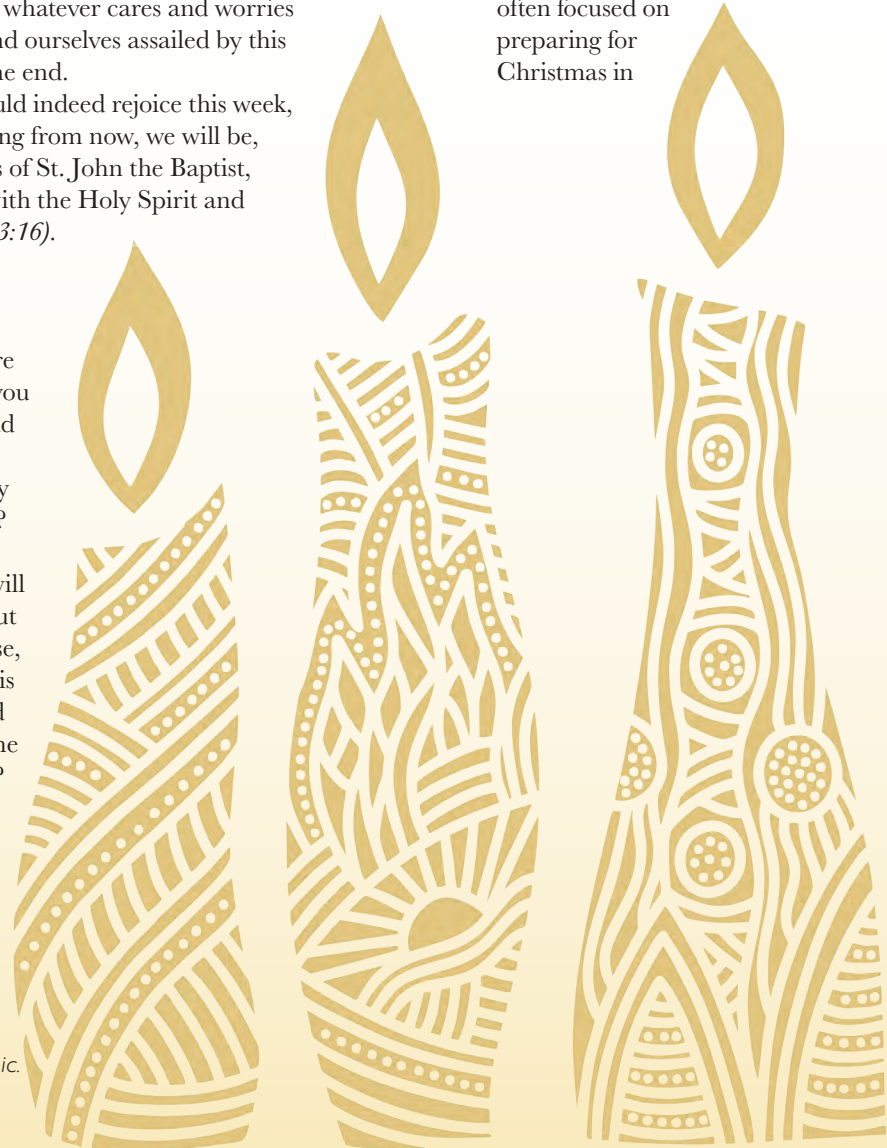
Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45

Sometimes, I find it difficult to know exactly how to prepare my heart for Christmas.

My mind is often focused on preparing for Christmas in



all the external ways: What plans do I need to make? What gifts do I need to purchase? Is my home ready for visitors? When will I be able to decorate?

I look at the grand celebrations of the Christmas season and create a task list to check off as the day approaches. There is much to be done in order to be ready, and I know that if I complete the items on my list, I will be ready for the event of Christmas.

But, the preparation of my heart works differently. When I try to make a “task list” for this internal preparation, I find myself arriving at Christmas coming

up short. So, here I am asking myself again: What should I do to be ready for Jesus’ arrival?

“Lord, make us turn to You; let us see Your face and we shall be saved” (Psalms 80:4).

The readings for this fourth Sunday of Advent help me have a clearer understanding of how I can prepare my heart for the arrival of our Savior. Preparing my heart is not like preparing for the externals of Christmastime.

There isn’t a task list to check off, no actions to perform that will assure me I am ready.

Psalm 80 reminds me that this readiness can be found solely by turning myself toward God.

To be ready to accept His Son, I must align myself with Him, gaze upon His face, and trust He will give me a new birth with Christ at Christmas.

Since I need God’s help to fully devote myself, one of the best ways to prepare for Christmas is by receiving the sacrament of reconciliation.

When I examine my conscience, confess my sins, and receive absolution, I am given new life with Christ.

During Advent, especially in these final days, I am empowered to ask for God’s help so I can have new life when celebrating Jesus’ birth.

Upon receiving Christ, — as Mary did in the Annunciation, as Elizabeth and her son John did in today’s Gospel — I too can be filled with the Holy Spirit and leap for joy. ✝

REFLECT ON THIS:

❓ What areas of my life need more alignment with God?

❓ How can I actively seek His guidance in those areas during this final week of Advent?

By Erika Bunt, the director for campus ministry at Nolan Catholic High School.



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Students at Sacred Heart Catholic School take a break from their studies. (NTC/Thomas Otto)

SACRED MEMORIES

Faithful in Muenster celebrate the 100th anniversary
of Sacred Heart Catholic School building

By Lance Murray

Sacred Heart Catholic School in Muenster is celebrating an anniversary this year that shows the importance of a Catholic education to the residents of the Cooke County town established in 1889 by German Catholic immigrants.

One of the first things the founders did was establish a Catholic school in a 14x24 wooden structure, bringing Sacred Heart's history to life. However, it was not long before its wooden structure proved to be too small for the burgeoning community. In 1919, fundraising began for a new school building, one that would serve Muenster's children for decades to come.

In December 1924, the cornerstone was laid for that red brick building, an edifice called "magnificent" for its time.

Now, the town is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the building that saw its first class of students attend the 1925-26 school year.

A WALK THROUGH HISTORY

Lydia Springer, an alumna whose parents and grandparents attended the school, knows firsthand the importance Sacred Heart holds for the townspeople of Muenster. Her own children attended Sacred Heart, and her grandchildren will attend too.

"When Muenster was founded, the founders actually came here to start a

Catholic school," Springer said. "When they started construction of buildings in 1889, the first thing they built was not the rectory, not a church, but a building for the school."

In fact, on Dec. 8, 1889, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the first Catholic Mass was celebrated in the town, marking the official birth of Muenster. On Jan. 1, 1890, the town's settlers met and made plans to first build a school followed by a rectory and church.

Springer said the school is central to the lives of the families in Muenster.

"It's so important to the whole community, but just incredibly important to our faith, the legacy, the importance of it," she said.

The school evokes strong memories and emotions for Springer.

“Even when I was in school in this 100-year-old elementary building ... even then, as I would run my hands [along the banisters], I remember distinctly that my grandparents, my grandmother, who was born in 1921, ran her hands down the same banisters, the same steps, the same classrooms,” Springer said. “Even then, it was significant to me.

“And then my kids got to do the same thing, even though that would have been their great grandmother long since passed — just the legacy of that struck me,” she said.

Springer said that much of the school’s interior is unchanged from 100 years ago, and a walk through the school is like a walk through history.

“Some of the desks the last time I was in it — and I think they’re still there — actually have the holes where the inkwells sat. So many have been refinished, and it’s just one of those things that our community thinks is important to maintain,” Springer said.

A NEED FOR A HIGH SCHOOL

Sacred Heart is a pre-K through 12 school, but in its early years, the school provided an education only through grade eight. Parents and students, however, sought to add high school classes by the late 1930s. Those first high school classes were held in the red brick elementary building, with a grade added each year.

Room needed for the growing high school meant renovations were made to the original wooden structure. The high school moved into its new home for the 1938-39



Kindergarten through eighth grade students stand before the main entrance of Sacred Heart Catholic School in Muenster. (NTC/Thomas Otto)

school year, the same year the school conducted its first high school graduation, granting diplomas to three students.

Later, a new 25,000-square-foot building became the home of the high school for the 1954-55 school year. That facility is still used for high school classes.

Among the most senior of the school’s alumni is 98-year-old Alvin Fuhrman, who along with his late wife, Gracie, supported Sacred Heart for decades.

Fuhrman, through his company Nortex Communications, provided the school with its electronics needs for many years, including Wi-Fi and computer assistance. Both Alvin and Gracie attended Sacred Heart. The couple was married for almost 75 years, Fuhrman said, having wed when he returned from the military.

Fuhrman, who graduated in 1944, said

he was good at math and that Sister Geraldine was his favorite teacher. Back then, Fuhrman said the same teacher taught every subject.

He said there were about eight or nine students, mostly girls, in his graduating class.

FACULTY OF THE FAITH

Sister Jeanette Bayer, OSB, 83, has taught and tutored at Sacred Heart since 1997, and she is proud that she still works at the school and is looking forward to the 100th anniversary celebration.

A member of the Olivetan Benedictine Sisters in Jonesboro, Arkansas, Sr. Jeanette has taken great pride in helping many students during her tenure as a relief teacher and tutor at the school. Some who struggled in school benefited from her tutoring and went on to find success in life, she said.

The school has had a long relationship with the Benedictine order, dating back a century. In 1893, the first Benedictine priest, Reverend Bonaventure Binzegger, arrived from Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas, and in 1895, he reached out to the Benedictine Sisters of Jonesboro and asked that they would come teach in the parish’s Catholic school.

Sr. Jeannette is the last of the Benedictine sisters to still be at the school and recalls her service to the school with pride.

A Muenster native, Sr. Jeanette said the school is part of her family’s legacy.

“My father remembered that school building being built,” she said. “He was going to school at the time. Then he had classes there and he was able to go through the ninth grade. Then, he had to stop and help farm.” 🇺🇸

what happened to CATHOLIC IRELAND?

A local priest examines the past, present, and future of his Irish homeland through the lens of Christianity

By Father Gerard Quirke, FSSP

Ireland. What comes to mind when you think about the “Emerald Isle”? Perhaps you think of its beautiful scenery, the green fields, the wild and rugged coastline. There is sure to be at least one reader who thinks of the leprechaun with a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Many readers will, no doubt, think of the rich Christian heritage of Ireland — the place often named the “Island of Saints and Scholars.”

Ireland — past, present, and future — is, perhaps, best viewed through the

lens of its Christian history: the coming of Christianity, the immense growth of the faith, the missionary spirit of countless Irish clergy and religious, and, in more modern times, the rapid decline of Catholicism in Ireland in recent decades.

In this three-part series, I will attempt to give the reader a brief overview of the faith in Ireland, looking firstly at the rise of Christianity in Ireland, and then looking at some of the factors which might cause us to ask if Ireland can be considered to be a Catholic country at all in the present day.

For millennia, before the arrival of Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century, the country had had a long and rich history and culture.

