

BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH



NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC

neighbors
under pressure

NOV - DEC 2025
VOL. 41 | NO. 6

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

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Human division; Catholic unity

Between the time I'm writing this and the time you're reading this, the details will change but the headlines will remain the same, reflecting the division and violence in our society.

The vitriol seems firmly entrenched, with each pointing a finger and calling the opposite side evil, or worse. The outlook seems bleak and immutable.

Until I go to Mass, that is, where I find a crowd of people who vary in ethnicity, economic status, age, and background. According to the times, we should be divided, but there we stand (or sit or kneel), united to worship Jesus.

Especially as the congregation processes to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, I'm struck by the image of all the individuals on the journey to our heavenly destination.

But how do I keep my mind fixed on the peace and hope of Jesus when my focus gets distracted by current events? And once my attention gets transfixed by the scandal or crisis of the day, it's difficult not to feel pulled to one side or another, like a fan at a football game wanting my side to win. Strangers become heroes or opponents.

Turning to Scripture is an effective reset. Jesus asks us to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (*Matthew 5:44*). I've added to my daily prayer list a few politicians and other public figures who, while I wouldn't consider them enemies, do perturb me.

Prayer has softened my heart toward them, and if my prayers bless them in some way, all the better.

Another Bible verse reminds me to limit my time spent with social media and the news, to consume enough information to be a responsible citizen, but not riveted to a screen, absorbing current affairs as a spectator sport.

"Think of what is above, not of what is on Earth" (*Colossians 3:2*).

By filling our minds with Jesus — in Scripture, in the Eucharist, and in prayer — and trying to live a life of charity, may we bring the hope and peace of Jesus into a world in need.

Susan Moses

EDITOR

Views from the Pews

Fall finds the 17 Catholic schools in the Diocese of Fort Worth in full swing, with sports, clubs, and service adding enrichment to the regular curricula of academic classes and faith formation.



NTC/Kevin Bartram

Catholic Bowl. Sacred Heart Catholic School (pictured above) and Nolan Catholic High School were two of the six teams who participated in the fifth annual Catholic Bowl, this year held for the first time at Choctaw Stadium in Arlington.

Acknowledge and appreciate. Each year, St. Joseph Catholic School in Arlington shows its appreciation for community service given by first responders by inviting them to breakfast and giving them cards made by the students.



NTC/Rodger Mallison

Honoring Our Lady. On Oct. 7, the feast day of Our Lady of Victory, students at Nolan Catholic High School in Fort Worth prayed a Rosary outdoors surrounding the statue of Our Lady of Victory, the patroness of the school.




NTC/Richard Rodriguez

THERE'S MORE

Find more photos of these events and others here:

North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.com





Bearing witness to Good News

World Mission Sunday encourages prayer and participation in global missions

PROSPER — World Mission Sunday is an invitation for the universal Church to pray for the fruitful and flourishing success of missionary efforts around the globe.

On Oct. 19, Bishop Michael Olson celebrated World Mission Sunday Mass at St. Martin de Porres Parish in Prosper.

During his homily, Bishop Olson reminded the congregation of our shared responsibility to promote the Gospel message in every way possible. “We can and should support missionary work with our financial gifts, but even more, we must seek to live as faithful disciples and loving friends of the Lord Jesus and so bear witness to everyone we meet that Jesus Christ is Lord,” he said.

While reflecting on St. Luke’s Gospel, Bishop Olson explained who is called to participate in mission work and why. “Jesus commissions all of His disciples, all of the members of His Church, to share the Good News among those who have yet to hear the Gospel and also those who are in need of being reminded of the Gospel that they have



Holding her award-winning art, Diana Uytingco stands with Bishop Michael Olson.

NTC/Kevin Bartram

already received,” he said. “It is up to us to ensure that when He comes again, He will indeed find faith on the Earth.”

Prior to the final blessing, the bishop recognized Diana Uytingco, a freshman at Nolan Catholic High School and alumna of St. Andrew Catholic School in Fort Worth.

Uytingco is a grand prize winner of the Missionary Childhood Association National Christmas Artwork Contest. Her depiction of the Nativity will be the official national Christmas card for the Pontifical Mission Societies.

— Jennifer Johnson



Educators honored for milestone anniversaries



Sandy Townsend, standing center between Bishop Michael Olson and Superintendent Frank Perez, has taught at St. Andrew Catholic School in Fort Worth for 45 years. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

FORT WORTH — On Friday, Oct. 10, Bishop Michael Olson joined Diocesan Superintendent of Schools Frank Perez at Nolan Catholic High School to honor teachers and staff who are celebrating milestone anniversaries this school year in diocesan Catholic schools.

This year, 60 teachers were recognized with a pin and a certificate in gratitude for their service to Catholic education in the Diocese of Fort Worth with length of service ranging from five to 45 years.

For a full list of the honorees, go to NorthTexasCatholic.org/local-news.



Flower Mound Jubilee

Pilgrims of Hope visit St. Philip the Apostle Parish

FLOWER MOUND — Pilgrims began arriving shortly after St. Philip the Apostle Parish in Flower Mound was designated a Jubilee Church by Bishop Michael Olson in early February.

Some came quietly, participating in Mass, reconciliation, and prayer as part of a personal, solitary journey to earn the indulgences granted during this Jubilee year. Others came in groups eager to share the spirituality of this once-every-25-year tradition.

Denise Koch, communications coordinator for St. Philip, was part of the team that prepared to welcome them. “The first thing we did was create a prayer card with the Jubilee prayer on the back and a picture of our church, so we would have prayer cards available for them to commemorate their visit,” Koch said.

Koch estimated the parish has

hosted more than 1,000 pilgrims. Many groups, ranging from as few as 10 to as many as 700, attended Mass celebrated by parish clergy.

From parish pastor Father Raymond McDaniel’s perspective, “Numerous pilgrims have spoken of the graces they have received from encountering Our Lord in the Mass in prayer. This Jubilee Year seems to have accomplished exactly what the Holy Father envisioned when he inaugurated it, helping us to become ‘pilgrims of hope’ in the One who is the greatest source of hope, Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In addition to St. Philip, Bishop Olson decreed four other pilgrimage sites in the diocese:

- St. Patrick Cathedral in Fort Worth
- Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Fort Worth
- Immaculate Conception of



NTC/Scott Wagner

Faithful in prayer at St. Philip Church in Flower Mound.

Mary Parish in Wichita Falls

- Sacred Heart Parish in Comanche.

The Jubilee Year closes Dec. 28, 2025.

– Brenda Raney



In service of justice

Authority, power, and St. Thomas More figure prominently in annual Red Mass and dinner for those in legal profession



Bishop Michael Olson at the Red Mass. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

FORT WORTH — Dressed in the red of the Holy Spirit aflame, Bishop Michael Olson celebrated the annual Red Mass at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Fort Worth on Sept. 25.

For nearly 800 years, the tradition of the Red Mass has drawn judges, lawyers, and public officials seeking the Holy Spirit’s wisdom and strength in the pursuit of justice. This year — the 19th Red Mass in the Diocese of Fort Worth — approximately 200 faithful attended the Mass organized by the St. Thomas More Society Fort Worth.

In his homily, the bishop expounded on the story of the Roman centurion’s compassion for his dying servant, drawing a clear distinction between those who recognize divine authority

and use power responsibly and in service to God, and those who, led by indifference and greed, distort their power into a fleeting pursuit of personal glory.

“Rightly understood, power is a tool to be authorized and used accountably and with purpose in accord with an ordinance of reason,” Bishop Olson said, explaining those who surrender to the Lord’s authority do not fall victim to power’s selfish allure.

The Red Mass dinner held afterward at the Fort Worth Club featured keynote speaker Judge Stuart Kyle Duncan of the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, who shared how St. Thomas More came to his aid during Duncan’s stressful confirmation process in 2018.

– Christina Benavides

A Mass for generations



Bishop Michael Olson celebrates Mass with Father Sandeep Lakra, HGN. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

MORE
PHOTOS



Bishop Michael Olson celebrated an anniversary Mass at St. Joseph Parish in Rhineland in honor of the 130th anniversary of the parish with more than 300 parishioners, including their pastor, Father Sandeep Lakra, HGN.

Check out the photo gallery of the beautiful historic church here: North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.com.

Roses to honor and remember

Memorial Mass acknowledges loss of stillbirth, miscarriage, and abortion

FORT WORTH — Dominic, John, and Isabel.

Those are the names of the three children lost during stillbirths to Danielle and Alex Mishork.

“We’ve had some turbulent years so this is very consoling to us,” admitted Alex, a St. Stephen parishioner, explaining why he and his wife have attended the Memorial Mass for Children Who Died Before Baptism for several years. “One of the great sadnesses of losing a child in the womb is the feeling that nobody knows exactly what you are experiencing.”

The Mishorks were part of a large turnout of families and individuals who attended the liturgy on Oct. 4 in St. Patrick Cathedral. Bishop Michael Olson celebrated the Mass with Father Jonathan Wallis, vicar general, and Father Joseph Moreno, pastor of St. Michael Parish in Bedford.

“It means a lot to us that the bishop has this Mass,” the bereaved father continued. “The world



Families place roses on the altar in memory of their children who died. (NTC/Ben Torres)

doesn’t recognize this pain. So, this is a great way to feel we are surrounded by people who understand the particular grief God has given us in this life.”

Sponsored by the diocesan Respect Life Office, the Mass is offered for babies lost to miscarriage, stillbirth, or abortion. The liturgy,

introduced by pro-life advocates Pat and the late Chuck Pelletier more than 30 years ago, is designed to give grieving families comfort, hope, and the religious rite many did not have after the death of their children.

— Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

Community and connection

DENTON — At the diocese’s annual Young Adult Mass at Immaculate Conception Church in Denton, college students and young professionals gathered to not only celebrate Mass with Bishop Michael Olson but also form new and deeper connections with their peers.

Community emerged as a theme in the bishop’s homily on the rich man and Lazarus (*Luke 16:19-31*). Warning of distractions of wealth, he reflected on community as a means of serving God by loving our neighbor.

He stated, “We are all connected to each other by a web of rights and duties bound up by love, but the challenge for each of us is to acknowledge and fulfill the duties we have to others. The way out is realizing that we cannot be disciples of the Lord without others to whom we can offer our lives in generosity and love.”

Immaculate Conception showed attendees that same generosity and love following the Mass, treating everyone like honored guests to a fajita dinner.

During the dinner, newly ordained Deacon



Bishop Michael Olson greets Bianca Medina during the presentation of the gifts.

NTC/Juan Guajardo

Wilfried Lampka of Holy Redeemer Parish in Aledo spoke on his life lived following *Hebrews 11:1*.

He encouraged young adults to find a Scripture verse to guide them through life and to check how well they’re following God’s will.

Marianna Hill, a TCC nursing

student, said, “When young adults are strengthened in their faith and feel united in community with others, that can have a great effect on the diocese because we can volunteer and encourage and lead others.”

– Lisa Moore

A Church of living witnesses

FORT WORTH — This year’s Diocesan Mission Council Day of Reflection called upon Catholics to become “Missionaries of hope among all peoples.”

About 45 parishioners from the Diocese of Fort Worth marked the Day of Reflection on Sept. 20 at Fort Worth’s St.

Bartholomew Church. Monsignor Roger J. Landry, who serves as the national director of Pontifical Mission Societies USA, spoke on hope and mission.

Hope is needed now more than ever in our increasingly secularized and divided world, Msgr. Landry said. “The

Church must become living signs, witnesses, and missionaries of hope inviting others to join us,” he said. “Because we cannot live without hope for long.”

– Matthew Smith

FROM LEFT, Sara Garcia from Pontifical Mission Societies USA with members of the Diocesan Mission Council: Deacon Mike Mocek, Annette Snodgrass, Philomena Ikowe, Mike Wuller, and Father Brijil Lawrence, SAC. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)



White Coat Mass inspires and renews

FORT WORTH — “The medical world calls it palliative care, but the Scriptures call it mercy.”

These were the words of Father Linh Nguyen, pastor of St. George Church, during his homily at the White Coat Mass held at St. Patrick Cathedral on Oct. 13, a service designed to bless health care professionals for their efforts in healing the sick and injured.

Doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals, many of them still wearing their coats, scrubs, and shirts bearing the insignia of their respective hospitals and clinics, filed into St. Patrick Cathedral on Monday evening for the Mass.

“When we come face to face with our sickness, we realize how fragile we really are,” Fr. Nguyen said. “That’s hard for anyone, but especially for those in the practice of medicine. You, as doctors, nurses, and caregivers, are trained to fix, to save, to restore. You fight every day for life, but there are moments

when no treatments are left, no cure is found ... and when healing is no longer possible, love still is, and that love is what heals the human heart ... every hand held, every tear wiped away, every patient seen as a person — those are the moments of grace. That’s when God’s healing occurs in a deeper way than medicine.”

Fr. Nguyen said there are different kinds of healing and said the most challenging aspect of faith is when loved ones don’t get well.

“We believe God heals, but we also know He doesn’t always do it the way we ask,” he said. “Some receive miracles of a cure, while others receive the miracle of endurance ... sometimes the most powerful healing God gives is not the removal of pain, but the transformation of pain. James doesn’t say, ‘If anyone is sick, let them demand a cure.’ He says, ‘Let them pray.’”

— *John English*



Medical students stand in prayer during the White Coat Mass at St. Patrick Cathedral on Oct. 13. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

OBITUARIES

SISTER JOAN MARKEY, SSMN

A dedicated member of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur for 71 years, Sister Joan Markey, 89, passed away peacefully on Sept. 11 at the Our Lady of Victory Center surrounded by her religious community.

Sr. Joan grew up in Wichita Falls where she attended the SSMN-operated Academy of Mary Immaculate.

Deciding to become a teacher like her mentors, Sr. Joan joined the convent after high school graduation in 1954.

She went on to earn undergraduate and advanced degrees in English from University of Dallas and Rice University and a master’s degree in library science from University of North Texas. Her various assignments include teaching at Nolan Catholic High School, University of St. Thomas, and University of Tulsa.

From 1996 to 2002, the accomplished administrator served as provincial for her community.



Sister Joan Markey

FATHER MANUEL HOLGUIN

Father Cruz Manuel Holguin Ogaz, 47, died on Sept. 20, after a lengthy illness.

The son of Everardo Holguin Camacho and Maria Guadalupe Ogaz Bonilla, Fr. Holguin was born on May 3, 1978, in Jimenez, Chihuahua, Mexico.

Fr. Holguin earned a degree in accounting and worked as an auditor before entering seminary for the priesthood at the age of 24.

He was ordained as a priest for the Diocese of Fort Worth

on June 9, 2012, at St. Patrick Cathedral.

After his ordination, Fr. Holguin served as a parochial vicar at Immaculate Conception Parish in Denton, St. Matthew Parish in Arlington, and St. John the Apostle Parish in North Richland Hills.

From 2016-2020, he was pastor of St. Peter the Apostle Parish in White Settlement, and then he was appointed pastor of All Saints Parish in Fort Worth.



Fr. Manuel Holguin

Carrie Wagner speaks at the SEEK 2025 conference. (courtesy photo/FOCUS)



AN ENCOUNTER WITH Christ

Diocese to host FOCUS's SEEK conference January 1-5, 2026

By Lisa Moore

One of the largest Catholic conferences in the country is coming to the Diocese of Fort Worth. FOCUS has selected the Gaylord Texan Resort and Convention Center in Grapevine as the site of a 2026 SEEK conference Jan. 1-5.

FOCUS's senior director of Formative Enterprises, Erin Falbo, a former FOCUS campus missionary at University of Texas at Austin and parishioner of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Keller, explained FOCUS's intention for SEEK.

"At its heart, SEEK is an extension of FOCUS's mission: to share the hope of the Gospel and equip students and missionaries to make lifelong missionary disciples," she stated. "It's a place where people can step away from the noise of daily life and experience Christ, community, and the richness of the Catholic faith."

The conference, which began in 1999 as a small gathering for college students, is slated to welcome tens of thousands at three conference locations across the U.S.

Graham schoolteacher Alicia Olvera,

who leads a women's group at St. Mary Parish, attended the 2024 Missouri conference with three friends. She returned the next year to Utah with a group of 16.

"Seeing people my age, and that number of people, was breathtaking, especially when it came to Adoration, being in a stadium full of people who were just on their knees worshipping all at once," Olvera said. "It's really important for people to see the magnitude of the Catholic faith. It's more than just yourself; it's something so many people around the world share and makes you feel accompanied."

Sam Macaraeg, head campus missionary at St. John Paul II Parish and Campus Ministry in Denton, explained how they are preparing the hearts of students after 12 attended in Utah in 2025 and returned "with a flame," he said.

"One student said discerning the priesthood wasn't so scary after seeing hundreds and hundreds of priests and getting to know them in normal settings," Macaraeg said. "Most people's interactions with priests are confession or

seeing them in their homily — at SEEK, they're around the whole time.

"We just had a SEEK party last week to promote it and to get people aware of it," he said. "We get the word out for SEEK pretty early to get a little buzz and excitement around it."

The anticipation is not unwarranted: Much of the growth and transformations students undergo at SEEK are often deeply life-altering.

Though SEEK may have originated as a conference for college students, Olvera made a point of encouraging anyone interested in attending.

"There are particular talks more catered towards younger people, but the main sessions are not just meant for young adults," Olvera said. "Everyone should go."

Falbo's advice is to come and "expect God to surprise you."

"SEEK isn't just a conference — it's an encounter," she said. "You'll find community, incredible talks, beautiful liturgies, and an invitation to meet Jesus personally. It's a place where you can belong, be renewed, and be sent back into the world with purpose and joy." 🇺🇸



Nolan Catholic High School President Clint Weber and Principal Susan LoCoco pose before the Fort Worth school. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

'BEST MISSION ON EARTH'

New Catholic school leaders in Fort Worth Diocese share their vision, calling, and the value of Catholic education

By Sandra Engelland

This academic year, several schools in the diocese have new leaders at the helm. *North Texas Catholic* spoke with them about their calling to serve in Catholic schools, their vision for their campuses, and the benefits of Catholic education.

**SUSAN LOCOCO, PRINCIPAL
NOLAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL**

Susan LoCoco went from a decade of serving as a popular math teacher at Nolan Catholic High School to the school's enthusiastic principal.

"This is the place to be," she said. "We have a good, strong college preparatory program and our faith-filled teachers do an amazing job."

