Family opens heart in time of tragedy

Dennis family matriarch, Meeka Dennis, standing, gathers with her husband, Charles, second from right, and their children Shane Grows, Joy Grows, Camrin Grows, Chelsea Dennis and Charles Dennis III at their Vacherie home. Meeka and Charles provided a home for her nieces and nephews after the death of her sister 13 years ago. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

The haunting memory of a phone call that forever changed the lives of Meeka Dennis and her family 13 years ago continues to linger, emotions just a teardrop away.

Perhaps it's because Dennis has never had the opportunity to grieve an unspeakable tragedy. One day after spending a joyful afternoon with her extended family to celebrate her niece's third birthday in Vacherie, Dennis, as she was preparing to attend church on a Sunday morning, received a call that her sister had been killed in a murder-suicide involving the sister's husband.

Admittedly devastated by the loss, grieving was not an option for Dennis, who had two young children at the time. Rather, she and her husband, Charles, focused their attention on her deceased sister's three young children, who were suddenly without parents.

"The thought was mainly the children," Meeka said. "They needed a family and they needed a family and they needed a family and they needed a family and they needed a family and they needed a family and they needed a family and..."
A scheduling quirk

The feast of the Annunciation is traditionally celebrated March 25 but because of a strange quirk in the calendar this year, the feast day, or Lady Day as it is also known, is being celebrated April 4. This year, March 25 fell on Good Friday, which, obviously, would not have been an appropriate day to celebrate the announcement of the angel to the Virgin Mary that she would become the mother of Jesus.

Occasionally, the feast of St. Joseph also falls during Holy Week. The rule is to transfer the feast day to the first unimpeded day after the Easter Octave, which is usually the day after Divine Mercy Sunday. This year that date falls on April 4.

However, a few years ago the Vatican called an audible. That particular year St. Joseph Day fell on Palm Sunday and Annunciation on Holy Saturday. Rather than follow its traditional policy, the Vatican transferred St. Joseph Day to the day before to avoid an awkward scenario where St. Joseph Day and the Annunciation would have been celebrated on the Monday and Tuesday after Divine Mercy Sunday.

Having to transfer both feast days is highly unusual, and transferring the feast of the Annunciation occurs about twice in 10 years.

In the Byzantine Rite feast days are not transferred, so the Annunciation was celebrated during the morning liturgy and at noon the commemoration of Good Friday began.

The Annunciation was originally celebrated in the Eastern Church in the fifth century and in the Western Church in the sixth and seventh centuries. Curiously, Spain celebrated the feast Dec. 18 until the 11th century when it adopted the Roman date.

In ancient times tradition held that March 25 was the day of the crucifixion. It was also the ancient custom of the papal curia to start the year on March 25 in all of its documents. Civil governments adopted this practice and England retained it until 1752.

In central Europe, Annunciation was also referred to as the Feast of the Swallows because it was believed the first swallows from their migration arrived about this time.

According to legend, during the Middle Ages the pope would distribute 50 gold pieces to 300 poor girls for a dowry following Mass. Some of the other customs were more profitable but equally innovative, including the lowering of a boy dressed as an angel from what was called the Holy Ghost Hole in the top of a church.

In most countries, including the United States, the Annunciation is not a holy day of obligation.
Order of St. Lazarus honors Lindy Boggs during graveside ceremony

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

With a wide-dimpled smile and affability, Corinne “Lindy” Claiborne Boggs was known as a gentle, yet strong, worldwide leader.

The dames and knights of the Military and Hospitaller Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem, dressed in regalia, commemorated St. Lazarus Dame Grand Cross and former U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican on the 100th anniversary of her birth at a Mass at St. Mary of False River Church in New Roads, where she was baptized, received first Communion, was confirmed and married Hale Boggs.

Lindy Boggs was admitted to the St. Lazarus Order in 1979. She was well known for her gaiety and grace.

“Whenever she was in New Orleans, she would be involved with activities of the Grand Commandery of the South, often hosting St. Lazarus events at her French Quarter home,” said Dame Grand Cross Mary Ann Straub of New Orleans.

St. Lazarus is a chivalric order composed of lay and religious men and women from North and South America, Asia, Africa, Australia and Europe founded in 1908 by Hospitalier Knights in the Holy Land. It dedicates itself to the service, Christian unity and gaiety and grace.

“Lindy shared in this humanitarian effort both at Carville and in Paraguay, where the order helped supply shoes to those with the disease,” said Stubb. Boggs was the recipient of the Alan Weaver Hazelton Award, given annually to a member who follows the ideals of loyalty, service and devotion to the Order of Saint Lazarus.

Boggs’ Catholic faith was the driver of her civic leadership, noted Deacon Mike Thompson, deacon assistant at St. Mary and St. Augustine Church in New Roads, who gave the homily during the Mass honoring Boggs.

Deacon Thompson was a congressional aide when he met Lindy Boggs at a social event for her husband. At the time, Rep. Hale Boggs was the house majority leader in the U.S. House of Representatives.

“She was a very gracious lady and made me feel right at home,” said Deacon Thompson.

He later met Lindy Boggs again after she was elected to Louisiana House of Representatives in 1972, a post she held for 16 years.

At that time, Boggs filled her husband’s seat when he was presumed dead after the plane he was traveling in crashed over a remote area in Alaska. She held this position for 18 years.

After the Supreme Court issued the Roe V. Wade decision, Deacon Thompson was part of a state delegation that “went to march in the snow” and appeal to Congress to support attempts to restrict abortion on demand.

“She was unequivocally pro-life,” said Deacon Thompson, despite the fact that many in the Democratic party were not.

She strongly supported the Hyde Amendment, a legislative provision barring the use of certain federal funds to pay for abortion unless the pregnancy arises from incest, rape or to save the life of the mother.

“She was always a staunch Catholic,” noted Deacon Thompson, who highlighted the fact that she was appointed ambassador to the Vatican in 1997.

The deacon further added, “Although she was never elected to a leadership position (in Congress), she was a very effective leader because she knew everyone on a first-name basis.”

Boggs connected with the impoverished as well as the elite.

“This was evidenced by her relationship with the poor minorities in her district. She was easily elected each time she ran,” said Deacon Thompson.

Boggs’ leadership influenced Deacon Thompson on how he treats others.

“The impact she had on me was that she received people coming into her office with such charm and welcome. She was never too busy to see people,” he said.

Edward J. (Ned) Hémard III, commander in Lazarus, said Boggs’ presence lit up a room.

“I was at a party when she came right up behind me and sang ‘The Sheikh of Araby.’ We were doing a duet,” mused Hémard.

He said Boggs served in a humble, other-focused fashion.

“She said you can get a lot done if you don’t take credit for it,” Hémard said.

Dame Lindy Sarpy, another member of Lazarus and classmate of Boggs’ daughter, Barbara, said Boggs brought people from opposite spectrums together for the common good.

“She succeeded in reconciling the parties because of her charm, courtesy, kindness and good will. This same conciliating spirit occurred in her relationship with individuals and as ambassador of the United States to the Holy See,” said Sarpy.

Her favorite memories of Boggs were her warmth and cordiality as the chatelaine of her home on Bourbon Street. Boggs’ daughter, Barbara, wore hoop-skirts in the courtyard.

Sarpy said Boggs’ daughter inherited her mother’s grace and charm, which, she said, “is why she was elected president of the student body at Manhattanville College.” Barbara Boggs was later elected mayor of Princeton, New Jersey.

Brian Costello, a New Roads resident and Lazarus officer, said he was honored to help coordinate the commemorative Mass and give a tour of points of historic interest in New Roads: the site of St. Joseph Academy, where Boggs was lodged and educated by the Sisters of St. Joseph; the home of her “Uncle Daddy” Ferd and Adrienne Lawrence Claiborne; the Pennsylvania Avenue sidewalk where her first cousin, deLesseps “Chep” Morrison, marked his name when it was overlaid and Boggs’ gravesite.

“Dame Lindy is a cousin of my wife, and more distantly of myself, as most colonial French Pointe Coupée families are related,” said Costello. “I was honored to visit with Dame Lindy during her visit to St. Mary Church in the course of the filming of “Velvet and Steel” for LPB; her visits to the grave of her pre-deceased infant son in St. Mary Cemetery; and at family functions including weddings and receptions in New Orleans.”

There are many things people today can learn from Boggs, according to Costello.

“Dame Lindy had the ability to remain ever faithful despite personal loss, as she bore the deaths of her parents, husband and two children. She was professional, kind and gracious despite hostility and ministry to the disenfranchised and exploited,” he said.

“Also remarkable is her ability to be an American and world citizen and remain loyal to one’s Catholic faith,” Costello said.

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This project is provided with support from the Walmart Foundation and Louisiana Public Broadcasting.
The storage crunch has reached the point where if a church calls asking if the archives department can take some records, Boltin said, “we have had to deny them.”