Poetry and storytelling were prominent art forms among the completely rural population. The great passage-tomb at Newgrange, County Meath, which is lit up once a year by the rising sun at the winter solstice, and which predates the great pyramids of Egypt, is a testament to both the engineering prowess

and the religious devotion of the Irish in pre-Christian times.

RELIGIOUS ROOTS

However, the religious practice of the people before the arrival of Christianity was most likely based largely on superstition, the observation of omens, and the practice of magical rituals.

There was a “pantheon” of sorts, with the people worshipping gods and goddesses, seemingly without any central organizing principle — as one author has written, “It is rather as if the pagan Irish lived and breathed with one foot in this world and one foot in the otherworld: the two worlds interpenetrated.”

There is also archaeological evidence to suggest the practice of human sacrifice in Ireland before the arrival of St. Patrick. From a Christian perspective, pre-Christian Ireland was very bleak.

When one considers what Ireland and its people became — the Island of Saints and Scholars — we may rightly think that their history is one of extremes.

Writing in the early third century, Gaius Julius Solinus remarked that Ireland was “inhuman in the savage rituals of its inhabitants.” These inhabitants were “an unfriendly and warlike people. When the





The Rock of Cashel where, according to legend, St. Patrick came to convert King Aenghus to Christianity.

blood of killers has been drained, the victors smear it on their own faces. They treat right and wrong as the same thing.”

Not long before the arrival of St. Patrick, St. Jerome noted that when he was in Gaul, he witnessed the Irish feeding on human flesh. He also claimed that when they came across herds of pigs and cattle, they frequently cut off the buttocks and nipples of shepherds and their wives, regarding these as delicacies. It should be noted that Jerome may have exaggerated his accounts of the Irish — since he opposed the heretic Pelagius, whom he wrongly believed to be Irish, he may have felt it necessary to disparage the Irish as part of his fight against Pelagius.

Whether or not Jerome’s account is completely accurate, we must also bear in mind that the Roman Empire never extended to Ireland, although most of Britain was Roman. Although it seems that the Romans considered invading Ireland, they never even attempted an invasion. We do know, however, that Irish pirates would often raid Roman Britain, taking slaves back to Ireland. St. Patrick was one of those slaves.

CHRISTIANITY ARRIVES

According to Patrick’s own account in his *Confessio*, it was while he was in captivity in Ireland that he found the Christian faith which he had abandoned as a youth. After returning to Britain, he perceived the voice of the Irish in a dream: “We appeal to you, holy servant boy,

to come and walk among us.”

Later annals indicate that Patrick was ordained a priest and a bishop and was sent by Pope Celestine I to preach the faith to the Irish and to baptize them. He arrived in Ireland around the year 432.

Patrick’s mission to the Irish paved the way for the conversion of the entire island of Ireland to the true faith.

It is quite remarkable, given how pagan religion was so central to the lives of the pre-Christian Irish, that there does not seem to be any substantial record of bloodshed on the arrival of Christianity to Ireland, although Patrick’s mission was certainly not without hardship. Perhaps the Christian faith preached by Patrick simply offered a convincing alternative to superstition, fear, and empty rituals.

It is also likely that the “ordinary” people would have felt freer to convert after Patrick had converted their kings.

Patrick himself says that he baptized thousands of people. It is unlikely that he himself baptized the entire population — he is said to have consecrated at least 350 bishops, including his nephew, St. Mel of Ardagh, who would have ensured that the faith reached every corner of the island. Over the course of the next century grew one of the chief hallmarks and treasures of early Christian Ireland: the monasteries.

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Father Gerard Quirke, FSSP, is a priest of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. He serves as associate pastor of St. Benedict Parish in Fort Worth.

The fraternity is a clerical Society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical Right, that is, a community of priests who do not take religious vows, but who work together for a common mission in the Catholic Church, under the authority of the Holy See. The fraternity was canonically erected by Pope St. John Paul II in 1988.

Ordained on June 3, 2018, Fr. Quirke was born and raised in Galway on the west coast of Ireland.



I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. /s/ Susan Moses, Editor

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FLOURISHING FAITH

From the fifth century onward, the faith in Ireland continued to prosper. While learning and Christian culture began to decline in much of Western Europe, the Irish monasteries became important centers of learning.

St. Bede, in his eighth-century *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, noted that “many in England, both nobles and commons ... left their own country and retired to Ireland either for the sake of religious studies or to live a more ascetic life.”

The strengthening position of the Church in Ireland along with the growth of the monasteries meant that many monks were able to

leave Ireland to establish new monasteries on the continent — one estimate suggests that in the seventh century the number of monasteries in Gaul increased from 220 to 550, mainly due to this Irish influence.

Prominent characters in medieval Ireland’s scholarly and missionary endeavors include St. Columbanus, Sedulius Scottus, and John Scotus Eriugena. However, the Church in this period was not merely concerned with learning: An enormous number of churches were built and rules existed to ensure the pastoral care of the faithful.

The Church in Ireland continued to increase over the centuries, with many religious orders (such as the Cistercians and the Augustinians) coming to prominence. 🇺🇸

READ THE REST



Discover how the Irish remained faithful despite priest hunters and Viking attacks. Scan the QR code or go to NorthTexasCatholic.org/feature-articles to continue this fascinating history.



Christmas Angels at Work

By Mary Lou Seewoester

Last Christmas, there weren't going to be any gifts for the children of a refugee family recently arrived from Cuba. But with help from Catholic Charities Fort Worth Christmas Angels program, the three children, ages 3 to 8, unwrapped new toys on Christmas morning.

Steve Beck, refugee services supervisor, said the family's father and grandfather were brought to tears when they picked up the gifts, saying they had no money for presents that year.

Volunteer Specialist Kelly Smith said Christmas Angels provided gifts last year for 848 children of clients participating in CCFW programs. The agency's Northwest Campus in Wichita Falls gifted presents to 124 children. She explained that each November, case managers identify families with the greatest need, then submit a wish list for each child to Christmas Angels.

"This is a resource for [families] while they're working on their path out

of poverty," Smith said. "They won't have to worry about how they'll pay for Christmas gifts when Catholic Charities is there to help."

Smith said last year, and during the pandemic, donors bought Walmart gift cards and ordered gifts sent directly to CCFW from an Amazon gift registry. She said 391 children received a \$50 Walmart gift card, 78 received gifts from their Amazon wish list, and 379 children received toys from the program's Toy Shop where case managers can shop for children of clients in any CCFW program.

Volunteer Brenda Gilb, who has coordinated Christmas Angels since 2011, said this year's program will use a hybrid of the gift registry and the pre-pandemic model in which donors purchased and hand delivered gifts to a drop-off location. Feedback from donors indicated they wanted their families to experience the joy of service by shopping for and delivering gifts in person. So, this year, donors can contact the program's email, ChristmasAngels@ccdofw.org

(Mcuba@ccdofw.org for the Northwest Campus) for a list of gifts to purchase.

"I get to witness during drop-off week the joy that people have in giving," Gilb said. "It's not something they have to do. It's something they've chosen to do. There's true joy in that."

Gift drop-off will be Dec. 9 and 10 at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Fort Worth and Dec. 5 at the Northwest Campus.

Smith said donations come not only from Catholic groups and parishes, such as Most Blessed Sacrament Parish in Arlington, St. Philip the Apostle Parish in Flower Mound, and Good Shepherd Parish in Colleyville, but also from non-Catholic faith partners, corporate partners, and individual donors.

"This is a community effort," she emphasized. "We couldn't do it without all of those donors working together." 🇺🇸

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



A BEAUTIFUL story



A museum visitor views "Virgin and Child," 1486.
(NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Masterpieces in the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth inspire and invite viewers to contemplate the life of Christ

By Susan Moses

Many of our parishes are filled with stained glass, statues, and paintings that inspire and lift thoughts heavenward.

However, even older treasures that elevate the mind and nourish the soul can be found at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth.

University of Dallas assistant professor of art history Dr. Estelle Voisin Fonteneau meets her students at the museum each semester for an informal Saturday visit. She called the Kimbell “my absolute favorite museum — that and the Gustave Moreau Museum in Paris.”

The Kimbell, Fonteneau explained, “gives you a good taste and it doesn’t overwhelm. They have the best of each” genre or artist.

For 52 years, this world-class museum has displayed masterpieces in its permanent collection, including many which depict the life of Christ. For the readers of the *North Texas Catholic*, their curators selected eight artworks that tell stories of Jesus from His infancy through the resurrection.

ART AND THE SOUL

When we perceive a beautiful piece of art, said Fonteneau, “You are encountering a taste of the divine; it gives you a taste of maybe what being in the presence of God may be like. It’s transformative.”

She cited Fra Angelico, OP, an Italian Dominican friar who painted in the 15th century. He believed that painting was a form of prayer, and his art invites us to do likewise.

Seeing the original art produces a different response than seeing an image, explained Nancy Edwards, curator of European art at the Kimbell. Studies demonstrate the brain is 10 times more engaged when we encounter the artist’s work as opposed to a poster.



The base of “Virgin and Child” statue is adorned with finely detailed angels. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Fine art also transcends the here and now.

“When you’re standing in front of a work of art itself, you know you’re standing in front of something created by another human, that they stood in front of this 500 years ago, halfway across the world. You’ve made a connection to another culture, far removed in time and in place,” said Nicole Griffin, head of marketing and public relations at the Kimbell.

ADVICE FROM THE PROS

The Kimbell has about 375 pieces of art in its permanent collection, but Griffin said, “Don’t be afraid. Slow down if you see something that draws you in, then just stand there.”

Edwards added, “Spend time with things that you like and then come back another time. Don’t feel that you have to see it all, to rush by it, but choose some things you like.”

When you find an artwork that draws

you in, Edwards continued, “Have confidence. Ask yourself what you’re seeing and enjoy what you’re seeing. The artists are good storytellers, you just have to have the confidence that you’re reading it.”

“Particularly in museums, we try to do things with slow looking. The more time you have with something, the more you discover,” she said.

If you want to learn more, the Kimbell offers audio tours and docent-guided tours. Or simply read the labels beside each artwork.

Are you a planner? The Kimbell’s website has a photograph of each piece, along with a short explanation. You can select pieces to view ahead of time.

The artworks highlighted in this article are in the Kimbell’s permanent collection, which is located in the Kahn building. Admission is free.

There is a charge to view special exhibitions in the Piano Pavilion.

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Master from the Atelier de Saint-Leger, "Virgin and Child," C. 1530-1535. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



The base of "Virgin and Child" statue is adorned with finely detailed popular saints of the region. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Guercino, (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri), Italian, "Christ and the Woman of Samaria," 1619-20. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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"VIRGIN AND CHILD," C. 1530-1535

The specific artist who carved this alabaster statue of Mary and the infant Jesus is unknown, but its characteristics correspond to other statues from the Atelier of Saint-Leger, a French workshop.