LoCoco grew up in a Catholic home in Greenville attending public schools. When

she went to college at University of Dallas, she met Catholic students from all around the country. "The knowledge they had was amazing, and I wanted more," she said.

She and her husband prioritized Catholic education for their five children, who attended St. Andrew Catholic School in Fort Worth. LoCoco didn't really intend to become an educator, but when her youngest child entered kindergarten at St. Andrew, the principal asked her to teach a fourth-grade class.

"It was wonderful. I taught fourth grade for a year, then moved up to seventh and eighth grade," she said.

She taught middle school at St. Andrew for 14 years before coming to Nolan to teach, mostly freshman and sophomore students.

She's seen firsthand the advantages of faith-focused learning.

"Life is hard," LoCoco said. "Catholic education prepares students not just academically but in faith, morals,

respect, and responsibility. They can make good choices based on what they've been taught."

Her vision for Nolan is twofold: for families to feel a sense of belonging and knowing "we're all in this together," and to always see the face of God in whatever they do.

"We want our students to know they can make a difference in the world and see the glory in all of God's creation," she said. "When you belong to something and you feel the presence of God, the world is a beautiful place."

**CLINT WEBER, PRESIDENT
NOLAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL**

Clint Weber, the new president of Nolan, works closely with LoCoco and is excited about his new role.

"I get to be a part of a great mission

Continued on Page 12

Principal Amber Fuhrmann of St. Mary Catholic School in Gainesville poses in a classroom. (NTC/Thomas Otto)



From Page 11

at Nolan Catholic High School,” Weber said. “We have a great history of creating strong and sound leaders for our country and community.”

Weber comes to Nolan after five years as president of the Advancement Foundation for the Diocese of Fort Worth.

He was very familiar with the school as his daughter just graduated from Nolan and is now a freshman in college.

Weber appreciates the calling to help young Catholics become stronger in their faith through sacraments like weekly Mass and solid theological teaching.

As a community, he wants Nolan students and staff to “be the best we can possibly be, strive for greatness, and live authentic Catholic lives.”

Before serving at the diocese, Weber spent 16 years as a naval aviator in the U.S. Marine Corps and six years in private equity and asset management.

His time in the military gave him a solid foundation in leadership, but now his sense of purpose is stronger than ever: “The Catholic Church has the best mission on Earth.”

**AMBER FUHRMANN, PRINCIPAL
ST. MARY CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

Amber Fuhrmann credits “divine intervention” for leading her to the role of principal at St. Mary Catholic School in Gainesville.

Fuhrmann recently retired after 28 years in public education, first teaching then serving in administration, wrapping up her career as a principal in West Texas before moving to Gainesville.

The chance to work at St. Mary brought her out of retirement.

She said after working in eight different school districts in public education, St. Mary is the best of all the schools where she has worked.

“Everyone is very supportive and we’re truly a family here,” she said. “The kids are amazing. They blow me away on a daily basis.”

Established in 1891, St. Mary has a rich tradition. One teacher is the fourth generation of her family to teach at St. Mary.

“We have a strong history of academics, family values, belief in God, and being an active and positive influence in the community,” Fuhrmann said.

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Fuhrmann treasures the opportunity to serve in a Catholic school.

“We’re able to bring God into every conversation, every subject and behavior,” she said. “We can pray at any time throughout the day.”

Fuhrmann said Catholic education helps students “have a deeper understanding of our God” and gives them tools to strengthen their faith and bless others.

“Society is very challenging with social media,” she said. “We want to protect and prepare them and give them a strong ability to talk about their faith.”

**JULIANNA MCCONEGLY, PRINCIPAL
CASSATA CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL**

Julianna McConegly feels blessed to be the new principal at Cassata Catholic High School in Fort Worth.

“I love being able to serve students who have been overlooked or who have challenges and help them to achieve goals they didn’t even realize were possible,” McConegly said.

With about 120 students, Cassata offers a close community setting where students receive individualized instruction and learn at their own pace.

McConegly said, “The majority of people in the diocese haven’t heard of Cassata, or they think we’re just a school for bad kids. That couldn’t be further from the truth.”

Cassata caters to kids who may not fit in traditional schools. They may have learning differences, social-emotional struggles, health challenges, or a



Principal Julianna McConegly poses in Cassata Catholic High School. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)

demanding work schedule.

Some students attend for just a semester or two while others complete their high school education.

“We help students with goals and college planning or just help them plan for life,” McConegly said.

Students who graduate from Cassata get preparation for college, trade school, the military, or the workforce, whatever their goals happen to be.

The faculty is close-knit and connected with students, who learn to have each other’s backs, she said.

Cassata has open enrollment throughout the year, welcoming students who may be struggling in a traditional high school. The school has a group that makes sure every new student meets other people and has someone to sit with.

McConegly grew up attending St.

Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic School in Keller and Nolan before attending Oklahoma State University.

After teaching in both public and private schools, she appreciates the benefits of Catholic education.

Many Cassata students are not Catholic, but they appreciate the faith aspects of the curriculum, with some even asking the theology teacher how to become Catholic, McConegly said.

“Catholic education really gives students a foundation to make good choices, grow in character, live with intention, and live in community,” she said. 🇺🇸

Learn more about the Diocese of Fort Worth’s Catholic Schools by visiting CatholicSchoolsFWDioc.org.



CULTIVATING VOCATIONS

Nolan Catholic High School helps students listen for God's call

By Christina Benavides

When he left Nolan Catholic High School for college, cross-country runner Joshua Keifer didn't expect to miss a closeness to the sacraments he'd previously had in his schooling. But soon, he found himself craving that quiet space with God, a habit of heart he said took root long before he noticed it.

"It was those little things that I just

took for granted while I was in high school that I feel were really grounding me," Keifer said. "I always used to say the things that grounded me were my sports and my friends, but really it was closeness to the sacraments, and that's something that you can only get at a Catholic school."

Opportunities to go to the chapel and sit in Adoration for the last 10 minutes of class; attend Mass in the middle of the week; pray the Angelus in the middle of the day; join a morning prayer session

before school — "At one point, I realized how much I craved that," the seminarian said.

Keifer's experience reflects a broader reality at Nolan, where students are immersed in a culture that provides them a foundation to listen for God's call without reservation. The school, which has shaped its students into community and religious leaders for 63 years, has an even "bigger presence of the sacraments" today, said school chaplain Father Brett Metzler.

◀ Nolan Catholic High School students pray a Rosary to commemorate the feast day for Our Lady of Victory/Our Lady of the Rosary, the patroness of the school, Oct. 7. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)



Father Brett Metzler flips a coin before the Nolan Catholic Vikings game during Catholic Bowl V on Sept. 12 at Choctaw Stadium in Arlington. (courtesy photo/Nolan Catholic, Alexandria Mechalske)

With regular access to Mass and confession, plus all-day Friday Adoration, students are encouraged to take their faith seriously, which “always comes with a deeper sense of joy, deeper sense of community, deeper sense of safety, like they feel they belong to a family,” said Fr. Metzler.

Dedicated faculty are instrumental in helping students further their relationships with God, Fr. Metzler added. After all, faith formation at Nolan doesn’t end in the chapel; it’s woven through the rhythms of student life, from the football field to theology class.

“There are tons of groups that provide ministry to students,” he said. “Football has a Bible study; soccer has a Bible study; basketball has a Bible study. They all have their own prayer groups and practices that the coaches have set up. Things are blossoming on their own which I think is a fruit of the sacraments and the fruit of being in Catholic soil.”

A FOUNDATION

Keifer was in his senior year of studying computer science and kinesiology/exercise science at College of Charleston in South Carolina when he heard God’s call to the priesthood. After graduating with both degrees, the 22-year-old returned to his native Fort Worth and entered the seminary.

Keifer said he holds gratitude for his time at Nolan as well as his K-8 education at St. John the Apostle Catholic School in North Richland Hills.

“It’s something that as a student, you take for granted,” he said.

Many students may not actively notice the lifelong impact of such a rich Catholic education.

“Some of this is just going to go over

your head, and that’s okay,” he recalled telling junior high kids preparing to enter Nolan. “It’s the fact that you’re here and in this environment that is cultivating you, even though you don’t even realize it, even though you’re not thinking about it.”

While in college, Keifer missed listening to Scripture regularly and breaking for prayer throughout the school day. Those moments are impactful because “once you leave the Catholic school system you end up in a secular world that tells you that prayer doesn’t work and that reading Scripture is a waste of your time. But no, those things are what ground us, and our faith is really what makes us more alive,” he said.

CULTURE OF FAITH

When Fr. Metzler arrived at Nolan as its chaplain, the first thing he noticed was just how busy students were, juggling advanced coursework and various extracurriculars.

“I realized that if I’m going to do ministry, I need to go to the things they’re doing. So whenever I can, I will go where they are, whether it’s football, volleyball, theater. If I can, I will. That’s kind of my motto,” he said.

Family support, he emphasized, is just as essential.

“Nolan students are sent by families who also form their kids to love faith, right? So it’s a compounding addition to

the school’s life of joy,” he said.

The priest makes a point to minister to the student’s strongest faith supporters: their parents.

“I’ve done more things for the parents to build up the community,” Fr. Metzler said.

He enjoys connecting with Nolan dads during a monthly Black Coffee Brotherhood group, where “we have time for Adoration and pray with Scripture” and also celebrates the monthly Mother’s Mass, which is followed by donuts and chats with Nolan moms.

“More and more are showing up,” Fr. Metzler said. “Just getting parents to come and pray for their kids who are at the school.”


PRAY FOR VOCATIONS

This year, Fr. Metzler accompanied 37 young men to the October *Come and See* weekend retreat held at St. Joseph Seminary College in Louisiana, where Keifer now studies. Six participants were Nolan students.

“It’s so exciting,” Keifer said, remarking on the students’ presence. “Just seeing high schoolers that are willing to say yes, maybe this is something that I’m called to. This is something you should honestly discern first, especially as men.”

Keifer recalls praying for vocations when he was at Nolan, but it was always “we’re praying for somebody else. We’re doing this for another group of people that are going to do this,” he said. “It never really dawned on me that in doing that, I was inadvertently praying for myself, which I find funny, but also very beautiful.” 🇺🇸

BEING CALLED?



Learn more about vocation discernment events by scanning the QR code or visiting [FWDiocese.org/discernment-events](https://www.fwdiocese.org/discernment-events).



FROM TEXAS TO ETERNITY

An encounter with
Saints Carlo Acutis
and Pier Giorgio
Frassati in Rome

By Sharon Perkins
Photography by Susan Perkins

Rome is known as the “Eternal City,” and indeed that is what it is. For the pilgrim, this geographic seat of the Roman Catholic Church is timeless.

This was my experience when I attended the canonization Mass of two of the Church’s newest saints: Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925) and Carlo Acutis (1991-2006) in the piazza of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome on Sept. 7.

Carlo Acutis, who is recognized for his intense devotion to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and his creation of a website on Eucharistic miracles, appeals especially to the millennial generation of whom he was a contemporary — whereas Pier Giorgio Frassati was known for his heroic virtue, his nurturing of authentic and holy friendships, and his deep compassion for the poor.

Both lived short but incredibly holy lives which have captivated the attention of young Catholics.

Provided with an unexpected

Pope Leo XIV celebrates the Sept. 7 canonization Mass of Saints Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican.



Banners with images of St. Pier Giorgio Frassati (left) and St. Carlo Acutis hang from the facade of St. Peter's Basilica during a canonization Mass at the Vatican Sept. 7. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

opportunity to participate in this exciting and long-awaited canonization event of two new saints, I joined thousands of cheering, banner-waving brothers and sisters in Christ.

It was a beautiful, sunny Sunday morning as Pope Leo XIV, speaking in Italian, walked out before celebrating the canonization Mass to informally greet the huge crowd.

Standing atop the colonnade of St. Peter's Square with other journalists, I was first struck by my proximity to the 140 giant statues of saints and martyrs carved in the late 17th century.

Though made of stone, I could imagine their voices joining ours in the petition: "Most Holy Father, Holy Mother Church beseeches Your Holiness to enroll among the saints Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati and Blessed Carlo Acutis, and that as saints they may be invoked by all the Christian faithful" — and then echoing the chorus of the Litany of the Saints as if to say, "Welcome to our number, brothers!"

Of course, the fact that hundreds of popes, martyrs, and other holy men and women are buried not only in the catacombs outside of the city but also beneath St. Peter's Basilica reinforces the paraphrased saying attributed to Tertullian (160-240): "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."



"Team Carlo" was well-represented in the crowd waiting to enter the Piazza San Pietro before the Sept. 7 canonization Mass of Saints Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati.

To be sure, more than 80,000 pilgrims attending the open-air Mass stood on holy ground and gave the martyrs much to rejoice over!

SAINTS OF THE PRESENT

While Rome was certainly bustling with citizens and tourists, it was clear that many of them had little understanding or interest in the deeper religious significance of the events happening around them.

However, this was not so on the evening of Sept. 6, in the apartment home of John and Ashley Noronha, founders of the Truth and Beauty Project and 17-year residents of Rome. A gathering of friends

and fellow pilgrims converged at the Noronha's home for a festive "pre-canonization party," and I was privileged to speak with several young adults about their expectations for the coming day, including University of Dallas senior Emily Jorgensen.

Jorgensen was familiar with Carlo's story and excited about seeing all the joy and inspiration around her. Her personal hope centered around the discernment of her future path upon graduation and plans on seeking the intercession of both new saints for her intention.

Continued on Page 18



Sharon Perkins poses atop the colonnade of St. Peter's Square during the Sept. 7 canonization of Saints Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati.

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A LOCAL IMPACT

Over the ensuing days, I noted the influence of these two newly canonized saints and felt inspired by the evangelization already happening in places around the world, including our home diocese of Fort Worth.

Andrea Woolums serves as the director of religious education at St. Mark Parish in Argyle. On a 2024 visit to St. William Parish in Round Rock, she was so impressed by a three-part interactive exhibit on Eucharistic miracles that she arranged to rent it from its creator, Melissa Kirk.

St. Mark Parish displayed the exhibit in early January. Woolums explained the exhibit extends beyond the poster presentations made available through the Carlo Acutis website and incorporates interactive elements that appeal to a broad range of ages, employing props, skits, and even a microscope where viewers can examine human heart tissue.

She estimated about

1,200 people experienced the exhibit in January, and she arranged for the second part of the exhibit to be displayed in October.

CALLED TO BE SAINTS

The French novelist Léon Bloy said, "The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint."

As I reflect on my experience in the Eternal City during the Jubilee Year of Hope and the Sept. 7 canonization, I feel inspired by my encounters with young people who so earnestly shared the desire to become saints by following the examples and seeking the intercession of Saints Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati.

Somewhere among those 80,000 people in attendance, I'm sure there are future saints waiting to be canonized — maybe even martyred — for their heroic faith in Christ. May we, by God's grace, be counted among them. 🇺🇸



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Catholic Charities Fort Worth staff Taylor Mull, Liliana Huerta, and Rita Gauthier stand in the food pantry at CCFW's Northwest office. (NTC/Bertha Salazar)

Game Changing donations

By Mary Lou Seewoester

Since 2022, Game Changers, a Catholic Charities Fort Worth donor program, has provided immediate assistance to CCFW clients encountering unexpected barriers on their journey from poverty to financial self-sufficiency.

In the past, Game Changers has helped with car repairs, tires, utilities, childcare, or gas for travel to school or work. Now, Game Changers also helps clients facing food insecurity.

Cindy Casey, head of CCFW Client Services, sees a trend toward food insecurity in the current economic environment. She explained that as food costs have skyrocketed, CCFW clients have experienced increasing difficulty obtaining federal benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Child Care Management Services, a state-funded program that pays a percentage of childcare costs.

Casey said many CCFW clients are single moms with young children. To work, they need a job, transportation, and childcare.

“But all the childcare funds are drying up,” she said, adding that some clients have lost their CCMS benefits. Currently, 35 clients are on the CCMS waiting list.

“Without help with food, they will use apartment funds for food,” Casey explained. “Game Changers allows us to help single moms feed their kids while they look to extend their incomes with federal benefits like SNAP or by getting a better paying job. We work with both.”

Game Changers are donors waiting to be asked to help when situations arise that would be a “game changer” for clients participating in long-term case management. With Game Changers, CCFW doesn’t have to look for funds; the help is already there, Casey said.

CCFW Fund Development Manager Francine Speer-Stratman said recipients include clients who are in case management and moms participating in Gabriel Project for expectant and new mothers.

“They are working on a goal and [the donors] are removing barriers to that goal,” Speer-Stratman said. “Case managers develop a plan with them when

they get financial assistance. It’s strategic assistance because it’s part of a plan.”

“The money goes right where they need it, right when they need it,” she continued, “because the case manager lets us know. They’ve been planning carefully, and they just need some ‘oomph’ to get over the edge.”

Help with food insecurity could be a Walmart gift card for groceries or a connection with a nearby food pantry. But sometimes assistance is not providing food, but removing another barrier so they can buy food, Speer-Stratman explained.

“So, we pay for half the rent and the client is able to buy the food they need and pay off their debt so they can buy their own groceries the next month,” she said.

“Game Changers is so powerful,” she added. “You’re getting the impact because the staff is there to help [clients] plan.”

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



FLOURISHING FAITH

Rapid growth brings opportunities and challenges
to the Diocese of Fort Worth

By Matthew Smith

The Diocese of Fort Worth grew by 871,000 new parishioners between 2000 and 2020, according to a 2021 study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University. The diocese was behind only Atlanta and San Bernadino, Calif.

Such growth falls in line with U.S. Catholic trends over the last 40 years. Nationwide, the number of Catholics grew 40 percent, from 48 to 67 million over that time period, according to an August *National Catholic Register* article.

Although U.S. numbers have grown, they have not done so uniformly throughout the country. There too, Fort Worth falls in line with national growth trends.

Of the top 10 national growth areas, all but one — the Archdiocese of New York — occurred in the south or west regions of the U.S. Six of those regions are in Texas or California.

Concurrently over the same period, many once Catholic strongholds, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest, have experienced declines in the number of Catholics, in some cases leading to parish closures and mergers, according to the same article. The population in those regions, which totaled about 70 percent of the nation's Catholics in 1980, now sits at

47 percent as of 2019.

Diocesan growth has also, to some extent and for several of the same reasons, mirrored the explosive growth of North Texas and most of the state over recent years. Those big-picture migration reasons include economic and societal conditions, among other factors.

CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

Diocesan population increase, while a plus overall, also brings growing pains, said several associated with the diocese. Parishes experiencing similar growth face the challenges of sufficient infrastructure to accommodate new parishioners.

Such challenges include COVID and rising construction costs, Diocesan Director of Construction and Facilities Tom Ross said.

“Until about five years ago, when COVID hit hot and heavy, we were on a pretty normal pace for construction,” Ross said. “That, and the population boom in North Texas overall, has really impacted the diocese.”

Growth arrived simultaneously with soaring price increases for building materials.

“The other thing is that, even with price increases, we and others in North Texas continued to build,” Ross said.

“Because of that, the market understood that it could bear those prices, which means now it’s going to stay that way.”

Challenges come too in the possibilities of expanding existing churches.

“Because a lot of our churches are old and designated historical, we can’t really alter or expand those buildings,” Ross said.

That said, the diocese is prepared and taking steps to meet the challenges of new growth, Ross added.

“I’m not sure what the major draw is in a lot of states losing residents while we’re gaining residents,” Ross said.

“Texas doesn’t have a state income tax. That and other things probably make it attractive, especially from an economic standpoint.”

Diocesan Director of Evangelization and Catechesis Jason Whitehead said the diocese’s new Catholic arrivals consist both of longtime residents converting from other religions as well as newly transplanted Texans.

“It’s partly the overall population influx,” Whitehead said when asked to attribute diocesan growth. “It’s also our more concerted efforts in sound catechesis and a movement of the Holy Spirit in creating increased interest in all things related to Catholicism.”



Parishioners fill the parish at Flower Mound's St. Philip the Apostle Church, which opened in 2022 and has plans to expand. (NTC/Scott Wagner)

The growth, while not without challenges, definitely represents opportunity, Whitehead said.

"One wherein we can reach more people for Christ," he said.

SEEKING SUBSTANCE

Arlington's St. Maria Goretti Parish Director of Faith Formation Keith Parker offered his take on diocesan growth, especially among college-age and younger people.

"I think the focus on more inclusion in the Catholic arena is appealing to many who feel disenfranchised with the prosperity gospel that is sweeping many Protestant churches in America," Parker said. "Many seem to be looking for meaning beyond health and wealth messages, and the tradition of the Catholic Church is becoming more attractive to those trying to follow the call of Jesus in a fractured society."

Parker added the diversity and inclusiveness of most parishes appeals to many as well.

"Put all that with the lack of

community everyone has experienced the last several years and it seems like the right time for many to reconsider the Catholic Church," Parker said.

Deacon Larry Sandoval of Keller's St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish said 100 to 120 sign up for OCIA classes each year and that they'd probably have more if they had more room. Those newcomers include Catholics never confirmed, members of other faiths, and those of no faith.

"They see the beauty of the Mass and the peace it brings them. That makes them wonder what this Catholicism is all about," Dcn. Sandoval said. "Ultimately, I would attribute it to the Holy Spirit working in their lives."

Dcn. Sandoval said he interviews each candidate at the beginning of the 10-month course to learn what brought them to the Church — stories he called a joy to hear.

"I had a man in his 70s last year who saw the change in his son and daughter-in-law after they went through OCIA," Dcn. Sandoval said. "He said he wanted to be part of that because it seemed so joyful."

Dcn. Sandoval credits the growth of area Catholic populations to the pastoral care present at the parish as well as the appeal of the truth and tradition of the Church.

Maria Rosales teaches OCIA classes at St. Patrick Cathedral. Rosales said Fort Worth's cost of living and small town feel with urban amenities draws many to the region.

"People are also getting back to normalcy from the COVID years," Rosales said. "Young couples are starting families and there's a conscious effort in keeping the traditions and connections to a local parish."

Many people of other faiths, especially those of mega churches or non-denominational faiths, feel disconnected or disenfranchised and are seeking something more substantive, Rosales said.

"I feel [the growth] is both exciting and challenging," Rosales said. "When I started, I didn't realize until later that God had this planned for me all along. I knew it would be challenging, but I welcomed the opportunity." 🇺🇸

HEALING, HELP, HOPE

Rachel Ministries retreat offers
post-abortion healing for affected women, men

By Sandra Engelland

For Lisa Jones, the Rachel Ministries retreat in 2010 completely changed her life, bringing her healing, hope, and an avenue for serving others.

Jones attended the retreat at age 40, more than two decades after having an abortion as a high school senior.

Although she is a cradle Catholic and attended Catholic schools, she couldn't bring herself to disappoint her parents and disrupt her future.

In desperation, she went to Planned Parenthood, where staffers assured her that abortion was a way to get her future back.

Instead, she found herself in a cycle of self-destruction. She turned to promiscuity and alcohol. Her first marriage ended.

Her second husband, a firefighter, recognized her signs of trauma and encouraged her to get help. He was the first loved one that she told about her abortion.

Then she learned about the Rachel Ministries retreat through the Church.

"I went and it changed my life," Jones said. "After the retreat, colors were

brighter, and it felt like a resurrection. I was filled with such joy."

She remembers hearing the story of the Prodigal Son at the retreat, and she could visualize the Father running to her.

"I didn't even need to explain to Him," she said. "His mercy is greater than any of my sin."

Two years after her retreat, she joined the small team that conducts the retreats.

"To be a part of that is the best gift of grace, to watch others experience that death and resurrection," Jones said.

GOD OFFERS HEALING

Betsy Kopor is the Rachel Ministries coordinator for the Diocese of Fort Worth. Like Lisa, she had an abortion and found healing and transformation through a Rachel retreat she attended in Dallas in 1999.

She then trained as a leader and, a few years later, helped start retreats in Fort Worth. Since 2001, the group has held close to 50 retreats.

The next retreat is set for Nov. 14-16 at a confidential location in a quiet rural

area within an hour of downtown Fort Worth.

"The healing is just amazing," she said. "It's amazing to be there and actually standing in awe and watching the Lord work in someone's life."

The small team leading the retreat includes a facilitator, a priest or deacon, licensed professional counselors, and a few people who prepare meals for the group.

One of the biggest impacts of the retreat is to draw hurting people back to the Church, which makes the presence of clergy so critical, Kopor said. They reassure those who have experienced abortion that the Church doesn't reject them.

"We want them to know that the Church does not abandon them," she said. "The Church wants them to heal and bring them back to the Church."

Kopor said attendees have the opportunity to go to confession, and, for some of them, it's the first time in many years.

During the course of the retreat, they can tell their abortion story, if they wish. Everything is kept confidential. Attendees are free to share their own stories with



Deacon Steve Dixon and Betsy Kopor, diocesan coordinator of Rachel Ministries, pose together at Holy Redeemer Parish in Aledo. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

others after the retreat, if they choose.

They also get a chance to personalize the child or children they aborted, giving them names and holding a memorial service for them.

Kopor said they've had teenagers and 80-year-olds attend the retreat, and they all can receive healing.

"Sometimes the abortion was a year ago and sometimes it was 60 years ago," she said. "They come, and they're all healed. It's a miracle in our midst.

"We couldn't do that on our own, but the Lord is there throughout."

Deacon Steve Dixon from Holy Redeemer Parish in Aledo served as clergy at a Rachel Ministries retreat for the first time last year and plans to serve again in November.

"I was impressed by how courageous retreat attendants are, and how they bring all the burdens they have and just allow the Holy Spirit to transform them," he said.

Dcn. Dixon said he'd attended many retreats and was truly touched and humbled by the transformations he witnessed at the Rachel retreat.

Dcn. Dixon also saw the healing power of the Holy Spirit working in the Eucharist and confession.

Some women come in believing they are cursed, he said, but God wants them to know that they can be reconciled and healed.

"God did not abandon you, and you're not alone," he said.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Dcn. Dixon said attending the retreat impacted his ministry in ways he couldn't have imagined, finding new ways to help others.

"I can be a better deacon to the people God puts in my path," he said.

It also transformed his prayer life as he seeks to share God's love with those in need.

Kopor encouraged the Catholic faithful to pray for them during the retreat.

"If anyone wants to pray for us, that is wonderful," she said. "Prayer changes things."

The organization receives help with finances and prayer from several Knights

of Columbus chapters.

Kopor is joined on the retreat team by her husband, Steve Kopor, also a licensed professional counselor. Men who have been impacted by abortion are welcome to attend, although most attendees are women.

The Kopors are parishioners at St. Patrick Cathedral and have recently published a book on healing from abortion titled "The Lord Heals the Brokenhearted."

For Jones, sharing her story has become a ministry. She frequently prays outside Planned Parenthood locations and sometimes goes inside to share her story with the staff.

"I'm just very thankful for Rachel [Ministries]," she said. "If there are people out there suffering in silence, there is help and hope." 🇺🇸

Fort Worth's Rachel Ministries retreat is part of Rachel's Vineyard Ministries. Get more information on the retreats at RachelsVineyard.org.

reflections of gratitude and grace



Sister Patricia Ste. Marie, Sister Miriam NeSmith, and Sister Patricia Ridgley pose for a photo after Mass on Sept. 8 at Our Lady of Victory Center. The three Sisters of St. Mary of Namur were honored for 65 years of religious life. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

Three SSMN jubilarians honored for 65 years of dedicated service

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

A peace and justice advocate, adult formation teacher, and parish social outreach coordinator.

Three dedicated women, who spent the last 65 years doing “a little good” in the world as Sisters of St. Mary of Namur, were honored Sept. 8 during a jubilee Mass and reception at the Our Lady of Victory Center in Fort Worth.

Sister Patricia Ridgley, Sister Patricia Ste. Marie, and Sister Miriam NeSmith entered the convent as young ladies in 1960 hoping to follow in the footsteps of the religious educators who taught them in the Catholic schools they attended. Decades later, the jubilarians still recall the good works they witnessed as youngsters.

“I remember seeing the sisters praying in the chapel and being impressed by some of the things they did,” said Sr. Miriam who entered the convent after

graduating from Our Lady of Victory Academy. “When they did ministries with families, I sometimes went with them and that spoke to me so much. I thought maybe this is where God wanted me to be.”

After joining the religious community, the Fort Worth native spent six decades in the classroom teaching before moving into parish-related ministries. She worked as an English as a Second Language instructor at Immaculate Heart Parish

and later helped the poor obtain food and other resources at St. Rita Parish in Fort Worth.

“I love being with God’s people, and I love the mission of the Sisters of St. Mary,” Sr. Miriam added, recalling how she handed out sack lunches to the homeless in the area.

Surrounded by members of her community and friends, the sister expressed gratitude for the past 65 years.

“It’s God’s grace that has led me here this long,” she expressed with certainty.

CHOOSING LOVE, SERVICE

Celebrated on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the jubilee Mass, concelebrated by Father Richard Flores and Father Tim Gollob, highlighted how Mary’s example of faithful discipleship encouraged the three jubilarians to say yes to God’s plan for their lives.

“Like Mary, they too accepted to follow the Lord faithfully,” Fr. Flores said, welcoming the congregation. “We ask the Lord to renew within us the spirit of service and love for God’s people that is embodied in these religious sisters.”

He told the gathering that 65 years ago, the honorees chose a path of love, service, and presence to literally thousands of people — people they didn’t know until their journey took them to places served by the Sisters of St. Mary in Fort Worth, Dallas, Wichita Falls, Belgium, and Rwanda.

“Wherever they were sent, that became home,” the

homilist continued. “And the people they served became family.”

Whether in the classroom, leading Bible study, or just being someone people trusted to unburden the pain in their hearts, “You said yes to do ‘a little good’ wherever you went,” Fr. Flores said, addressing the sisters.

“You have experienced God’s presence over these 65 years, and He continues to accompany you. Your lives are a testament that God is with us.”

BEING INSPIRED

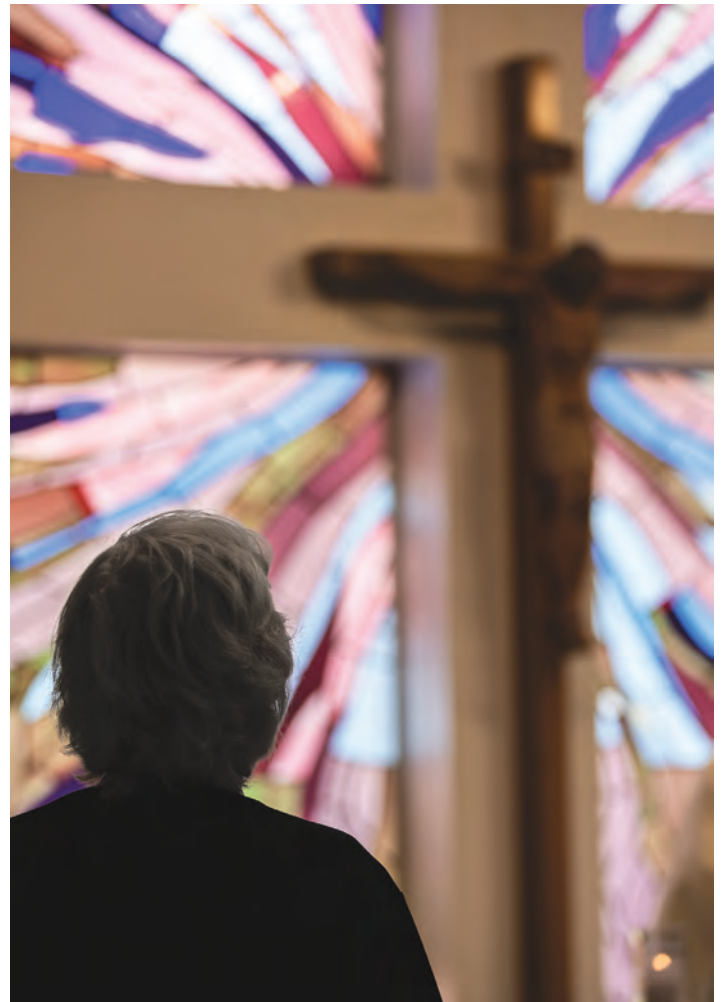
As a fourth-grade student at St. Alice (now Holy Family) Catholic School in Fort Worth, Patricia Ste. Marie knew she wanted to become a religious sister.

“I was taught from the first grade by the Sisters of St. Mary, and I was really inspired by them,” recounted the former second grade and high school religion teacher. “It’s been a wonderful 65 years. I still remember the day I entered. There wasn’t much to it. We came to this building, they showed us our room and then we went to chapel.”

After almost 12 years in the classroom, she settled in Wichita Falls where the educator helped with adult formation, RCIA (now known as OCIA), and different Bible study classes at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in Wichita Falls.

“Scripture studies is my favorite thing to do,” Sr. Patricia Ste. Marie admitted.

Her advice to other young women discerning a religious



Sister Patricia Ridgley, SSMN, looks at the crucifix during Mass Sept. 8 at Our Lady of Victory Center. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

profession stems from her own experience.

“Ask the Lord if that is what He wants you to do,” she explained. “That’s what I did, and the Lord said yes.”

A DEEP THANKSGIVING

“Unexpected discoveries.” That’s how Sr. Patricia Ridgley described her life as a Sister of St. Mary of Namur.

“God leads in mysterious ways,” said the Our Lady of Good Counsel High School alumna who considered becoming an airline stewardess after graduation. “As a sister, one thing led to another, and you never know what tomorrow will bring. As a woman, you do what needs to be done and my life has been about that too.”

Over the years, the Dallas native worked as an educator, in parish ministry, as a peace and justice advocate in the Diocese of Dallas, and as director of the Maryknoll Mission Education Center. She is now part of the leadership team for the SSMN western region.

“I have deep thanksgiving in my heart,” Sr. Patricia Ridgley said, reflecting on her vocation.

“I’m so grateful for all the people who accompanied and surrounded me for 65 years. Some are still here, and some have gone to God.”

A BLESSING TO ALL OF US

Rosemary Hayes considers the Sisters of St. Mary of

Continued on Page 26

From Page 25

Namur part of her family.

“I’ve been with them my whole life from the first grade to now,” enthused the 77-year-old who started the SSMN Auxiliary in 2003.

Every Saturday, she makes flower arrangements for the OLV Center’s dining room tables and the sisters are always appreciative and complimentary.

“They are a blessing to all of us,” Hayes added. “Some are in their 90s and are still working and taking care of each other. I just love being around them.” 🇺🇸



Sister Patricia Ste. Marie, Sister Miriam NeSmith, and Sister Patricia Ridgley are photographed together after Mass on Sept. 8 at Our Lady of Victory Center. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

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

1. **Publication Title:** North Texas Catholic Magazine
2. **Publication number:** 0899-7020
3. **Filing date:** September 24, 2024
4. **Frequency of issue:** Bi-monthly
5. **Number of issues published annually:** 6
6. **Annual subscription price:** \$18
7. **Location of Known Office of Publication:** 800 West Loop 820 South, Fort Worth, TX 76108
8. **Mailing Address:** Same as above
9. **Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor:** *Publisher*, Bishop Michael F. Olson, 800 West Loop 820 South, Fort Worth, TX 76108; *Editor*, Susan Moses, 800 West Loop 820 South, Fort Worth, TX 76108.
10. **Owner:** Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, 800 West Loop 820 South, Fort Worth, TX 76108
11. **Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities:** None.
12. **The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal purposes of this organization has not changed in preceding 12 months.**

15. **Extent and nature of circulation:** Households, parishes, and schools.

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
A. Total No. Copies Printed	78,914	81,510
B. Paid/Requested Circulation		
1) Outside County Mail	35,630	36,328
2) Mailed In-County	40,795	42,026
3) Outside the Mail	0	0
4) Other classes mailed through USPS	0	0
C. Total Paid Distribution	76,425	78,354
D. Free/Nominal Rate Distribution		
1) Free Distribution Outside County	1,730	1,765
2) Free Distribution In-County	511	511
3) Free Distribution through USPS	0	0
4) Free Distribution Outside the Mail	0	0
E. Total Free Distribution	2,241	2,276
F. Total Distribution	78,666	80,630
G. Copies Not Distributed	175	175
H. Total	78,841	80,805
I. Percent Paid	97%	97%
16. Paid Electronic Copies	0	0

A woman prays at the columbarium on the grounds of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Keller. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



a nearby repose

More parishes offer sites for the final resting place of loved ones' ashes

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen

When Billy and Liliana Anderson were faced with the devastating task of planning their son's funeral, the grieving parents knew where they wanted to shelter his remains.