Fortunately, help is on the way. The diocese is completing plans and going through the permitting process with the city to build a new archives building on the rear of the property where the Catholic Life Center, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and the Bishop Robert Tracy Retreat Center are currently housed.

When completed, the building, which is designed as an Acadian style house to fit in with the current architecture of the residential neighborhood, will be a little less than 8,000 square feet. Perhaps most important to Boltin and her staff, the vault will be 1,000 square feet, a substantial increase from the current 300-square-foot vault.

“We are excited about the building,” Boltin said. “It’s going to be a really pretty building. It’s designed to look like a home because it’s going to be in a neighborhood. … the vault will be 1,000 square feet, a substantial increase from the current 300-square-foot vault.

“And the landscaping is beautiful.”

The project, which has been in the discussion stages since 2004, is being fully funded from the sale of diocesan property, funds raised through the Bishop’s Annual Appeal and a large donation, according to Joe Ingraham, chief financial officer for the diocese.

“It’s been a long time coming,” Boltin said. The vault will be the heart of the building, according to Boltin. It will have no windows, no water pipes near it, no bathrooms or water fountains to offer the highest possible protection, she said.

Additionally, it will be closed off to the rest of the building and only the staff will have access to it.

A 1,500-square-foot nonactive record storage center to house records slated to be destroyed in five to 10 years is also included as well as three offices, another separate office for an intern, a separate room for research with a library for researchers and volunteers, conference room, microfilm and digitization room and processing room.

“…I was called in with the architects because archives buildings are totally unique,” Boltin said. “They are not libraries, not office buildings. They are built specifically to house and preserve records and objects.”

She said complexities not common to traditional office buildings include temperature and humidity control, the use of certain types of shelving so records are not compromised, higher load bearing floor loads, the type of paint used, and even fire suppression.

Boltin emphasized the building will be 1,500 square feet, which is not very large,” said Boltin, who has been with the diocese since 2003 and director of archives since 2007. “We cannot fit an other thing in there responsibly.”

The three closets the archives department has taken over are also spilling over. Currently, one staff member’s office is in the research room, where volunteers and researchers gather.

Archivist Ann Boltin squeezed and wriggled her way through 300 years of history in the tiny vault currently housing all of which chronicle the history of a dio-... the vault will be 1,000 square feet, a substantial increase from the current 300-square-foot vault.
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Supporting friends or scandal?/Gestures and postures during Mass

Q My wife and I were recently married, and we both feel strongly that we need to set a positive example in a secular culture, which seems to condone so much immorality (sex outside of marriage, contraception, abortion, etc.).

Our dilemma is that there is a really “nice” Catholic couple (recently engaged) in our circle of friends whom we love going out with. The problem is that, as we recently learned, they are cohabiting.

We feel that if we were to continue to socialize with them, we might be condoning immorality. How do we balance our friendship against the “sin of scandal”? Is it appropriate to cut off social ties with them until they marry or decide to live separately? In other words, how do we show them the love of Christ while still maintaining our moral values of the church?

Q I recently joined a small parish where the entire congregation holds hands together at the Our Father. I feel uncomfortable holding hands with people I don’t know; so instead, I put my hands in a prayer position as a signal to others not to grab for my hands. I don’t know how to handle this. (Charleston, West Virginia)

Q Several priests and seminarians of our diocese have reminded the faithful that only the priest should have his palms raised and extended during the Lord’s Prayer. However, elsewhere in the country local customs persist. Most typical is that of joining hands with adjacent worshipers. Many end by raising joined hands after the doxology (the closing portion of the prayer). Can you please clarify the preference of the (Catholic Church)?

(Atlanta)

A Thank God for people like you and your wife, people willing to adhere to the church’s teaching, which has guided Christians successfully and happily for many centuries.

Your issue now, though, is not so much one of morality as of strategy: What action by you and your wife can best help lead your friends to see the wisdom of the church’s view?

It seems to me that if you were to cut off all ties with them abruptly, this could create resentment and entrench them more deeply in their choice of an immoral lifestyle. (By the way, not just the Catholic Church, but many religions hold that couples should not live together as man and wife until they have made a religious and civil commitment that is formal and permanent.)

Why not, instead, take the courageous step of explaining to them, in a quiet and kind way, how much you enjoy their company but also how much the moral values of the church mean to the two of you and how it saddens you to see them stray from those values?

You could suggest to them that they will surely be looking for God’s blessings throughout their marriage and that they might want to speak with the priest who will do their wedding about how to stay close to the Lord until that wonderful day arrives.

A The two questions above reflect many that I regularly receive, and they demonstrate the continued angst over bodily gestures at Mass especially during the Our Father. And even though I answered a similar question in this column four years ago, that has not surprised as it may seem resolved the matter for all time! So let’s try again.

One fact is clear: In response to a question about the correct congregational posture while the Our Father is prayed, the website of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops says simply: “No position is prescribed in the Roman Missal for an assembly gesture.” I take that to mean that, within reason, people are free to do as they wish.

If you want to raise your hands with palms uplifted, have at it. If you prefer to join hands with your family or a (willing) pew-mate, then do that. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (in No. 42) says that, in the liturgy, “a common posture, to be observed by all participants, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community.”

More important, I think, is to leave worshipers free of anxiety and able to lift comfortably their minds and hearts to God.
Spreading the joy of God for 24 hours

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“Jesus is available,” announced St. Aloysius as it opened its doors for a 24-hour Lenten initiative March 4-5. Church officials were floored by amazement and grace as people flocked non-stop through them, confirming many are still hungry to spend time with God.

When Pope Francis announced the Lenten initiative “24 Hours for the Lord,” in which Catholic churches around the world were asked to open their door for 24 hours for people to receive the mercy of God through eucharistic adoration and the sacrament of reconciliation during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, it touched the heart of Father Joshua Johnson, parochial vicar at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge. He had prayed for years about having the two sacraments together.

“People can receive the mercy of Christ through the priest in the confessional. And those who have been to confession can spend time with the one who gave them the forgiveness, which is Christ himself,” Father Johnson said.

After meeting with diocesan officials, he approached the church’s pastoral council with the idea of accepting the pope’s invitation and combining it with the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

“We were on fire with it,” said Judy Giorlando, pastoral council mentor. The council approached its ministries’ commissions: administration, community life, education, social responsibility, spiritual growth and worship. They were equally enthusiastic and offered their ideas and talents. Each commission was responsible for taking on a four-hour period in which they would assist priests and provide activities, etc. Everyone, from the pulpit to the office to the school and pew, were involved.

When the parishioners were told about the plans, they also took it on as their own.

“This is cool, this how the body of Christ works together,” said Father Johnson who said he can provide the vision, but it was to the pastoral council, members of the committees and parishioners who “put it together on paper and made it happen.”

While numerous ideas were offered about different activities that could also be offered, organizers knew nothing must “upstage” the central reason for being there: confession and adoration.

“We said if we really want this to work the important thing is to make adoration and confession extraordinarily available,” said Giorlando.

Bishop Robert W. Muench and the priests of the diocese committed themselves to hearing confessions, putting plans into motion.

As the event approached, organizers recited the church’s mantra, “If it only helps one person or five people, we’re still going to do it,” said Giorlando.

No one anticipated the overwhelming response. For 24 hours, there were long lines of people waiting at the confessional.

“I looked out and said, ‘This is the Lord, this wasn’t us,’” said Father Johnson. “It was the spirit drawing them. It was all the Lord.”

Michael Acaldo, executive director of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and co-chair of the administration committee, was gratified to see Father Randy Cuebas, pastor, Father Johnson and the commissions and ministries heavily involved in organizing 24 Hours for the Lord, and the community coming to the event.

“It was great to drive up at 3:45 a.m. and see so many cars in the parking lot,” said Acaldo.

“There’s nothing more energizing than to get up early and do something for God.”

Those coming for the event had a variety of activities to participate in. After the all-school Mass, there was exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the singing of the divine mercy chaplet, Stations of the Cross, the rosary, end of day prayer, praise and worship, night prayer, office of readings, morning prayer and benediction.

Students at St. Aloysius Parish School of Religion and School and their families also became involved through making blessing bags, which contained essential items for the students to give out to the homeless.

Ann Michael Lagarde, a member of the pastoral council and catechist, and her sixth-grade PSR students brainstormed about a project of corporal works of mercy. They became excited about the idea of assembling blessings bags for the homeless.

They shared the list of items they were collecting with the first- through fifth-grade PSR students, and the school caught wind about the project and wanted to help. More than 350 blessing bags were made.

“People get to experience the whole repertoire of the church’s prayer and social justice mission,” said Ken Thevenet, director of worship at St. Aloysius.

“When there were times of silence and times of praise and worship. There were different rosaries. Some things were traditional and some things were contemporary. It was really amazing.”