Mary is represented as both a youthful virgin mother and the queen of heaven, wearing an ornate crown and finely detailed robes with traces of gilding.

Baby Jesus holds a pomegranate, a symbol of resurrection and eternal life.

Edwards explained Jesus is often represented as a man/child in works of art, representing the wisdom of the Word Incarnate.

"VIRGIN AND CHILD," 1486

Just around the corner from the French alabaster sculpture, you'll find another Mary with the baby Jesus, this time sculpted in silver and gold.

Mary is depicted as the Virgin of the Apocalypse, with the crescent moon at her feet and a crown of 12 stars, and Jesus hold an orb with a cross to show his dominion over the world.

This statue bears the shield of the bishop of Eichstatt, a city in southern Germany, and its base is adorned with finely detailed angels and popular saints of the region.

Edwards said this "exquisitely crafted" sculpture is rare — most have been melted down.

"THE MADONNA AND CHILD WITH SAINTS JOSEPH, ELIZABETH, AND JOHN THE BAPTIST," C. 1485-88

Why is baby Jesus so often naked in religious artwork? To emphasize the mystery of the incarnation — Jesus, fully God, has become fully man, explained Edwards.

In this devotional painting by Italian artist Andrea Mantegna, Mary gazes tenderly at her Son while a young John the Baptist looks up in awe.

"THE RAISING OF LAZARUS," 1310-11

Visitors will wait until next year to see this painting by the Italian artist Duccio di Buoninsegna of Italy, which is currently on loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

Created as part of the altarpiece made for the high altar of Siena Cathedral, it portrays the moment when Lazarus comes out of the tomb. Despite the crowd of mourners, the gaze between Jesus and Lazarus is palpable.

"CHRIST AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA," 1619-20

This larger-than-life oil painting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is framed closely, drawing you into their conversation.

Possibly painted for Pope Gregory XV, the Italian artist Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri) shadows her face to indicate she doesn't completely understand Jesus' offer of living water.

"THE SACRAMENT OF ORDINATION (CHRIST PRESENTING THE KEYS TO SAINT PETER)," 1636-40

Nicholas Poussin created a series of seven oil paintings, each depicting a sacrament.

For Holy Orders, the French painter chose the Gospel account of Christ giving the keys of heaven and Earth to the kneeling Peter.

The background enriches the storytelling. Judas stands at the back of the Twelve Apostles with his face shadowed, and Saint Paul reads in the background, unaware of Jesus.

"CHRIST BLESSING," C. 1500

The incarnation, the resurrection — Giovanni Bellini incorporates details to illustrate both mysteries — if you can tear your eyes away from Jesus' gaze.

In the background, a shepherd keeps his flock nearby, and the three Marys hurry along the road to tell the Apostles about the empty tomb in this Italian masterpiece.

"SUPPER AT EMMAUS," 1538

Having arrived at Emmaus, Jesus breaks bread with the two disciples. The table has the bread and wine of the Eucharist as well as eggs, a symbol of resurrection, and cherries, which can represent the blood of Christ or the sweetness of heaven.

Italian painter Jacopo Bassano creates a different story at the peripheries — two characters who don't recognize the divinity of Jesus. A serving boy in fine clothing and a plumed hat represents vanity, and a well-fed innkeeper symbolizes the pleasures of the world. 🍷



Nicholas Poussin, French, "The Sacrament of Ordination, (Christ presenting the keys to Saint Peter)," 1636-40. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Giovanni Bellini, Italian, "Christ Blessing," C. 1500. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Jacopo Bassano, Italian, "Supper at Emmaus," 1538. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Living Water

The sacrament of baptism changes our identity, our family, and our purpose

By Susan Moses

Kristina Mata remembers her baptism — she was baptized as a teen at an Easter Vigil Mass — but she made certain her son, Dominic Davis, won't remember his.

She and her husband, Beverly Davis, had 12-week-old Dominic baptized at St. Andrew Parish in Fort Worth on Sept. 22 in a group baptism with two others.

She didn't want to wait longer, she said, explaining that the couple was eager for their son's life of faith to begin.

So Dominic, like the majority of cradle Catholics, will not remember the most important day of his life.

GATEWAY TO HOLINESS

It's easy to overlook the incredible significance of the day that we don't

remember, but baptism changes our identity, our family, and our purpose.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes the sacrament: "Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission" (1213).

When Matthew Gill, director of formation and evangelization at St. Philip the Apostle Parish in Flower Mound, helps teach baptism to catechumens preparing to enter the Church and to new parents, he lays it on the line.

The sacrament of baptism, he explained, marks a permanent change. "You're claiming that child or that adult for Christ. You're moving them from the

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Zayn Gonzalez is baptized by Father John Shanahan, TOR, at St. Andrew Church in Fort Worth on Sept. 22. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



A stained-glass window depicts the baptism of Jesus at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Hillsboro. (NTC file photo/Juan Guajardo)



Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."

John 3:5



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domain of Satan to the domain of God — the Kingdom of God, the Church. You're expelling original sin and putting in its place sanctifying grace."

He uses the analogy of living in a lousy apartment complex with roaches, flickering lights, and a terrible landlord. There's a new apartment complex on the street, but how do you get there?

"Jesus Christ died for us and conquers the terrible landlord and pays your rent. Now you can move across the street. ... That's just so liberating," he said.

Laura Nelson, diocesan director of faith formation, also described the effects of baptism as a stark contrast.

"We're no longer children of darkness. We're children of the light," she said. "The world's a dark place; we need as much light as we can get, right? A light that never will be extinguished."

A GROWING FAMILY

Through baptism, we are adopted as sons or daughters of God and we become part of God's family.

"In baptism, when we are regenerated and renewed, we're also introduced into the mystical Body of Christ," said Jason Whitehead, diocesan director of evangelization and catechesis.

The Body of Christ includes not just our brothers and sisters visible in the pews, but all the saints in heaven and the souls in purgatory.

"We become, through what the Church calls the grace of adoption, part of God's family. And as part of God's family, we are part of the Body of Christ. We directly participate in His divine life," explained Whitehead.

Ashley and Christopher Gonzalez had their son, Zayn, baptized in the group baptism at St. Andrew Parish with Dominic.

Ashley appreciated the community aspect of having other children, each with an extended family, present.

"Seeing other children get baptized was very special to see," she said, emphasizing that being part of the large family of God offers opportunities to support and be supported on a common journey of faith.



Deacon Jim Crites blesses Madeline Elder with the oil of catechumens during a group baptism liturgy at St. Patrick Cathedral on Sept. 29. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

WHY SO YOUNG?

Infant baptism is a teaching that some Christians don't understand, but Catholics have practiced it from the earliest days of the Church, and with good reason.

The *Acts of the Apostles* refers to entire households being baptized, which would have included children in those multigenerational homes.

In the Old Testament, infant boys were circumcised on their eighth day of life as a sign of the covenant between God and the people of Abraham.

"Some people don't understand why we're baptizing infants because they think the grace comes through belief, and an infant can't believe," said Gill, emphasizing that the sacrament, not belief, confers the sanctifying grace.

In fact, the free grace of God is exemplified in infant baptism, Whitehead said.

"Baptism initiates you into the entire life of grace, and there's no greater example in my mind of the absolute gratuitousness of God's grace — just how free grace really is — than in the example of infant baptism," he said.

A baby has not met any standards or expressed a set of beliefs, but God freely bestows that very first gift, Whitehead said.

Nelson explained that baptism removes the stain of original sin, and even though a baby hasn't done anything wrong, "we still need that mercy, even if we haven't chosen sin, because of the fallen nature of humanity."

"The child as an infant does not know what's happening to them. But the grace is still there and there's nothing getting in the way of them being receptive to the grace because they're very

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A catechumen closes his eyes as holy water is poured on his head during his baptism at the 2022 Easter Vigil Mass at Immaculate Conception Parish in Denton. (NTC file photo/Ben Torres)

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innocent. That grace will come alive and be embodied throughout their life as long as it's nurtured," she continued.

She added that baptism "is like armor in a way, too," equipping the baptized for a spiritual battle. "It's going to help guard and protect that child. Spiritually we need to put them in an environment of the family of God that equips them to be able to handle the challenges that will come ahead."

RESPONDING TO THE GIFT

So the graces of baptism are freely given, but what do we do with the gift?

Our responsibility is to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, live up to the baptismal promises we made or that were made on our behalf by our parents and godparents.

The Church reminds us of those promises each year during the Easter season, when we respond "I do" to questions about rejecting sin and Satan and believing in God in Three Persons.

Baptism equips us to uphold those promises.

Nelson said, "When we enter into the sacrament of baptism, He gives us a share of His life so that we can emulate Him. We can live in union with Him. We can live the life that we're called to live. Without that grace of the sacrament, we're doomed. We can't do it by sheer force of will."

Emulating Jesus means sharing in His ministry as priest, prophet, and king, which we carry out according to our vocation.

"Priests, prophets, and kings were anointed, and Christ means anointed one," said Gill. In baptism, we are anointed with the oil of catechumens and the sacred chrism, "so you're now a little Christ; you are putting on Christ."

For the laity, we share in Christ's role as priest when we grow in personal holiness and sanctification, taking advantage of the graces available in the sacraments.

We are called to be prophets, to share



the Gospel with those in our families, our workplaces, and our neighborhoods.

As kings, we govern our own souls and the lives in our care.

We promise, summarized Whitehead, "first and foremost to keep the faith, live the faith. Not only to live the faith, but to proclaim it, within your own station of life."

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

The baptism liturgy is filled with symbols and prayers that reinforce the importance of our first sacrament and recall allusions to the sacrament in Scripture.

As Father John Shanahan, TOR, conducted the rite at St. Andrew, he told the parents and godparents that he would use the same elements that John the Baptist used when he baptized Jesus at the beginning of His ministry.

Water represents the cleansing of original sin. Nelson explained when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, "The waters did not sanctify him. He sanctified the waters. He was able to make the waters holy instead of the opposite. Isn't that beautiful? He did that for us so that we

could be united with Him."

Although water is most closely associated with baptism, oil is also a meaningful symbol in the liturgy.

The priest or deacon makes a cross on the chest with the oil of catechumens to represent the strength of Christ to fight off temptation. Then he anoints their foreheads with the sacred chrism (also used at confirmations and ordinations) to symbolize sharing in Jesus' roles of priest, prophet, and king.

Parents or the newly baptized are presented with a candle, lit from the Easter candle, to represent the light of Christ, which guides us through the darkness.

A white garment represents Christian dignity and recalls *Galatians 3:27*, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

REMEMBER THIS

Whether you recall receiving the sacrament or not, Catholics remember the gift of baptism every time they bless themselves with holy water. Making the

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Valerie Rosalez is anointed with sacred chrism by Deacon Jim Crites during a group baptism ceremony at St. Patrick Cathedral on Sept. 29. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.