The longtime members of Most Blessed Sacrament in Arlington chose to place the ashes of the 30-year-old in the parish's newly built columbarium.

Derived from the Latin word *columba* meaning dove or pigeon, the term "columbarium" once referred to the nesting boxes found in ancient Roman dovecotes.

Today, the freestanding memorials with stacked niches are designed to hold urns with cremated remains.

"We go to church every Sunday and can visit our son on the way in and out," explained Billy Anderson, who finds the prayer garden with a columbarium and Stations of the Cross a peaceful setting. "You could spend all day there in prayer. We consider it holy ground."

The couple's own funeral arrangements involve cremation rather than burial, and they plan to purchase a space near their son.

A columbarium, adjacent to the parish they've belonged to since 2007, is a

beautiful alternative for families, according to Liliana Anderson.

"Nothing helps my grieving process, but it's so serene and reverent out there," the heartbroken mother pointed out. "It doesn't matter who you see at the columbarium. We're all experiencing the same thing. We can comfort one another."

PERMITTED WITH RESTRICTIONS

The popularity of columbaria grew following the Second Vatican Council. In 1963, Pope Paul VI lifted the ban on cremation for Catholics, recognizing the

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act didn't affect the soul or prevent God's power of resurrection.

Unlike other religions however, Catholics are not permitted to spread, scatter, or separate cremated remains in any way. Only burial in the ground or columbarium is allowed.

According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, and the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition."

Although the Catholic Church prefers traditional burial because it more clearly expresses faith and hope in the resurrection of the body, an increasing number of parishioners find cremation meets their family's needs and personal preferences.

A WONDERFUL GIFT

Eight parishes in the diocese have built a columbarium on church property and more are looking into possible construction, said Kevin O'Brien, diocesan director for parish/school services and cemeteries/columbaria. Erected on a concrete foundation, the steel structures are encased in marble, stone, or granite and feature inbuilt spaces or niches.

"In our diocese, the niches are one cubic foot so you can put two urns in them," he said, noting other denominations, like the Methodists and Presbyterians, are also building columbaria. "It's a small footprint structure that can hold a lot of remains. Columbaria are not new but their use in the diocese is."

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Keller; Good Shepherd in Colleyville; St. Philip the Apostle in Flower Mound; St. Maria Goretti and Most Blessed Sacrament in Arlington; Immaculate Conception in Denton; Sacred Heart in Wichita Falls; and Sacred Heart in Seymour currently

offer inurnment in a columbarium for parishioners or practicing Catholics.

"People find a columbarium is more economically feasible than body burial and are easily accessible on church property," O'Brien continued. "On All Souls Day a lot of parishes will have a procession out to it to pray for the dead."

In some ways, it's a nod to earlier times when churches had their own cemeteries. But the director was quick to emphasize that a columbarium is not a cemetery.

"We're not allowed to build a cemetery within city limits per Texas law," O'Brien stressed.

Culturally, Americans don't spend as much time in cemeteries as mourners do in other parts of the world. The availability of a columbarium near the church allows, and even encourages, people to visit a loved one's final resting place.

"It's a wonderful gift to the faithful to be able to offer something like this," he added. "It helps people cope with grief to have a family member close to where they



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A pietà statue graces the new columbarium on the grounds of St. Maria Goretti Parish in Arlington. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

attend Mass every week. Our funeral rites are about helping a family to grieve and let go of their loved one until the resurrection.”

CREATING A SACRED SPACE

The price of purchasing a niche at a columbarium in the diocese ranges from \$2,000 to \$3,800 depending on the parish. Some local funeral homes with a columbarium charge up to \$10,000 for a niche, according to Kathy McCoy, the business manager at St. Maria Goretti Church in Arlington.

Purchasing a spot “is a benefit of being an active member of our church,” explained the administrator, who has sold 130 of the 464 available niches to date.

In April, Father Samuel Maul, the pastor, blessed the new columbarium located on the southeast corner of the parish. The blessing followed careful planning and construction to create a sacred space where the faith community can remember and honor its deceased loved ones.

Money generated by the columbarium is placed in a separate savings account to maintain lights, landscaping, and engraved nameplates at the site. In addition to the huge financial difference between cemetery and columbarium costs, “people like the idea of being buried on holy ground and on church property,” McCoy asserted. “And it’s easy to visit the grave site.”

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton opened its well-planned columbarium in 2013 after prodigious research, said Suzanne Lynch, a parish employee who manages the site. Two aesthetically pleasing monuments — titled Our Lady of Grace and St. Joseph — have a combined 968 spaces. Approximately 434 are sold.

“Parishioners come to Mass here, love the church, and want their loved ones in a Catholic place,” she said, describing a possible motivation for choosing the columbarium. “We’ve installed new lights out there and it’s not gated so people can visit 24/7.”

AN EASY CHOICE

For Debbie Braymer, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church always felt like home. A member since 1997, the New York native and her husband, Michael, were early supporters of the growing parish and helped start its school. When he died in 2022, placing his cremated remains in the parish’s columbarium was an easy choice.

“It was the best thing we could do,” said Braymer, who made the decision with her son. “I can go there any time I want. Every weekend, I go to church and have that option.”

Growing up on the east coast as an Italian Catholic, the 72-year-old remembers family visits to cemeteries were frequent and a chore. It always felt cold and finding the grave site was sometimes difficult.

“I didn’t want that,” Braymer said, explaining her parish’s columbarium is well-done, reverential, and provides a place for meditation. “I want to visit and feel safe when I visit. It’s a blessing.” 🇺🇸

Advent Companions

By Jennifer Johnson
Artwork by Maria Diaz

The liturgical season of Advent is a four-week journey filled with hope, wonder, anticipation, and preparations, culminating with the joyful celebration of our Savior's blessed nativity. At the same time, Advent offers a tremendous test of patience for children and adults alike. In

Advent, one must wait, and sometimes the waiting is hard.

Company often helps lighten one's load during difficult times. Throughout the year, the Catholic Church celebrates the lives of heavenly companions — saints — who eagerly await an invitation to accompany the faithful. Through their intercession, guidance, and the legacy of their earthly witness to holiness, the saints teach us how to love God and others as Jesus did.

This year, consider a new way to wait by inviting these saints, whose feast days we celebrate during Advent, into your heart and home. Be inspired by their example of Christian virtue and how their lives beautifully reflect Jesus' light in the world. They long to accompany us throughout this sacred season as spiritual friends because they hope we someday experience what they now have: eternal joy in the presence of God.

ST. NICHOLAS: DECEMBER 6

Nicholas was born in the southern part of modern-day Turkey near the end of the third century. Raised in a loving, affluent Christian family, he was orphaned at a young age. Upon receiving his inheritance, Nicholas gave his wealth to assist the needy, the sick, and the poor.

Years later, he was ordained a priest and appointed abbot of a monastery. Nicholas was then elected bishop of Myra and served the people well until he was exiled and imprisoned under the emperor Diocletian. After being freed, he attended the Council of Nicea in 325 and was one of the Council Fathers that wrote the same Creed we recite during Mass today.

Many stories have been handed down about St. Nicholas, all demonstrating a life spent in generous service to the poor and the vulnerable. Most familiar is one about a poor family whose three daughters faced a life of slavery because their father could not afford a suitable dowry for them to marry. St. Nicholas rescued the sisters by secretly tossing three bags of coins into their home. That story birthed a tradition that Catholic

children around the world still celebrate: to set out socks or shoes before bedtime, hoping they will be filled with goodies the next morning.

St. Nicholas died in Myra on Dec. 6, 343, and is the patron saint of children, archers, sailors, and merchants. He is often shown bearing three moneybags or, more commonly since the late 19th century, portrayed as Santa Claus.

ADVENT CONNECTION: Pope Benedict XVI once said that St. Nicholas' saintly miracle "was one of constant kindness in everyday life." His example encourages us to be a miracle to others by generously giving our time and friendship as well as material goods. Advent is an opportunity to reflect on when God was most generous with us: the birth of His only Son, Jesus.

REFLECTION: How can we imitate St. Nicholas' example of quiet, sacrificial giving by bringing hope to those in need rather than focusing on material gifts?

FAMILY ACTIVITY: In the spirit of St. Nicholas, bring the gift of Jesus to others by loving as He loved. Remembering the three bags of coins, consider doing three good deeds during Advent. For example: Visit a neighbor who may be lonely or residents at a local nursing home who seldom receive guests. Or secretly leave treats and an encouraging note for a co-worker, teacher, classmate, or priest.





ST. LUCY: DECEMBER 13

Lucy was born in 283 to noble Christian parents in Sicily. After her father died, Lucy vowed virginity and secretly promised herself to Jesus as His special bride.

When Lucy came of age, her mother attempted to arrange a marriage between Lucy and a pagan man. After a pilgrimage during which her ailing mother was healed and St. Agatha appeared to Lucy, she asked permission to refuse the marriage and to share their wealth with the poor. Her mother honored both requests.

In retaliation, her angry betrothed revealed Lucy's Christianity to the Roman governor, who sentenced her to torture and death. Tradition says that she survived many attempts on her chastity and her life, and that Lucy's eyes were removed by her persecutors, which is why

she is often depicted holding a plate with two eyes on it.

St. Lucy was martyred by the sword on Dec. 13, 304, becoming a martyr at 21. She is the patron saint of light, the blind, and eye disorders. Her name, mentioned in the First Eucharistic Prayer, is one of seven female saints commemorated in the Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass and one of four who share the title of virgin-martyr.

ADVENT CONNECTION: St. Lucy's feast day is well situated in the midst of the darkest, coldest time of the year. During Advent, we await the celebration of the Incarnation — God made man in Jesus — and we look forward to Christ's Second Coming when His eternal light will remove all darkness forever. We have a friend in St. Lucy whose example encourages us as we wait for this Christmas and for the Light of the World to return.

REFLECTION: Meditate on Scripture that compares light and darkness such as *Isaiah 9:1*, *Isaiah 60:2*, *Luke 1:78-79*, and *John 1:5*. How do these passages relate to Advent and Christmas? Is there any darkness in our hearts that needs to be brought into the light so we can walk free from guilt and sin this Advent?

FAMILY ACTIVITY: To honor the patron saint of light, have dinner by candlelight on her feast day. Afterward, drive around to look at Christmas lights while listening to the song "Santa Lucia." Share one idea about how to be Christ's light in your school, workplace, parish, or community.

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ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS: DECEMBER 14

Born Juan de Yepes y Álvarez in 1545, St. John of the Cross was the son of poor parents from Castile, Spain. After studying at university, John decided to become a monk and lead a humble life, completely dependent on God. He was ordained in 1567 and met St. Teresa of Avila who asked John to help her reform the Carmelite order, including the male branch. They worked together and started the first house of the Discalced Carmelites. It was then that he adopted “of the Cross.”

Their efforts met violent resistance which led to Father John’s arrest, imprisonment, and abuse. During that time, he prayed and wrote poems in his mind about God’s love. Assisted by Teresa, Fr. John eventually escaped and returned to continue their work and record his poems.

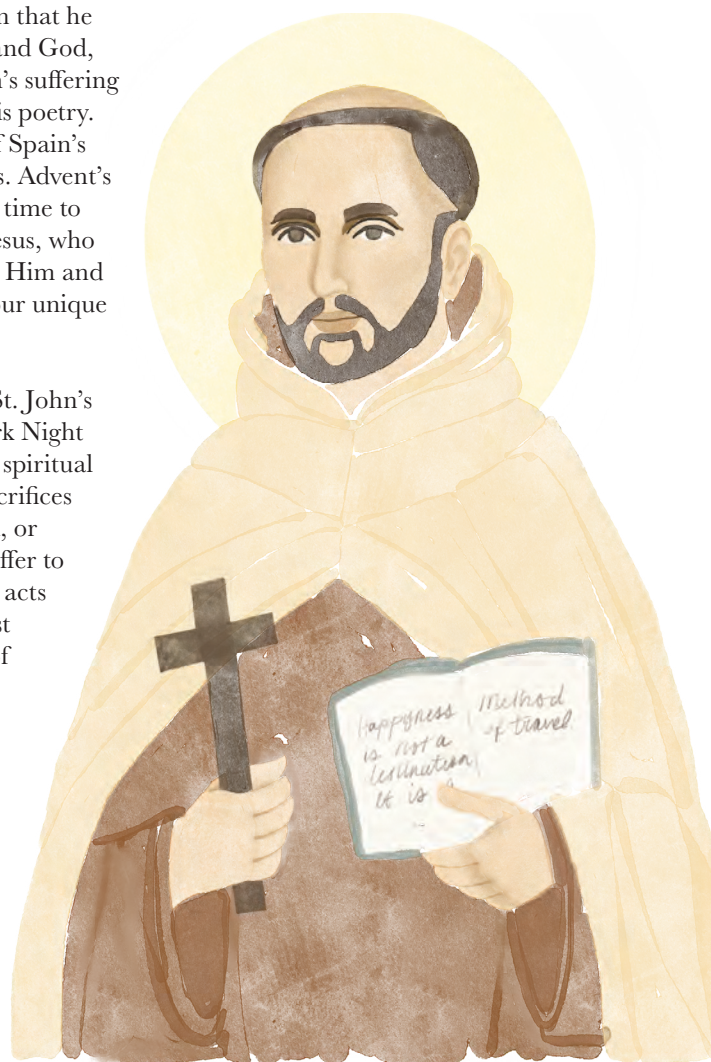
A great theologian and Doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross died on Dec. 14, 1591. He is the patron saint of mystics, contemplatives, and Spanish poets.

ADVENT CONNECTION: St. John of the Cross spent many months unjustly locked away in dark, solitary confinement. It was in his loneliness and pain that he began to more deeply understand God, who ultimately turned St. John’s suffering into a gift for others through his poetry. Today, he is regarded as one of Spain’s most profound spiritual writers. Advent’s season of waiting is the perfect time to unite our own suffering with Jesus, who wants to help us grow closer to Him and bring hope to others through our unique gifts and talents.

REFLECTION: Read one of St. John’s most famous poems, “The Dark Night of the Soul,” and reflect on his spiritual transformation. What small sacrifices in our daily life — family, work, or personal discipline — can we offer to God, knowing that these small acts unite us with the cross of Christ and lead to our ultimate goal of eternal life?

FAMILY ACTIVITY: Make a sacrifice of time each week in Advent for family prayer, Scripture reading, daily Mass, or going to confession. Since St. John was from the Carmelite order, enjoy a caramelized treat afterward, such

as caramel popcorn, apples, or candies to represent the sweetness our souls feel when they are united to God.





ST. ANDREW DUNG-LAC: DECEMBER 21

Andrew Dung-Lac was born Dung An-Tran to a poor, pagan family in north Vietnam in 1795. When his parents moved them to Hanoi to find work, he met a catechist who provided food, shelter, and an education in the Catholic faith.

At age 15, Tran converted to Christianity and was baptized with the name Andrew Dung. After learning Chinese and Latin, he became a catechist and taught the faith until he was ordained a priest in 1823. Father Dung was a good teacher and baptized many; however, this was a dangerous time to be a Christian in Vietnam.

In 1832, Emperor Minh Mang banned all foreign missionaries and tried to make all Vietnamese publicly renounce their faith. Many hiding places for priests were offered in homes of the faithful. Fr. Dung was first arrested in 1835, but his parishioners ransomed him. He changed his last name to Lac and moved to a different region to avoid persecution. In 1839, he was arrested and ransomed again.

Fr. Lac was arrested a third time, tortured, and beheaded in Hanoi on Dec. 21, 1839.

St. Andrew Dung-Lac died for the faith on Dec. 21. He is the patron saint of

Vietnam, and his feast day is celebrated on Nov. 24, along with the 116 named and thousands of unnamed Vietnamese martyrs who died for their faith between the 17th and 19th centuries.

ADVENT CONNECTION: As the end of Advent draws near, we can grow restless and impatient. In reflecting on the life of St. Andrew Dung-Lac just four days before Christmas, we are reminded of his perseverance. His story of conversion, leadership, and courage is a powerful inspiration for us to remain steadfast in our faith journey.

REFLECTION: When St. Andrew was arrested, his parishioners provided support by hiding him and paying ransom for his freedom. What are some ways your parish supports its priests, especially during the weeks leading up to Christmas? Imagine how a spiritual prayer bouquet and a freezer-ready meal might bless our spiritual leaders during this busy time.

FAMILY ACTIVITY: Have you ever considered making a day-trip pilgrimage to the Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine in Oklahoma City? It features a chapel with an image of St. Andrew Dung-Lac and the Vietnamese martyrs, honoring their faith and sacrifice.

For something closer, visit the beautiful Vietnamese Martyrs Church in Arlington. 🇺🇸



Real or Ideal?

courtesy photo/Zack Hebert

On the weekend of Oct. 3, our diocese sent 37 young men to St. Joseph Seminary College in Covington, La. The goal was to see and experience the place where our diocesan seminarians are formed to become priests.

As we endured the eight-hour bus ride, I made sure the guys received one essential message before arriving. “Gentlemen, up until now, all of your discernment of the priesthood has been in the realm of the ideal. You’ve been praying about what you think the priesthood looks like in your mind. Some days this appears profoundly heroic. Other days it appears gloomy or lonely. But it’s still only an ideal, in the realm of the ideal.

“Today, you will see the reality. You will be immersed into what the real beginning of the priestly journey actually looks like. You will be on the physical grounds where the men are formed. You will eat the food they eat. Pray in the places they pray. Play sports in their gym and on their fields. Hear the real voices of real teachers. Encounter truly holy men, and real men striving for holiness. Why is this important? Because when discerning God’s will, what is real must be considered as much as, if not more so, than the ideal.”

What do we mean by this? For every person throughout history, there has

always existed the real and the ideal. The ideal of how things should be, and the real of how things actually are. This tension always exists.

For the most part it is always a bit painful. “I should be better. Society should be better. My school should be better. My family should be better. The priesthood should be better. The Church should be better.” But ... they aren’t better. They are what they are.



Fr. Brett Metzler

So what are our options? Do we simply sit around imagining the ideal and complaining that reality is not so? Maybe we do. This path, however, usually does not lead us toward the ideal, nor help us deal with the real.

A second option is to see reality through the eyes of providence. God can change the real into the ideal whenever He wants to. However, in His divine wisdom, He allows for reality to be what it is with all of its purifications, confusions, sufferings, and joys.