The event concluded with a Mass for families with special needs, which profoundly impacted the participants and their supporters.

Sharon Stickling said she had been going to church with her son Jacob, 17, who has special needs, to St. Francis Xavier Church in Metairie, which celebrates Masses for people with exceptionalities. She had been wanting to have such a Mass in Baton Rouge. She talked to Giorlando about this, and plans were made to have one.

“In most instances kids with special needs meet in clinical settings, such as the doctor’s office, therapy or school... This is a perfect opportunity for them to meet their peers in prayer,” she said.

The children actively participated in the Mass. Jacob does not communicate verbally, but the Prayer of the Faithful was programmed into his iPad and he played it for the Mass.

Blake Black, whose son Patrick, 19, has special needs but who is an altar server at St. Aloysius, said there were people who had participated in most or all of the 24 Hours with the Lord who stayed for the Mass. She said the children were thrilled that a Mass was celebrated especially for them.

“Even if things didn’t go perfectly, there was a peace that made it all it can be,” said Black.

The children responded enthusiastically to Father Johnson’s homily, which he illustrated by referring to super heroes, about the gifts everyone has to share.

“Spreading joy, that was their gift of the day,” said Stickling.

“There was not a dry eye in the church, but they were tears of joy.”

24 Hours for the Lord featured eucharistic adoration, the sacrament of reconciliation, corporal and spiritual works of mercy, praise and worship and Mass. Photo provided by Ken Thevenet
If you have news or events coming up in your church parish, school or organization, please let us know about it so we can spread the word! Email Richard Meek at rmeek@diobr.org or fax to 225-336-8710

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The Catholic Commentator
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The Catholic Commentator
April 1, 2016

The Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at its schools. They do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school administered programs.

Bishop’s letter to diocese from 2014

Dearly Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings. “Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). This “great commission of Jesus,” given to the eleven before his ascension into heaven, is the same instruction assigned to every Christian community throughout time. The recent Diocesan Rite of Election, where we celebrated the anticipated entrance of almost 500 new members to Catholicism at this year’s Easter Vigil, is one sign of the vitality and vibrancy of the church in and of Baton Rouge. The excellent response, for the fifth straight year, to the Diocesan Little League for reconciliation initiative, is another.

The Situation. While the number of Catholics in our diocese is growing (290,000), the number of priests available for assigned parish service (50 diocesan, 17 religious, 4 extern) continues to decline, and their median age is increasing. Correspondingly the number of religious order women and men is decreasing. And while this year we have matched our “modern era” high of 20 seminarians, it generally takes six to eight years from start to finish, for a seminarian to become a priest. Regrettably our “pipeline” is not keeping pace with our pastoral situation. The generous ministry of our retired from assignment priests (20) and our permanent deacons (65) continues to be a great blessing, as has the emergence of countless dedicated and formally prepared lay faithful. While a very challenging situation, many other dioceses in our country are far more hard-pressed than we.

Historical Context. Beginning in 1984 the Diocese of Baton Rouge embarked upon several strategies to deal with this developing dilemma: a heightened vocational program of promotion and support, a carefully devised configuration of parish clusters (evolving to now include 22 of our church parishes); more recently, other measures, including a judicious use of invited international priests, were implemented. Though helpful, these steps have not kept pace with the burgeoning circumstances.

Ongoing Pastoral Planning. Given the above, a further diocesan pastoral vision to serve as a guide for effective ministry is required. To meet this goal, today I am announcing the establishment of a highly diverse Diocesan Pastoral Planning Task Force to address issues of long-term renewal within our local Church. Its members consist of Father Trey Nelson (Chair), Deacon Dan Borne, Major Reginald Brown, Father John Carville, Father Jamin David, Sister Renee Daigle MSC, Mrs. Pamela Polse, The. Rudy Gomez, Brother Ray Hebert SC, Mrs. Pat Hives, Mr. Lyle Hitzman, Mr. Gerald “Jay” Jackson, Father Tom Ranzino, Mr. Robert Sibille, Dr. Christel Slaught- ter. This task force is commissioned to advise how to provide ministry, sacramental and other, to the people of our diocese, being attentive to the needs and aspirations of individual church communities while making recommendations for the prospective well-being of lay faithful, religious and clergy. It will consider the development of a diocesan long range plan that integrates creative proposals for clergy personnel to provide parish ministry in new ways along with the design and possible redesign of some parish configurations. There will be an emphasis on preparing lay ecclesial ministers for pastoral service, and a revitalized focus on the promotion of vocations to the priesthood and the diaconate. Let me emphasize: at this time absolutely no proposals have been made; no decisions have been reached. For emphasis I repeat: No proposals have been made; no decisions reached. Any speculation or ru-
mors to the contrary should be considered mere idle musings of some amorphous, nebulous, anonymous, unreliable source.

A Future Full of Hope (Jer 29:11). Several significantly positive factors can give us hope. The quality, dedication and zeal of our priests and deacons and religious are phenomenal. The same can be said for our seminarians in formation, as well as the inspiring response of so many of our youth who have identified themselves as vocational prospects. The welcomed increase of enthusiastic seminarians, the expanded number of devoted deacons and deacon candidates, the growth in community living by newly ordained priests, including those pursuing graduate degrees in theology and related church ministry, and the energetic spirit of countless others are welcomed signs.

In Conclusion. I entreat your prayer, understanding, support, assistance and cooperation to this initiative. A church of 2000 years has never flourished by merely functioning in a maintenance mode. Change, the hardest part of which is its transitional phase, is never easy. Concerns over the deployment of diminishing clergy with ever expanding diocesan demographics clearly pose a challenge. Innovative directions will be necessary for us to anticipate and provide for evolving circumstances. Our ongoing charge will be to make the maximum use of our resources. Some measures that might prove unavoidable can be expected to be difficult to implement. Belief in, commitment to and reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide are fundamentally essential. Truly we are and will be called to pray that “the master of the harvest send laborers to the vineyard” (Mt 9:38). Through it all we can trust the promise of Jesus to be with us “until the end of time” (Mt 28:20) and the enduring gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us (Jel 1:7). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

In the love of Jesus, the Good Shepherd,

Robert W. Muench
Bishop of Baton Rouge
Bishop Muench asks for openness during Chrism Mass homily

I acknowledge representatives from our various Church parishes, schools, diocesan offices and agencies, deacons and their wives, religious, and on this, their anticipated Holy Thursday feast day, our esteemed priests. We recognize in particular those priests celebrating ordination anniversaries this year: 60 years, Msgr. Lefebvre and Father Marcelli; 50 years, Father Mascarella; 45 years, Father Moroney; 40 years, Father Healy SSJ; 35 years, Father Clark SJ; 30 years, Father Gyan, Father Lorraine and Father Suchit IMS; 25 years, Father Raj IMS. Would those priests please stand? Ad multos annos. (Rough translation: May you live a long life.) We also recall that since last year’s Chrism Mass, one of our legendary priests, Msgr. Guilott, entered eternal life with the Lord. May he rest in peace. Amen.

Two years ago at this Eucharist I announced the formation of a Diocesan Pastoral Planning Task Force. In those past 24 months the number of priests available for parish assignment has declined from 71 to 64, and the number of retired priests reduced from 20 to 19. This year only one candidate will be ordained a priest for the diocese and next year just two. Happily the number of permanent deacons has risen from 65 to 73. Statistical changes from 1961, when the diocese was formed, to today are even more dramatic: Catholic population increased from 165,000 to 223,000, and church parishes rose from 51 to 67, while the number of diocesan and religious priests for parish service declined from 110 to 52. To sumarize, in the last 55 years our diocese has experienced an additional 16 church parishes, and 58,000 more Catholics, but a decrease of 58 priests, more than 50% less, for parochial ministry. Obviously these figures have significant ramifications.

Last Friday in meeting with Father Trey Nelson, chair of the task force, I thanked him and other members for their diligent, conscientious work. Before receiving the study, I mentioned to him (as I had earlier that week done with the Presbyteral Council) some related concepts I had prepared for this homily. Father Trey told me those reflections mirrored well those of the task force.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus left a basic mission statement and pastoral plan for the church. The first concludes St. Matthew’s Gospel: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And, behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20). The second begins St. Luke’s Acts of the Apostles: “You will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Lk 1:8). Upon Jesus being lifted up from their sight, St. Luke continues: “Then suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them saying: ‘Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking into the sky?’” (Acts 1:11). Understandably those 11 apostles became immobilized. Surely they were thinking to themselves: “Jesus, don’t go yet. We need more directions. What do we do? Who should do what? Where do we begin?” Days later, they dramatically experienced a life-changing event, as St. Luke further records: “When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind and it filled the entire house in which they were ... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1-2, 44).