Matthew 28: 19-20



Father John Shanahan, TOR, places a white garment on Zayn Gonzalez during his baptism at St. Andrew Church in Fort Worth on Sept. 22. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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Sign of the Cross with holy water as we enter a holy place helps us remember we are called to be in union with Christ and part of the family of God.

“Things like holy water really help us to ground ourselves physically in a spiritual

reality,” said Nelson.

In addition to holy water blessings, baptismal anniversaries can be acknowledged in simple ways or by making an event of it.

The Catholic Church grants a plenary indulgence for those who renew their baptismal promises on the anniversary of their baptism.

Even better, suggests Gill, is renewing the promises at the church where it happened. He has made cross-town pilgrimages by taking his children to the parishes where they were baptized on their baptismal anniversaries.

Renewing the baptismal promises “only takes five minutes,” he said, but can serve as a springboard for sharing memories of that day. “All those roots are very important — to know where you come from and to know a little bit about that day,” he said.

Some families celebrate baptismal anniversaries with a special meal or a cake and a relighting of a person’s baptismal candle.

Nelson discovered a simple method to recognize the significance of her sacraments. When going through some old documents from her childhood, she noted the anniversary dates of her baptism, first holy Communion, and confirmation and added them to her calendar.

Each year, when she receives the reminders, she pauses for a prayer of gratitude.

She also recommends showing your children photographs and reminiscing about their baptisms.

Godparents, who promise to help the



Now, why delay? Get up and have yourself baptized and your sins washed away, calling upon His name.

Acts 22:16



The holy water font at St. Peter the Apostle Church in White Settlement. (NTC file photo/Juan Guajardo)





Rosa Samaniego lights her son Aaron's candle during a group baptism ceremony at St. Patrick Cathedral on Sept. 29. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

newly baptized grow in the faith, can also acknowledge baptismal anniversaries, even if it's just a call or a text.

JUST THE BEGINNING

Fr. Shanahan told the families of those assembled at St. Andrew for baptism, "This is the beginning of the journey for the children, and the Church is here to support you, to help you to show each other how to pray, how to act justly, how to walk humbly, and how to love tenderly God, your maker."

The graces we receive in baptism — forgiveness of sin, rebirth as sons and daughters of God, incorporation into the Body of Christ, a share in Christ's mission — are just the start.

The *Catechism* teaches, "Baptism is the gateway to life in the Holy Spirit and the doorway which gives access to the other sacraments" (CCC 1213).

We receive the graces of baptism once, but all sacraments of the Church have been instituted by Jesus to strengthen the



Carlos Vargas smiles after being baptized by Father John Shanahan, TOR, at St. Andrew Church in Fort Worth on Sept. 22. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Church and to help us grow in holiness by sanctifying grace.

"Grace is everything," said Whitehead. "That's the reason for all of the

sacraments, ultimately, to communicate supernatural power for living a supernatural life in this life and to see God face-to-face in the next life." 🇺🇸



Blessed to teach

Beloved Nolan Catholic biology teacher Don Cox reflects on vocation in education

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

As a high school freshman, Bella Steele already knew which teacher would help her don the graduation robe when the time came to graduate.

A traditional rite of passage at Nolan Catholic High School, the robing ceremony celebrates the relationship between a student and faculty

member who inspired him or her.

“Mr. [Don] Cox was my favorite teacher at Nolan — always encouraging and willing to provide help if needed,” remembered the 2024 Nolan graduate. “He made biology easy.”

Now a freshman at Texas A&M University, the 19-year-old chose biology as a major with the hope of pursuing a career in dentistry.

“I liked what we did in biology class,” Steele

said. “It was a factor in my going in that direction.”

After 50 years in the classroom — nine of them at Nolan Catholic — Don Cox knows how to engage students in the classroom using creativity, humor, and kindness. His blueprint for innovative lesson plans was inspired by a 1974 film “Conrack” based on the autobiographical book “The Water is Wide” by Pat Conroy. The story centers around Conroy’s experiences trying to teach a group of underprivileged, illiterate 10- to 13-year-olds who lived on an island off the coast of South Carolina and knew little of the real world. His unconventional teaching methods led to battles with narrow-minded school district administrators.

“He did all these different things with the kids, like teaching them to swim and showing them wildflowers,” recalled Cox, who worked as a hospital lab technician during college and initially considered studying medicine. “After seeing the movie and reading the book, I thought I’d really like to be a teacher.”

His medical background made teaching biology a natural choice. After graduating from the University of North Texas, Cox began his career in education at Duncanville High School, where he remained for 22 years. A new principal then hired him at his alma mater, Richland High School, telling the seasoned educator, “I need someone who can work with kids because I have a lot of people here who can’t do that.”

Frustrated by an overemphasis on student performance on standardized testing, Cox left the public school system for St. Vincent

Episcopal School and then Nolan Catholic.

“I was doing all this practice teaching and couldn’t be creative,” he pointed out. “In the private schools, I got to do the things I love to do.”

How do you make science interesting to distracted teenagers? For Cox, it involves telling a few classroom jokes, engaging students in conversation, and finding new ways to teach old concepts.

“Between classes I sit out in the hall and when the kids go by, I give them a high five or talk about the football game,” said the ardent Texas Longhorns and Cowboys fan. “I’m always trying to encourage the kids as much as I can.”

His positive energy generates results. Four years ago, a student struggling academically confided to Cox he didn’t expect to graduate from Nolan. “So I began working with him and he became motivated,” said the veteran teacher. “The kid is graduating this year and I’m excited for him. That’s what keeps me coming back when people ask if I’m going to retire.”

Dedicated to preparing tomorrow’s faith-filled leaders, Nolan Catholic nurtures students and provides a top-tier learning environment. The young men and women he meets in the classroom are exceptional, according to Cox.

“When I give assignments out, kids say thank you. They’re so polite,” he explained. “And I haven’t heard any cuss words in the nine years I’ve been here. Teaching the kids at Nolan nourishes my soul. They inspire me to be a better teacher.”

Raised Southern Baptist, Cox joined the Episcopal church after marrying his wife, Kit, but the

couple are now Anglican. Nolan’s commitment to faith and character development is something he embraces.

“At Nolan, we get a chance to teach, and we get a chance to teach faith,” he emphasized. “I love that we pray before class.”

In addition to his classroom duties, the 72-year-old is the announcer at Nolan Viking football and basketball games as well as school dances.

“He’s known as the golden voice of the Vikings,” enthused Tom Roanhaus, dean of student formation. “He does announcing at other places too, but always makes time in his schedule for Nolan.”

The school’s former security and safety director came to Nolan the same year as Cox and praises his colleague’s ability to connect with students.

“Don is really here for the kids and he’s a great teacher of the subject matter — biology,” Roanhaus continued. “Parents know when their student is in Don’s class, he’s teaching to the kid and not the ‘seat.’”

Although well past the age when most teachers retire, promises made will keep the Arlington resident in the classroom a little longer.

“There are a lot of kids who want me to robe them and that’s a big deal here,” explained Cox, who’s already committed to presenting the Marian blue graduation gown to seniors in 2025 and 2026. “People always ask me when I’m going to retire, but I work with a great group of kids who want to learn and amazing colleagues. I just love what I’m doing. I love to teach.” 🇺🇸



BOUND TO HIM

Joel and Veronica Plasencia shed light on the importance of an active faith

By Christina Benavides

In his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis introduces the concept of *panta hypoménei*, a love that endures trials with positivity. He describes it as a love that “stands firm in hostile surroundings” and “never gives up, even in the darkest hour” (118).

Longtime St. George parishioners Joel and Veronica Plasencia have each faced many trials that deepened their understanding of *panta hypoménei*. Together, they reflect on how God led them to one another and how they have shared His love with their five children and beyond.

A ROUGH START

Joel grew up a cradle Catholic but turned away from his faith after the tragic murder of his pregnant first wife by a distant relative and the subsequent death of his mother from cancer. Feeling abandoned by God, he embraced atheism, drugs, alcohol, and violence over the next decade.

During his second prison sentence in that dark period, Joel rediscovered his faith through the help of a visiting priest

and confession. For the first time in years, he prayed for help to turn his life around, promising to dedicate his life to God if he found a way out of the 30-year sentence he was facing.

In what he believed was divine intervention, all charges against him were dropped in the following court hearings, and his case was dismissed. “I left prison and began attending Mass again because God answered my prayer,” Joel said. Over the next year, he prayed regularly and experienced another miracle as God helped him overcome his addictions with ease.

RADIO ROMANCE

Veronica grew up in a traditionally Catholic family in Monterrey, Mexico. While visiting a cousin in Fort Worth, she heard her name in connection with Joel’s during a song dedication on the radio. Assuming it was a joke, she dedicated a song to Joel in return.

For two weeks, they played the radio game, until finally, the radio host gave Veronica’s number to Joel. That night, Joel prayed to God for a wife.

“I had prayed for God to help me with my drug addiction, alcoholism, my rage



◀ Joel and Veronica Plasencia pose before a painting of Jesus in a workroom at St. George Parish in Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Cuajardo)

and resentment, but I'd yet to pray for help with women," he said.

Once they connected, they had long phone conversations. They met face-to-face for the first time about a month later. Veronica described it as "love at first sight," saying she immediately felt a deep connection unlike with any previous boyfriends.

They met in October 1998 and married in Monterrey in October 1999 at her childhood parish.

CALLED TO AN ACTIVE FAITH

In the next four years, the Plasencia family grew by three. As they raised their daughters, Joel nurtured his family's faith, affirming, "I had not forgotten my promise; my life was God's."

Never missing Sunday Mass, he walked his family to St. George when then-pastor Father Thu Nguyen called out, "Hey you! What are you doing? Your tattoos! What's that?" Startled, Joel explained his tattoos symbolized past hardships. Fr. Nguyen responded, "Oh, you believe in God? Your faith is strong? You are going to work with teens and share your story."

The encounter sparked Joel's work with Life Teen ministry at St. George.

POWER OF PRAYER

As Joel became more involved in the church, Veronica began to resent Joel for spending so much time away from home.

"He would come back tired from Life Teen, and I was angry that he couldn't spend time with us," Veronica said. One day, overwhelmed with frustration, she recalled Joel taking her hands and saying, "My love, please, let's pray."

Initially resistant, she eventually joined him in praying the Lord's Prayer.

"As we prayed, I felt a release of something dark and heavy, and by the end, peace filled me," she said. This experience renewed their commitment to God and to each other, and they learned to take their anger and resentment to prayer and confession.

With their faith and commitment strengthened, the couple welcomed two more children in the following years.

THE SECRET TO AN ENDURING MARRIAGE

The Plasencias enjoy seeing older couples at Mass, and Joel often seeks their advice on marriage.

"I ask them, 'What is your secret?' and many say, 'Divorce is not an option,'" he recalled. The Plasencias credit this wisdom as essential for navigating life's ups and downs, knowing their marriage involves not just two but three: "God has always been there; I don't know how we would've managed otherwise," Veronica said.