In facing reality through this lens, the confusing inadequacies of life take on their true meaning and offer us the essential meaning of life: God desires you for Himself, and everything He is doing in, around, and through your life is to sanctify you.

At the end of the day, God allows

the *real* intentionally. All that is taking place providentially in your life is meant to purify you of your ego, awaken you to your need for God, and direct you back to loving Him with all that you are.

God knows how to fix the world. Christianity teaches He has already saved the world. His task now is to do everything in His power to invite you to accept that salvation. To allow the Gospel of Jesus Christ to form your life and make you a saint.

On the final day, this is all that will count: not, did I change the reality of the world into the ideal I have in my mind, but, did I allow God to change my real into His ideal?

For those discerning their path, particularly to a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, the question is not: Where is the ideal place to go? Where will I find the ideal priesthood, the most ideal sector of the Catholic Church? Where is the ideal vocation?

The question is, rather, where is God in my reality, and what is He asking me to do for my real neighbor, about my real sins, for my real spiritual life, and for my real calling? 🇺🇸

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

Uniquely Mine

NTC/Juan Guajardo

HE IS: Father Pepe Ruiz, SJ, of Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON: A child of parents who met at a retreat and were deeply involved in the church, Fr. Ruiz recalled watching his father seek spiritual guidance from a Jesuit priest during challenging moments.

“When I turned 14, I attended a retreat for myself, and it was a pivotal experience for me, one that helped me realize my faith was taking shape in a way that was uniquely mine, different from my parents,” Fr. Ruiz shared.

A GIFT, A CALL: From then on, he began helping lead retreats for young adults in Ciudad Juárez. It was a lot of work, but he felt drawn to the spiritually transformative experiences.

He continued discerning while pursuing an industrial engineering and business degree.

“The most important insight I had was to recognize what I most enjoy, what gives me life, and what I feel I do well, and where I’ve been gifted: organizing retreats and working with people,” Fr. Ruiz said. “I felt a strong calling toward ministry.”

BEAUTIFUL SERVICE: Drawn to the Jesuits’ four main areas of service (spiritual retreats, education, social outreach, and

parish work), Fr. Ruiz entered the order’s seminary at the age of 21. His formation journey ended 21 years later, when he took his final Jesuit vows on Aug. 5, 2024, at Sacred Heart Parish in El Paso.

Throughout his formation, Fr. Ruiz served in Louisiana, St. Louis, Boston, Houston, Puerto Rico, and Guadalajara. He earned two master’s degrees from Boston College; a third from the University of Comillas in Madrid, Spain; taught high school; worked in campus ministry; was a vicar and a pastor; and offered support to those impacted by both Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Maria. During those critical moments, he offered pastoral care and support to those affected.

“The experience was very beautiful, even as it was difficult,” Fr. Ruiz reflected. “It was rewarding to be able to serve during such times.”

ORDAINED: June 15, 2015, at St. Joseph Parish in New Orleans

SEEING CLEARLY: Fr. Ruiz finds a special joy in receiving confessions.

“I feel moved to reflect on how, all this time, God has used me to extend His mercy to others. It’s incredible to see how God works through this sacrament.”

As people find peace in relieving their sins, “it’s like I’m seeing a window of what God sees, and I can sense the

warmth in how He cares for us.”

RETURN TO RETREAT: For the past three years, Fr. Ruiz has been one of three Jesuit priests serving at Montserrat.

“It’s a place where we can be together. People don’t come to debate the Word. No, it’s a place to pray, be with God, read Scripture, and there are no impediments to be with Him.”

SAFE PLACE: Some attendees come to Montserrat looking for insight, wisdom, and renewal; and others come carrying the weight of difficult decisions.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUND: “A lot of people come fearing they won’t be able to handle the silence, that it’s going to be very difficult. But almost always, what I hear is that it becomes irrelevant once the retreat begins because there are talks, opportunities for spiritual guidance, and there’s a lot to pray.”

TAKE JOY IN PRAYER: He hopes for the faithful to find renewed joy in prayer, recommending for all to try the Ignatian Examen, which sustains his own prayer life.

“Even if it’s something as simple as closing my eyes, imagining that God is embracing me, this could be the most beautiful and most important thing in my day.” 🇺🇸



CLOSE, AND GETTING CLOSER

By Karla Silva

More than 15 years of service in various ministries within the diocese have taught Campus Minister Lupita Andrade of Cristo Rey Fort Worth College Preparatory the key to persevering on the path of faith: “Always seek to be close to Jesus.”

Andrade comes from a practicing Catholic family, originally from Zacatecas, Mexico. From a very young age, her mother instilled in her the importance of having a personal relationship with Jesus.

“My mother was in a convent, and although she decided her vocation wasn’t there, thanks to the formation she received, she was able to strengthen her relationship

with God. I feel that this was key to her becoming a testimony for us and, for me, the first instrument that allowed me to know God in a personal way,” Andrade said.

During a retreat at age nine, her path of faith became more clearly defined. “I remember at the end of one of the retreats at the Catholic school I attended, they made us open a letter. In my case, it was from my mother, and at the end of the letter, she wrote, ‘I hope God always comes first in your life.’

“That phrase resonated deeply in my heart, and even though I was still a child, thanks to those words and the example I received from my family, I truly began to put

◀ Lupita Andrade holds her Bible at Cristo Rey Fort Worth College Preparatory on Sept. 30. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

God above all else,” Andrade shared.

At 21, Andrade moved from her native Zacatecas to Fort Worth, and it was within the diocese that her journey of service truly began. The first parish she served was St. George in Fort Worth, where she joined the Hispanic youth ministry through the parish’s young adult group.

“For me, Hispanic youth ministry was the catalyst God used to continue my faith formation. Although I participated in church activities in Mexico, which allowed me to have a personal encounter and relationship with God, I realized I lacked training in the Church’s teachings,” Andrade said.

She then began attending various training workshops offered by the ministry, which helped clarify her doubts and understand the reasoning behind many of the Church’s teachings.

“Then I thought: I now know God, I now know what our Church teaches. Now, I want to share it with others. And that’s where I began to serve in other ministries outside of the youth group,” Andrade added.

Even as she threw herself into service, Andrade sometimes struggled with homesickness. “When I arrived here, I had to work full-time and didn’t really have the opportunity to visit my family in Mexico very often. That, without a doubt, caused sadness in my heart,” she commented.

However, she soon came to realize that her service was helping her develop a family in Christ. “God is so good that He placed people in my path who invited me to diocesan events and welcomed me as family. I felt that God was always present in some way to let me know that, as long as I was with Him, everything would be okay,” she said.



Lupita Andrade with her guitar at Cristo Rey Fort Worth College Preparatory. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

With that desire to share God with others and the strength she gained from the family she formed in Christ, Andrade began serving in the charismatic movement, groups for adult women, the Christ Renews His Parish ministry, Kairos movement, and as a confirmation teacher from 2010 to 2023.

“Although I served in different ministries, being a confirmation teacher for teenagers had a great impact on me because it made me realize that the way I grew up, being so close to Jesus thanks to my mother, was not the story of many teenagers here in the country. I began to realize that teenagers often attended the sacrament of confirmation [preparation classes] because their parents forced them, not because they wanted to know more about Jesus. In fact, sometimes their parents didn’t have a personal relationship with God either. That reinforced my desire for people, especially teenagers, to have a personal encounter with Jesus,” she shared.

With a smile, she explained she never imagined she would be able to put the desire God had placed in her heart into practice at Cristo Rey. Andrade had been working in the school’s admissions office when the opportunity to be a campus minister opened. She didn’t hesitate

to accept it.

During her time at Cristo Rey, Andrade has established various activities for the students, such as monthly youth nights, which include a Holy Hour, as well as a weekly “Lunch with the Saints,” where students learn about the life of a saint as they eat. Although participation is optional, there has been a notable increase in attendance at both activities. Youth nights see upwards of 120 students attending, and “Lunch with the Saints” which once began with four students is now limited to 30, the maximum capacity of the classroom.

“Being before Jesus in the Eucharist has allowed the teenagers to experience the goodness and peace of Jesus, and thanks to that, we have seen a very significant change in their openness toward God. Not only in allowing themselves to be encountered by Him, but also in sharing Him with others,” Andrade reflected.

This is Andrade’s fifth year working as a campus minister at Cristo Rey, and she hopes to continue creating spaces for teens, staff, and parents to have a personal and intimate encounter with Jesus and “never tire of seeking Him, because in doing so, their lives will bear fruit, and they will become living witnesses of His love.” 🇺🇸



Community Rules

By Christina Benavides

Instilling strong Catholic values in their family was never a question for Vincent Dang and his wife, Hoang Dinh. When the two moved to Arlington shortly after their wedding, they immediately sought the nearest Catholic church, eager to practice their faith as their parents had taught them, and just as they hoped to teach their own children.

Parishioners of St. Vincent de Paul Church in Arlington for 13 years and parents of two St. Joseph Catholic School students — Lucas and Zachariah — Vincent and Hoang shared with the *North Texas Catholic* how community and a steady practice of faith shape their family's daily life.

HOW THEY MET: Hoang's and Vincent's parents have known each other since before the Vietnam War, but the two first met in their late twenties when Vincent came to visit Harrisburg, Pa, where Hoang grew up.

The couple married on June 23, 2012, at Hoang's home parish, St. Catherine Laboure.

"I went to the Catholic school there," she said. "I went to 12th grade all the way from elementary, so we got married in the church I grew up in."

While Vincent had not attended Catholic school in Vietnam, he did grow up in a vibrant Catholic community.

"There were a lot of activities and services over there. I would go to church

twice a day as a boy, in the morning at 4 a.m. and at 5 p.m. daily," he recalled. "It was just a very close and tight community."

DUAL PERSPECTIVE: Tradition and Catholic values are important in the Dang household, Vincent said. When the couple had children, there was no question about whether they would attend Catholic school.

"It's different as a parent, you know," Hoang reflected. "I definitely have a greater appreciation for Catholic school now. It's not just the academics, which are certainly very good, but it's very wholesome. My boys are well-mannered and polite, and they're taught service to the community."

◀ Vincent Dang and his wife, Hoang Dinh, pose with their sons, Lucas (11) and Zachariah (9), and their niece, Han (6), in the library at St. Joseph Catholic School in Arlington, Sept. 23. (NTC/Rodger Mallison)

KEEP IT CLOSE: When the Dangs first moved to Texas, they lived very close to St. Vincent de Paul in Arlington. “We now live in Mansfield, but we just kept going back to St. Vincent,” Hoang said with a laugh. “Our boys have been raised there. I love the small community, and we know all the faces there.”

From kid’s programs to donation drives to joining small prayer groups or being inspired to volunteer at Mission Arlington as a family, the Dangs have many ties of gratitude and joy connected to the Arlington church.

FAITH AT SCHOOL, HOME: The environment at St. Joseph Catholic School “feels like a family. Everyone knows each other and the teachers really care about their students,” Vincent said.

At the school, parents work with teachers to help develop their children’s faith and education.

“We are both working full-time jobs,” said Vincent, who works in software development. “We only have a small window after work from 5 to 9 p.m. to be with them.” Homework, prayers, and family time routines are supplemented and invigorated through conversations and lessons taught at school.

“It’s a time to reinforce what they’ve learned in school,” Hoang, a physician’s assistant, said. “I hope with the qualities they learn here, they will be able to grow as good humans.”

ALL TOGETHER: After hearing the success of their children’s education at St. Joseph, Vincent’s brother and sister-in-law decided to send their 6-year-old daughter, Han Dang, to the Arlington school as well.

“They live on the same block, and so we pick up, and we drop off, and we get to do a lot of things together,” Hoang and Vincent said.

TAKE IT SERIOUS: The Dangs will pass on a vacation destination if there

isn’t a Catholic church nearby to attend Sunday Mass.

“Our faith is a priority,” Hoang said. “Prayers at nighttime, very simple but important. When we have routines, it’s automatic for the boys, and I don’t have to remind them even when we’re away from home.”

First, the brothers will brush their teeth. Then they pray the Our Father, three Hail Marys, the Glory Be. After a few minutes of silent prayer, the boys will read through their picture book Bible before settling down to sleep.

“We hope they have good habits,” Vincent said, thinking forward to when the boys are in high school and college, and their faith is challenged.

PARENTS HELPING PARENTS:

“There are a lot of good parents out here, who are probably more involved than us. They take care of this and that. It inspires me to step up a little bit more, to take care of our kids,” Hoang said.

“When you’re in a good community, you’ve got a lot of good parents that you can follow,” Vincent added.

TALK AND LISTEN: When it comes to sustaining a marriage, always eat dinner together, Hoang recommended.

“We talk a lot,” Vincent said. “We eat dinner, we talk, we don’t have phones or TVs — just everyday discussion. And we take time to listen.”

LIFE OF PRAYER: To be Catholic is to live a life of prayer, Hoang said.

“We encourage prayers a lot in everything we do. You know, prayers when we’re sick and hurt. Prayers also in thanksgiving.”

“We don’t know what will happen tomorrow, so I always ask God to guide me with how to solve and deal with the unknown,” Vincent added. “I’m always asking God to help guide me on what to do.” 🇺🇸

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





The Lesson of the Mount

Over two thousand years in the future, we still have much to learn from the words spoken by Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount. Presently, we're living through a time when (I fear) a growing number of people have firmly decided that this command of Jesus' is trite, unrealistic, or, ironically, *injurious*. How could we ever be so foolish to believe we could ever truly love someone who stands athwart of everything we hold dear. How could we let some high-handed, delicate "morality" get in the way of us doing what needs to be done for "the good of all."

Besides what is obvious on its face, this shift in cultural attitude worries me for other reasons. The old adage which says those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it gets thrown around perhaps too often, but I feel that it can be applied with particular severity in our own time.

One can be assured that Jesus knew, in his human nature, the full weight of his words when He stood in front of that crowd. His was an ancient, scarred society, one that had fought war after war after war, both with expansionist neighboring powers who sought their destruction or displacement, and amongst themselves, amongst people who should have been neighbors. They were acquainted with, far more intimately than we, the

reality of conflict, most of it deadly.

Hating your enemy was as natural, and as expected, as the gradual erosion of a cliff face; it was physics. That's why Christ's command to *love* someone who is your enemy, an enemy who might very well be plotting your destruction at any given moment, was and is still so radical.

How could it be possible for a Hebrew to love an Assyrian, or an Egyptian, or even a Roman? This was all too much.

For much of the 20th and 21st centuries, "radical" would be the last adjective many secularly minded people would apply to any idea remotely associated with Christianity. It was the religion of parents and grandparents, of the people who were trying to unreasonably control them along with the rest of society. It was a great big NO FUN plastered across their forehead. And worse, it was in the way.

I believe that perception is about to change. We've been gradually rediscovering that hate can be satisfying, can be indulged like any other pleasurable thing. It conjures the unquiet specters of tribal warfare, of the generational feud, of culturally prescribed vengeance. Read only a couple historical narratives and see if this hasn't been an incessant, discordant undertone for most of the time humans have existed. "An eye for an eye, and a

tooth for a tooth."

If we continue to isolate, continue to hide behind online masks that become harder and harder to distinguish from our actual faces, then we will be in danger of forgetting what loving another person truly means, because we will have (in some sense) forgotten what a person actually looks like. Back in Jesus' time, you could at least be assured, as a citizen of Jerusalem, that the Assyrians were real and posed a physical threat to your well-being; now, we spend hours of our time losing our peace to ephemeral names paraded before us on a screen.

This is my exhortation to you. Get outside. Talk to people; ask them how their day's been going. Go for a hike. Spend time that you otherwise might've spent doomscrolling in the magnificence of God's creation. Reset.

But above all, commit in your heart of hearts to the words of Jesus. Contained in them is the most revelatory physics equation in the universe. To will the good of another, to realize that you have far more in common with the person next to you than not, is the antidote to it all. ✚



Walker Price

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

Vice and virtue

NFC/Juan Guajardo

I have been a Dallas Cowboys fan a long time. So long in fact, I watched their last Super Bowl win in 1996. The years since have been brutal as I start each year with a lot of hope just to see my dreams dashed in every possible way. Injuries, poor play, bad trades, bad luck, and don't get me started on the ownership. It seems like there is really no reason to hope for things to change.

I sometimes feel a similar way when I read the news. So much pride, greed, lust, wrath, gluttony, envy, and sloth that hope seems to flee my soul.

These deadly sins take many forms in our world. They happen at all levels of society from government policy and procedures to corporate fiscal decisions and employee care, and even our own personal attitudes and actions.

So where is the hope? Is there a path forward?

Admittedly, I do not have neatly packaged answers for the political and corporate levels of our community, but the Church does offer some insight and spiritual activities we can employ to reform our lives, steer away from vice, and live in virtue.

Each vice that can send our lives down the road to ruin has a corresponding virtue that can recalculate the Google

map of our spiritual life and reroute us toward holiness:

Pride isn't just the original sin; it is the most popular. We tend to crave credit or anger when we don't get enough. I've put the Litany of Humility into a note on my phone, and I pray it at least once a week. It is a great way to reassess my motivation and inclination to pride.

When **greed** has too tight a hold, it's a good idea to find ways to be generous. Give away items we might be holding onto too tightly; purchase blankets and socks, take them to Catholic Charities; give to fundraisers or offer your time and talents to friends. There are countless ways for generosity to function as the antidote to greed.

When **lust** and physical desires overtake us, it is good to practice self-control. Maybe fast from something different each week, or set time limits on social media or video games. Denying ourselves in various areas of life gives us strength to avoid desires of the flesh.

Many of us struggle with **wrath**. To combat it, I have recently been working hard on being patient when I drive. This is not easy as my default is to get irritated and to scamper around the vehicle in front of me. But after months of taking a deep breath and staying in my lane, I can see that patience on the road is helping other areas that used to trigger my temper.



Jeff Hedglen

I am not so much a **glutton** for punishment, but I am a glutton for food, television, social media, and other forms of leisurely activities. Those might not necessarily be evil, but overindulgence is its own type of prison. Moderation frees us to live the life God has for us.

Envy slowly infects, spreads, and imprisons our hearts. But self-sacrificial love counteracts envy. Instead of desiring what others may have, love them for who they are!

The modern doom scrolling, video gaming, binge watching life we live is fodder for **sloth**. If we put down the devices and pick up our bodies and move them in love of God and neighbor, our sloth will slither away.

It might not seem like individuals living this way can make much of a difference, but it is my firm belief that if enough of us were to live virtuous lives, the landscape will look more like the garden of Eden.