The local roots of our Catholic faith date back to March 7, 1699, when the Frenchman Pierre LeMoyne, Sieur d’Iberville led an expedition upriver past the future site of New Orleans to a spot which tradition tells us he named le Baton Rouge. In 1720 Father Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix SJ, traveled to the lower Mississippi Valley and on January 1, 1722 celebrated the first recorded Eucharist in this area. From humble beginnings, over time the church developed. As the number of both priests and lay faithful increased, so did the number of Catholic Church parishes, schools, institutions and agencies. Fast forward to the 1960s which brought momentous change in society and the church, including a marked decline in the number of priests, women religious and seminarrians.

Please allow me now to quote from the task force’s report: “While it is prudent that pastoral planning would continue to discern current and future trends, it is imperative that our efforts consider immediate needs and develop adjustments in response to those needs as soon as possible. These adjustment strategies and tactics should have as their objective the spiritual welfare of all God’s people: clergy, religious, and laity alike. Adjustments should not be made simply as a means of momentary relief but intended to assist our diocese through the next several years. Most importantly, the first adjustment to which we are called is one of mind and heart. As members of the Body of Christ each of us is called to embrace an attitude and mindset of collaboration that is rooted in God’s word and the wisdom of the church” (Pastoral Planning Task Force Report, Section 1, March 2016).

This annual Chrism Mass assembles members of each church parish and other entities in the diocese, not only for the function of receiving and transporting the blessed oils for use in our churches and institutions, but even more deeply to represent, witness and celebrate our union with the diocesan church, which is an extension of the church universal: one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

As Bishop, I honor, respect and affirm and support individual church parishes, their cherished members, present and past, and revered histories. As a diocese we have been very good at operating parochially; perhaps we may not have been so good at operating ecclesially. We are challenged to grow in our conscious understanding that the Catholic Church, universal and diocesan, is not primarily a collection of individual locations. As available priests, deacons, religious, lay leaders and parishioners, as well as technology and transportation continue to change, so also the arrangement and alignments of parish structure, consideration of the places, number and times of obligatory Masses require renewed attention. Adjustments implemented since the mid-1980s have served us well, but are no longer sufficient to handle current factors. A church of 2000 years has never flourished by merely functioning in a maintenance mode. Specifically the task force has recommended the adoption of a more collaborative approach to the scheduling of Masses throughout the diocese. Obviously a comprehensive study needs to be made for this to be implemented. To be authentically Catholic, we must think church and Eucharist, not only past history, status quo, schedule convenience and personal preference. None of this calls for any drastic change overnight. Nonetheless it does require a new openness to the well-documented circumstances of the times.

Our commitment to promote vocations, particularly to the priesthood, must be ever more intentional and focused than ever before. We follow Jesus’ command: “Ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for the harvest” (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2). Let us also pray for, support and assist priests, and all parish leaders, to be authentic and effective workers in the vineyard and actively encouraged others to consider and seek the possibility of a church vocation.

In the midst of challenges and burdens, may the words of St. Paul resonate within us: “We are not discouraged ... For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to what is seen, but what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:16-18).

In closing I express deep regard and sincere affection to each of you present and to our television prayer partners, assure you of my remembrance of you and your intentions, and trust that our worship, devotion and meditation this Holy Week and Easter Season will fill us with the abundance presence and blessings of our faithful Lord. God love you all.
New show likely to surface surprising family secrets for celebrities

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

It’s probably safe to say that every family has its secrets. But just how well do you know your ancestors?

Thanks to a new program produced by the diocese’s department of archives and CatholicLife TV, several families in the Diocese of Baton Rouge are about to find out.

The program, part of the station’s “Roots of Faith: Ancestry” series, will feature local celebrities, business owners and other residents wanting to know more about their family’s past.

Program hosts and genealogists Judy Riffel and Renee Richard will uncover and present detailed family information to each guest, explaining how and why their past family members came to Louisiana and the origin of each journey.

Taping of the new series began in February, and if past shows are any prediction, ancestry surprises are definitely in store for a guest list which includes local celebrity chef John Folse, Dr. Mike Stacy, a local veterinarian, and Jay Lindsey, whose well-known business, Jay’s Donuts, closed in 2010.

Richard, who is a former archivist for the diocese, noted genealogy records can help validate and even provide more information on family stories, but records are not just paper-based.

Richard said DNA can also be used, and one future episode will feature DNA as a tool used in genealogical research.

“That’s the new thing in research,” she said, adding how it can benefit people with common last names.

As researchers, Richard and Riffel, who are assisted by Ann Boltin, archivist for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, go the extra mile, literally, in tracking down information for their show. They have traveled to other states, cities and even across town to complete research, and in some cases, they can spend months and even years gathering information needed for genealogical research.

However, it’s work they enjoy, and something Richard believes is important, as it “allows people to relate” to each other and understand where they are from.

Richard anticipates the new shows will be ongoing and encourages anyone interested in being on the program to write to the diocese’s archives department.

She noted that many people are interested in family research but “hit a wall” and sometimes stop altogether.

Richard added one of the best tools is the diocese’s archives department.

“Roots of Faith: Ancestry” first began airing in 2014 as a way to help others interested in genealogy and even included an episode on how to get started. From there, the show focused on the state’s many ethnic groups, information that can help in understanding family stories.

For example, according to Richard, some genealogical research may help families understand why recipes passed down from a German ancestor also contain traditional Cajun flavor or how some last names changed (in either spelling or pronunciation) reflecting the state’s different governing bodies.

The new episodes of “Roots of Faith: Ancestry” are scheduled to air in late April. Other shows in the series are still available for viewing online at catholiclifetv.org and can be found using the drop down menu under “Shows.”

CatholicLife TV airs primarily on Cox Cable Channel 15 in Baton Rouge and can also be found on Spectrum/Charter Cable Channel 19 in Hammond, Spectrum/Charter Cable Channel 10 in St. James Civil Parish and on Fidelity Cable Channel 14 in New Roads.
Baton Rouge photographer sees Mother Teresa through unique lens

By Richard Meek
The Catholic commentator

Amazing what treasures can be unearthed in an old shoebox. The negative that has ultimately become the iconic photo of Mother Teresa has origins as humble as the nun herself. Baton Rouge freelance photographer Marie Constantin had taken the original photo during Mother Teresa’s second visit to Baton Rouge in 1986, one year after she had established a mission for the poor to be staffed by her Missionaries of Charity nuns at St. Agnes Church.

At one point during the visit, Mother Teresa briefly stepped away from the microphone and Constantin shot the photo from which she was speaking, flashed her endearing smile and clasped her hands. At that instant, Constantin snapped the shutter, never imagining what the future would bring for the photo.

For several years, the negatives were stored in a shoebox in Constantin’s closet. “Today, it is the photo of a saint.”

“It’s outrageous,” Constantin said of the popularity of the photo, which was used at the beatification of Mother Teresa in 2003 and now sits at Mother Teresa’s tomb as well as in the motherhouse of the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta and all of their houses worldwide.

The photo, which was not even Constantin’s favorite from that day, is once again gaining notoriety since the Vatican announced March 15 that Mother Teresa would be canonized Sept. 4.

“I’m sitting there and getting my Wall Street Journal and there’s my photo (of Mother Teresa) on the cover,” she said. “There is no place to really put that. You feel like I have to honor that.

“Pray for things and you don’t get it but other things are so wonderful you would never pray for because they are ridiculously wonderful. It’s so beyond what anybody could explain in terms of great wonderfulness happening to you.”

Circumstances allowed Constantin to travel extensively with Mother Teresa along the East Coast and even visited Calcutta on three occasions. She admitted that while she was in her 20s she had little interest in Mother Teresa but a visit to Tijuana, Mexico with a friend to bring food and clothing to the needy left an impression on Constantin. She saw people living in cardboard boxes, an image she relives even today.

Years later, she photographed Mother Teresa in New Orleans and Baton Rouge and became part of an entourage that followed the human rights leader during her visits to the United States.

“One day I came home from work and (Mother Teresa) was on television holding a baby and saying, ‘God doesn’t do this. We do this because we don’t share what we have.’

“I just started crying.” Constantin was so moved that she began volunteering at the St. Agnes soup kitchen and occasionally spending nights at the shelter to relieve the nuns.

She printed the photo that has become the defining photo of Mother Teresa for the sisters as gifts for their incoming professions.

She later received a call from a Spanish priest living in the United States requesting a photo of Mother Teresa he could use in his prayer book so she sent him the same one she had given to the sisters and, as she said, “I didn’t think anything else about it.”

Years later, the priest called, excitement in his voice, explaining that he wanted the negative. He explained that while in Rome, he was with others who were looking at several photos of Mother Teresa, trying to decide which one to use at her beatification, but none were satisfactory.

The priest then pulled out his prayer book with Constantin’s photo and “that was it.”