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

As their Silver Anniversary approached, Joel and Veronica considered a small renewal ceremony and Mass with their five children and close family. Instead, they drove to the hospital to be with their eldest daughter, who gave birth to their first granddaughter the morning after their anniversary.

"The gift we received for our 25th anniversary was our granddaughter," Joel said.

SCHOOLED IN FAITH

All five of the Plasencia's children attended St. George Catholic School for primary education, but the couple agrees it is equally important for children to see their parents keeping the faith.

"We can provide our kids with all the education on the faith as we'd like," Joel observed. "But if the parents aren't living a life of faith — it's like the parable of when Jesus scattering the seeds. ... the message won't last for long."

In addition to working in Life Teen ministry, the couple participates in Parent Life ministry, where parents learn about faith at the same time their children do. This involvement has helped Joel and Veronica find a community of like-minded adults who share their values and love for God. 🇺🇸

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

To Report Misconduct:

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

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

To Report Abuse or Suspected Abuse:

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

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

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



JOY AND SACRIFICE

HE IS: Reverend John Perikomalayil Antony, HGN, pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Fort Worth. In his 12 years in the Diocese of Fort Worth, he has also served at Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Hillsboro; St. Joseph Parish in Rhineland; Santa Rosa Parish in Knox City; Sacred Heart Parish in Seymour; and St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Megargel.

FEELS LIKE HOME: He grew up in a remote farming community in Kerala, India, so his seven years in Rhineland “was a family atmosphere. Being with the farming community was kind of home.”

FAMILY OF FAITH: His parents and grandparents were Catholic, and Fr. Perikomalayil and his three siblings grew up attending Mass and participating in parish youth ministries.

In the fourth grade, he was playing with a cluster of kids outside of the church shortly before Mass began, and the pastor called him to do a reading and serve at the altar. “I was so nervous, but then after the first day, it went on from there. I never looked back,” he said.

PERSISTENT CALL: In eighth grade, he told his mother he was thinking seriously about the priesthood. She reminded him, “That is what you told me when you were a second grader.”

NEW ORDER: At a diocesan vocation camp, he met a priest from the *Heralds of Good News*, which had been founded just 10 years earlier. “We were able to see our founding fathers. I had the privilege of living with our founder — we lived in the same building for about four or five months when I was doing my internship year.”

ORDAINED: January 17, 2004

EARLY ASSIGNMENTS: Fr. Perikomalayil spent the first nine years of his priesthood in India in a variety of assignments: teaching English in minor seminary, financial administration for his order, earning a master’s degree in contextual theology based on the Eucharist, being a school principal, and serving as an assistant pastor.

JOYFUL PRIEST: “I’m happy as a priest. I am both enjoying and also sacrificing at the same time. Every life is, one way or another, a sacrifice and a joy.”

“Unless you love what you do, you cannot do it. That love comes from loving where you belong ... It’s the same case wherever I am assigned. I see that the particular community is well attended and maintained and taught.

WATCH THIS: Fr. Perikomalayil said his example is more impactful than his words. “My perspective about my life — my life is a responsibility, hard work, and dedication.”

SACRED SPACE: “Reverence to the [Blessed] Sacrament is something we need to develop and we need to practice,” said the priest, noting chewing gum and chatter are not welcome in the sanctuary.

LEISURE: Fr. Perikomalayil is usually found in the parish office or helping with maintenance, often with his 90 pound Great Pyrenees/lab mix nearby. At least twice a month he meets with his brother priests to cook, to eat, and to spend time together.


A BEAUTIFUL LANDMARK: Shortly after he arrived at St. Mary of the Assumption in July 2022, he began the planning (and requisite fundraising) to restore the beauty of the parish, which was completed in 1924.

Renovations were finished in October, including new ceiling murals which represent the Sorrowful and Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary and complement the stained-glass windows which depict the Glorious and Joyful Mysteries.

He extends an invitation for all to attend a Mass at the parish and experience its sacred beauty. 🇺🇸



NTC/Juan Guajardo



Trust in His light

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (*John 1:4-5*).

Why is it so easy to look around and become discouraged? Why are there so many problems in my family, my community, my church, my world? Why does still so much darkness remain in myself? Why have I not overcome the darkness? This small passage from John’s Gospel offers us answers.

John is speaking about the creation of humanity and also about man today. Life itself belongs to God. Thus, the life of humanity, of creation, flows from the very life of God. Its source is in God.

Particularly in human beings, however, this life is a light. It is a light that guides man through life. It draws him towards goodness, truth, and the beautiful things of Earth. It also serves as a guiding principle that informs him of what is good and what is evil. What should he do? What should he not do?

This very light is what allows him to

perceive the good, but it also is the very reason he is able to perceive that the darkness around him is, in fact, dark. Without this light, darkness would seem normal.

Thus John’s answer to the discouragement caused by darkness is firstly, be grateful and filled with hope. Be grateful for the light inside of you that can both notice darkness for what it is, and hope, strive for, and pray that your light grows brighter to eliminate it.

John also illumines us to a second reality that instills hope.

The light is in fact shining!

While darkness often seems more apparent, we do see many lights. We see them in ourselves, in our few virtues. We see them in various places in community, in our families. We see many lights in our churches. Many forces for good are radiating around us drawing us towards peace and a deep sense of joy.

As St. Paul reminds us in *1 Thessalonians 5:16*, “Rejoice always.” We rejoice always because there is in fact light. It is present and it is strong, not primarily because of us, but because this light is the

life of God in us.

Finally, John encourages us. He does this not with a wish or hope for future, but with a present reality. The darkness has in fact not overcome the light. Many sources of darkness have tried again and again to overcome this light. Early civilizations tried to stomp out Christianity by martyring its members, unaware that this would only make the light stronger. Our world has faced everything from natural disasters to heinous crimes on a massive scale, particularly in the last century. The light remains. There are still good people. There are still faithful and saintly followers of Jesus Christ. And the Church remains.

During this Advent season, let our candle wreaths remind us that the lights will not go out. The darkness will not prevail in the end. And most especially, let us take great confidence that even if our own lights seem dim, the True Light Himself is coming on Christmas day: to offer us His own brightness, His own joy, His own life. ✝



Fr. Brett Metzler

Father Brett Metzler serves as Chaplain at Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth and as the Vocations Director for the diocese.

PESCADOR DE HOMBRES

El Diácono Mauricio Hernández celebra 15 años de responder al llamado

Por Christina Benavides

“**T**ú has venido a la orilla, no has buscado ni a sabios ni a ricos, tan sólo quieres que yo te siga”.

Así comienza la canción del Pescador de Hombres, la cual tiene un significado muy especial para el Diácono Mauricio Hernández. Al cumplirse los 15 años desde que fue ordenado al diaconado en septiembre del 2009, el diácono reflexiona cómo Dios lo ha guiado a lo largo de su vida.

“SONRIENDO, HAS DICHO MI NOMBRE”

El Diácono Hernández creció a sólo dos casas de su futura esposa en Ciudad de México, pero la verdadera piedra angular de su relación fue la iglesia. Se enamoró de Ofelia al escucharla cantar en el coro de la iglesia. En su camino hacia el trabajo se detenía para verla; ella era entonces la secretaria de la parroquia.

“Duramos tres años de novios, entonces nos casamos y nació nuestro primer hijo”, comparte. Al pasar un tiempo, la joven familia de tres emigró a Texas en busca de mejores oportunidades.

“Así como nos vinimos muchos, nos vinimos no más con la esperanza y la bendición de nuestros padres para

empezar a buscar una nueva vida”, explica.

Luego de establecerse en Weatherford, Hernández, que en ese momento tenía 20 años, recibió la noticia del fallecimiento de su padre. No pudo asistir al entierro y el joven se sumió en profundo dolor. Recurrió a su fe en busca de consuelo y asistió a su primer retiro de Cursillos.

“Ahí fue el inicio de mi conversión”, reflexiona el Diácono Hernández. “Le prometí al Señor que ya no trabajaría para nadie más, sino sólo para lo que realmente valía la pena. Y lo único que vale la pena es Jesús.

“Entonces empecé a estudiar y a descubrir el tesoro que mi papá, que en paz descansé, me había dejado y que todos mis antepasados me habían dejado en la fe y el amor de la Iglesia Católica — la fe en Cristo”, asevera.

Después de varios años de estudiar y cultivar su fe, le recomendaron que considerara ingresar a la formación diaconal.

Al principio se mostró reacio, pero con el apoyo de su esposa, Hernández decidió discernir esa llamada.

El diácono afirma que “Dios me fue llevando, me fue llevando, me fue llevando hasta recibir la institución al acolitado. Sentí el llamado y escuché el



Diácono Mauricio Hernández y Padre James Amasi, SAC. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

llamado del Señor durante un canto, el Canto del Pescador de Hombres”.

“Clarito escuché la voz decir, ‘Mauricio, sígueme’”, recuerda el Diácono Hernández. “Yo buscaba quién me hablaba, pero no había nadie”.

“TÚ NECESITAS MIS MANOS”

Una vez ordenado como Diácono, él sabía que su asignación parroquial probablemente no lo mantendría en su misma parroquia, donde ellos llevaban más de 20 años.

“El Padre John Kelly, ex párroco de St. Stephen, me había dicho, ‘usted se va a ir a donde haya la necesidad, no donde usted quiera, a donde haya la necesidad’”, recuerda el diácono.

Cuando llegó la carta de su asignación, el Diácono Hernández se despidió de la comunidad de Weatherford con una misa a la que asistió su padrino, que era el mismo sacerdote de su infancia que lo bautizó, ofició su boda y que también hizo la investidura de sus vestimentas diaconales.

Más tarde esa noche, un feligrés le dijo: “Mi hermano, usted ya tiene todos estos hermanos aquí en esta comunidad; ya están aquí. Vaya a encontrar a los otros hermanos que el Señor le tiene allá”, apunta el diácono.

Esas palabras lo inspiraron mientras se dirigía a las comunidades triparcales de Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish en Decatur, St. John the Baptizer Parish en Bridgeport y St. Mary Parish en Jacksboro.

“Desde entonces he estado sirviendo a todos los que puedo, lo más que puedo en estas tres comunidades que amo tanto”, afirma. “Son donde sirvo y he encontrado, así como me dijo mi otro hermano, muchos hermanos allá”.

“ANSIA ETERNA DE ALMAS QUE ESPERAN”

El Diácono Hernández y su esposa Ofelia tuvieron cuatro hijos, pero su hijo mayor “ya está en la casa del Señor” desde el 2013, aclara el diácono.

La muerte de su hijo ha sido muy difícil para él y su familia, “pero por la gracia de Dios, ya lo vamos superando poco a poquito”.

Después en el 2021, el Diácono Hernández fue despedido de su trabajo. Al cabo de unos meses regresó a la parroquia de Weatherford, donde el entonces párroco, el Padre Michael O’Sullivan, lo contrató como asistente pastoral a tiempo parcial.