Hope is not just a theological virtue; it is the voice crying out in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord." 🇺🇸

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

Broadening the Path

Catholic Schools Camino initiative helps parents, students access Catholic education

By Christina Benavides
Photography by Juan Guajardo

On an unfamiliar path, a knowledgeable guide is invaluable. This spring, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 2, giving parents the option to apply for state funding for private education, as early as January, and receive approximately \$12,000 for the 2026-27 school year to use toward private school tuition, uniforms, tutoring, and other approved educational services. Children with special needs may receive up to \$30,000.

Funds will be distributed in a lottery-based system, with applicants' likelihood of receiving the funds increasing according to four categories of prioritization.

Questions abound about eligibility, the amount of funds, the application process, and more.

To guide families step by step through the entire program, the diocese's Catholic Schools Office opened the Camino initiative.

"The diocese wants to make sure no family is left wondering, or confused with all the paperwork, or missing any deadlines," Oscar Ortiz said. As

executive director of strategic outreach and educational access for the diocese's Catholic Schools Office since June, Ortiz has worked to open the lines of communication with current and prospective families who could benefit from this opportunity.

"We want to express this commitment to our families, that we will walk with them through this new path that they'll be taking towards Catholic schools," said Ortiz, previously principal of Nolan Catholic High School.

SHARE THE WORD

Since the school year began in August, the Catholic Schools Office has made spreading awareness of the Camino initiative a priority, hosting parent information sessions at each of the diocese's 17 schools.

Bishop Michael Olson also expressed the significance of this bill and the opportunities it will open for many parents and students in the diocese. During a Q&A with the bishop at Holy Trinity Catholic School in Grapevine, Bishop Olson reaffirmed the importance of Catholic education.

"The responses I hear from parents in

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At St. Peter the Apostle Catholic School in White Settlement, a fourth grader receives Communion during a school Mass celebrated by Bishop Michael Olson on Sept. 23.



Un estudiante de la escuela católica St. Peter the Apostle en White Settlement recibe la Comunión durante una Misa escolar celebrada el 23 de septiembre.

Ampliando el Camino

La iniciativa de Camino ayuda a padres y estudiantes a acceder la educación católica en la diócesis

Por Christina Benavides
Fotografía por Juan Guajardo

En un camino desconocido, un guía experto es indudablemente muy valioso. La Legislatura de Texas aprobó en la primavera del año en curso el Proyecto de ley SB 2 del Senado. La ley otorga a los padres la opción de solicitar una Cuenta de Libertad Educativa de Texas (TEFA, por siglas en inglés) a partir de enero de 2026 para recibir aproximadamente \$12,000 para el año escolar 2026-27.

Los fondos pueden cubrir los costos de matrícula de escuelas privadas, uniformes, tutorías y otros servicios educativos aprobados y los niños con necesidades especiales pueden recibir hasta \$30,000.

Los fondos estatales se distribuirán mediante un sistema de lotería. La probabilidad de que los solicitantes reciban estos fondos para la educación privada varía y aumenta según la prioridad de cuatro categorías.

Existen numerosas preguntas sobre la elegibilidad, la cantidad de fondos, el proceso de solicitud y otros aspectos de esta nueva ley.

La Oficina de Escuelas Católicas de la diócesis lanzó la iniciativa de Camino para guiar a las familias paso a paso a través del programa TEFA, anteriormente conocido como la Cuenta de Ahorros para la Educación (ESA, por siglas en inglés).

“La diócesis quiere asegurarse de que ninguna familia se quede con dudas ni esté confundida debido al mucho papeleo que se requiere y que no logre cumplir con los plazos requeridos”, declaró Óscar Ortiz.

El Director ejecutivo de difusión estratégica y acceso educativo de la Oficina de Escuelas Católicas de la diócesis, que fue nombrado en junio, Ortiz ha trabajado incansablemente para establecer comunicación abierta con las familias actuales y futuras que podrían beneficiarse grandemente de esta oportunidad.

“Deseamos manifestar nuestro compromiso con nuestras familias y expresarles que caminaremos con ellas en este nuevo camino que emprenderán hacia las escuelas católicas”, afirmó Ortiz, que fuera anteriormente el director de Nolan Catholic High School.

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Executive Director of Strategic Outreach and Education Access Oscar Ortiz leads an information session about Camino at St. Peter the Apostle Catholic School on Oct. 9.



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Catholic schools is, ‘Boy, I’m learning a lot of stuff that I didn’t know before about the faith,’” the bishop said. “That is part of the mission of Catholic education in Catholic schools: to promote and foster the family, because families are the foundation of society, not the individual.

“Our Catholic schools are essential to show the Truth by how we live. I am very committed to Catholic education, and Catholic schools as a means for that,” he said. “It’s important that we go through this together, that we foster the growth of our schools and the access to them as we go forward.”

The bishop celebrated the passing of the Senate Bill and the introduction of the Texas Education Freedom Accounts (TEFA) program, which he explained is very different from vouchers. Whereas TEFA’s (formerly known as Education Savings Accounts/ESAs) are granted to parents, vouchers are paid directly to schools.

“With vouchers come expectations from the state onto the school, which we don’t want because we want our religious liberty. We want to teach as we are called to teach and what we are called to teach,” the bishop concluded.

A DEVELOPING STORY

Parents have a lot of good questions, and some answers are still in development at the state level. But don’t let that stop you from planning to apply or staying informed, Ortiz advised.

“The key to our success is getting our families to subscribe to get alerts from Camino, to get information, and to ask us questions when they need us,” he said.

As of the beginning of October, about 1,300 families had subscribed to the diocese’s Camino alerts, representing more than

3,000 current and prospective students.

“Essentially, if you qualify under the categories, we encourage you to apply,” Superintendent Frank Perez said. “We’re encouraging everybody to apply — I’m applying myself because I have a student with special needs. I might not be at the very top of the list, but it just shows our legislators that this program is important to us.”

The state has budgeted \$1 billion to serve approximately 90,000 students, based on their circumstances. It’s up to parents to show their legislators this program matters, Perez continued. “The more people that come, the more that it will grow and expand for years to come.”

“There’s a lot of factors that are out of our control, but what we can control is go ahead and register,” Ortiz added.

BLESSING TO SHARE

Informed parents and administrators are excited to share the good news revolving around Camino, Ortiz said.

A Camino volunteer task force that Ortiz is organizing will include social media promoters to help with visibility and sign-ups; parishioners who can personally share the news and QR codes at churches; and faithful who have pledged their time, come January, to help with applications and questions.

“It’s a mix of principals, some

enrollment coordinators, some secretaries or office managers at their parishes, and many parents who have committed to be on location once dates are available,” Ortiz said.

Angelica Birdsong of Holy Trinity has volunteered to help with applications.

“I’m not sure what Saturday or time it will be, but I will make myself available and offer up my help to people with the application,” Birdsong said.

Birdsong enrolled her son in Holy Trinity in first grade and has seen him thrive in his education for the past four years.

“I saw a difference since the beginning, in his academic level and his understanding of our religion. This was very important for me,” she said.

The mother believes Catholic education is worth the investment.

“I understand all of the work it takes to make it happen, but, in my opinion, the education is worth it, regardless of its cost,” she said. “But now, with this option that we have to potentially receive the funds, ease our family’s struggle, well, it goes without saying — it’s a great blessing.” 🇺🇸

Get more information on Camino and applying for the Texas Education Freedom Accounts at CatholicSchoolsFWDiocese.org/esa-school-choice.



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DIFUNDIENDO EL MENSAJE

La Oficina de Escuelas Católicas ha priorizado la difusión de la iniciativa de Camino desde que el año escolar comenzó en agosto y ha organizado varias sesiones informativas para los padres en cada una de las 17 escuelas de la diócesis.

El Obispo Michael Olson recalco también la importancia de este proyecto de ley y las oportunidades que brindará a muchos padres y estudiantes de la diócesis. El Obispo reafirmó la importancia de la educación católica durante una sesión de preguntas y respuestas celebrada en la Escuela Católica Holy Trinity de Grapevine.

“Escucho de los padres de las escuelas católicas: ¡Vaya! Estoy aprendiendo muchas cosas que no sabía sobre la fe”, aseveró el Obispo Olson. “Eso es parte de la misión de la educación católica de las escuelas católicas: el promover y fomentar la familia porque las familias son la base de la sociedad, no el individuo.

“Nuestras escuelas católicas son esenciales para mostrar la Verdad a través de nuestra vida. Estoy muy comprometido con la educación católica y con las escuelas católicas como un medio para lograrlo”, afirmó. “Es importante que enfrentemos esta misión juntos, que fomentemos el crecimiento de nuestras escuelas y el

Oscar Ortiz, director ejecutivo de alcance estratégico y acceso educativo de la Diócesis de Fort Worth, dirige una sesión informativa sobre Camino en la escuela católica de St. Peter the Apostle el 9 de octubre.

acceso a ellas, a medida que sigamos adelante”.

UNA HISTORIA EN DESARROLLO

Los padres tienen muchas y muy buenas preguntas, pero aún no se tienen todas las respuestas a nivel estatal. No obstante, Ortiz advierte a los padres que no dejen que esto les impida prepararse para presentar su solicitud o mantenerse informados.

“La clave de nuestro éxito es lograr que nuestras familias se suscriban para recibir alertas de Camino, obtener información y hacer todas las preguntas necesarias”, Ortiz señaló. A principios de octubre, más de 1,000 familias de la diócesis se habían suscrito a las alertas de Camino, lo que representa a más de 2,000 estudiantes actuales y futuros.

“En esencia, si califican bajo cualquiera de las categorías establecidas, los animamos a que soliciten”, dijo el superintendente Frank Pérez. “Animamos a todos a que soliciten; yo mismo lo estoy haciendo porque soy padre de un estudiante con necesidades especiales. Puede que no esté entre los primeros de la lista, pero esto demostrará a nuestros legisladores que este programa es importante para nosotros”.

El estado ha presupuestado mil millones de dólares para asistir alrededor de 90,000 estudiantes, según sean las circunstancias. Los padres han de demostrar a sus legisladores la importancia de este programa, agregó Pérez. “Cuanta más gente se interese y participe, más crecerá y más se expandirá el programa en los próximos años”.

“Hay muchos factores que están fuera de nuestro control; sin embargo, hay algo que sí podemos controlar y es el inscribirse en este programa”, agregó Ortiz.

UNA BENDICIÓN PARA COMPARTIR

Tanto los padres como los administradores que buscan informarse están entusiasmados por compartir las buenas noticias sobre Camino, apuntó Ortiz.

Él está organizando un grupo de trabajo de voluntarios de Camino que incluirá promotores de redes sociales para ayudar con la visibilidad y las inscripciones del programa; feligreses que podrán compartir personalmente las noticias que vayan surgiendo y los códigos QR en las parroquias; y numerosos fieles que se han comprometido a dar de su tiempo a partir de enero para ayudar a llenar las solicitudes y responder las preguntas.

“El grupo se compone de directores de escuelas, varios coordinadores de inscripción, algunas secretarías o gerentes de oficina de las parroquias y muchos padres que se han comprometido a estar en persona en las sesiones, una vez que se tengan los lugares y las fechas disponibles”, explicó Ortiz.

Angélica Birdsong de la escuela Holy Trinity se ha ofrecido como voluntaria para ayudar a llenar las solicitudes.

“No estoy segura de qué sábado ni a qué hora será, pero estaré disponible y ofreceré mi ayuda cuando vayan a llenar la solicitud”, dijo Birdsong.

Birdsong matriculó a su hijo en primer grado en Holy Trinity hace cuatro años y ha visto el gran progreso educativo que ha tenido durante este tiempo.

“Desde el principio noté una gran diferencia en su nivel académico y en su comprensión de nuestra religión. Esto ha sido muy importante para mí”, añadió.

Ella cree que la educación en una escuela católica vale la pena.

“Entiendo todo el trabajo que requiere lograrlo, pero, en mi opinión, la educación católica vale la pena, sin importar el costo”, dijo. “Pero ahora, con esta opción que tenemos de posiblemente recibir estos fondos y aliviar la lucha de nuestra familia, bueno, no hace falta decirlo, ¡es una gran bendición!” 🇺🇸

Obtén más información sobre Camino y cómo solicitar la Cuentas de Libertad Educativa de Texas para la Educación en CatholicSchoolsFWDioc.org/eleccion-escolar-esa.

Who is my neighbor?

More stringent enforcement of immigration law affects parishes and schools in the Diocese of Fort Worth

By Susan Moses

It's hard to put an accurate number on how the stricter enforcement of immigration law is affecting parishes and schools in the Diocese of Fort Worth, but it is possible to know some local individuals impacted — both documented and undocumented.

And maybe, for Catholics, that's more helpful, because we're called to love our neighbors.

But before we get too far into this snapshot of how immigration enforcement is affecting the Diocese of Fort Worth, we remember the “*both/and*” approach to immigration emphasized by Bishop Michael Olson in his Jan. 24, 2025, statement to the diocese, in solidarity with the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops.

First, Bishop Olson reiterated the right and responsibility of each country to maintain a safe border *and* an orderly immigration process that respects the laws of each country.

Also, he continued, “Our government must promulgate laws that include *both* a secure border *and* a humane immigration policy that respects the integrity and unity of families.”

Finally, the bishop concluded, “Please be kind to each other and avoid incendiary language and actions that will not help us to act justly or mercifully.”

An important appeal, given the heated rhetoric around the topic.

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Worshippers listen to the homily during Mass on June 23 at Holy Name of Jesus Church in Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



¿Quién es nuestro prójimo?

La aplicación más estricta de las leyes migratorias afecta a las parroquias y las escuelas de la Diócesis de Fort Worth



Por Susan Moses

No es fácil determinar con precisión de qué manera la aplicación más estricta de las leyes de inmigración afecta a las parroquias y las escuelas de la Diócesis de Fort Worth. No obstante, es posible que conozcamos a personas en nuestra comunidad que hayan sido afectadas, ya sean documentadas o indocumentadas.

Como católicos esto quizás nos ayude a nuestra vivencia de fe porque estamos llamados a amar a nuestro prójimo.

Antes de examinar más detalladamente esta perspectiva con respecto al efecto que tiene la aplicación de las leyes migratorias sobre la Diócesis de Fort Worth, recordemos el enfoque de “*ambos/y*” sobre la inmigración que el Obispo Michael Olson enfatiza en su declaración del 24 de enero de 2025 a toda la diócesis en solidaridad con la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Texas.

En primer lugar, el Obispo Olson reitera el derecho y la responsabilidad que cada país tiene de mantener una frontera segura y de establecer un proceso de inmigración ordenado que salvaguarde las leyes del país.

El apunta también que: “Nuestro gobierno debe promulgar leyes que incluyan tanto una frontera segura como una política migratoria humana

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Deacon Rigoberto Leyva carries the Book of the Gospels at St. Philip the Apostle Parish in Flower Mound on April 5. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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FEAR AND UMBRAGE

When policy changes were implemented following the inauguration of the new administration in January, Deacon Rigoberto Leyva, diocesan director of Hispanic Ministry, noticed fear kept some people from attending church on Sunday.

Panic and anxiety are amplified by rumors and social media. Dcn. Leyva, who serves at St. Peter the Apostle Parish in White Settlement, observed that an offhand comment from a political leader gets magnified, and social media “publishes it right away and everyone’s talking about it. We put fear on our own people.”

However, Dcn. Leyva recognized that in subsequent months, “Little by little, they start coming back to church, but they still have that fear, that uncertainty, of what’s going to happen.”

Undocumented residents are returning to public life prepared, Dcn. Leyva noted, with legal custody arrangements for children and additional names on property or financial accounts “just in case something happened. That’s what they’ve been doing. They’re more prepared for

whatever happens.”

In addition to a general unease, immigrants bear the sting of being labeled a criminal.

Dcn. Leyva can relate. A citizen since 2001, he crossed the border illegally at 19 and worked as a roofer to help his mother buy a house in Mexico.

He said, “I was illegal at one time. I always tried to do good. I was going to church, but I was in that category of criminal.

“There are some bad apples. I do not deny that. But most or the majority of the illegals here come with something in their head: ‘I want a better life for my family.’ That’s all they want.

“This is the American dream, to better yourself and to contribute to the community. Many of our people, many — and I know them — that’s exactly what they do. They are contributing to this country,” he continued.

UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS

Felipe fled his native El Salvador to escape its civil war when he was a teenager. After working many years as a legal permanent resident, he eventually

became a U.S. citizen.

Now 71, he earns a living as a landscaper in Tarrant County.

On a Saturday afternoon in July, Felipe got out of his pickup truck to enter a store. Recovering from foot surgery, the slight man wore an orthopedic boot as he limped toward the door.

Suddenly, three Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents came from behind, knocked him to the ground, and put him in handcuffs, scraping his knees in the process.

They confiscated his wallet and phone but refused to look at his driver license or passport card as they put him in a van with others, headed to Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado.

At 10 p.m., they returned his wallet to him, without his phone, and told him he was free to leave. He limped along dark, unfamiliar roads until he found an open convenience store where he borrowed a phone to call his family for a ride.

A few months have passed, and Felipe is still a little shaken by the experience, especially last month when a police officer

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A LA IZQUIERDA: La Parroquia de Holy Name of Jesus de Fort Worth ofrece los fines de semana cinco misas en español y una en inglés. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

ABAJO A LA IZQUIERDA: Un bebé mira hacia el altar en la Parroquia de Holy Name of Jesus. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



de St. Peter the Apostle de White Settlement, observa que, muy a menudo, un comentario casual de un líder político se amplifica y las redes sociales “lo publican de inmediato y todo el mundo habla de ello. Infundimos miedo en nuestra propia gente”.

Sin embargo, el Diácono Leyva reconoce que en los pasados meses, “poco a poco, los fieles comenzaron a regresar a la iglesia, pero aún persisten el miedo y la incertidumbre de lo que podría pasar”.

Los residentes indocumentados están regresando a la vida pública preparados, señala el Diácono Leyva, pues han hecho acuerdos de custodia legal para los niños y añadido nombres adicionales a sus propiedades o cuentas financieras “por si acaso, algo sucediera. Eso es lo que han estado haciendo. Están mejor preparados para lo que suceda”.

Se añade a la inquietud general de los inmigrantes el dolor de ser calificados como delincuentes o criminales.