During Mother Teresa’s beatification ceremony, which Constantin attended, the photo was temporarily placed on the façade of St. Peter’s Basilica and unveiled during the event.

Because of some anxiety leading up to the event, Constantin was “kind of numb” at the unveiling. But now she is enjoying the rebirth of her photo.

“I think I’ve had more fun in the last few days seeing it pop up in all kinds of forms,” she said. “I’m relaxed about it. It’s just been a blast, seeing it and having it come into my house in the newspaper I subscribe to.”

Constantin, who hopes to attend the canonization, has a lifetime of cherished memories of Mother Teresa, and uses her motto of “do little things with great love,” to guide her own life. But she also remembers Mother Teresa in a way that few ever saw.

“I always think of her as very joyful,” Constantin said. “I always saw her laughing, cutting up, making jokes. When she was out in the public and in the press, she would get serious.

“Behind the scenes she was doing one liners about nothing. Anything to make us laugh. She loved it if she made you laugh. When she laughed her whole body laughed.”

Constantin still cherishes those memories, but it is her photo of Mother Teresa’s smile that will endure forever.
Easter baskets bring joy to hundreds of needy families

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

It was a scene that would make any Easter bunny smile: in one room, taking up every floor space available, hundreds of brightly colored baskets, each filled with candy and toys and wrapped in clear cellophane. But the Easter spirit wasn’t limited to just one room at Daniel Ourso’s house.

For this junior at Catholic High School, coordinating a collection for St. Vincent de Paul’s annual “Build a Basket for a Needy Child” campaign also meant finding baskets in the family den and even into the kitchen where the table was quickly converted into a make-shift workspace.

The effort, which resulted in 333 completed baskets for children in need in the Baton Rouge area, was Ourso’s Eagle Scout project.

Surprisingly, Ourso, a member of Boy Scout Troop 888 chartered to Most Blessed Sacrament and St. Andrew’s United Methodist Church, didn’t start out intending to help with the build a basket campaign at St. Vincent de Paul. Instead, he wanted to build something else.

“I was looking at making a rosary garden or doing some kind of a construction project, like making a gazebo for Ollie Steele (Burden Regional nursing facility),” said Ourso.

But when those ideas fell through, Ourso’s dad, Darrell Ourso, showed him a flyer about the “Build a Basket for a Needy Child” campaign, and the idea for his Eagle Scout project just took off.

A bonus was the project’s connection to St. Vincent de Paul, an organization that is imbedded deep in his family.

“My grandfather’s cousin worked there for many years,” said Daniel.

That cousin, Marvin Ourso, volunteered at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul for nearly seven decades, helping to establish several community programs, such as opening the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room in 1982, opening the first Bishop Ott Shelter on Plank Road in 1991 and establishing the society’s pharmacy in 1995.

Then Bishop Alfred C. Hughes presented Marvin Ourso with the St. Vincent de Paul “Top Hat” award, the organization’s highest recognition, in 1994.

Knowing this legacy at St. Vincent de Paul was important for Daniel, who has fond memories of the man who grew up calling “Cousin Marvin.”

In the beginning Daniel was hoping his efforts would result in about 150 to 200 baskets, something he knew the society could really use. He explained that Michael Acaldo, president and CEO of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, was supportive of his project since “a lot of help is given during Christmas” but donations can be limited for the Easter baskets.

Daniel began by placing flyers in his own and nearby neighborhoods, but he admitted he really wasn’t sure what type of response he would receive since he knew there were a lot of other outreach programs going on at the same time. But that thought quickly changed on collection day.

“We asked everyone to put their donations out with the flyer attached. The first street we went down, there was next to nothing, but then when we got around the corner to the next street, I could see all of the donations. We filled up the car, and that’s with three other scouts in it,” he said excitedly.

But his flyer wasn’t the only thing working.

A request on Facebook, posted by his mom, Angele Ourso, also got family and friends involved. Ultimately, that collection netted so many baskets, small toys, stuffed animals, candy and any other item needed to build a basket, that Daniel knew he would exceed his original top goal of 200 baskets. He also received donations from businesses and organizations including Benny’s Car Wash, Truly Scrumptious Candies and Confections, National Charity League and the faculty and students at Dutchtown Middle School, where his mom works as a sixth-grade math teacher.

The sheer number of items collected meant assembly had to take place off site from the Ourso home. As parishioners of Most Blessed Sacrament Church, family members along with other scouts and friends used the church’s Bishop Stanley Ott meeting room to put the majority of Easter baskets together.

With final donations in place, all 333 baskets were delivered to St. Vincent de Paul for its annual Easter basket giveaway on March 19. “We thought his efforts were extraordinary,” said Acaldo, adding that Daniel’s commitment along with that of Pat Hill, a parishioner at St. Thomas More Church, helped make the program a success this year. He noted that Daniel and Hill were instrumental in contributing more than 50 percent of the total baskets this year.

With his project completed, Daniel has a few more steps before obtaining Eagle Scout. But once he achieves this highest rank, he will join an elite group. According to the National Eagle Scout Association, only five percent of all boys entering boy scouting go on to become Eagle Scouts.
Task force to study potential LHSAA split

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

No decision has been made regarding the Louisiana Catholic schools’ continued participation in the Louisiana High School Athletic Association.

A statement released March 23 said the state bishops have approved the formation of a task force to look into all options “when it comes to the future of Catholic high school athletics.”

The statement also called inaccurate recent reports that a decision had already been made.

“The Catholic school superintendents will convene the task force in the coming months and it will be comprised of members from each of the dioceses of the state,” the statement said. “By no means does this mean the Catholic schools of Louisiana have closed the door on LHSAA membership, nor has there been a commitment to any one future plan.

“The task force will be working for what is in the best interest of the student-athletes in Catholic schools throughout the state. We must examine all options in order to make a wise decision.”

It has been widely reported that several LHSAA members have been discussing the possibility of splitting from the LHSAA and forming their own athletics organization. There has been some discussion in the LHSAA because of the splitting of schools to select and nonselect for the playoffs.

Beginning in 2013 the select/nonselect was only used for football but that same format will be implemented in basketball, baseball and softball for the 2016-17 school year.

Several schools recently received a letter from Paul Rainwater, Gov. Bobby Jindal’s former chief of staff, detailing an outline for what was called an “athletic cooperative.”

According to multiple media reports, the new association would require a minimum of 60 schools to begin, with an initial, one-time membership fee of $15,000. Schools unable to meet that fee would be able to pay it off incrementally.

The letter stated the organization would be open to all schools, including public, private, charter, laboratory or other secondary schools.

Two local students named award finalists

Maria Mengis, a senior at St. Joseph’s Academy and Chase Bruniilliette, a senior at Catholic High School, were named diocesan finalists in the LHSAA State Council of the Knights of Columbus Catholic Youth Leadership Award scholarship program.

The two Baton Rouge youth were selected from local KC Council scholarship winners to represent the diocese. They will compete against other finalists chosen from dioceses across Louisiana.

Scholarship awards, including a grand prize of $4,000, will be awarded to one boy and one girl who exemplify Catholic ideals as well as other outstanding qualities including academics. The state finals will be held at St. Joseph’s Academy on April 10.

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Moive Reviews
USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classifications:
A-I – General patronage
A-II – Adults and adolescents
A-III – Adults
A-IV – Adults, with reservations
L – Limited adult audience
O – Morally offensive

Motion Picture Association of America ratings:
G – General audiences; all ages admitted
PG – Parental guidance suggested; some material may not be suitable for children
PG-13 – Parents are strongly cautioned to give special guidance for attendance of children under 13; some material may be inappropriate for young children
R – Restricted; under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian
NC-17 – No one under 17 admitted

The Catholic Commentator ENTERTAINMENT April 1, 2016

Zootopia Disney
Anthropomorphism runs amok in this 3-D animated comedy-adventure with animals of all shapes and sizes assuming human traits and jabbering away as they earn a living in the bustling metropolis of the title. A bright-eyed, bushy-tailed suburan-reared rabbit (voice of Ginnifer Goodwin) joins the city police department but faces resentment and prejudice from her peers as well as her buffalo boss (voice of Idris Elba). Assigned to parking duty, she crosses paths with a con-artist fox (voice of Jason Bateman) who happens to be a key witness in a high-profile missing-persons case that has the potential to win her the respect of her co-workers. Directors Byron Howard and Rich Moore, together with co-director Jared Bush, keep the action moving at a fast pace, and offer good lessons in tolerance, hard work and optimism. The film takes a day’s current as the ground and action proceeds, however, leading to scenes of animal conflict and cruelty that could frighten and confuse the younger set. Occasional mild action violence, including torture, bullying, a naturist theme, some rude gags, momentary religious but not irreverent humor. A-II; PG