“Ahí entendí lo que dicen, ‘si estudias lo que te gusta, nunca en tu vida vas a

trabajar’”, añade el diácono. “Y pues es lo que estoy haciendo, lo que me gusta, y siento que no es trabajo. Ya van a ser casi tres años aquí en esta comunidad”.

A principios de este año, el Obispo Michael Olson confirió al Diácono Hernández la asignación de asesor espiritual del Movimiento de Cursillos Hispánicos.

Sus deberes como esposo, padre y líder de la fe mantienen al diácono muy ocupado.

“Debemos balancear en nuestra vida nuestro trabajo y nuestro ministerio para poder servir a Dios porque a través de nuestra familia doméstica, que es la Iglesia doméstica, también estamos sirviendo a Dios”, aconseja el Diácono Hernández.

El consejo nace de su propia experiencia.

“A veces, uno sacrifica mucho, pero uno no se da cuenta hasta pasado el tiempo”, comenta, refiriéndose al tiempo que pasó alejado de la vida de sus hijos, como resultado de las exigencias de su trabajo anterior. “Gracias a Dios, ya se acomodando todo. Ya con más madurez y los años, voy apreciando a nuestros muchachos que Dios nos dejó, y le doy gracias a Dios por haber tener tenido a mi primogénito, que ya está en la casa de Dios”. 🇺🇸



Hogar para una reliquia venerable

Una reliquia de San Pío se instala de forma permanente en la Diócesis de Fort Worth

Por Susan Moses

Mary Tobola rebosaba de energía, aún luego de haber estado 12 horas dando la bienvenida a los visitantes que deseaban venerar las reliquias de San Pío en la Parroquia de St. Peter the Apostle de White Settlement.

Tobola, una voluntaria del ministerio

de San Vicente de Paúl de la parroquia, recibió el encargo de ayudar a distribuir estampillas de oración, vender artículos devocionales y dar a los invitados un breve resumen de las reliquias del Santo Padre Pío que se exhiben en la iglesia.

Tobola y los demás voluntarios acogieron a todos los visitantes con gran hospitalidad. Alrededor de 2,000 personas visitaron la parroquia el 18 de

septiembre para venerar las reliquias del santo italiano. El día comenzó con una misa, celebrada por el Padre Alexander Ambrose, HGN.

A continuación, se presentó una exhibición temporal de cinco reliquias de primera clase; el día culminó con una misa vespertina oficiada por el Reverendísimo Obispo Michael Olson, que bendijo e instaló la reliquia permanente en la

◀ Familias veneran la reliquia del Santo Padre Pío que permanece permanentemente en la Parroquia de St. Peter the Apostle de White Settlement. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

parroquia, que está ubicada en el oeste de Fort Worth. La velada de esa noche concluyó con el estreno del docudrama titulado, “San Pío de Pietrelcina: Hombre de esperanza y sanación”.

UN LUGAR SAGRADO PARA UN SANTO

La reliquia, un vendaje manchado con sangre de una de las heridas en el costado de San Pío, se encuentra permanentemente en un relicario frente al altar de la iglesia. Se exhibe todos los días en la iglesia y el relicario estará disponible tres días al mes a los peregrinos devotos para que tengan la oportunidad de tocarlo. El horario de las visitas se puede encontrar en el sitio web: StPeterFW.com/visitation-hours-and-pilgrimages.

Una reliquia es un objeto físico asociado con un santo, como restos físicos o efectos personales, conservados en lugares sagrados con el fin de ser venerados. La Iglesia Católica enseña que las reliquias se veneran para ayudar a los fieles a centrarse en la vida y las virtudes del santo; y para acercarse a Dios a través de la oración y la intercesión del santo.

El Padre Ambrose, que es el párroco, manifiesta que la Parroquia de St. Peter the Apostle se siente muy “benedicida y feliz” de albergar la reliquia de San Pío. El sacerdote espera que “toque la vida de las personas porque San Pío fue un gran santo y un santo ejemplar”.

ACERCA DE SAN PÍO

San Pío nació en el 1887 en Pietrelcina, Italia, y se unió a la orden de los Capuchinos a la edad de los 15 años. Fue ordenado sacerdote franciscano en el 1910 y sirvió en el ejército como fraile durante la Primera Guerra Mundial.

San Pío recibió en septiembre

del 1918 los estigmas de las cinco heridas que sufrió Jesús durante su Pasión. Las dolorosas heridas permanecieron en su cuerpo durante 50 años. Él fue conocido también por tener visiones y el don de sanación. La santidad y el amor por los demás que lo distinguían atrajo a muchos fieles a buscarlo en la celebración de la misa y en el confesionario, donde a veces permanecía desde el amanecer hasta el atardecer.

Soportó el sufrimiento espiritual y la mala salud con valor, obediencia y devoción a la oración.

Luego de su muerte en el 1968, debido a su santidad y las numerosas manifestaciones milagrosas, el Padre Pío recibió un mayor reconocimiento en todo el mundo. El Papa Juan Pablo II beatificó al Padre Pío en el 1999 y fue canonizado el 16 de junio del 2002.

UNA CRUZ DE PEREGRINOS

La Diócesis obtuvo la reliquia en asociación con la Fundación San Pío, que está llevando y colocando de forma permanente una reliquia en el norte, sur, oeste, este y centro de los Estados Unidos para formar simbólicamente una cruz gigante. Fort Worth es el extremo sur de la cruz y es el segundo lugar que recibe una de las reliquias.

Esta idea surgió de Luciano Lamomarca, que fundó la Fundación San Pío hace 10 años y ha realizado muchas giras con las reliquias de San Pío por los Estados Unidos y alrededor del mundo.

La devoción de Lamomarca y su esposa a San Pío se acrecentó mucho más después de que su primer hijo naciera muerto. “A través de esa adversidad y de esa experiencia tan dolorosa, nos acercamos a San Pío”, Lamomarca declara. “Este hombre humilde, mediante su pobreza y su humildad, ha cambiado muchas vidas”. ✚

NTC/Juan Guajardo

AMBIENTE SEGURO

Para Reportar Mala Conducta Sexual:

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

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

Para Reportar Abuso o si Sospecha de Abuso:

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

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

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





el significado profundo del MATRIMONIO

Símbolos y tradiciones que se encuentran en el matrimonio

Por Karla Silva

“**E**l matrimonio es un sacramento, y este sacramento es un misterio: el misterio mediante el cual dos personas con mentalidades distintas pueden ser una sola”, explica el Diácono Rigoberto Leyva, al referirse al verdadero significado del matrimonio.

Aunque muchos piensan que lo más importante es la fiesta, los invitados, la música, la decoración o la comida, en realidad, hay un significado mucho más profundo. Además, la celebración del Sacramento del Matrimonio dentro de la Iglesia, acompañada de las tradiciones de la comunidad hispana, incluye símbolos de gran significado.

El matrimonio tiene su origen en la creación divina. Dios crea al hombre y a

la mujer con el propósito de que ambos se unan en una sola carne. Con la llegada de Cristo y Su redención, Él restituye al matrimonio a su forma y santidad originales, “De manera que ya no son dos, sino una sola carne. Pues bien, lo que Dios unió no lo separe el hombre”. (*Mateo 19,6*) Además, eleva al matrimonio a la categoría de sacramento, que simboliza, así como Cristo amó y entregó su vida por Su Iglesia, el hombre y la mujer se unen

◀ Isaías y Vanessa de Reza llevan seis años de casados e imparten el programa de preparación para el matrimonio Fully Engaged en la Parroquia de St. Frances Cabrini de Granbury. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

de la misma forma. Por eso, el hombre dejará a su padre y a su madre para unirse a su mujer, entregándose mutuamente, tal y como Cristo se entregó por Su Iglesia, manifiesta el Diácono Leyva al referirse a los orígenes y significado del matrimonio.

“Estar consciente y entender los valores y principios de nuestra fe, así como el significado de este sacramento es parte fundamental de vivir las enseñanzas de Cristo en común unión. Hay que esforzarse mutuamente para poder sobrellevar las cargas de la vida y poder solucionar las diferencias”, señalan Isaías y Vanessa de Reza, que llevan seis años de casados e imparten el programa de preparación para el matrimonio Fully Engaged en la Parroquia de St. Frances Cabrini de Granbury.

No se trata sólo del profundo significado espiritual del matrimonio, sino también de los muchos símbolos y tradiciones que tiene la celebración de este sacramento, que refuerzan y manifiestan la unión sagrada de la pareja.

La celebración sacramental se inicia con una procesión en la que participan el celebrante, los padrinos, el novio y la novia junto con sus padres. En una boda tradicional, el novio espera a la novia en el altar, mientras que ella entra acompañada de su padre. Al llegar al altar, el padre bendice a su hija. Luego, ambos padres entregan respectivamente a la novia y al novio; y comparten palabras de bienvenida y bendición, según explicara el Diácono Leyva.

Nancy Hernández y David Martínez, que celebrarán el Sacramento del Matrimonio el 23 de noviembre del año en curso, comentan que para ellos esta tradición tiene un gran significado. “Que



Nancy Hernández y David Martínez celebrarán el Sacramento del Matrimonio el 23 de noviembre del 2024. (foto de cortesía/David Martínez)

el hombre que ha cuidado de mí todos estos años sea quien me entregue a alguien en quien confía, significa que me está dando su aprobación y dejándome en buenas manos”, asegura Hernández. Por su parte, Martínez afirma que el hecho de que su madre lo entregue a otra mujer con quien formará una familia en el futuro, es muy significativo.

Otra parte de la celebración que tiene un profundo simbolismo es la entrega de los anillos. “El significado de los anillos es confirmar el consentimiento mutuo que los novios se acaban de dar al pronunciar sus votos de amor eterno. En este intercambio,

los esposos dicen: ‘Recibe esta alianza, en señal de mi amor y fidelidad a ti, en el nombre del Padre, del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo’. Esto significa que están haciendo a la Santísima Trinidad testigo de su amor y fidelidad”, destaca el diácono.

El lazo y las arras forman también parte de esta celebración, y ambos poseen un significado muy especial. El lazo representa la unión indisoluble que los novios establecen en ese momento ante Dios. Las arras simbolizan que los esposos lo compartirán todo, “y cuando digo todo, es todo, incluso las cuentas bancarias”, aclara el Diácono Leyva con cierto sentido de humor. Él resalta la importancia de que los matrimonios comprendan el significado de estas tradiciones y las pongan en práctica.

Otra tradición que se lleva a cabo al final de la celebración es la ofrenda de un ramo de flores a la Santísima Virgen María. Hernández y Martínez seguirán esta tradición; y resaltan que para ellos este momento es muy significativo,

ya que, al ofrecer el ramo de flores a la Virgen, le están pidiendo su intercesión, y que los ampare siempre en su matrimonio.