El Diácono Leyva entiende bien el temor que ellos sienten. Él se hizo ciudadano estadounidense en el 2001; cruzó ilegalmente a los 19 años la frontera de este país; y trabajó en la construcción y reparación de tejados para ayudar a su madre a comprar una casa en México.

Comenta que “Por un tiempo fui ilegal. Siempre intenté hacer el bien. Iba a la iglesia, pero estaba en esa categoría de delincuente”.

“Hay algunas personas que no

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que respeta la integridad y la unidad de las familias”.

El Obispo concluye su declaración con estas palabras: “Por favor, sean amables unos con otros y eviten el lenguaje incendiario y las acciones que no nos ayudarían a actuar con justicia ni misericordia”.

Esto constituye un llamado importante, dada la acalorada retórica que existe en torno a dicho tema.

MIEDO Y RESENTIMIENTO

Luego de que se implementaran cambios en las políticas migratorias tras la toma de posesión de la nueva administración gubernamental en enero, el Diácono Rigoberto Leyva, Director diocesano del Ministerio Hispano, notó que el miedo estaba impidiendo que algunas personas asistieran los domingos a la iglesia.

Los rumores y las redes sociales tienden a acrecentar el pánico y la ansiedad. El Diácono Leyva, que sirve en la Parroquia



Friar Feliciano Torres Castro, OFM Cap., pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Fort Worth, in the church courtyard. (NTC/ Juan Guajardo)



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pulled him over. The officer looked at his driver license, threw it back at him, and drove away, he said.

“I’m not angry; I’m not hateful. I’m a peaceful guy, you know. They are doing their job, but they don’t have to do it like that,” he said.

A Catholic, Felipe said his faith has buoyed him through difficult circumstances. “Faith, I can’t tell you how much faith I’ve got. I don’t do nothing before I pray.” Pointing upward, he added, “That One is my God; that One is my everything.”

STAY CALM AND FAITHFUL

Friar Feliciano Torres Castro, OFM Cap., serves as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, a bustling parish in

north Fort Worth that offers four Spanish and two English Masses each weekend.

“All the Spanish Masses are full, always packed,” he said. “But people are scared right now. No one wants to go out much. Still, attendance at church has increased. Curiously, people feel safe at church.”

As the pastor, he provides practical and spiritual support.

The parish offers citizenship classes for those who qualify, and Friar Torres said a record high of about 70 are enrolled. He also encourages parishioners to improve their English, which he too studies most nights.

Spiritually, he said, “We keep encouraging them to stay calm. God is with us, and the Church is here for them. I always

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El Obispo Michael Olson y más de 3,500 fieles toman parte el 8 de diciembre del 2024 de una procesión en la Parroquia de Immaculate Heart of Mary de Fort Worth y sus alrededores en honor a la Inmaculada Concepción y Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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son buenas. No lo niego. Pero la mayoría de los ilegales llegan aquí pensando en su cabeza: ‘Quiero una vida mejor para mi familia’. Eso es todo lo que quieren”.

“Éste es el sueño americano: superarse y contribuir a la comunidad. Muchos de nuestros compatriotas, muchos —y los conozco—, eso es exactamente lo que hacen. Están contribuyendo a este país”, continúa diciendo.

RUDEZA INNECESARIA

Felipe huyó de su país natal El Salvador cuando era adolescente para escapar de la guerra civil. Trabajó muchos años como residente permanente legal

y se convirtió finalmente en ciudadano estadounidense.

Tiene 71 años y se gana la vida como jardinero en el condado de Tarrant.

Un sábado por la tarde de este pasado julio Felipe se bajó de su camioneta para entrar a una tienda. Llevaba una bota ortopédica y cojeaba porque se estaba recuperando de una cirugía en uno de sus pies. De repente, mientras se dirigía hacia la puerta, tres agentes del Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas (ICE, por siglas en inglés) lo tiraron al suelo y lo esposaron y sus rodillas se rasparon en el proceso.

Le confiscaron la billetera y el teléfono, pero se negaron a mirar su licencia de conducir o el pasaporte y lo subieron a

una camioneta con otros detenidos, rumbo al Centro de Detención Prairieland en Alvarado.

A eso de las 10 p.m. le devolvieron la billetera, pero no su teléfono, y le dijeron que podía irse. Se fue cojeando por caminos oscuros y desconocidos hasta que encontró una tienda abierta en la que pidió que le dejaran usar el teléfono para llamar a su familia para que lo recogieran.

Pese a que han transcurrido varios meses, Felipe está todavía un poco afectado por esta experiencia. Este sentimiento se agravó el mes pasado cuando un policía lo detuvo. Él nos cuenta que el agente miró su licencia de conducir, se la arrojó y se fue.

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More than 800 faithful attended the Mass for the repose of the soul of Pope Francis on April 24 at Holy Name of Jesus Parish. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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tell people: Stay calm; stay faithful; pray; behave well; pay taxes; live peacefully. Be polite, kind. Live your life normally but be prepared — because we never know.

“Immigration even came to check on me once — to confirm I’m here legally and doing my job. Everything was fine,” he said.

In ministering to immigrants in an atmosphere of anxiety, Friar Torres Castro calls upon his formation as a Franciscan friar. “That’s my mission: to be an instrument of peace. And we have to say no to violence. That’s so important. And to learn how to express emotions, disagreements. Sometimes I don’t agree, but I express it through dialogue, not aggression.”

DETAINED, DERAILED

For a school with an enrollment that barely cracks three digits, Cassata Catholic High School has had three cases involving

Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The most recent was just days before school started in August, when Lucia, a Cassata senior, called and said her parents, who had worked in the U.S. for more than 20 years, had been detained that weekend. Concerned about the possible length of detention and the expense of a legal case, her parents decided to return to their country of origin.

She was able to speak on the phone with her mom, who told Lucia, “You need to be strong; you need to raise your middle-school sister as your own.”

Principal Julianna McConegly said the school sprang into action. “We spent the first week of school just making sure she had immediate assistance, then trying to get some legal help — that way she could get custody of her sister. It did help that she was 18.”

Cassata staff also set up passport appointments so Lucia and her sister will

be able to see their parents in the future.

McConegly checks in regularly with Lucia, who finished her graduation requirements a few weeks ago and began working double shifts to support herself and her sister.

The principal said, “What should be one of the happiest times, finishing high school — she’s now under an immense amount of stress and pressure, knowing that she’s responsible for her sister.”

While Lucia and her sister are U.S. citizens, two recent graduates of Cassata who are not citizens were detained. Both were brought to the U.S. as infants.

One had just completed his graduation requirements when he was in a minor car accident. Police turned him over to ICE custody, where he remained for several months until he bonded out. He missed graduation and his college plans derailed.

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Los estudiantes hacen su trabajo en clase en Cassata Catholic High School el 11 de abril de 2024. (foto del archivo de NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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“No estoy enojado; no odio. Soy una persona pacífica, ¿sabes? Están haciendo su trabajo, pero no tienen por qué hacerlo así”, asevera.

Felipe es católico y afirma que su fe lo ha sostenido en circunstancias muy difíciles. “Fe, no puedo expresar cuánta fe tengo. No hago nada sin antes rezar”. Señala hacia arriba y añade: “Ése es mi Dios; ése es mi todo”.

MANTENER LA CALMA Y LA FE

Fray Feliciano Torres Castro, OFM Cap., se desempeña como párroco de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, una concurrida parroquia en el norte de Fort Worth que ofrece cuatro misas en español y dos en inglés todos los fines de semana.

“Todas las misas en español están llenas, siempre abarrotadas”, apuntó. “Pero la gente tiene miedo ahora mismo. Nadie quiere salir mucho. Aun así, la asistencia a la iglesia ha aumentado. Curiosamente, la gente se siente segura en la iglesia”.

Como párroco, el fraile brinda apoyo

práctico y espiritual a sus feligreses.

La parroquia ofrece clases de ciudadanía para quienes califican y Fray Torres dijo que hay una cifra récord de aproximadamente 70 personas inscritas. Anima también a los feligreses a aprender y mejorar su inglés; tarea que él hace para sí mismo casi todas las noches.

El fraile atiende también el aspecto espiritual de ellos y explica que “Seguimos animándolos a mantener la calma. Dios está con nosotros y la Iglesia está aquí para ellos. Siempre les digo a las personas: Mantengan la calma; sean fieles; recen; compórtense bien; paguen sus impuestos; vivan en paz. Sean educados, amables. Lleven su vida con normalidad, pero estén preparados, porque nunca se sabe”.

Nos comparte que “Inmigración incluso vino una vez a verificar mi propia situación; querían confirmar que estaba legalmente aquí y que estaba haciendo mi trabajo. Todo estaba bien”.

Fray Torres Castro recurre a su formación como fraile franciscano al ejercer su ministerio con inmigrantes que están viviendo en un ambiente de mucha ansiedad. “Ésa es mi misión: ser un

instrumento de paz. Y tenemos que decir no a la violencia. Eso es muy importante. Y aprender a expresar las emociones y los desacuerdos. A veces, no estoy de acuerdo, pero lo expreso a través del diálogo, no de la agresión”.

DETENIDOS, DESCARRILADOS

Pese a que la Escuela Preparatoria Católica Cassata tiene una matrícula que apenas llega a los tres dígitos, ya ha tenido tres casos relacionados con el Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas (ICE).

El incidente más reciente ocurrió pocos días antes del inicio de clases en agosto. Se trata de Lucía, una estudiante de último año de Cassata, que llamó a la escuela para dejar saber que sus padres, quienes habían trabajado en los Estados Unidos por más de 20 años, habían sido detenidos por ICE ese fin de semana. Sus padres decidieron regresar a su país de origen porque les preocupaba mucho la posible duración de la detención y el costo del proceso legal.

Lucía llegó a hablar por teléfono con

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Another Cassata graduate worked as a mechanic and married a U.S. citizen. When their baby girl was born, he felt he was living the dream. But this spring as he left work, police stopped him to ask if he knew anything about a nearby crime, then turned him over to the custody of ICE, where he remains in detention.

McConegly said she and others at Cassata have written letters in support of the two detained graduates.

These experiences have shown McConegly, “This is actually real. It’s not just nameless, faceless people. These are good kids who are trying to make something of themselves and contribute to our community.”

WARY STUDENTS

In her 10 years teaching English at Lamar High School in Arlington, Sarah Scheibelhut has faced external challenges to education before — remote learning during COVID being primary.

She’s always had immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries, Vietnam, and the Philippines in her classroom. In the past, they would spend their first two years in a newcomer center focused on learning English. This year, “They go straight to my classroom. They may not speak any English, and I have to teach them ‘Macbeth.’”

She’s observed more immigrant students staying with family friends instead of parents. “They lack the support they need to succeed in school,” she said.

In general, Scheibelhut, a parishioner of St. Jude Church in Mansfield, noticed, “Students have less trust in adults, less trust in the school system. I sense that they are wary about everything.”

She strives to have her classroom be a place where students are respected, valued, and comfortable. “I’ve always felt like this is my Calcutta,” she said, referencing St. Teresa of Calcutta’s dedication to the poor. “It’s my mission to be Christ to these kids; my goal to be the arms and hands of Jesus. I try to love them where they are; give them what they need, as much as I can. I want to give them a space to feel safe.”

FIVE-STAR CITIZEN

Deacon Mauricio Hernandez can be found weekends at the tri-parish community of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Decatur; St. Mary in Jacksboro; and St. John the Baptizer in Bridgeport. During the week, he prepares Spanish speakers for the sacraments and conducts funerals, weddings, and quinceañeras at St. Stephen Parish in Weatherford.

He first crossed the border illegally in 1986, and he finally became a citizen in 2015. “All these years, I was with no papers. With my legal situation, to protect yourself: be invisible.”

He encourages immigrants “to be a five-star citizen in this country,” obeying traffic laws, avoiding large gatherings, and forgoing loud music.

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su madre, que le dijo con profundo dolor: “Hija, tienes que ser fuerte; tienes que criar a tu hermana de secundaria como si fuera tuya”.

La directora de Cassata, Julianna McConegly, explicó que la escuela actuó sin demora. “Pasamos la primera semana de clases simplemente asegurándonos de que Lucía recibiera inmediatamente la asistencia que necesitaba y nos ocupamos de conseguir ayuda legal para que pudiera obtener la custodia de su hermana. Fue de gran ayuda que tuviera 18 años”.

El personal de Cassata también programó las citas para obtener el pasaporte de Lucía y de su hermana, para que así pudieran ver a sus padres en el futuro.

McConegly se comunica con frecuencia con Lucía. Ella completó sus requisitos de graduación hace unas semanas y comenzó a trabajar doble turno para poder mantenerse a sí misma y a su hermana.

La directora señaló que “Éste debería haber sido uno de los momentos más felices de su vida por terminar la preparatoria; en cambio, ahora está bajo una enorme presión y estrés, sabiendo que es responsable de su hermana”.

Si bien Lucía y su hermana eran ciudadanas estadounidenses, dos recién graduados de Cassata que no eran ciudadanos fueron también detenidos. Ambos eran bebés cuando llegaron a los Estados Unidos.

Uno de ellos acababa de completar sus requisitos de graduación cuando sufrió un accidente automovilístico leve. La policía lo entregó a la agencia de ICE, donde permaneció varios meses hasta que salió bajo fianza. No pudo graduarse y sus planes de estudios universitarios se desearrilaron.

Otro graduado de Cassata

trabajaba como mecánico y se casó con una ciudadana estadounidense. Cuando nació su hija, sintió que estaba viviendo su sueño. Sin embargo, al salir del trabajo un día durante la primavera, la policía lo detuvo para preguntarle sobre un delito ocurrido en la vecindad. Lo entregaron a la custodia de ICE y aún permanece detenido.

McConegly dijo que ella y otras personas de Cassata han escrito varias cartas de apoyo para sus dos estudiantes graduados detenidos.

Estas experiencias le demuestran a McConegly que: “Esto es real. No se trata sólo de personas sin nombre ni rostro. Son buenos chicos que intentan salir adelante y contribuir a nuestra comunidad”.

CAUTELA Y DESCONFIANZA

En los 10 años que lleva como profesora de inglés en la escuela secundaria Lamar de Arlington, Sarah Scheibelhut se ha enfrentado a desafíos que se originan fuera del ámbito escolar. El mayor de ellos fue el aprendizaje remoto durante la pandemia.

Scheibelhut ha tenido siempre en su aula inmigrantes procedentes de países hispanohablantes, de Vietnam y de las Filipinas. Pasaban anteriormente sus dos primeros años en un centro para recién llegados, cuya enseñanza se centraba en el aprendizaje del inglés. Este año “Van directamente a mi aula. Puede que no hablen nada de inglés, pero aún así tengo que enseñarles la obra ‘Macbeth’”.

Scheibelhut ha observado que una mayor cantidad de estudiantes inmigrantes se alojan ahora con amigos de la familia en lugar de con sus padres. “Carecen del apoyo que necesitan para tener éxito en la escuela”, comentó.

Scheibelhut, feligresa de la Parroquia de St. Jude de Mansfield, apuntó que en general, “Los estudiantes confían menos en los adultos y en el sistema escolar. Siento que desconfían de todo”. Ella se esfuerza para que su aula sea un lugar donde los estudiantes se sientan respetados, valorados y

El Obispo Michael Olson celebra el Rito de Elección en la Parroquia de Holy Name of Jesus de Fort Worth. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

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“First, put your faith in the Lord. If you do everything right, don’t worry about it. For us immigrants, the church is the only island of refuge we find in this big sea,” he said.

He emphasized that immigrants should retain a sense of “gratitude for the U.S., where you have the opportunity to work, to support, to provide for your family. Appreciate that.”

STANDING WITH THE CHURCH

The Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have much to say about treating migrants with the dignity and respect due every person, made in the image and likeness of God.

Bishop Olson, in his editorial in the September/October issue of the *North Texas Catholic*, said, “The distinction between criminals who have been involved with trafficking drugs or human beings and people who have come to our country without legal authorization and who have worked productively among us, sometimes for decades, is an important distinction for just, reasonable, and compassionate immigration reform.”

The Catholic Church is an advocate for the rights of immigrants, added Dcn. Leyva, and members of the Body of Christ need to align their attitude with Church teaching.

He said, “If we learn to see and to welcome the immigrant people as the Gospel teaches us to do, the Church and our communities will be much better off. But we need to step up and leave our fears behind and learn to be more human. We need to see the humanity of Jesus Christ. He came to teach us how to be good humans.” ✝

EDITOR’S NOTE: Photographs are for illustrative purposes only, and Lucia and Felipe’s names have been changed to retain their anonymity.



Deacon Mauricio Hernandez delivers a homily at St. Stephen Parish. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Cientos de feligreses celebran el 12 de diciembre de 2023 la Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la Parroquia de Holy Name of Jesus. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

RESPALDAR A LA IGLESIA

La Biblia, el *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica* y la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de los Estados Unidos nos hablan extensamente sobre cómo tratar a los migrantes con la dignidad y el respeto que merece toda persona, hecha a imagen y semejanza de Dios.

El Obispo Olson, en su editorial de la edición de septiembre/octubre del *North Texas Catholic*, afirmó: “La distinción entre los delincuentes que han estado involucrados en el tráfico de drogas o de seres humanos y las personas que han llegado a nuestro país sin autorización legal y que han trabajado productivamente entre nosotros, a veces durante décadas, es una distinción importante para una reforma migratoria justa, razonable y compasiva”.

“La Iglesia Católica defiende los derechos de los inmigrantes, añadió el Diácono Leyva, y los miembros del Cuerpo de Cristo deben alinear su actitud con las enseñanzas de la Iglesia.

“Si aprendiéramos a ver y acoger a los inmigrantes como nos enseña el Evangelio, la Iglesia y nuestras comunidades estarán mucho mejor. Hemos de tomar la iniciativa de dar un paso adelante, dejar atrás nuestros miedos y aprender a ser más humanos. Necesitamos ver la humanidad de Jesucristo; Él vino a enseñarnos a cómo vivir a plenitud nuestra propia humanidad”. 🇺🇸

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cómodos. “Siempre he creído que ésta es mi Calcuta”, aseveró, refiriéndose a la dedicación de Santa Teresa de Calcuta a los pobres. “Mi misión es ser Cristo para estos niños; mi meta es ser los brazos y las manos de Jesús. Intento amarlos donde están; darles lo que necesitan, tanto como puedo. Quiero darles un espacio donde se sientan seguros”.