Miracles From Heaven Columbia
Remarkable fact-based story of a 10-year-old Texas girl (Kylie Rogers) who develops a rare, painful and incurable disease that prevents her body from digesting food. Though her parents (Jennifer Garner and Martin Henderson) are both churchgoers, persistent Mom after struggling to obtain a correct diagnosis and access to the care of a kindly specialist (Eugenio Derbez) loses her faith in the face of her daughter’s current torment and impending death. Yet a startling, almost inexplicable, turnaround awaits her. While it’s clearly designed for believers, and sometimes feels padded, director Patricia Riggen’s squeaky clean drama minimizes neither its protagonist’s crisis of doubt nor the larger mystery of innocent suffering. Mature themes, potentially upsetting incidents and medical procedures. A-II; PG

The Perfect Match Lionsgate
This so-called romantic comedy follows the sexual escapades of a womanizing Southern California talent agent and photographer (Terrence J.) who puts his one-night stands on hold after falling for a mysterious stranger (Cassie Ventura). The triumph of true love would please his concerned brother (Mark Strong), a skilled agent, he not only compromises his partner’s odds of survival are pretty good. Pervasive and often offensive gags, momentary religious but not irreverent humor. A; PG-13

London Has Fallen Focus
In the equally improbable and considerably more petulant sequel to 2013’s “Olympus Has Fallen,” a Secret Service agent (Gerard Butler) must once again protect the U.S. president (Aaron Eckhart) after insurgents controlled by a vengeful Pakistani arms dealer (Alon Moni Aboutboul) devastate the British capital and imperil British and world leaders for its leader, the U.K.’s prime minister. With such a ruthless guardian at his side brutally dispatching assailants, the chief executive’s odds of survival are pretty good. The overall level of belligerence grows excessive, however, and the atmosphere becomes truly noxious when the script tries to find humor in the hero’s sadistic treatment of bad guys. Director Babak Najafi makes some effort to highlight the human relationships, but video-game mayhem still predominates. Pervasive and often gory scenes of combat, murder and torture, a revenge theme, some profanity, frequent rough and crude language. O; R

The Young Messiah Focus
This engaging dramatization remains faithful to the unifying message of scripture even as it speculates about the childhood of Jesus (played here, age 7, by Adam Greaves-Neail), a topic on which the Gospels are virtually silent. As Joseph (Vincent Walsh) leads his family back from exile in Egypt, he and Mary (Sara Lazzaro) struggle to understand and guide their unique son, whose supernaturally identity is at least partially known to his relatives including his uncle Cleopas (Christian McKay) and cousin James (Finn McLeod Ireland) and whose miraculous powers are already apparent. Danger pursues the extended clan in the person of a Roman centurion (Sean Bean) who has orders from King Herod (Jonathan Bailey) to find and kill the boy and in the figure of Satan (Rory Keenan) whose presence only Jesus can sense. Director and co-writer Cyrus Nowrasteh’s screen adaptation of Anne Rice’s 2005 novel “Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt” sensitively explores the mystery of the Incarnation in a way that will both intrigue and entertain viewers of most ages. Though discreetly handled, some mature elements bar endorsement for the youngest moviegoers. Combat violence with slight gore, scenes of crucifixion, an attempted rape, at least one crass term. A; PG-13

Also wrote the screenplay, incorporates themes of altruism, family love and the inherent value of working-class lives into his script, as directed by Louis Letterier, his pursuit of gross-out gags dementes human sexuality and wallows in nastiness. Strong sexual content, including graphic acts and full nudity, constant action violence with some gore, drug use, extremely coarse humor, at least one use of profanity, considerable rough and crude language. O; R

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**We must hone our listening skills to help others**

In Rudimental’s collaboration with Ed Sheeran in “Lay It All On Me,” the song describes an individual who feels “all alone as you look through the door, nothing left to see.” However, another person tells her “if it hurts and you can’t take no more, lay it all on me.” He tells her that “you got a friend in me,” and “I’ll be your shoulder at any time you need.” He asks her to “let my love in, lay your heart on me.”

We know that one of Jesus’ main messages is that we need to be there for each other. Indeed, we want to be the friend that others can trust with their hurts and burdens. Set aside one’s perspective. There is an Indiana pastoral counselor who reviews current music for Catholic News service. Write to: cmartin@hughes.net or at: 7125 West CR 200 South, Rockport, IN 47635, or like this column on Facebook at “Charlie Martin’s Today’s Music Columns.”

**Search ‘Charlie Martin’ for more of his columns online at thecatholiccommentator.org.**
A saint has been in Baton Rouge, at least twice! Yes, that’s true. In 1985 Mother Teresa of Calcutta snuck in, without anyone but Bishop (Stanley J.) Ott knowing it, to find a good place to house her sisters.

She wanted a place in Louisiana for her Missionaries of Charity, and Bishop Ott wanted them in Baton Rouge. So he arranged a mini-tour of parish facilities that could possibly serve her purpose. I was his vicar general at the time and ordinarily would have been involved in that search. In fact, on Bishop Ott’s behalf, I had been negotiating with the pastor of St. Agnes Church for the use of his convent and school buildings as a new site for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. The school had closed, and its Dominican sisters had left. I thought we had a done deal and left on vacation.

Returning on a Saturday evening, I noted that there was a big diocesan convocation the next day at the Catholic Life Center that I should attend. I arrived as Bishop Ott was ending the opening prayer. He then added, “I have a special announcement to make. Mother Teresa’s nuns are coming to Baton Rouge to begin a ministry.”

As for Catholic Charities, they had to put up with cramped quarters in the Catholic Life Center for a while longer. However, after Bishop Ott died, his successor, Bishop Alfred C. Hughes, made their need for larger quarters the primary goal of his diocesan-wide fund raising drive, “Campaign for Tomorrow.” They got a new building tailored to their needs on the campus of the Catholic Life Center.

On her second visit to Baton Rouge, Mother Teresa may not have wanted publicity, but she closed, he apologized, saying, “I am sorry. I showed her several options, but she wanted St. Agnes. And you can’t no to Mother Teresa.”

In the end, it all turned out for the better. Bishop Ott was a holy person too. He was always humble and kind enough to change his decisions when the good of people was at stake, especially poor people. The Missions of Charity have done wonderful work for the street people in our downtown area of Baton Rouge. They run a soup kitchen for whoever walks in and an overnight shelter for women and children. And some visit prisoners at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women in St. Gabriel. They are fulfilling Mother Teresa’s wish in founding her religious order: “To do something beautiful for God.”

As for Catholic Charities, they had to put up with cramped quarters in the Catholic Life Center a while longer. However, after Bishop Ott died, his successor, Bishop Alfred C. Hughes, made their need for larger quarters the primary goal of his diocesan-wide fund raising drive, “Campaign for Tomorrow.” They got a new building tailored to their needs on the campus of the Catholic Life Center.

On her second visit to Baton Rouge, Mother Teresa may not have wanted publicity, but she was completely relaxed, speaking softly in quite understandable English. The shouting and pushing people didn’t phase her. She asked if there was a room where they could talk to them. The nuns said that they were in the process of redoing the rooms in the school, but there was one where work had not yet begun.

On the way to the school, one of the street people, who appeared very disturbed, approached. A man, who I thought was a policeman, stopped him. Mother Teresa walked over to the two of them and quietly talked to the street person who had been saying something irrelevant. I didn’t know what she said, but the street person sort of bowed and walked away seeming happy and satisfied.

The schoolroom turned out to be a lower grade classroom. We walked in with the media trailing. The desks were child size. Mother Teresa grabbed a little stool and put it in the middle of the room and sat on it. Beneath her habit, the same Indian sari her nuns wore, two bare feet with crooked toes poked out. In complete silence the media people squeezed themselves into the desks around her as she began talking. She said a few words and asked for questions. Very politely they took turns asking questions to which she gave simple, straightforward answers. Her nuns were here in Baton Rouge to do God’s work by taking care of the poor. We all do God’s work if we take care of others with the skills God gives us in life, media people too. I didn’t know what they expected to hear, but they were mesmerized listening to her. “Wow,” I thought, “this was as good as Daniel in the lions’ den.”

My lasting impression of Mother Teresa was that of a saint, a truly human person, who with God’s grace did what God put her here to do. She was an extension of his son, Jesus Christ, in our world and in our community of Baton Rouge. On Sept. 4 Pope Francis will declare her sainthood officially in the name of Christ’s church.

FATHER CARVILLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and writes on current topics for The Catholic Commentator. He can be reached at johnnycarville@gmail.com.

Something beautiful for God

Another Perspective
Father John Carville

got lots of it. She came back a year after the sister of quietely checking how her sisters were doing. The day before she arrived, Bishop Ott came into my office and said, “I have a secret to tell you Mother Teresa is coming to visit her nuns tomorrow. Would you want to come with me to meet her?” Who was I going to pass up that chance? I told him yes, and so would Father Donald Blanchard who was working with me at LSU.