Es importante destacar que el Sacramento del Matrimonio va mucho más allá de los aspectos festivos de la celebración. Está profundamente arraigado en la fe y la doctrina cristiana; y simboliza la unión indisoluble entre un hombre y una mujer, reflejada en Cristo y su Iglesia. Las tradiciones y símbolos que se utilizan, como el lazo, las arras y la ofrenda a la Virgen María, enriquecen este compromiso sagrado y refuerzan su verdadero significado. 🇺🇸

Una imagen de la Virgen de
Guadalupe en la Parroquia de St.
Francis of Assisi en Grapevine.
(NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Bajo el manto de Guadalupe

Cómo los devotos en la Diócesis ruegan por la intercesión de la Virgen de Guadalupe

Por Violeta Rocha

“Escucha, pon bien en tu corazón, hijo mío, el más pequeño: nada te asuste, nada te perturbe tu corazón, tu rostro. ¿No estoy aquí yo, que soy tu madre? ¿No estás bajo mi sombra y resguardo? ¿No soy yo la fuente de tu alegría? ¿No estás en el hueco de mi manto, en donde se cruzan mis brazos?”

El amor a la Virgen de Guadalupe rebasa fronteras y el cultivo de su devoción cubre y se extiende por varias generaciones. A pocos años de cumplirse un siglo de las apariciones de la Virgen Morena en el cerro del Tepeyac en el 1531, las palabras que la Virgen le dijera a San Juan Diego resuenan en nuestra Diócesis de Fort Worth con vibrantes testimonios que hacen palpable una profunda devoción.

“¿No estoy aquí yo, que soy tu madre?”

Guadalupe Vega Sánchez, feligrés e integrante de las Guadalupanas de la Parroquia de St. Jude de Mansfield por 17 años, recuerda peregrinar cuando era muy joven junto a miles de personas desde su natal Guanajuato hasta la Basílica de Guadalupe en la Ciudad de México.

Vega asegura que la Virgen del Tepeyac le permitió convertirse en madre tras 8 años de ardua lucha; y es por eso, que le encomienda a Ella su salud. Su hija, que tiene ya 18 años, fue bautizada con el nombre de “Lupita, porque ella es un milagro”, asevera.

“¿No estás bajo mi sombra y resguardo?”

Bernarda Miramontes, 55, originaria de Jalisco, México, señala que, aunque ya conocía muy bien quién era la Virgen de Guadalupe, no fue hasta que llegó a los Estados Unidos hace 33 años, que su devoción a la Guadalupe creció más profunda. “Ella ha sido mi refugio al estar lejos de México”. Bernarda relata que cuando nacieron sus hijas gemelas,

que tienen hoy 30 años de edad, tras complicaciones a causa de una cesárea, casi pierde la vida. “Fue Ella quien me protegió. Tengo una gran devoción por la Virgen de Guadalupe y siempre le pido que me ayude a perseverar”, agrega.

Miramontes, que es también miembro de St. Jude, coordina el grupo de Guadalupanas tras 27 años de ser feligrés de la parroquia y 9 años de ser Guadalupana. Aun cuando “la fiesta de la Virgen de Guadalupe es muy grande en la comunidad,” ella invita a todos a servir sin importar las dificultades, pues a pesar de sus propios problemas de salud y “con poca escuela” y, de sentirse humilde como San Juan Diego, ella se anima a decir “¡Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!”

“¿No soy yo la fuente de tu alegría?”

Braulio Nambo, el Director del retiro Kairos Mariano, que se realizará tentativamente en diciembre, señala que ser Guadalupanos es la “esencia” de los mexicanos.

Nambo pertenece al Apostolado Kairos de su Parroquia de Immaculate Conception de Denton, desde hace más de diez años. Aprendió música inspirado en el amor a María, a quien le escribe y dedica cantos mientras participa como miembro del coro. Saber que en el manto de la Virgen de Guadalupe se pueden leer notas musicales, que fueron escuchadas por San Juan Diego, “es algo que me llega al corazón”, dijo Braulio. Él fue parte del grupo de los Matachines en Coahuila cuando era niño y lo continuó haciendo con su familia en la parroquia.

La Virgen María “fue el primer tabernáculo de Jesús”. Por eso, al describir la vivencia de un retiro Kairos Mariano, que se realiza más o menos cada 5 años, dice que el retiro representa “el deseo de vivir siendo mariano, de conocer el amor de Mamita María en sus diferentes advocaciones para que nos enamoremos más de Ella y para que nos lleve a Jesús”, explica al hablar sobre la importancia de tener la experiencia de este retiro junto a 35

voluntarios y en el que, por lo general, se atiende a unas 60 personas.

“¿No estás en el hueco de mi manto, en donde se cruzan mis brazos?”

“Juan Diego nos representa ... y la Virgen de Guadalupe nos dice que es nuestra madre y la madre de Jesús”, apunta la Hermana Diana Rodríguez, que es la Directora de Formación Religiosa de la Parroquia de All Saints de Fort Worth desde hace 4 años. “Ella siempre está con nosotros, ya sea el día de su Fiesta o no”, señala. La devoción a la Virgen de Guadalupe debe cultivarse “con cercanía”, sobre todo, es importante que los niños y niñas sepan que “tienen a María como madre, y que siempre pueden acudir a ella. Que estén atentos a Ella porque tiene cada día algo que decirnos”, declara la Hermana Diana, que desde niña creció yendo a la Parroquia de All Saints. Su vocación religiosa surgió al ver “la alegría y la unidad” de las Hermanas Catequistas Guadalupanas, lo que le llevó a entrar en esa Orden y a tomar sus votos en el 1983.

El sábado antes del 12 de diciembre los alumnos del catecismo realizan una pequeña procesión, en que participan danzantes, se hacen cantos y se llevan flores con el fin de hacer una consagración a la Virgen de Guadalupe. La idea es “que a los niños no se les apague ese amor a la Virgen María y para que conozcan quién es la Virgen de Guadalupe”, explica la Hermana Diana. Agrega, además, que la importancia de esta celebración es “que no se apague la devoción guadalupana; y que las nuevas generaciones sigan a la Virgen de Guadalupe”.

María del Carmen Conchas, 44, originaria de Zacatecas, se alegra de que su hijo menor de 9 años cultive su amor a la Virgen de Guadalupe en la Parroquia de All Saints. “Mi mamá me enseñó a recurrir a la Virgen de Guadalupe y ahora yo hago lo mismo con mis hijos. Ella está presente en mi vida cada día; sin su ayuda, yo no pudiera salir adelante”, asevera con firmeza. ✝



UNIDOS A DIOS

Verónica y Joel Plasencia comparten
la importancia de una fe viva

Por Christina Benavides

En su exhortación apostólica *Amoris Laetitia*, el Papa Francisco introduce el concepto de *panta hypoménei*, que se trata de un amor que sobrelleva las pruebas y supera las contrariedades de la vida con espíritu positivo. Lo describe como un amor que se mantiene “firme en medio de un ambiente hostil” y que manifiesta “potencia en contra de toda corriente negativa, una opción por el bien que nada puede derribar”. (118)mo

Joel y Verónica Plasencia, feligreses de la

Parroquia de St. George desde hace mucho tiempo, han enfrentado muchas pruebas que le han llevado a comprender más profundamente el concepto de *panta hypoménei*. Reflexionan juntos cómo Dios los condujo el uno al otro y cómo han compartido el amor de Dios con sus cinco hijos y los demás.

UN COMIENZO DIFÍCIL

Joel fue criado como católico, pero se alejó de su fe después del trágico asesinato de su esposa embarazada y la muerte de su madre por cáncer apenas un par de meses después. Sintióse abandonado por Dios,

abrazó el ateísmo, las drogas, las bebidas alcohólicas y la violencia por alrededor de diez años.

Durante una segunda sentencia de encarcelamiento en ese período oscuro de su vida, Joel redescubrió su fe con la ayuda de un sacerdote visitante y la confesión. Por primera vez en muchos años, Joel oró pidiendo ayuda para cambiar su vida. Prometió dedicar su vida a Dios, si se encontraba una manera de evitar la sentencia de 30 años que enfrentaba.

En lo que él cree fue una intervención divina, todos los cargos en su contra fueron retirados en las siguientes audiencias judiciales y su caso fue desestimado. “Yo salí de la prisión y derechito, fui a misa; quise regresar a la iglesia porque Dios cumplió”, afirma Joel. Durante el año siguiente, oró constantemente y sintió otro milagro cuando Dios lo ayudó a superar sus adicciones con facilidad.

ROMANCE DE LA RADIO

Verónica se crió en una familia católica tradicional en Monterrey, México. Mientras visitaba a un primo en Fort Worth, escuchó su nombre en relación con el de Joel durante la dedicación de una canción en la radio. Asumiendo que era una broma, le dedicó una canción a Joel a cambio.

Siguieron dedicándose canciones uno al otro por la radio, hasta que finalmente, la locutora de radio le dio el número de Verónica a Joel. Esa noche, Joel le rezó a Dios para conseguir una esposa.

“Había pedido a Dios que me quitara mi adicción a las drogas, el alcoholismo, la ira y el rencor, pero aún no había orado para que me ayudara con las mujeres”, explica. Una vez que se conectaron, tuvieron largas conversaciones telefónicas. Pasó un mes antes de que se conocieran cara a cara por primera vez. Verónica lo describe como “amor a primera vista”, pues sintió inmediatamente una conexión profunda con Joel a diferencia de cualquier novio anterior.

Se conocieron en octubre del 1998 y se casaron en Monterrey en octubre del 1999 en la parroquia de la infancia de Verónica.

LLAMADO A UNA FE VIVA

Verónica dio a luz a tres hijas en los siguientes tres años. Mientras criaban a sus hijas, Joel alimentó la fe de su familia y afirma que “No me había olvidado de lo que le dije a Dios, ‘Te entrego mi vida’”. Por eso, Joel nunca faltaba a la misa dominical.

Un día, él caminaba con su familia hasta la Parroquia de St. George cuando el párroco de ese tiempo, el Padre Thu Nguyen, le dijo en voz alta: “¡Oye, tú! ¿Qué estás haciendo? ¡Tus tatuajes! ¿Qué es eso?” Sorprendido, Joel le explicó al sacerdote su historia y que sus tatuajes representaban dificultades pasadas. El Padre Nguyen respondió: “Oh, ¿crees en Dios? ¿Es fuerte tu fe? Pues, vas a trabajar con adolescentes y compartir tu historia”.

Este encuentro inspiró a Joel a unirse al ministerio Life Teen de St. George y lo motivó a seguir profundizando en su fe. Comprendió mejor lo que significaba participar activamente en la parroquia y trabajar activamente para difundir las enseñanzas del evangelio, y leer la Biblia. Ya no se trataba sólo de asistir a misa.

EL PODER DE LA ORACIÓN

A medida que Joel se involucró más en la iglesia, Verónica comenzó a resentirse con él por pasar tanto tiempo fuera de casa. “Luego él llegaba a casa y no hablaba por estar cansado y haber estado hablando tanto allá; y eso me caía gordo a mí”, apunta Verónica. Un día, abrumada por la frustración, recuerda que Joel tomó sus manos y le dijo: “Mi amor, por favor, vamos a orar”.