CIUDADANO DE CINCO ESTRELLAS

El Diácono Mauricio Hernández sirve los fines de semana en las comunidades de tres parroquias, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary de Decatur, St. Mary de Jacksboro y St. John the Baptizer de Bridgeport. Prepara durante la semana a los hispanohablantes para recibir los sacramentos y oficia funerales, bodas

y quinceañeras en la Parroquia de St. Stephen de Weatherford.

Cruzó la frontera ilegalmente por primera vez en el 1986 y se naturalizó en el 2015. “Todos esos años estuve sin papeles. Dada mi situación legal, para protegerme, tenía que ‘ser invisible’”.

El Diácono Mauricio alienta a los inmigrantes a que “sean ciudadanos de cinco estrellas en este país” y obedezcan las leyes de tránsito, que eviten reunirse en grupos grandes y que no escuchen música estruendosa.

“Primero, pongan su fe en el Señor. Si lo hacen todo bien, no se preocupen. Para nosotros, los inmigrantes, la iglesia es el único refugio que encontramos en este enorme mar”, señaló.

Enfatizó que los inmigrantes deben mantener “un sentido de agradecimiento hacia los Estados Unidos, en donde tienen la oportunidad de trabajar, apoyar y sustentar a su familia. Aprecien eso”.

NOTA DEL EDITOR: Las fotografías se utilizan sólo para fines ilustrativos y los nombres de Lucía y Felipe se cambiaron para proteger su anonimato.



UN
ESPACIO
PARA

Dios

Cómo el Padre Pepe Ruiz, SJ, acompaña a otros a encontrar claridad y fortaleza en el silencio

Por Christina Benavides

En medio del bullicio de cada día, el silencio se convierte en un refugio necesario. El Padre Pepe Ruiz, SJ, invita a acudir a la casa de retiro Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House a todos los que deseen explorar el don del silencio como un camino para reconectarse con Dios lejos de las distracciones cotidianas.

“Conozco personas que vienen cada seis meses y otras, cada dos años”, dijo el sacerdote. “Lo más importante es establecer una regularidad para tener un momento especial en el que uno pueda estar solamente con Dios, sin distracciones”. Hacer un retiro al año se convierte en algo parecido a un ejercicio espiritual, dijo.

Muchos participantes encuentran consuelo y claridad al seguir las prácticas de los Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio durante un fin de semana de retiro en silencio. Se trata de una experiencia que también ha sido profundamente significativa para el Padre Ruiz.

El sacerdote fue testigo del valor de la guía espiritual desde muy joven, lo que le llevó a hacer su primer retiro a los 14 años, en el que descubrió la trascendencia de su relación personal con Dios.

“Recuerdo que cuando íbamos a ver a un sacerdote jesuita él hablaba de temas de discernimiento, algo que ahora reconozco como parte de la espiritualidad ignaciana”, afirmó. “Más adelante,

cuando tenía unos 14 años, hice un retiro personal. Fue una experiencia muy importante para mí porque me ayudó a darme cuenta de que mi fe era distinta a la de mis papás y de que yo tenía mi propia historia con Dios”.

A partir de entonces, el Padre Ruiz comenzó a ayudar a dirigir retiros para jóvenes adultos en Ciudad Juárez donde se crió. Era mucho trabajo, pero se sentía atraído por las experiencias espirituales transformadoras de cada fin de semana.

“Fue allí donde comenzó mi vida personal de oración y empecé a discernir lo que Dios me estaba llamando a hacer”, aseveró el Padre Ruiz. Mientras estudiaba ingeniería él deseaba tener una pareja que compartiera su pasión por los retiros

◀ El Padre Pepe Ruiz, SJ, en un embarcadero situado en la propiedad de Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House en Lake Dallas, donde se ha desempeñado como líder de retiro durante los últimos tres años. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

y buscaba trabajos que pudieran financiar sus esfuerzos ministeriales. No obstante, al reflexionar más profundamente se dio cuenta de que sus prioridades y deseos más profundos lo estaban guiando hacia ayudar a otros a encontrarse con Dios y tomó un semestre sabático para discernir su vocación.

“El mayor descubrimiento que tuve fue reconocer qué era lo que más disfruto, lo que me da vida, lo que siento que hago bien, y donde he recibido dones: organizar retiros y trabajar con las personas”, compartió. “Sentía un fuerte llamado al ministerio”.

Atraído por las cuatro áreas principales de servicio de los jesuitas — los retiros espirituales, la educación, el trabajo social y el servicio parroquial — ingresó al seminario a los 21 años. Tras 21 años de formación, pronunció sus votos perpetuos en el 2024 en la Parroquia del Sagrado

Corazón de El Paso.

El Padre Ruiz sirvió en Luisiana, San Louis, Boston, Houston, Madrid, Giadalajara y Puerto Rico durante su formación. Obtuvo dos maestrías en Boston College, enseñó en una preparatoria, trabajó en la pastoral universitaria, fue vicario, párroco y brindó apoyo a las personas afectadas por el huracán Katrina y el huracán María. En esos momentos críticos ofreció apoyo y guía pastoral a quienes más lo necesitaban — visitaba a los más vulnerables, oraba con ellos, los acompañaba en su dolor y los animaba a invitar a Cristo a ser parte de lo que estaban viviendo.

“Fue algo muy bonito, incluso en medio de todo lo que estaba siendo difícil”, explicó. “Para mí fue profundamente gratificante poder estar ahí, acompañándolos en ese momento”.

¡APRENDA MÁS!



Aprenda más sobre Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House escaneando el código QR o visitando MontserratRetreat.org.



Padre Pepe Ruiz, SJ, en una de las bibliotecas de Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)

REGRESO AL RETIRO

El Padre Ruiz se encontraba sirviendo en Denver cuando su provincial le hizo una petición: necesitaban un sacerdote que hablara español en Montserrat.

El ministerio de retiros fue siempre una parte central de la vocación del padre Ruiz, pero se ha convertido en los últimos tres años en su enfoque principal al servir junto a otros dos sacerdotes jesuitas en Montserrat.

La casa de retiro, que está ubicada en Lake Dallas, es un espacio de oración y encuentro con Dios, sin barreras ni debates, en la que se acoge a personas de todas las edades y credos, señaló el sacerdote. “Es un espacio para orar, estar con Dios, leer la Escritura... y no hay ningún impedimento para hacerlo juntos. Es un lugar muy amigable para ese tipo de encuentro y diálogo entre personas diferentes”.

Los participantes hacen un retiro en busca de claridad interior, sabiduría, renovación y, a veces, con el deseo de liberarse del peso de decisiones difíciles.

Muchas personas se sienten agobiadas por decisiones “grandes y difíciles, y sienten que aquí pueden enfrentarlas, que éste es un lugar seguro para estar con Dios y que salen con la fuerza para tomar esas decisiones”, añadió.

La casa de retiro de Montserrat proporciona a la comunidad hispana una oportunidad adicional para participar de un retiro en silencio, ya que tiene disponibles cinco diferentes fechas al año. El Padre Ruiz espera que los asistentes puedan experimentar en cada retiro los frutos de los Ejercicios Espirituales y del Examen Diario Ignaciano, una práctica que invita a reflexionar sobre cómo Dios ha estado presente día a día a lo largo de sus vidas.

El Padre Ruiz tiene la esperanza de que los fieles puedan “pensar que la vida espiritual puede ser algo que se disfrute mucho. Hay gente que ven la oración como una responsabilidad... Pero también, puede convertirse en un momento personal para mejorar y crecer”. 🇺🇸



un camino al altar y el cielo

José Guadalupe Valdez y su esposa Sofía Valdez escuchan la homilía del Padre Ariel Muñoz durante la Misa del Sacramento del Matrimonio en la Parroquia de St. Matthew en Arlington el 27 de septiembre. (NTC/Ben Torres)

Impulsadas por la fe, 17 parejas reciben el Sacramento del Matrimonio

Por Violeta Rocha

Luego de casi dos décadas caminando juntos, Rosendo Sánchez, 39, y Monserrat Mora, 38, rebozaban de “felicidad” al caminar hacia el altar, pronunciando su “Sí” al Sacramento del Matrimonio y recibiendo en su unión la bendición de Dios.

Rosendo y Monserrat fueron una de las 17 parejas que se acercaron a la Parroquia de St. Matthew en Arlington en boda comunitaria el 27 de septiembre.

“Dios es la fuente del amor. Nunca se aparten de Él, para que se mantengan fieles a Él”, dijo el párroco Padre Ariel

Muñoz, CORC, a los recién casados. Les agradeció por decir “Sí” al sacramento, que describió como “una comunidad de servicio”.

Rosendo y Monserrat han sido feligreses de St. Matthew desde hace ocho años. Tras 19 años juntos, decidieron recibir el Sacramento del Matrimonio. Según relata Rosendo, fue gracias a escuchar la Palabra de Dios y los consejos del Padre Muñoz, o “como él dice, sus ‘pedradas’ que nos avientan”, que tomaron la decisión, con el deseo de mantenerse en gracia y para “que cuando Dios nos llame, podamos encontrarnos en el cielo”.

La pareja llegó a prepararse para la

boda comunitaria después de pensarlo mucho.

“Mi estado de salud ha ido empeorando cada año y decidí que era el momento de casarnos”, compartió Monserrat. Añadió que tener a sus padres en su natal Ciudad de México también retrasó su boda religiosa.

Se vio “sorprendida de lo fácil” que fue el proceso de una boda comunitaria, además de no sentirse sola. Expresó estar muy agradecida con su parroquia de St. Matthew “por brindarnos esta oportunidad” y por “poder dar un buen ejemplo” a sus tres hijos, “aceptando al Señor Jesucristo en nuestra vida, en nuestra casa y en nuestra familia”, dijo.



Padrinos colocan el lazo nupcial a las 17 parejas durante la Misa del Sacramento del Matrimonio en la Parroquia de St. Matthew en Arlington el 27 de septiembre. (NTC/Ben Torres)

Ellos piden a Dios “fuerza, paz y sabiduría” para su matrimonio.

ABRIENDO LAS PUERTAS AL SACRAMENTO DEL MATRIMONIO

“Cristianizar a estas parejas, para que santifiquen su unidad matrimonial”, es de gran importancia para el Padre Muñoz, que, desde hace cuatro años, cuando fue asignado párroco, se dio a la tarea de fomentar estos sacramentos en la parroquia. Se esfuerza a conocer la historia de cada pareja y buscar el mejor camino “para que vivan su vida sacramental”.

El Padre Muñoz aseguró que cuentan con la plena autorización y que cumplen con cada requisito de la Diócesis. No obstante, procuran evitar requisitos demasiado “rigurosos”, como el de requerir el Sacramento de la Confirmación, “pues lo pueden realizar después”; esto aplica también a documentos que pueden presentarse mediante una declaración jurada. Él señaló que lo importante es “no cerrarles las puertas” a las parejas y enfatizó que es el párroco quien debe tomar la decisión, mientras que las secretarías parroquiales “deben estar bien informadas”.

Acercar las parejas al Sacramento del Matrimonio significa “ganar más almas para Dios” y “un triunfo, pues ése es mi cometido como sacerdote”, enfatizó Padre Muñoz, originario de Querétaro, México. Él agregó que está alegre de ver crecer en

la fe a familias de su parroquia, mientras que al mismo tiempo anhela que cada parroquia tenga la apertura para que más parejas puedan vivir en gracia.

Ésta es la cuarta boda comunitaria anual que se celebra desde el 2022, luego de una pausa en el 2014, explicó Alma Vázquez, directora de educación religiosa y coordinadora pre-matrimonial de St. Matthew.

La mayoría de las parejas llevan más de 10 años viviendo juntos o están casados solamente por la ley civil, señaló Vázquez, quien ha preparado parejas que llevan hasta 40 años en unión libre. Vázquez comentó además que el Padre Muñoz da a las parejas la libertad de ir con su vestido blanco, usar el velo y que sus padrinos lleven el anillo, el lazo y las arras, permitiendo así que, aún en una boda grupal, “puedan seguir teniendo esa bonita experiencia”.

“Se hace todo exactamente como si fuera una pareja de novios”, explicó Vázquez sobre la preparación que pide la Diócesis, que incluye, cuestionarios, entrevistas con el sacerdote, los retiros “Jesús te invita al Sacramento del Matrimonio” y, si fuera necesario, el curso

de planificación familiar en línea.

Vázquez quien ha trabajado con parejas desde 1996 destacó “el gran anhelo de las parejas de recibir la Eucaristía”, y afirmó que verlas luego “participar por completo en la Misa, algunos involucrados como lectores o acomodadores, y sus hijos, como monaguillos” representa la alegría de “saber que estoy poniendo un granito de arena para que, gracias a Dios, estas parejas tengan su Sacramento del Matrimonio”.

NUNCA ES DEMASIADO TARDE

José González y Eleonor García llegaron también “a pedir la bendición de Dios”. Eleonor con su sonrisa y José con su mirada plasmaron en todo momento de la ceremonia su deseo de “estar bien con Dios”, luego de 11 años de estar casados sólo por lo civil.

Aunque habían intentado antes casarse por la Iglesia en otra parroquia, se encontraron con “una serie de requisitos” que no pudieron cumplir y fueron posponiendo su boda. Por eso, cuando escucharon que St. Matthew, la parroquia a la que Eleanor había ido desde niña, celebraría una boda grupal, fue como sentir “un llamado de Dios”, exclamó José. Agregó que el proceso fue sencillo “en comparación de cómo fue hace años cuando tratamos de hacerlo” apuntó.

“No hay que tener miedo pensando que es demasiado tarde para recibir el Sacramento del Matrimonio”, enfatiza Eleonor, cuyos padres son mexicanos. Además aseguró que los retiros, pláticas y prédicas de la diócesis y de la parroquia les ayudaron a “valorizar y atesorar” su matrimonio.

José señaló que no estar casados por la Iglesia los hacía sentir “muy atrás en la fila”, al no poder recibir la Eucaristía. Por eso, al llegar “el anhelado” día de su boda, se sintieron “llenos” y esperanzados de poder integrarse pronto a algún ministerio parroquial y ser ejemplo para sus cuatro hijos. 🇺🇸

MÁS
FOTOS



Para ver más fotos de la boda comunitaria escanee el código QR o visita: North-Texas-Catholic.smugmug.com.

Karla Silva, presentadora del nuevo pódcast diocesano, *Alumbremos Juntos*, en el estudio el 13 de septiembre. (NTC/Juan Guajardo)



Alumbremos **JUNTOS**

En noviembre, un nuevo pódcast diocesano está disponible en español

Karla Silva, moderadora del nuevo podcast diocesano *Alumbremos Juntos*, comparte cómo los primeros episodios han revelado el poder de los testimonios de fe en nuestra comunidad hispana, en preparación para el comienzo del podcast en noviembre.

“Resaltar las voces de la comunidad hispana de la diócesis mientras compartimos cómo llevan la luz de Cristo a los demás mediante su testimonio”. Ésa es la misión de *Alumbremos Juntos*, que es el nuevo podcast en español de la diócesis, del cual me siento honrada de ser la moderadora.

Se preguntarán ¿cómo nació este proyecto? Nuestra diócesis se compone de una gran diversidad de culturas e idiomas; entre ellas, la cultura hispana. Dentro de esta comunidad hay muchos feligreses; cada uno tiene una historia y un testimonio de fe, que ilumina a las personas que le rodean. Sin embargo, en este mundo estamos tan ocupados que muchas veces no nos detenemos a escuchar y compartir esos testimonios. A menudo, pasamos por alto que lo que le pasa a una persona también me puede estar pasando a mí; y que la manera en que alguien supera los obstáculos puede servirme de inspiración para superar los míos. *Alumbremos Juntos* es ese espacio en el que personas como usted y como yo podemos compartir cómo la luz de Cristo transforma nuestras vidas. A su vez, es mediante este compartir que se puede alumbrar la vida de alguien más. Por eso, el podcast se llama así.

Pese a que me siento muy privilegiada de ser la moderadora de este podcast, debo admitir que cuando Juan Guajardo, director del podcast, me llamó e hizo la invitación, no estaba segura de hacerlo. No porque no quisiera, sino porque estaba consciente de la importancia de llevar las historias de la comunidad a los demás; y ciertamente, no me sentía preparada (aún sigo trabajando en ello). No obstante, lo puse en oración

y acepté, pero la duda persistió: pensaba que no era lo suficiente buena para este proyecto. Todo cambió cuando grabamos el primer episodio con, nada más y nada menos que, el Diácono Rigoberto Leyva. Al escuchar su inspirador testimonio, reflexioné y me di cuenta de que, a donde Dios nos lleve, Él nos dará las herramientas necesarias para formarnos y poder llevar a cabo la misión que se nos encomienda.

En nuestro segundo episodio tuvimos el honor de entrevistar a Lupita Andrade, a cargo del Ministerio del Campus de Cristo Rey Preparatory School y que lleva sirviendo a nuestra diócesis por más de 15 años. Deseo señalar que todos necesitamos escuchar su historia, especialmente quienes servimos en la Iglesia, ya que ella nos recuerda la importancia de siempre buscar y estar cerca de Jesús. Él es el alimento que nos da energía para seguir ejerciendo nuestro servicio, que a veces, nos podría resultar agotador.

No quiero compartir todavía todas las historias que aún están por venir, pero estoy segura de que algunas, si no todas, tendrán un gran impacto en su vida, como lo han tenido en la mía.

Para que no se pierda ningún episodio, le invito a seguir las redes sociales de la diócesis, así como a buscar el podcast *Alumbremos Juntos* en su plataforma de podcast favorita.

Por último, lo invito a no sólo escuchar estas historias, sino también a compartir su propia historia. Ya que cada uno de nosotros lleva en su vida la luz de Cristo y, cuando la compartimos, se amplifica. Rezo para que *Alumbremos Juntos* no sea sólo un podcast, sino un recordatorio de que usted y yo estamos llamados a iluminar el mundo con nuestro testimonio, que ha de ser reflejo de la luz de Cristo. 🇺🇸

¡Próximamente, un nuevo podcast de la Diócesis: Alumbremos Juntos!



Acompaña a Karla Silva mientras conversa con voces de fe dentro y fuera de la diócesis, empezando con el Diácono Rigoberto Leyva.



The Official Publication of the
Diocese of Fort Worth

November/December Issue 2025

800 West Loop 820 South
Fort Worth, TX 76108



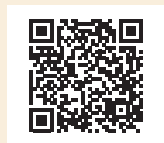
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