Secrets do not last long in Baton Rouge, in neither politics, football nor the diocese. Someone let it out. When the bishop and his two priests arrived at St. Agnes, there were media people all over the place, and a group of Catholic lay people who had started a Home, a home for unwed mothers and pregnant girls who without care might be tempted to abort, and some of the street people that the nuns were already ministering to.

The bishop, of course, and his two shadows, got to greet Mother Teresa first. I was amazed at how small she was, and rather weather beaten, tanned and wrinkled. She had a beautiful smile and looked completely relaxed, speaking softly in quite understandable English. The shouting and pushing people didn’t phase her. She asked if there was a room where they could talk to them. The nuns said that they were in the process of redoing the rooms in the school, but there was one where work had not yet begun.

On the way to the school, one of the street people, who appeared very disturbed, approached. A man, who I thought was a policeman, stopped him. Mother Teresa walked over to the two of them and quietly talked to the street person who had been saying something irrelevant. I didn’t know what she said, but the street person sort of bowed and walked away seeming happy and satisfied.

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Letters to the Editor

Silence is blessed

I have been following the five responses to Sister Joel Gubler’s letter regarding Catholics being refused the Eucharist (love over law), noting especially in three of them of the laws cited which our church demands that we obey in order to be saved.

Well, aren’t we fortunate that Jesus did not obediently uphold the numerous laws of his church. He would never have been branded a blasphemer and rabblerouser and would have died from natural causes, with private thoughts of how life could be lived in a more virtuous way, simply by sincerely loving God and our neighbors with our whole hearts.

His silence would have resulted in the religion of Christianity never existing.

Marc Joffrion
Baton Rouge

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

Please pray for the priests, deacons and religious women and men in the Baton Rouge Diocese.

Apr. 7 Rev. Gerald H. Burns Dcn. Eugene F. Brady Sr. Evelyn Mee CSJ
Apr. 9 Rev. Peter J. Callery SJ Dcn. Patrick J. Broussard Jr. Sr. Anne Merideri SCJ
Apr. 11 Rev. Chuong Cao CSSR Dcn. Michael T. Chiappetta Sr. Dolores Munoz HMSS
Apr. 15 Rev. Thomas F. Clark SJ Dcn. Guy E. Decker Sr. Huong Nguyen ICM
Apr. 17 Rev. Paul D. Counce Dcn. W. Brent Duplessis Sr. Mary Noel OP
Apr. 18 Rev. Randy M. Cuevas Dcn. Jeff R. Easley Br. William Cawley SC

The Catholic Commentator
APRIL 1, 2016
PERSPECTIVE
The power of fear

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ear is the heartbeat of the powerless. So writes Cor de Jonghe. That’s true. We can deal with most everything, except fear.

The late Belgium spiritual writer, Bieke Vandekerkehove, in a very fine book, “The Taste of Silence,” shares her story honestly about the demons that beset her as she faced a terminal illness at age 19. She singled out three particular demons that tormented her as she faced the prospect of death, sadness, anger and fear and she suggested that we can more easily cope with the first two, sadness and anger, than we can with the third, fear. Here’s her thought: “Sadness can be handled through tears, through grieving. Sadness fills us like a water glass, but a glass can be emptied. Tears can drain sadness of its bite. We have all, no doubt, experienced the release, the catharsis, that can come through tears. Tears can soften the heart and take away the bitterness of sadness, even while its heaviness remains. Sadness, no matter how heavy, has a release valve. So, too, does anger. Anger can be expressed and its very expression helps to release it. The very expression of anger helps to release us like a water glass, but a glass can be emptied. Tears can drain sadness of its bite, but anger can be drained of its heat through the catharsis that tears provide. Tears can soften the heart. Anger can be softened, but sadness cannot. The sadness remains even after the tears have dried.”

What’s the lesson in this? To name something correctly is to partly free ourselves of its dominance. That’s ultimately the function of prophecy. Prophets don’t foretell the future, they properly name the present. Richard Rohr is fond of saying: “Not everything can be fixed or cured, but it should be named properly.”

This can be helpful in dealing with fear in our lives. Fear can render us impotent. But, naming that properly, recognizing where that symptom belongs and how powerless it leaves us, can help us to live with it, without sadness and anger.

FATHER ROLHEISER, theologian, teacher and award-winning author, is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He can be contacted through his website ronrolheiser.com or on Facebook at facebook.com/ronrolheiser.

Fondness for a former first lady

The March 6 passing of Nancy Reagan saddened many Americans. I know it affected me more than I expected. She had an endearing smile and a quiet dignity.

Everyone knew the role she played in the life of President Ronald Reagan and how important she was to him. He claimed that his success was directly related to her presence in his life. He had faced a particularly bad year, including a long hospital stay. “And then along came Nancy Davis and saved my soul,” he is said to have told his biographer.

The bond between them was very admirable. They fulfilled the highest values of the human spirit in their unconditional love for each other. She was revered and despised for her power in the White House. When she spoke, people knew that the president of the United States was solidly behind her.

In her memoirs, the Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova, recounts an encounter she once had with another woman, as the two of them waited outside a Russian prison. Both of their husbands had been imprisoned by Stalin and both of them were there to bring letters and packages to their husbands, as were a number of other women. But the scene was like something out of the existential literature of the absurd. The people were barefoot and crying. First of all, the women were unsure of whether their husbands were even still alive and were equally uncertain as to whether the letters and packages they were delivering would ever be given to their loved ones by the guards. Moreover the guards would, without reason, make them wait for hours in the snow and cold before they would collect their letters and packages, and sometimes they wouldn’t meet the women at all. Still, every week, despite the absurdity of it, the women would come, wait in the snow, accept this unfairness, do their vigil, and try to get letters and packages to their loved ones in prison. One morning, as they were waiting, seemingly with no end in sight, one of the women recognized Akhmatova and said to her: “Well, you’re a poet. Can you tell me what’s happening here?” Akhmatova looked at the woman and replied: “Yes, I can!” And then something like a smile passed between them.

Why the smile? Just to be able to name something, no matter how absurd or unfair, no matter our powerlessness to change it, is to be somehow free of it, above it, transcendent in some way. To name something correctly is to partly free ourselves of its dominance. That’s why totalitarian regimes fear artists, writers, religious critics, journalists and prophets. They name things. That’s ultimately the function of prophecy.

Think about it, she lived 12 more years after her husband’s death and was virtually alone. She cared for him for years before he died and when he was lost in the fog of Alzheimer’s disease.

How bravely she carried her cross during those years, until her death finally took her at the age of 94. In thinking of her, I’m reminded of a quote from Malcolm Muggeridge: “For instance, success in all of its various guises; being known and being praised; ostensible pleasures, like acquiring money or seducing women, or travel-

ing, going to and fro in the world and up and down in it like Satan, exploring and experiencing whatever Vanity Fair has to offer. … They are diversions designed to distract our attention from the true purpose of our existence in this world, which is, quite simply, to look for God.”

Some people are not distracted, and Nancy Reagan was one of those who was not distracted. May she rest in eternal peace.

FATHER CATOIR writes on issues of spirituality for today’s Catholic for Catholic News Service.
**Frank Hayden Memorial Scholarship Brunch**  
– The Baton Rouge Chapter of Xavier University will honor its annual Frank Hayden Memorial Scholarship Brunch and silent auction Sunday, April 3, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m., at the Renaissance Hotel, 7000 Bluebonnet Blvd., Baton Rouge. The John Gray Quartet will provide musical entertainment. Tickets are $50 each. Proceeds will benefit the scholarship fund. For information and tickets, call 225-803-0700 or email xulabralumi@gmail.com.

**Natural Family Planning Seminar** – Dr. Susan Caldwell, who specializes in NaPro Technology, will present a class on natural methods of family planning, “Love&Life: Understanding God’s Plan for Your Marriage and Family,” Thursday, April 14, 6:30 p.m., at the St. Elizabeth Community Center, 123 Hwy. 403, Paincourtville. Attendees will learn about the advances in natural family planning and women’s reproductive health, as well as the benefits of NFP on marital happiness and longevity. For information call 985-369-7598.

**Beginning Experience Weekend** – Rosaryville Spirit Life Center, 39003 Rosaryville Road, Ponchatoula, will host its Beginning Experience Weekend in April. This program focuses on their experience and emerging from the darkness of grief into the light of a new beginning. For information, call 985-789-8666 or 504-455-8920.

**Pro-life Mass** – A monthly pro-life Mass will be celebrated Tuesday, April 12, 5:30 p.m., at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. For information, call 225-383-4127.