Al principio se resistía, pero finalmente se unió a él para rezar el Padre Nuestro. “Mientras orábamos, sentí que algo se me quitó dentro de mí; algo fuerte, pesado y feo, y cuando terminé el Padre Nuestro, me sentí bien relajada, así como bien tranquila y me llené de paz”, señala Verónica. Esta experiencia renovó su compromiso con Dios y con Joel. Los dos aprendieron a llevar su enojo y resentimiento a la oración y la confesión.

Con su fe y compromiso fortalecidos, la pareja tuvo dos hijos más.

EL SECRETO PARA UN MATRIMONIO DURADERO

Los Plasencias disfrutaban ver a parejas ancianas agarradas de la mano en la misa. A veces, Joel busca consejos sobre el matrimonio de ellos. “Les pregunto, ‘¿Cuál es su secreto?’ y muchos dicen, ‘El divorcio no es una opción’”, recordó Joel.

Ellos atribuyen esta sabiduría como esencial para navegar por los altibajos de la vida, sabiendo que su matrimonio no involucra sólo a ellos dos, sino a tres. “Dios ha estado siempre ahí; no sé cómo nos la habríamos arreglado de otra manera”, dice Verónica.

CELEBRANDO 25 AÑOS

A medida que se acercaba su aniversario de plata, Joel y Verónica consideraron una pequeña ceremonia de renovación de los votos y una misa con sus cinco hijos y familiares cercanos. En cambio, se dirigieron al hospital para estar con su hija mayor, que dio a luz a la primera nieta la mañana después del aniversario de plata.

“El regalo que recibimos por nuestro 25 aniversario fue nuestra nieta”, agrega Joel.

EDUCADOS EN LA FE

Los cinco hijos de la familia Plasencia asistieron a la escuela de St. George para recibir su educación primaria, pero la pareja está de acuerdo en que es igualmente importante que los niños vean que sus padres viven y mantienen la fe.

“Podemos brindarles a nuestros hijos toda la fe que queramos”, observa Joel. “Pero si los papás no están viviendo y practicando la fe, es como la parábola de cuando Jesús tiró las semillas... el mensaje no durará mucho”.

Además de trabajar en el ministerio de Life Teen, la pareja participa del ministerio de Parent Life, donde los padres aprenden sobre la fe al mismo tiempo que lo hacen sus hijos. Esta participación ha ayudado a Joel y Verónica a encontrar una comunidad de adultos con ideas afines que comparten sus valores y el amor hacia Dios. 🇺🇸

Responsabilidad de cuidar

Antes de comenzar mi jornada como parte del equipo de la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro de la Diócesis de Fort Worth a principios del 2019 lo único que sabía sobre este programa era que la capacitación que ofrecen era un requisito para todos. Al hablar de su función, nunca hubiera pensado en la palabra “ministerio”.

Cuando asumí este puesto el primer día pensaba que mi tiempo estaría dedicado mayormente a las políticas y procedimientos a seguir. No obstante, todas estas nociones comenzaron a cambiar ya en mi segundo día de trabajo. Miré un mapa de la diócesis y me pregunté cómo podríamos supervisar todos esos lugares y estar a cargo de todas esas personas.

El director anterior de Ambiente Seguro, Richard Mathews, me hizo cambiar de perspectiva al decirme con firmeza: “Responsabilidad. Somos responsables de las personas de nuestra diócesis”.

Ese día, a través de ese breve intercambio, se plantó una semilla en mí: estamos llamados a servir, amar y protegernos unos a otros como personas de fe. Somos un solo cuerpo; y nadie es más o menos importante que nadie.



Alma García

Esto es lo que me impulsa cada día para ejercer el *ministerio* de Ambiente Seguro. Es un llamado que mueve a 103 coordinadores, 207 facilitadores y a cada voluntario de la parroquia a recordar constantemente que tenemos la *responsabilidad* de salvaguardar a los más vulnerables. No sabemos las batallas que otras personas podrían estar librando, o por las que hayan pasado mientras oramos junto a ellas.

Con demasiada frecuencia nos sentimos preocupados por nuestros trabajos y tareas, siempre preguntándonos qué más hay que hacer. ¿Cumplí con los requisitos? ¿Logré todo lo que estaba en mi lista?

Aunque ambas son preguntas muy válidas, no podemos olvidarnos de que el Ambiente Seguro va mucho más allá de llenar formularios y asistir a sesiones de formación.

Por eso implica presentarse cada dos años con una mente abierta y un corazón sincero cuando vamos a renovar nuestra certificación. Los voluntarios laicos tienen que hacerse las debidas preguntas, aunque sean difíciles, y asumir la responsabilidad de sus ministerios, así como de las personas que participan activamente en ellos.

Debemos tomarnos un tiempo para reflexionar si queremos ser la voz que

habla por los demás; y siempre debemos esforzarnos por ver y comprender verdaderamente la dignidad que cada persona tiene inherentemente.

El Padre José Ignacio Olvera Álvarez, CORC, párroco de Holy Name of Jesus de Fort Worth, expresó acertadamente en su charla a los líderes del Ministerio Hispano en septiembre que éstos son *nuestros* ministerios; y que es *nuestro* deber hacer que nuestras parroquias sean lugares seguros para todos.

Más de 80 líderes de diversos ministerios de toda la diócesis que se habían congregado hicieron un compromiso con sus comunidades y entre sí. Brotó así esa noche la primera hoja de la semilla que fue plantada hace mucho tiempo y la esperanza comenzó a florecer.

La esperanza resonó en los pasillos del Centro Católico cuando los líderes de los ministerios reafirmaron su respuesta al llamado y se comprometieron entre sí a sumarse a la importante tarea de la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro de proteger a los más vulnerables. Al hacerlo con amor y compasión, la esperanza aún podría resonar en los corazones de todos aquéllos a quienes servimos. ✝

Alma García, coordinadora de Ambiente Seguro de la Diócesis de Fort Worth.



NUESTRO PASTOR HABLA

Obispo Michael F. Olson, STD, MA

OBISPO MICHAEL OLSON
es el cuarto Obispo de la
Diócesis de Fort Worth.



@BpOlsonFW

¿ESPERANZA O CIERRE?

REFLEXIÓN SOBRE LA INADMISIBILIDAD DE LA PENA DE MUERTE

La Congregación (ahora llamada Dicasterio) para la Doctrina de la Fe promulgó el 11 de mayo del 2018 una reformulación del Canon 2267 del *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica* sobre la moralidad del recurso a la pena de muerte. Esta nueva formulación se hizo como parte del oficio de magisterio del Papa Francisco en conjunto con las enseñanzas articuladas por sus predecesores más recientes, incluidos el Papa Benedicto XVI y el Papa San Juan Pablo II. La parte pertinente de la nueva formulación afirma: “Por tanto, la Iglesia enseña, a la luz del Evangelio, que **la pena de muerte es inadmisibles** porque atenta contra la inviolabilidad y la dignidad de la persona’ y se compromete con determinación a su abolición en todo el mundo”.

Si bien el uso del término “moralmente inadmisibles” no coloca la pena de muerte al mismo nivel que pecados como el asesinato o el aborto, que son “inherentemente malos” porque la Iglesia siempre ha enseñado que las circunstancias nunca pueden justificar su comisión, el término “moralmente inadmisibles” transmite que nuestra comprensión de la dignidad humana y el bien común de la sociedad ha evolucionado y que la pena de muerte ya no puede utilizarse como un medio eficaz, justo y coherente para honrar el valor de la vida humana de quienes han

sido asesinados y cuyos seres queridos sobrevivientes se han visto agraviados por tal violencia pecaminosa.

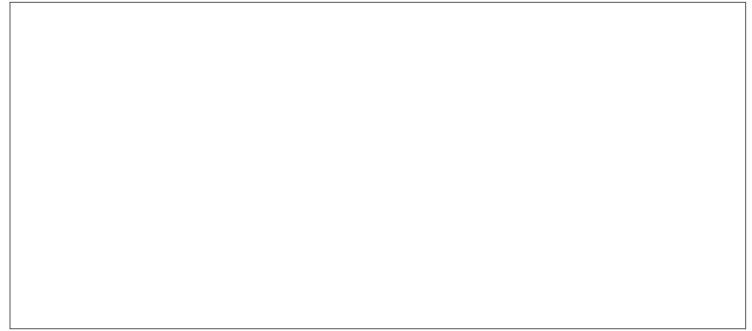
El contenido de la nueva formulación del Canon 2267 nos ha de llevar a la oración y reflexión constantes al respecto. Un punto de la formulación que les ofrezco para su consideración es que “ha surgido una nueva comprensión de la importancia de las sanciones penales impuestas por el Estado”. Antes del desarrollo del Estado secular, se entendía que el papel del gobierno civil incluía el fomento de las dimensiones espirituales de la dignidad humana que se basaban en los presupuestos del juicio divino y la vida eterna. La imposición de la pena de muerte en casos de asesinato incluía la importancia de que el asesino convicto buscara el perdón de Dios y de aquellos perjudicados por su pecado en preparación para el juicio divino, que le evitaría la condenación eterna y evitaría el daño al bien común mediante la venganza individual.

Sin esta presuposición cristiana del juicio divino y de la dignidad humana tal como se reconoce y defiende jurídicamente por parte del Estado, este significado moral de la acción del Estado se pierde y es reemplazado por una forma mecanizada de venganza que sólo promete una sensación de cierre a los seres queridos de las víctimas de asesinato, todavía comprensiblemente enojados por la

injusticia del asesinato perpetrado contra su ser querido.

Sólo el mundo moderno y sus residuos posmodernos, con su traslado de Dios a la esfera privada de la sociedad humana y su sustitución por el Estado en la esfera pública, serían tan osados como para sugerir que la ejecución de un criminal bastaría para cerrar el hueco dejado en la vida de los seres queridos por la muerte violenta e intencional de su ser querido en beneficio del interés común de la sociedad. Esta oferta se hace con la audaz presuposición de que la vida humana y su fin merecen un cierre humano. ¿Cierre para quién? El cierre prometido por los defensores de la pena de muerte sugiere una finalidad que sólo puede tener sentido si se considera que este mundo es todo lo que existe, y que los poderes de este mundo tienen, sobre esta base, una voz concluyente en la cuestión de dar y quitar la vida: una responsabilidad que recae sólo en Dios.

El cierre de dicha herida no cura la herida. Sólo la esperanza en Dios puede traer tal curación. La esperanza condena la injusticia del asesinato. La esperanza cristiana reconoce que la acción humana por sí sola no puede producir la satisfacción que deseamos, sino sólo la acción humana en cooperación con el plan creativo de Dios para la vida humana y que nos llama a la justicia auténtica tanto a través de la Ley Natural como de la Sagrada Revelación. ✝



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