**Metairie Retreat Center Events** – The Archdiocesan Retreat Center, 5500 St. Mary St., Metairie, will host the following events in April: “Finding Afresh the God of Our Longing” with Father Simeon Gallagher OFMCap, Friday, April 8 – Sunday, April 10. Minimum offering is $25; and “Spiritual Legacy Letters” with Jim Adams, Tuesdays, April 12, 19 and 26 – RSVP by calling 504-527-5788. For information about these events, call 504-267-9604 or visit retreats.arch-no.org.

**Magnificat Breakfast** – Andi Oney, a stay-at-home mother who attended the International Prophetic Convention on gatherings in France where she had a profound experience, will speak at the meeting of Magnificat on Saturday, April 3, 9 a.m. – noon, at Oak Lodge Reception Center, 2834 South Sherwood Forest Blvd., Baton Rouge. Reservations are $22 each and will be sold through Tuesday, April 26. Indicate the number of reservations and send a check made to BR Magnificat for your reservation with the name of each attendee to Kathy Simonneaux, 9650 Victory Lane, Denham Springs, LA 70726.

**Grandparent’s Conference** – The 19th annual Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Conference will be held Friday, April 22, 8:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m., at the Holiday Inn South Hotel, 9940 Airline Hwy., Baton Rouge. There will be six workshops to choose from, a legal panel to answer legal questions, exhibitors and lunch provided. Pre-registration is required. For information, all 225-362-2662 or email annaskathycoleman@yahoo.com

**Bible Patch Program** – Boy and Girl Scouts are invited to attend the first Bible Patch program, hosted by the Catholic Committee on Scouting, Sunday, April 3, 1:30 – 3:30 p.m., at Our Lady of Mercy Church Parish Activity Center, 454 Magnolique Ave., Baton Rouge. The program will reinforce the duty to God in the law of scouting. The program is free. Applications can be found at info.cosbr.net. For information, call 225-769-7787 or email chesziek@sellsouth.net.
Two years after the murder-suicide, the family moved into a spacious home in Vacherie, which eased the tight living quarters. Shane, now 25, works in the oil industry and assists financially, especially to his younger brother, who is a running back and lineman at St. James High School.

“God provides for us,” said Charles, who is involved in the choir and several other ministries at St. James Catholic Church. “I believe in the idea to much is given, much is required. Because of that, good things happen to us.”

As time went on, the family settled into the routine of a normal family life, which included family vacations and attending band concerts or football games in which the children were participating. Meeka made sure to treat every child equally.

“I did not want them to feel any more out of place than losing their mother and father,” she said. “To me, that was enough damage for them already. So we were doing our best to make them as comfortable as possible. I got very protective.”

For Charles, that also meant setting the rules regarding dating, especially for Chelsea Dennis and Joy, who are high school juniors. Chelsea admits that it’s difficult to find someone to meet her dad’s approval.

“My standards are real high,” Charles said. “The current boy, I like him, but I watch him. I tell her you are the jewel, you are the princess.”

Charles and Meeka det- ermined their adopted children were exposed to a loving, environment, not the chaos in which they were previously raised.

(Grows) once told me, ‘my mama used to say you and Uncle Chuck used to pretend (about their loving marriage.’) (Grows) never realized what a solid relationship, what a strong marriage looks like. When he came with us, he saw there was no fighting, no arguing,” she said.

“At 11, that’s all you see,” Grows quickly added. “You don’t think it’s right but you think it goes on everywhere.”

Faith became the cornerstone of the family and remains to this day. Children were required to pray each night and leave their bedroom doors open for their parents could hear their prayers.

“God always opened the door to make sure everyone is getting ready. All of the children have been baptized and Joy and Chelsea, who are the same age, were recently confirmed,” Meeka even converted to Catholicism from her Baptist background.

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Faith became the cornerstone of the family and remains to this day. The children were required to pray each night and leave their bedroom doors open for their parents could hear their prayers.

Skipping Mass is never an option, a point still driven home to Meeka bangs on the bedroom doors to make sure everyone is getting ready. All of the children have been baptized and Joy and Chelsea, who are the same age, were recently confirmed.

Meeka even converted to Catholicism from her Baptist faith in which she was raised. Previously, she would attend the Baptist church and Charles would attend Mass at St. James, although they often attended St. James together.

“I tease (Charles), telling him he’s the first cousin to the pope,” she said. “He is a strong Catholic.”

“I wanted everybody to go to the same church,” she explained as to her own conversion. “(Charles) was our head, and I knew he was going to guide us in the right way.”

Joy and Camrin Grows have little memory of their mother, but Shane believes she would be proud of how they are turning out. He has embraced his role of big brother, becoming a mentor to Camrin, and a protector to his younger sister.

“She don’t like me talking to her,” the soft-spoken Shane said. “I’m too hard on her. Nobody will meet my approval.”

“I know my mother is happy for all of us,” he added. We are good. We are just blessed to be with a really great family. I’m really thankful for that.”

For Meeka, the memories of her sibling remain alive, whom she still mourns.

“Without faith, I don’t know where we would be,” she said. “God always opened the door for us, always provided.”

“Some days I still cry,” Meeka added. “I still have my moments.”
SAINT ▼
From page 1

for her beatification. When she was beatified in 2003, we began praying a pray every evening after the divine office for her canonization,” explained Sister Christa, who added the sisters will continue to pray the prayer until her canonization.

“We pray her life and apostolic will continue to pray the prayer Christa, who added the sisters to love God and serve their neighbors, especially the poorest of the poor,” she said.

In December, Pope Francis helped clear the path for the canonization of Mother Teresa by recognizing a second miracle attributed to her.

Sister Christa, who worked alongside Mother Teresa tending to the poor in Rome, said Mother Teresa worked hard and made a lot of sacrifices.

“She radiated love, joy and peace to everyone she met,” said Sister Christa. “She loved Christ with her whole heart and saw him in everyone she met.”

For Sister Christa and the other sisters, seeing Jesus “in the least of my brothers” is a vow they live by. Their local order, which provides shelter for women and children as well as hot meals for the homeless, was established by Mother Teresa when she visited the city in 1985.

At that time, Mother Teresa was invited by Bishop Stanley Joseph Ott to set up a place to help the city’s poor. When she arrived, Mother Teresa opened her order’s 27th House of Ministry.

Mother Teresa is known for her life’s work of helping the poor and presenting the face of Christ to everyone. Father Jeff Bayhi, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Zachary, has fond memories of her. He traveled to Calcutta in 1991 and, at the request of Mother Teresa, returned for seven consecutive years to conduct retreats. On one visit, she was very sick, and he administered the last rites to her a year before she died.

“She is the poster child of demonstrating what a difference a life can make when you are living for the sake of the Gospels,” he said.

Born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in 1910, Mother Teresa was Albanian. At 18-years-old, she joined the Sisters of Loreto in Dublin. She took the name Sister Mary Teresa after Saint Therese of Lisieux and began teaching.

Years later she received a second calling or “a call within a call” and began caring for “the unwanted, the unloved and the uncared for” in the slums of Calcutta. She received many awards for her humanitarian work.

This may look like a poster for a new Mission Impossible movie, but, actually, this graphic portrays Blessed Frederic Ozanam, founder of St. Vincent de Paul. He is depicted with a basket of bread, rushing toward someone in need as St. Vincent de Paul watches over him. Sometimes, the villains in life aren’t criminals, but dangers just as real – poverty, hunger, homelessness, and illness.

At St. Vincent de Paul, our mission may sometimes seem impossible, but because of so many agents of mercy, we are able to make a difference to people in need.

In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis has called us all to be agents of mercy – people whose lives revolve around kindness, compassion, and generosity. At St. Vincent de Paul, we need your help. This year, you can help us serve over 240,000 meals, fill over 30,000 prescriptions, and provide over 28,000 guest nights of shelter to homeless men, women, and children.

We hope you will become an agent of mercy and support our efforts by making a contribution using the form below. $1 will provide a hot meal; $10 will provide a night of shelter for a homeless family; and $28 will fill a prescription; so you can imagine what a difference a larger gift can make.

Please cut out and mail

Be an Agent of Mercy

Yes, I want to make a difference.
My gift of $_________ is enclosed.

Name:__________________________
Address:_________________________________________________________
City: ____________________ State: ______ Zip: ______

Mail your gift to St. Vincent de Paul, P.O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-0127 or call us at (225) 383-7837, ext. O.

You can also give online at www.svdpbr.org.

Honored to be Louisiana’s Hospital of the Year 7 Times

Congratulations also to our nurses who were recognized for excellence in their individual fields.

Delivering the best in healthcare is our job, but our mission is to serve. And we work hard every day to serve our patients with the highest level of care. That’s why when we are named Hospital of the Year for the seventh time, it means something. This year, Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center was once again named Hospital of the Year in the large category by the Louisiana State Nurses Association. Why work so hard to earn your trust year after year? Because we believe we’re at our best when we’re constantly striving to be better. Learn more at oolomc.com.